



“That looks great, Abbie,” said my sister Saff as she hurried past me, clutching several bottles of nail polish.

I smiled. “Thanks.”

I’d just redone the display table with spicy, warming things now that it was officially autumn. I love how the air changes and summer suddenly stops, and you start to think about the leaves falling and getting all cosy and snuggly indoors. I wanted to bring some of that into Rainbow Beauty, so I’d put our Spicy Delight Bubble Bath and Warming Cinnamon and Sandalwood Massage Oil on a rich red, gold-embroidered Indian throw borrowed from

my friend Summer's house. A pile of bath bombs sat in a bronze bowl, like delicious sweets. Some were rose and geranium with little rose petals in, and some were speckled with tiny lavender flowers. I couldn't help smiling as three women gathered around the table, smelling the products and chatting about them.

It was three o'clock on Saturday afternoon and Rainbow Beauty was buzzing with clients coming and going for their beauty treatments – waiting on the gorgeous purple velvet sofas in the reception area, browsing all the scrummy products on the glass display shelves, or just dropping in for one of our home-made juices or smoothies. I saw two girls from my sister Grace's class chatting to her as they chose from the colourful display of fresh fruit and veg in the chiller counter – yes, veg! We put carrots, beetroot and spinach into some of our juices – totally yummy, honestly!

To me it was pure paradise, standing there amongst the happy, glowing clients – Mrs. Arthur was flicking through a mag, waiting for her massage with Mum, and Kate was showing off her new perfectly polished nails after a manicure with Saff. Saff was getting really good at nail art now, too. She'd done little rainbows on mine and everyone was commenting on them, saying how nice they were.

Rainbows.

We'd named Rainbow Beauty after "Somewhere over the Rainbow", Mum's favourite song. Looking around me, I felt like our dreams really had come true – it was hard to believe we'd built this place from nothing – well, from a wish, an idea, and from selling Mum's engagement ring which, at that point, was the only thing in the world we had worth selling.

Just then, a treatment-room door opened and Trish, one of our regular customers, emerged. "Hello, girls!" she said, beaming. "Oh, I'm walking on air, I am! Your mother's a marvel!"

"Hi, Trish," we all chorused, as Mum appeared behind her.

"Abbie, you always look so happy!" Trish cried. "And so talented, making up all these lovely products. You're beautiful, too!"

By this point I was obviously blushing about a zillion degrees. And that last bit made me splutter. "Oh, I'm not!" I cried. "My skin and hair are so pale that if I don't wear loads of eye make-up—"

"...it looks like I haven't got a head," finished loudmouth Saff, doing an impression of me.

Trish just smiled at that. "Have you got a boyfriend, love?" she asked then, making me splutter even more. "My son—"

“Yes, she has,” Saff informed her. She did a little wiggly dance and sang, “His name is *Mar-co*. And she *lurves* him!”

Grace was walking by with a stack of freshly washed towels, and she and Saff looked at each other and burst into giggles. I did the goggly eyes thing at them to try and make them stop, which just made them worse, obviously. So instead I went bright red and wished I could melt into a puddle of embarrassment on the floor. Perhaps then someone could put *me* into a Rainbow Beauty product – Eau de Cringe, or something.

Trish went over to the old-gold-painted reception desk to pay Mum. “Kim, love,” she said, “I’m off on a girls’ night out tonight. Why don’t you come along? Alison and Denise have been in for treatments before so you’ll recognize them, and you’d love Lucilla, she’s such a laugh!”

Mum looked a bit surprised for a moment, and then she said, “That’s really kind, Trish, but I’m just so exhausted. I’ve been on my feet since seven this morning.”

“Oh, go on, Mum,” said Saff. “A night out would do you good. You haven’t been anywhere since we moved here – well, apart from over the road to the pub with Liam for a glass of wine, which hardly

counts as letting your hair down.” She turned to Trish. “Liam’s our neighbour,” she explained. “He and Mum are like BFF now. There’s nothing going on between them, though, what with him being gay.”

“Saff!” Mum shrieked. “TMI!”

“I didn’t know you knew what TMI meant,” said Saff, looking impressed.

“Oh, come on, Mum, go out,” Grace urged. “Us lot are all out tonight anyway, so you’ll be stuck in the flat on your own if you don’t,” she added.

Saff gave me a cheeky look. “Yeah, Abbie’s going out with...” She went into giggling-and-singing mode again. “*Mar-co*. Who she *luuuurves*.”

I swatted at her, then asked Grace where she was going.

“Cinema,” she said, “with Saff. We would have asked you, but we knew you –” she grinned cheekily – “had a *da-ate*, with your *boy-friend*.” Argh, even serious, sensible Grace was joining in the wiggling-and-singing thing now.

I forgot to swat her, though. I was too busy being surprised. It’s not easy to get Grace to leave her Maths books behind and actually go anywhere, and I can’t remember the last time she and Saff did something together on their own – they’re at each other’s throats most of the time.

Saff sighed loudly and rolled her eyes at Mum. “Mum, do you want to be sad, staying in on your own on a Saturday night?” she asked.

“I’m going to have a nice bath, a glass of wine, and I’m halfway through a good book,” said Mum. “So, yes, please. I want to be sad.”

“Oh, but you can be sad *tomorrow* night,” Trish teased. “Come out, Kim, it’ll do you good.”

Mum grimaced. “Oh, I was so looking forward to that bath and book...” We all eyeballed her a bit more, and eventually she sighed and said, “Fine, okay, I’ll come out. But if I fall asleep in the corner at half eight, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

When we’d all said our goodbyes and Trish had gone, I gave Grace the swatting she’d missed out on, and she squealed and ran at me while holding a stack of towels, so we kind of bounced off each other. Then just as Mum was about to tell us off for mucking about, a new client walked in the door and she didn’t have to say anything because suddenly we were All Professionalism.

As Mum welcomed the new lady and Grace took her coat, Saff swished off and came back with the juice and smoothie menu and offered her a complimentary drink. She was booked in for an aromatherapy massage and facial with one of our

All-Natural Fresh Face Masks, so I went to reset the treatment room. As I restarted the CD of relaxing music and topped up the oil burner, which was filling the room with the delicious scents of jasmine and bergamot, I thought about Marco. I didn’t know if I *lurved* him, as Saff put it, but I did know that ever since the first moment we met, I’d had a bone-shaking, knee-collapsing crush on him.

And now he was my BOYFRIEND (sorry, I just had to say that in capitals). My BOYFRIEND (sorry, just had to say it again!). Anyway, now he was my BOYFRIEND (right, stop that now!) I was walking round with a smile on my face like a lighthouse beam. His band was playing at a live-lounge thing in a cafe in town that evening, and me and my friends from my new school were going along. I’d only known Summer and Ben for a couple of months, but it felt like far longer than that. And as for Marco...

Well, us two got back together last Saturday. *Why did you split up?* you’re thinking. That’s a long story involving both of us being really busy and stressed, but the main thing is that we’re together now and this time this is IT, with added foreverness.

When my family and I first got here, I used to wake up every day with this cloud of dread hanging over me, after all the awfulness had only just

happened. But now I get this happy glow, and for a moment I wonder why I feel so good inside, and then I remember that Rainbow Beauty is real, not just a dream, and that me and Marco are back together. He's been going all out on the boyfriend front, making me a playlist of songs he thought I'd like, and giving me his jacket when it suddenly went all autumnly chilly on Tuesday, even though that left him shivering in just a T-shirt and the black skinny jeans he always wears, even to school. I wonder if you call the guys' ones that, actually? I mean, "skinny" doesn't sound very manly, does it?

"Abbie, why are you still in here?" Mum asked, making me jump. She was standing at the doorway with her client. "Come on, love, less daydreaming, more working!" she said, ushering me out of the treatment room.

I came back to earth again with a bump as I hurried into the reception area. Grace was looking flustered, trying to deal with three customers, and Saff's next client was standing in the doorway, with no one to welcome her. "Abbie, this lady and her friends were asking about the antioxidants in your Blueberry Face Mask," Grace gabbled, "but I'm not sure about—"

"Sure, no problem. How can I help you?" I asked,

beaming at Grace's customers. My sister gave me a grateful smile and hurried over to welcome the person who'd just arrived.

I got a tub of the Blueberry Burst Fresh Face Mask out of the chiller counter (they look fantastic dotted amongst all the fruit and veg) and let the ladies smell it, then put some of the silky-smooth purple mask onto their hands. "The blueberries have anti-inflammatory properties, camomile soothes, calamine cleanses and the almond oil leaves the skin looking really polished," I explained.

"Oh, yes. Lovely," said the blonde one.

Her friend asked me what I'd recommend for dry skin, so I showed her the Oat and Banana Mask, which really calms and moisturizes. "Oh, and you might like our Carrot and Calendula Hand Balm too," I suggested. "I created it for gardeners, so it's perfect for dry and chapped skin." I gave them wipes to remove the face-mask samples, then handed them the balm tester from our glass display shelves. They loved that too, and by the time we'd all finished chatting, they had a little stack of products on the reception desk. Two of them took the Blueberry Burst Fresh Face Mask and some Rose and Geranium Bath Bombs and the other went for the Oat and Banana Fresh Face Mask and the hand balm I'd

recommended, as well as a tub of our Sunset Glow Body Butter and some Zesty Zing Shower Gel for her daughter.

Grace's eyes gleamed as she put it all through the till. I wrapped everything up in tissue-paper parcels finished off with ribbons and rosebuds before popping them into our special recycled bags with little rainbow-print stamps on them, which we made ourselves one evening while we were watching TV.

Once the customers had gone, Grace turned to me. "Great upselling, Abs," she said. "*Alan* would be very impressed."

By Alan, Grace meant her ultimate hero Lord Alan Sugar – although they'd never met, she'd decided that they were on first-name terms.

"I don't know about upselling," I said. "I just want everyone to know about Rainbow Beauty and take a little bit of our magic home with them."

"That's great," said Grace. "And if you could get a bit extra-enthusiastic about the Seaweed and Honey Fresh Face Masks next time, that would be even greater – they're nearing their sell-by date and stock wastage is going to mess up my profit projections for the product line."

"Okay, sis. I'll do my best," I promised. Although we all teased Grace about her obsession with the

figures, we knew how important it was. We were a new business, and with around 40% of new businesses failing in their first year, we had to do everything we possibly could to make ours one of the success stories.

Our biggest challenge was getting together the next instalment of our rent – Mr. Vulmer the landlord wanted another three months' money in advance for the shop and the flat, which came to very nearly £2000 altogether (GULP!). It wasn't due until the eighth of October, more than a month away, and we'd already managed to put aside £800 from our first few weeks of being open, so we were feeling pretty confident we'd have it in time. We had to keep focused and stay on target though – goodness knows what he'd do if we couldn't make the payment.

Grace and I got on with tidying up, while Mum and Saff finished treating their last clients of the day. Then we closed and Mum made a round of smoothies with some mangoes that didn't look like they'd survive until Monday, while I got all the used towels and robes in to wash. Saff swept through and cleaned the little customer loo and Grace cashed up. A few minutes later, we all flopped out on one of the purple sofas with our drinks.

“It’s been another good Saturday,” Grace reported. “Especially with Abbie on product sales. Asking clients on the phone if they’d like any extra bits and pieces when they book has really worked, too. All those leg waxes and eyelash tints add up, and four ladies added a facial to their massage package for today, just because we talked it up to them on the phone.”

“That’s fantastic,” said Mum. “Let’s make sure we do the same next week.”

“And I did rose nail art for two girls today,” Saff said proudly. “It’s only an extra fiver, but it all helps, and it looked fantastic. Hopefully when their friends see it at school on Monday, they’ll all want them.”

“Well done, love,” said Mum. Grace and I shared a secret smile. Saff hadn’t been sure about doing a beauty course at college at first (she’d been set on becoming a famous singer even though, sorry to say this, but she isn’t exactly Adele). It was great to see how she was madly into being a beautician now, and she was really brilliant at it, too.

“We’ve got some rebookings for next Saturday already,” said Grace, “and I’m sure we can fill up the other spaces by the end of Friday.”

“Oh, it’s a bit daunting, though,” Mum said then, “thinking of you all going back to school and college, and me running this place on my own...”

“You won’t be on your own,” Saff assured her. “I don’t have college on Tuesdays, so I’ll be here to help, and we’ll all be back just after four most days.”

Mum smiled, stretched out her arms and caught us all into a hug round our waists. “I know. I’m so proud of you girls. You’re amazing. This – everything we’ve done – is amazing. Now we’re up and running, we’re just going to go from strength to strength.”

“Too right!” cried Saff. “Look out, world, here we come! Well, look out, Devon, anyway!”

“Right, I think we’re all sorted here. Let’s head upstairs,” said Mum, linking arms with me. “I need to get ready to go out before I run out of energy and change my mind.”

“Oh, Saff, that reminds me, can I borrow your blue top to wear to the gig?” I asked, as we headed for the door. “Pur-lease...” I added, batting my eyelashes at her.

She gave me a cheeky grin. “Okay, seeing as you’re meeting up with your *boy-friend*, who you *lu-rve*.” Argh, not again!

We locked up, then all bustled upstairs to the flat. It looked so much better now that we’d had a couple of months to get settled in. Mum’s colourful designer scarf covered up most of the revolting brown sofa in the corner of the kitchen (that, and the telly on the

end of the peeling worktop, was basically our living room). Saff and Grace had covered their room in posters (completely different ones, obviously – Grace’s were all *Twilight* and quotes from Einstein and Saff had romcom ones scrounged from the local cinema). Still, they hid the grubby, eighties’ wallpaper – that was the main thing.

I shared a room with Mum (*Yikes!* you’re thinking, and yes, at first I’d been horrified, but we’d got used to it). It looked better since I’d hung some of my clothes up on the walls as outfits with accessories to make it look like some kind of fashion mag’s store cupboard. And we’d put the lovely big wool picnic blanket on the bed, since that was more cosy and dressed up than just the plain duvet.

And now I had my chill-out room, of course. It had started off as the manky Hoover cupboard but then Mum, Grace and Saff had secretly decorated it for me, in a warm burnt orange, and added big sequined floor cushions, fairy lights and a CD player. It was my special place to draw, write, daydream, read – and come up with new ideas for our home-made pamper products, of course.

For supper, Mum had made a big dish of cannelloni the night before, so that was all ready to go in the oven.

“Yum!” exclaimed Grace as we tucked into it half an hour later. “Proper food is back on the menu! You’re right, Saff. We’re definitely on the up!”

We all giggled at that. When we’d first moved down to Totnes, our fave dinner had been reduced to a tin of tomatoes and an economy bag of twisty pasta. But now Mum’s signature cannelloni was back to being creamy and delicious, full of spinach and mozzarella and crème fraiche.

After we’d eaten, Saff put some music on and we all took turns in front of the bathroom mirror (well, okay, nudged and jostled and tried to borrow stuff and complained about each other taking all the space).

Eventually Saff got really annoyed and marched us all back into the kitchen, emptied her make-up bag (well, *bags*) onto the rickety Formica-topped table and said, “Look, *I’ll* do you lot up, okay? It’ll be good practice for when my course starts. Form an orderly queue and behave yourselves.”

“Yes, ma’am!” said Mum, saluting. We all giggled at that, even Grace.

Saff did a really classic look on Mum, with blusher and plum lipstick, and when Mum went off to get dressed, Saff then did this amazing transformation on me. She used my usual lashings of black eyeliner



and mascara (I'm sure I've mentioned the headless thing) but with loads of grey-black cream eyeshadow too, and pale-out lips, so I looked really rock chick-y. "Oh, Saff, I love it!" I shrieked, when she showed me in the bathroom mirror. "And you know what would really finish the look? Your black skinny jeans..."

I thought I was pushing my luck there, but Saff was so happy playing make-up artist that she said, "Oh, go on then, and you can borrow my slouchy boots, too."

"You're the best sister in the world!" I cried, and Grace said, "Ahem, she might be the best sister *now*, but Monday morning when you need help to do your Maths homework in the loos before school, I think you'll find *I* am..."

I grinned at Grace. "Yes, I've got the best *sisters* in the world, that's what I said," I replied sweetly.

"Abbie, you don't *really* leave your homework until Monday morning in the loos, do you?" asked Mum then, so I gave Grace a look and luckily for me she promised she'd just made that up.

Grace even let Saff put a bit of mascara and lip gloss on her and we managed to talk Mum up to half ten on our curfew. She made my sisters absolutely swear to be back on time so that when Summer's

dad dropped me home, I wouldn't be there on my own. "I'm sure I'll be home long before then anyway," she added. "But just in case there's a queue for taxis or something..."

"Mum, go out, have fun, relax!" I cried. "I'm *fourteen* – I could go and babysit for little kids, and you're worried about me spending ten minutes in the flat on my own!"

She blinked at me. "Yes, I suppose you're right," she said. "I can't believe my girls are growing up so fast!"

Just as we were all about to head out, I dug around in my bag for the little vintage compact that held my home-made solid perfume (my signature scent – geranium and rose) and dabbed some on. Then I slicked a bit of shine onto my lips with my Peppermint Kiss Lip Balm. I'd been wearing it when Marco and I had our first kiss, as we danced in the empty beauty parlour to "Somewhere over the Rainbow", and the scent always brought back that memory. For a moment, my fingers lingered on my lips, remembering... I stood, daydreaming, smiling...until Saff stuck her head round the bathroom door and dragged me out to help her choose the right eyeshadow to go with her slinky red vintage dress.

Mum came back into the kitchen then and I noticed her do a double take at me, and then start giving me a “you’re not going out like that” kind of look. I thought she was about to grab the wet wipes and un-rock-chick me, so I quickly announced that we really ought to go. I started bustling everyone towards the door, handing them bags and coats on the way.

Halfway down the hall, Mum stopped still and I thought my cool make-up was doomed, but then she said something that surprised us all. “Do I look overdone?” she asked anxiously. “I mean, are you sure about this top of yours, Saff? Does it look too young for me?” She was breathing fast, like she was about to have a panic attack. “I’m not sure what the others will be wearing,” she went on. “I don’t know Trish’s friends apart from having a quick chat with the ones who came in to Rainbow Beauty. Oh, goodness, I hope we’ll get on alright. Look, I think I’ll just stay here after all. You go on...” And with that, she turned and hurried back to the kitchen, looking very unsteady.

We all rushed after her.

“Mum, calm down!” I cried. I was really shocked to see such big cracks in her confidence – they’d never been there before.

Saff was staring at her, and I knew she was also thinking, *Is this really Mum talking?* “You’ll be fine,” she said.

“You look great,” Grace insisted.

Mum sighed. “Oh, girls. I really don’t know if I can do it,” she muttered. “I haven’t been out, properly *out*, since...since...”

“What, since Dad had an affair, split up with you, moved out and lost his business, and the bailiffs took our house and most of our stuff from right under us, and we ended up in this hellhole flat?” asked Saff breezily.

Grace and I held our breath. The silence seared and burned around us for a moment, and I felt the pain of it all again, as scorching and sharp as when it had just happened. We looked at Mum, worried she was about to burst into tears and collapse in a heap.

But instead she breathed in sharply and said, “Saff, whatever you do, never ever chat to our clients about their problems, will you? They’d run a mile!”

“Sorry...” Saff half-whispered. “It just came out...”

“It’s fine, love,” Mum insisted, managing a smile. “And you’ve put things into perspective for me. We’ve come this far. We can get through anything.”

It's only a night out, for goodness' sake. I'm not being asked to perform brain surgery."

"You'll have a great time," I insisted.

"Yeah, go for it," added Saff.

"And if it's awful, you can always make an excuse and come back early," said Grace.

"Oh, my girls, my lovely girls! Come here!" Mum cried, pulling us all into a big hug again. Then she let us go, smoothed down her top and skirt, and patted her hair. She always did that before she went anywhere or opened the door to anyone. And then she said, "Look out, Totnes. Here come the Green girls!"

And with that we bustled down the stairs, chatting and giggling, and stepped out into the blustery September evening.