

# DROPPED!

ALICE KUIPERS

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Author: Alice Kuipers

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In this high-interest accessible novel for teen readers, Dex is dropped onto a deserted tropical island to compete in a high-stakes internet reality show. He takes it to the extreme to gain the most social media likes and followers needed to win.

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## KEY SELLING POINTS

- A teen competes in a high-stakes internet reality show set on a deserted island, taking it to the extreme to get all eyes on him.
- The story explores the false reality of lives lived online, and how far people might go for social redemption, popularity, fame and love.
- The main character struggles with the pressures of social media as he tries to figure out who he really is and what it means to be authentic.
- This fast-paced story takes place over four days and is told using a mix of short social media posts and a first-person narrative.
- Enhanced features (dyslexia-friendly font, cream paper, larger trim size) to increase reading accessibility for dyslexic and other striving readers.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**ALICE KUIPERS** is the author of more than 10 books for young readers, including the Arthur Ellis Award winner *The Worst Thing She Ever Did*, as well as *World's Worst Parrot* and *Pia's Plans* in the Orca Currents line. Her work has been published in dozens of countries and has also been made into plays and produced for radio. She lives with her family in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

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**DROPPED!**



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Alice Kuipers



ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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To Orin and Sylvie. I love how  
you're always there for each other.





# Chapter One

*DAY ONE*

11:30 AM

The helicopter sounds like a roaring monster.  
And I'm in its belly.

While the pilot prepares for takeoff, I quickly edit my video. Type words over it. Move the text around. Then I hit *upload*.

@Dex\_Effex\_

 19-second video

**COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE!!!**

**SEE IF I SURVIVE!!!**

**FOLLOW THE FIVE-DAY FEED THEY SET  
UP @Dropped\_CanTheyMakeIt/Dex**

Selfie mode—Me! Gangly, brown-eyed, ear triple pierced. “Hey, everyone. I’m ready to go! Just saying bye to my mom.”

Phone flips to our small, tidy house. Mom stands outside. She blows kisses. To the camera, not to me. “Be careful, Dex!” she says.

Selfie mode—Me again! Grinning. “Can’t wait for this! Make sure to follow me!” I stick out my tongue.

Phone flips. And joggles. I walk toward  
a helicopter in the field behind my house.

“Check this out!”

Selfie mode—Me sitting in the helicopter.

One thumb up.

**IF YOU GUYS LOVE ME THE MOST, I WIN  
\$250,000! AND THAT SICK TRIP TO DUBAI!!!  
REMEMBER...WHEN I GET TO ADVENTURE  
ISLAND, FOLLOW ME  
@Dropped\_CanTheyMakeIt/Dex**

When I look up from my phone, the pilot  
hands me a blindfold. I set it on my lap while  
I check the main *Dropped!* feed. They started  
filming an hour ago. Their team is editing  
and uploading to this main page. They told

us they'll post whatever they think will get the most attention. Their footage. Our footage. They have 100,000 followers already. Each contestant has their own *Dropped!* feed too. I don't have many followers—and one of them is my mom.

Right now one of the updates on the main feed is a photo of me in the front seat of the helicopter. I scroll through the rest.

## **@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt**

### **Updates**



Close-up video of a girl blowing kisses at the screen. Tons of makeup.



Hypershort video of another teenager chewing her nail.



Two big guys get into a helicopter, arms round each other. They are identical twins. Hard to tell which one is which. They both wear swim trunks and not a lot else.

Soon I'll know all these people. I'll be competing against them.

I guess I already am!

**11:39 AM**

With a lurch, the helicopter rises. Blindfolded, I find everything even more strange. My stomach feels like a fish is swimming inside.

I am one of six contestants on the new reality show *Dropped!* When I told my mom

three weeks ago, she shared it on her social media. In fact, she made me tell her again so she could film me sharing the news. She's totally addicted. Her whole life is online. *Our* whole lives are online.

Sure, she asked me if Adventure Island was safe. Asked if I was going to be okay. But only after she stopped filming "our moment." Like it was an afterthought.

I didn't tell her I had to escape my real life. The way it had suddenly headed. Downhill, like my life online.

I was no longer Mr. Popular.

She knew anyway. She'd seen my ratings crash. My friends abandon me. But talking about all that bad stuff makes it real to her. I know she didn't want to face that.

The helicopter swings to the left, and I try to imagine where we're going. It helps me forget about my ex-girlfriend, Lola. Forget about my crappy friends. Forget how I broke my life.

No, I'm lying. I never forget. It's like, when I close my eyes, my brain is looping. The video in my mind shows Lola making out with my best friend. Ex-best friend.

The next scene is at that party. Where I drank too much. Where I stood by the outdoor pool in my swim shorts. At the party. In front of everyone.

And sang.

I sang to Lola. She used to love my songs.

Multiple people streamed my performance. It did not look how I'd thought it would. In real



life, I looked pathetic. Not as muscular as my feed makes out. In my old swim shorts. With wet hair over my face. Slurring my words.

Then I'd flung my arms out and yelled, "I love you, Lola! Take me back!" Well, that was the death of my old life. Right there. My followers left me. My social-media life was over.

But not anymore. I'm going to revive it. On the island the *Dropped!* team will be filming us constantly. With secret cameras. Some will livestream, and some footage will be edited. To best suit their audience. Which will help me regrow mine. Both on the island and when I win that trip to Dubai. Imagine the photos and content I can score from a trip like that.

The helicopter speeds up. It pushes me into my seat.

“You doing all right, kid?” the pilot shouts over the roar.

I can’t see her at all with the blindfold on. “Awesome,” I say, although my stomach is queasy.

**12:15 PM (I’m guessing!)**

Still blindfolded, I get off the first helicopter. Then the pilot ushers me up a short flight of steps. I work out that we’re getting onto a plane.

I try to look cool in my seat. Because I know they are filming us. Every minute.

We take off, and hours go by. I try not to drool while I sleep.

When we land, I hear two voices talking behind me. “We’re going to win this easily.”

“You bet, Salvo.”

I am led off the plane. A newly familiar helicopter roar fills the air. Another chopper? By this stage, I can’t tell how long I’ve been traveling.

I’m squished close to someone else. They smell antiseptic. Like a hospital.

More time goes by.

Suddenly we’re dropping down.

The churn of the helicopter.

The sudden rush of heat as the door opens.

The tropical smell of the air.

“Come on, kid, let’s go.”

The other person stays behind as someone leads me out.

I go down the steps. My hair blown by the chopper blades, floppy all over.

The soft ground makes me stumble to one knee. Sand. Someone says, “Good luck. Remember...”

“What?” I ask.

“Don’t risk too much,” she says. I think it’s the pilot. Before I can ask what she means, her footsteps retreat. Rustling. The helicopter gets even louder, then rises above me.

I listen to it disappear.

In the new quiet, I hear a swooshing noise. Water perhaps.

It repeats. Waves.

Sand. Waves. Tropical air.

Sweet! Adventure Island smells and sounds amazing.

I call out. “Hello?!”

There’s no answer.

The *Dropped!* people told us we could take off our blindfolds once we’ve arrived.

So I do.

## Chapter Two

### *DAY ONE*

4:37 PM

I'm on the most gorgeous beach I've ever seen. A half-moon bay with blue-green water. The sky is radiant with color. I grab my phone and take a photo right away. I hook up to the game's Wi-Fi. Like I was told.

If we use our own socials, we forfeit the game. So I head to my *Dropped!* account. Like I was told.

They've changed the profile they set up for me @Dropped\_CanTheyMakeIt/Dex.

**Dex**

**Come along for the ride!!! See if I survive!!!**

That's not what I had there before. It used to say, *Life is about the experience*. But they took the lines from my post earlier today.

My stomach lurches. Like it did on the helicopter.

My profile pic now shows me blindfolded, on one knee. On this beach. I look sweaty. I do not look cool and exciting. I glance

around for the cameras. But I can't see them anywhere. They must be tucked into the trees. Livestreaming. Recording. I imagine the *Dropped!* team editing and posting. Constantly. Twenty-four seven. Shaping our stories for the world.

On the warm sand, I sit and scroll through the profiles of the other contestants. Panic rising. There are five other teenagers on the island. All of them already have more likes and followers than I do. How?

The whole point of coming here is to get back what I lost. I'm awesome at social media. I was born into it! My mom has been sharing my life since I was tiny. I remember my life through photos on her feed. My first birthday was shared on some long-dead



social platform. Since then she's branded us. My whole life.

Except...I screwed all that up. One party. One desperate move. And it was all over. So far, it doesn't seem to be getting any better.

Amina is one of the other contestants. She's gorgeous. Right now she's live-streaming herself in a bikini, trying to catch a fish. With her bare hands. Her likes are going up by the second. She must be farther around the island, judging by the sun in her stream.

I check out the other four contestants more closely.

Salvo and Kai are twins. They are both buff and already building a shelter out of branches.

They will be tough competition. I heard their voices on the plane, I think.

Em is mousy. The one who was chewing her nail. Deepak is a geek. Neither of them has a chance.

I look at the main page. Our tasks will be posted here.

There are no tasks yet.

**5:15 PM**

I look away from my phone at the island. Forest flanks me on the left. The beach backs onto a steep cliff. I walk over to it. It's warm to the touch.

I raise my phone in front of me. Choose a filter to make everything look cool.

## @Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Dex

### (o) Livestream

Selfie mode—I'm sweaty, with sand on one cheek. I wipe my face. "I'm looking up at this crazy cliff. Nooo. Check this out."

Phone flips to face the cliff. A dark cave opens into the rock.

Selfie mode—Back to my delighted face. "I think I just found myself a place to sleep tonight! This cave is perfect. Am I right? Tell me in the comments?!"

My livestream tanks. The only comment I get is, *YOU COULD NOT PAY ME TO SLEEP IN THAT DARK CAVE!*

My ex, Lola, didn't even watch the video. I

crouch on a rock outside my cave and scroll.  
And scroll. In case she tunes in.

**6:47 PM**

The main *Dropped!* feed is all about Amina. She is laughing and still fishing in her white bikini. Did she wear that from her house?

The sun is setting behind her. Her likes and follows are going up by the minute. It's like the rest of us aren't here.

Oh no. As I watch, they bring up my image. This was taken maybe ten minutes ago. I'm tapping at my phone. Over and over. It's like I'm obsessed. They pull out to show the beach.

Still, in the video, I tap, tap, tap. No wonder hardly anyone is following me. I'm boring!

I shiver. It's suddenly cold. The night comes down hard and fast. We must be near the equator. No slow sunsets here.

My stomach hurts. I forgot to eat. I'm not tired, but it's too dark to go anywhere. Do anything.

I crawl into my cave.

It's cold. And shadowy.

I totally have the creeps. Something flies over my face. I leap up and scream.

A bat!

I slap myself all over my body.

Then lie back down. If they are filming me in this cave, I might as well quit now. They'll have footage of me screaming and jumping around. Trying to get that bat away from me. There's no way I can win. The whole point of

this game is to have the most followers at the end. I'm already so far behind, how can I ever catch up?

I check one last time. Lola has followed someone. But not me. She's following Amina.

# Chapter Three

## *DAY TWO*

7:08 AM

A beam of white light wakes me. The front of the cave warms rapidly. I yawn and stagger onto the soft sand. The sun is rising over the water. I haven't sat and watched the sun rise before. I'm usually getting to school or asleep. It hurts my eyes at first.

The sky seems alive. It's stunning. I take a photo and upload.

A task has been posted.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt**



**Task**

**BURIED TREASURE.**

**Find it first!**

The image is of a treasure map. The X is not far from something named Cliff Bay. I'm guessing that's where I spent the night. Sweet! Maybe I can do better today!

My stomach is so hungry, I could eat a raw fish. But I'm not going to catch a fish right now. Even if I knew how. Instead I'm going to win this task and get into the game.



I livestream myself telling my phone that. Then continue filming as I walk through the forest at the edge of Cliff Bay. The ground is covered in leaves and twigs. A hooting sound makes me gasp. The hill slopes quickly, and I push through thick foliage. I stop streaming and check the map. Check my profile. I am gaining a few followers finally.

So obvious. I have to *do* stuff. Not just sit around.

I need to up my game. Make it feel more real. The forest is dark and damp. I use a filter to make it look even more spooky. Energized, I start walking again. Livestreaming as I go. It looks like I'm the only one awake. I'm going to win this challenge!

Because I'm watching my phone, I don't see the tree root. I trip and fall down a small bluff. My phone skitters away. I hurry to pick it up.

I say to the camera, "First tip—don't die! That root came out of nowhere!"

Instantly I get a few likes. 👍👍👍

I check for any broken bones. And say, "I seem to be okay." I brush off some leaves and mud.

*That looks so dangerous, Dex!* someone writes.

Dangerous Dex! That could be how I play this game. Willing to take a risk. Showing how daring I am.

Daring Dex!

That name sounds cool too.

Looking at the map, I see I'm close to the X. Confidence pumps through me. I recognize myself all of a sudden. Dex, social-media star. How I used to be.

"With your help, I got this," I say to my audience. Some people are watching my livestream! Awesome. People love to answer questions on social media. So I ask, "Which way should I go?"

A bunch of people make suggestions. One tells me they think I need to go farther to the right. I adjust my path.

I push through leaves, going deeper into the trees. "Can you see the treasure?" I ask.

Someone else tells me to be careful of an overhang. I avoid it.

Someone else types that they think I'm close.

I get into a clearing. A huge red plastic X glows at the far edge.

"Guys! We found it! Thank you!" I put my phone against a tree to keep livestreaming. Then I start digging.

**8:12 AM**

A rustling sound at the other side of the clearing makes me turn. Amina pushes through the trees.

"Hey," she says. "You beat me to it." In real life she's even more stunning. She wears a green hoodie. Her hair is in a ponytail. She looks casual yet hot. My mind notes that we're alone in the woods.

“Want to share?” I offer. I’m impressed with myself for saying the right thing. I’m confident I’ve got this. I’m going to win over Amina. And win this game.

She comes to sit beside me. Her eyes are a lively brown. She smiles, showing perfect, straight teeth. I bet she had Invisalign. Mom says there’s no way we can afford it. Unless someone sponsors it for me through social media.

“I’m Amina.” She leans forward. She smells of the ocean. “You helped me figure out how to get here.” She taps my arm lightly, so quickly I’m not sure it happened. “I’m way around the island. It was a hike! I’ll dig with you.”

We dig together. The earth is soft and moist. Eventually we haul out a wooden chest. I bring

my phone closer to zoom in for the viewers.

Amina flips open the lid.

Inside is a fishing rod. Lures. A carton of eggs. Two packets of biscuits. A cooking pot. Something that filters water. A spear, hunting knife, flashlight and compass. Two long pieces of nylon cord. A first-aid kit. A mirror. A sleeping bag. And a candle and lighter.

“It’s like the ultimate survival kit,” I say, stopping the livestream and taking photos instead.

“For sure.” She laughs. “But how are we going to share?”

“I have a cave on my beach. It’s good shelter.” I leave the invitation open. “If you can handle bats...”

“Gross,” she says. “But if I can join you, that’d be peachy. Sleeping out on my beach was way cold last night.”

This gorgeous girl is going to sleep in the cave? With me? This is good news. More people will follow me. For sure. I wish I hadn’t stopped streaming. “You didn’t build a shelter?” I ask, trying to play it cool. *Dropped!* should be filming. I want everyone to see how chill I am that Amina is moving to my beach.

“I spent all afternoon trying to catch a fish,” she says, laughing. “The fishing rod will help. A ton.”

“I spent all afternoon scrolling. Trying to figure out who you all are.” I take the compass from the chest. I hold it flat in my palm. “My bay is east. Where the sun rises.”

“Yeah. I saw.”

She was watching me? More good news.

She smiles. “Let’s get this over to your beach.”

“I gotta eat first.” I open the biscuits and quickly do the math. “I’ll have two now. You want some?”

She nods.

“We can have two more with eggs down at the beach. I make great eggs.” Geez, could I have come out with a more cheesy line?

But she laughs. “Peachy.”



# Chapter Four

*DAY TWO*

9:45 AM

The chest is heavy, but we manage to carry it down together. We don't chat much. We don't have that much to say to each other. But no matter.

I make us eggs on the beach. After we've eaten, I scroll. Turns out Amina and I got

one map. Em and Salvo got a different one. And Deepak and Kai got a third. That totally wasn't clear to me in the task bar. These game makers are clever.

Kai took the chest before Deepak got there. Em managed to get to her chest first. Salvo found her and forced her to give up a few items.

A clip of me saying "Want to share?" is being replayed. And my likes and followers are going up. I don't come across as Dangerous Dex. Or Daring Dex. Not yet. But I come across as decent. Decent Dex. Maybe that could be my angle?

**12:07 PM**

Amina and I are both hungry. We decide to fish. Well, she fishes—quietly, using the

fishing rod. I rush and flail about. Trying to catch fish with a spear. Missing. Every. Time. Story of my new life.

Amina has her phone set up on the beach. I pass her the spear, then go sit beside her phone to start my own livestream. I try not to notice that she has more people watching her stream than I do.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Dex**

**(o) Livestream**

Turquoise water laps at my feet. I sit in the frame. Amina is just beyond. Waiting. Suddenly, in a rush of movement, she spears the ocean.

She yelps. Then laughs as she lifts her spear. There's a fish flapping at

the end. It's muscular and strong. But  
it's pierced through.

"Come and help!" she yells.

"Seriously?" I get up but have no idea what to do. I splash over to her and try to grab the fish. It's way stronger than I could have guessed. As I slip, the tail of the fish slaps my face. Amina cracks up.

I wade back to my phone and force a grin.  
"You got that, right? Fish slapped!"

Amina strolls over and sits beside me, checking she's in both phones.

"You're delightful," she says to me, ruffling my hair.

I'll take it. Delightful Dex.

She nods at the now-dead fish lying on

the sand. “We have to gut that,” she says.

“Can we wait five minutes?” I ask. My stomach turns. Gutting a fish? Seriously?

We sit peacefully on the warm sand, the ocean soothing and steady.

“Where are you from?” I ask her.

“London. I have three sisters there. All influencers.” She turns to speak directly to her phone. “Follow them all! Thanks for sharing.” I can practically see the emojis floating out of Amina’s head. I know I’m imagining it, but it seems very real.

“My oldest sister is going to get her own show!” she says. “Isn’t that so cool?”

“That’s cool,” I agree. But I have a niggling feeling that I don’t really think so. Is the whole aim of this to get my own show one day?

In my head, I ask myself why I want to be social-media famous. For money? So I can afford Invisalign? Because I want people to look at me? Because I want to record every moment and share it? I don't know the answer.

“Ready to get gutting?” Amina asks.

“Ready when you are,” I reply.

**7:30 PM**

As dusk falls, Amina and I sit by the fire we made. Teaming up with her is working out well for me in the game. My followers are way up. Amina is still in the lead. But Lola is following me now. I could win the prize. Get Lola back. And we have something to eat. Although gutting the fish was revolting.

“Have you ever felt in your sisters’ shadow?”

I ask Amina quietly, in the soft glow of the fire. It’s something I wanted to ask earlier, but we were livestreaming. Hopefully *Dropped!* won’t replay this moment if they’re filming it right now.

Maybe Amina is worried that they will share it, though. Because she narrows her eyes. And doesn’t answer. The breeze changes slightly, and smoke gets in my face.

A sudden crash in the bushes makes us turn. A tall, muscular teenager appears. In the moonlight, I recognize one of the twins.

“I saw you guys were eating,” he says.

Behind him, the quiet Em arrives. That means this twin must be Salvo. They come and stand by the fire. Em looks into the

flames like they hold the answer to a question. I glance at Amina, who weighs up Em before dismissing her.

Amina flutters her fingers at Salvo. “Hello again. I was hoping to be partnered with you,” she says to him. “Or against you. I definitely would’ve found the treasure faster.”

He laughs, his eyes lingering on Amina. Stars appear in the darkening sky.

“Not against me,” Salvo says. He’s clearly comfortable flirting.

Amina shrugs lightly, smiling at him. “I got exactly what I wanted.”

Now that Salvo is here, Amina is more electric. Happier. Although it’s hard to tell what’s real. Maybe she did enjoy hanging out with me. She moves closer to him.



Em raises her eyes to look at me over the fire. I can't read her expression, but I feel like she's judging me. Or even pitying me. I look away. Who is Em to do that? All of us are here to win. All of us are just doing whatever it takes. Right?

## Chapter Five

*DAY THREE*

**7:28 AM**

I wake with Amina's leg on mine. I take that as a good sign. Then I see she's squashed against me because our cave is full. Salvo. Em. Amina and me. We are all sleeping here now.

The others continue sleeping while I make my way out of the cave. I'm hit by the heat of

the morning. I take out my phone. I sit in the sand and scroll. I check my likes. My followers. And everyone else's. On the main page, a task is posted.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt**



**Task**

**Today you have to get real. Take turns to make your way here:**

A photo shows the peak in the middle of the island.

**At the top, share your saddest story with the world.**

I decide to go first. This is my chance to get ahead.

I climb through the undergrowth and sweat my way to the top of the mountain.

10:03 AM

I sit on a rocky outcrop and begin.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Dex**



**4-minute video**

Selfie mode—I sit hunched on a rock, looking over the ocean. I sigh and start to speak.

“I was so broken up when my ex dumped me. I knew it wasn’t forever, but she made me smile. She was fun and smart and gorgeous. I loved being with her. I don’t know how many of you have

been dumped? Sucks, right? And I bet none of you decided to sing to your ex at a crowded house party.”

I point to myself with my thumb. I tell them how I sang a song. Then I even sing a line of it. I tell them how I begged Lola to get back with me. While wearing old swim shorts.

“Anyway, that’s what I did. I destroyed my social life. My whole life. And any chance I had with my ex. Forever.”

I post it and watch the response.

*Uh, privileged?*

*Sure, tell us a real problem.*

I cringe. My sad story doesn’t vibe with

people watching. I think about it from their point of view. My life *is* pretty lucky right now.

Someone else comments.

*Think about it! Look around you! That view is AMAZEBALLS! And you got away from all that drama to this!*

I look up from my phone. The view *is* incredible. The edges of the island disappear into a turquoise sea. It spreads in all directions. Fluffy clouds float above the horizon. It's true. It's amazeballs.

After a while I scramble down the mountain, baking warm but happier. I pass Amina. She looks sweaty. She pauses. "Holy hot, hey?"

"I'm dying," I reply. Then I wish I'd said something different. I imagine the replay.

Over and over. With my sad story. That no one thinks is sad at all. Could I get any worse at this game?

**12:36 PM**

I make Em an egg. I serve it to her with a biscuit. She smiles at me gratefully. “It’s a long time since anyone has cooked for me,” she says.

We eat together. But I watch Amina’s stream.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakeIt/Amina**

**(o) Livestream**

“My parents died in a car crash when I was five years old. It destroyed me. I was...

lucky...to have a wonderful foster family. I blocked out the pain. When they told me... about my real parents...I thought I was going to die. I could suddenly remember..."

She pauses and wipes away a tear. She looks up at the sky. "This is hard...I could remember it all."

Em snorts.

"What?" I ask.

"At the back of the cave," Em whispers, then points. I follow, intrigued.

She murmurs, "They don't film us here."

"Really?" I look around. They never did show me freaking out about the bat. "They don't have cameras here?"



She shakes her head.

“Anyway, what? You don’t feel bad for Amina?” I push back my hair. “That’s a really sad story.”

“Amina lied. Her parents are fine.”

“She lied?” I say. “Why?”

Em holds out her phone. Amina’s numbers are rocketing.

“But she’ll get caught out!”

“Does that matter? By then she will have won. We only have two days left.” Em shakes her head. “She wants to win so badly, she isn’t thinking straight.”

“She’s ruthless.”

Em nods.

I flop onto my back. The cave is much cooler than outside. “I thought I had a chance

at this game. I was always really good at social media. But I seem to have lost my skills. I'm never going to win something like this."

"Me either."

"I'm never going to impress Lola. Not with this show." I check my own feed. "I have less followers than I did this morning."

Oddly, lying in this cool cave, for a tiny moment I don't care.

## Chapter Six

### *DAY THREE*

1:15 PM

Still lying at the back of the cave, out of the heat, I pick up my phone multiple times. I read through the *Dropped!* feed. Then I tap mindlessly at the screen. It's odd not to have all my apps and notifications.

“You’re addicted to it,” Em says, next to me. She scratches at the earth with a stick.

“Not at all.” I put my phone away. But it tugs at my attention. Maybe Em is right. “What’s your story for today?” I ask.

Em shrugs.

I sit up. “What?”

“My mom is sick. I have to look after her. Cook for her. Clean for her. My aunt came to stay so I could be here. We thought the money would help. A lot.”

Em draws a smiley face on the ground with her stick. “Whatever. I don’t want to share all that.”

“You should tell everyone. People would like that.”

“That’s not who I am,” Em says. “I’m not holding my mom up for the world to look at.”

Her reply gets to me. This person is so quiet and ordinary, but Em has a strength in her that I don’t. I have no idea who I am. I was Lola’s boyfriend. I was Mr. Popular. Now I’m kind of desperate. Desperate Dex.

“My mom is really into social media,” I say. “Since I was born. I don’t think she meant to get so into it all. When my dad left when I was seven, she said she wanted to connect with people all over the world. To get over my dad. Maybe. But she’s a good business person. She understands how it all works.” I sigh.

“Is she connected with people all over the world?”

“I think the online world is her community. Mom had to do everything as a single parent. She told me once that she worried she had no idea how to be a good mom. I reassured her. Felt close to her.” I sit up, tuck my arms around my knees. Remembering. “The next day she made a video and shared it, saying exactly the same thing. Asking her followers for support and advice.”

“That’s intense,” Em says. “How did she feel about this game?”

I shrug. “She saw it as an opportunity for me to...well, rehabilitate myself. I think.”

Em frowns.

“I used to have a good following. Mom thought I could even start making money at

it, like she does. My followers crashed when my life did. Mom was happy I applied for this. She supported it.”

“No wonder you’re addicted to your phone.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Sounds like you and your mom live a lot online.”

I nod. It’s true.

“I wanted to win the money for my family,” Em says. “But now that I’m here, and I see what it takes, I just want to go home.”

In the dark the two of us are sharing our most intimate selves. It’s intense. It’s full on. And I am suddenly too uncomfortable being so real.

I jump up and bang my head on the rocky ceiling. “Ouch!” I rub my temple.

“You okay?”

“Sure!” I clap my hands. “Let’s have a party.”

“What do you mean?” Em asks.

“Neither of us is going to win. So let’s have a fun day.” I walk to the front of the cave and yell, “Hey, *Dropped!* We want to party!”

Em laughs. “I hate parties.”

“I figured. But it’s better than sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves.” I spread out my arms. “You listening? Followers? Do you want us to party?”



# Chapter Seven

## *DAY THREE*

5:16 PM

Tons of followers wanted us to party. So that's what happens. *Dropped!* sends us food and drinks. And now I'm livestreaming. We have a roaring fire. We even have music. Amina is dancing next to Salvo. She tips her drink

to her mouth. I can see why everyone wants to watch her. She waves at me. My followers jump in number.

*Are you and Amina a thing? Check out that wave!*

*Ooooh, you and Amina!*

People like it when we interact. Because it creates a love triangle. Will she end up with me? Or with Salvo?

I'm sure the answer is Salvo. But this will get me back in the game. Tons of people are watching, for sure.

Including Lola.

As soon as I see that, I have an idea. I head over to Amina. "Want another drink?" I ask her.

She nods. I smile at her, then check my phone again. Lola is still watching. And my own followers are going up. The more I connect with Amina, the more followers I get.

Two guys appear out of the bushes. Deepak and Kai. The last two contestants. I welcome them. I show them the hot dogs and invite them to cook their own.

Then I go back to the game. I mean, \$250,000 is \$250,000, right? I remember how I felt at the top of the mountain. And at the back of the cave. But right now, at the party, that conversation with Em seems far away.

I bring Amina a drink and decide to be bold. "Want to come with me?" I ask.

She must see that we're catching attention online. I'm guessing that's why she says yes.

We walk away from the music and the party, both of us livestreaming. We slip through the trees. The air smells of flowers and moist leaves.

I know that people are watching, and I feel powerful. We walk farther away. The music sounds faint from here. I hear the rush of water.

"What's that noise?" Amina asks me and her followers at the same time. She pouts at her phone.

We push through branches.

A swirling river cuts through the ground. It tumbles to the ocean. It's fast and strong.

“Let’s cross it,” I say. I glance at my numbers. They’re ticking up. So are hers.

“No!” Amina replies, looking at hers. But I can tell she’s playing along.

I scroll through the comments.

*Cross the river?!*

*No! You’ll both die!!!*

Amina’s numbers are way ahead. But I’m catching up. In only ten minutes I’ve gained so many new followers. Then I see a message from Lola. Everything I wanted.

*Hey, Dex, be careful. I miss you, you know? Let’s connect when you get home. If you survive!*

It propels me into the water. I toss my phone onto the riverbank. I wave at Amina’s phone, hoping that *Dropped!* has cameras here too.

## @Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Amina

### (o) Livestream

Dex is getting into the river. The water is up to his thighs. He takes another step. The water pulls him under!

Amina screams. “Dex!”

She drops her phone. It tumbles and bounces through leaves and dirt. Comes to rest with only a corner of green light.

Frantic screaming.

Someone picks up the phone. It’s Salvo! He yells, “I’m getting him!”

Salvo props up the phone, giving it a quick thumbs-up. It views the rushing water, the sound filling the air. Amina stands at the edge, shouting, “Salvo is coming!”

Dex is holding a branch in the middle  
of the river, about to be ripped away.

Salvo runs in. Splashing!

Both Salvo and Dex disappear.

For a moment.

Then Salvo drags out Dex.

The two of them cough and splutter as  
they collapse on the far side.

**8:00 PM**

After I survive the river, my follower count  
leaps. I have tons. So does Salvo. People think  
I'm crazy. They think Amina is falling for me.  
They think whatever. I've finally got the hang  
of the game. I feel like myself again. Finally.

Night has fallen, dark and swift. The stars  
pepper the sky.

All of us are dancing on the beach.

I can feel the \$250,000. It's so close now.

Two more days.

I have to think of something to keep everyone watching. To blow this out of the water.

I don't think about how afraid I was. I don't want to remember the rushing river. The absolute terror.

The knowledge that I could have died.

I ignore Em. She keeps trying to catch my gaze. I can tell she's worried about me.

But I'm having the time of my life. I am.

And I know, just know, this is who I'm meant to be.



# Chapter Eight

## *DAY FOUR*

6:03 AM

My mouth is dry when I wake. I remember snatches of last night. I remember trying not to drown. Salvo saving me. Amina running over to make sure I was okay. I remember dancing on the sand. Ignoring Em.

I remember thinking I was going to win.

I step over the others in the cave. Now all six of us are squashed in. It's stinky and sour in the dark space.

I stagger out. On the quiet beach, I look for a leftover bottle and gulp down water. The night is falling away to a glimmer of morning.

Then I look at my phone. Remembering that I was almost in the lead last night.

But now everything has changed. I tap frantically at my device.

Salvo and Amina went skinny-dipping.

After the rest of us fell asleep.

They said they saw a shark. She screamed. He dragged her to safety. I don't believe there was a shark.

Amina is streaks ahead. Salvo is a close second. Everyone thinks he's a hero.

I keep scrolling. Deepak and Kai have a hilarious hot-dog video on here. Both of them have more likes and followers than I do.

Em and I are back at the bottom.

If nearly drowning can't win me this game, how far am I willing to go?

I spot a shadow by the edge of the water. I go closer and see Amina. I'm running out of time. Perhaps this is my last chance.

"Hey, Amina, I was just thinking about you," I say. It's not exactly true. But I hope Lola will see this. She smiles as soft sunlight appears in the sky. "I bet you were."

"So what's going on with you and Salvo?"

She shrugs. "Depends..."

“I was feeling like you and me, well, we have a connection.” I reach for her hand. “Right?”

She tangles her fingers in mine. I sneak a glance at my phone. The screen is filling with hearts.

“Maybe,” she says, dropping my hand and jumping up. I can tell she’s playing the game, just as I am.

“I have a plan for today,” I say. “How about a little climbing?”

She laughs, the sound spilling into the rushing waves. “Peachy. I’m ready when you are.”

**11:15 AM**

Salvo, Amina, Deepak, Kai and I line up by

the monster cliff. My plan is that we climb it. I'm a good climber, and I think I'll get up the highest. And I know the attempt will have everyone watching. It's totally dangerous. And cool. And makes for good content.

I look over at Em. "You sure you don't want to join us?"

She shakes her head.

"Make sure you film it all," I say.

She gives me a long, sad look. It seems like she's about to say something, but she just nods.

And then we begin.

My hands find holds naturally. Within a couple of minutes I'm about twelve feet off the sand. It didn't seem high until now. I look around to see how the others are doing.

Kai has already let go. Deepak is higher up than I am. So is Amina. Salvo is grunting slightly below me. Any higher than this, and a fall will be painful for any one of us.

I have a sudden jolt of worry. I can handle it if I get hurt. But I can't take the guilt if someone else does. I hope no one gets injured doing this.

My muscles strain as I pull myself higher. The rock is jagged. Salvo gasps below me. I watch him fall. Because he was lower than I am, he hasn't hurt himself.

Deepak, who is up the highest, shouts out, "It gets way harder here. No holds. Nah, I'm done." He shakes his head. "Amina, seriously. Come down."

"You think?" Kai calls up to Deepak. "Your numbers are flying."

“Bro, it’s deadly.”

Deepak climbs down, leaving only Amina and me on the cliff face.

She makes it look easy. She’s a few feet above me.

I pull myself up so I’m alongside her. “I guess it’s just you and me.”

I look down. We’re about forty feet up now. Falling from here would be bad. Any higher, and it becomes a game of life or death. Maybe this wasn’t my best idea.

“Dudes!” I hear Kai call out. “You guys are streaking ahead. You’re both, like, setting the internet on fire!”

It’s enough to make me pull myself higher. Amina does the same.

“Dex, this is dangerous!” Em calls. Her voice is far away. “Deadly!” Deadly Dex. I wonder if that’s the name I want.

“Look at those numbers,” Kai cries out.

I reach for a handhold. Deepak was right. It’s getting harder to find any. It’s like the cliff face doesn’t want us to climb it.

Just as I’m thinking all this, Amina screams.



# Chapter Nine

*DAY FOUR*

11:38 AM

Amina hangs by one arm, scrambling for footholds.

“Let me help you,” I call, panicking. It doesn’t seem like she’s doing this for followers. It looks like she’s about to fall.

She scrabbles in the rocks.

She regains her footing. I breathe a huge sigh of relief. But I feel sick. What have I done? I could have killed her with my dumb plan.

Suddenly my phone buzzes with an alert from *Dropped!*

**GET OFF THE CLIFF NOW!**

**IT'S TOO DANGEROUS.**

“Peachy,” Amina says to me, and we don’t climb down. “More people are going to tune in.”

My heart is pounding. Amina nearly died because of me. I’m an idiot. And she’s not going to stop.

“No way, Amina!” Kai yells from below. “You lied about your parents? Wow. People are hating on you.”

Amina looks over at me. “It’s still good content,” she says knowingly. No one can hear us up here.

“It’s pretty dark to lie about your parents being dead!” Kai shouts. “Especially when your sisters are social-media rock stars.”

I turn away from her and balance myself on a narrow ledge. I scroll through my feed. My followers are going up. I might even go past Amina. She is losing them by the second.

And suddenly I don’t want to win. I nearly got myself killed last night. And today I nearly got someone else killed. I look down at the beach. Then I look at Amina. She reaches up suddenly, poised to climb higher. I know what I’m going to do.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Dex****(o) Livestream**

Selfie mode—I'm pressed against the cliff face.

“You guys need to know that the most authentic person here is Em. She has heavy stuff she's dealing with in real life. And she needs this money. I'm super grateful you've followed me. But I've been an idiot.

“I risked my life. I risked Amina's. But it's not too late.

“Follow Em. Make her the winner. Turn this whole messed-up game on its head.

“Let's do this. #TeamEm.”

2:30 PM

I chat on the beach with Em. A lot of people are following her now. Amina's numbers have tanked. Right now she's making a video with Salvo where she's crying. Apologizing for lying.

"Are you going to get back together with Lola?" Em asks.

"Being here made me realize..." I shake my head. "I'm going to rethink a lot. I wanted to be on top again, have tons of followers. I wanted Lola. Now I think I'll...well, I'll do something else."

"Thanks for telling people to follow me."

My phone screen flashes with hearts and likes. ❤️❤️❤️👍👍👍

Em laughs. "Now they think we're getting together."

“Well, I’d like to stay in touch,” I tell her.

She nods. “I’d like that too. I could do with a real friend.”

“I could too,” I say. We still have another day and a half on this island, but I’m done playing the game. At the moment Em has the most likes and followers. But I bet Amina will turn that around by tonight. Or Salvo will. Or maybe even Kai and Deepak with their bro routine.

It’s nice not to care.

“I’m glad we get one more beautiful day here,” I say.

“You can actually look at the island instead of your phone,” Em quips.

I laugh. The sand is warm beneath me. The sun is hot above. The ocean is wild and amazing. “Absolutely.”

## @Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Dex

### (o) Livestream

Em is standing by the water. She turns and waves at me.

Selfie mode—I look directly into my phone. “This is my last update. I’m going to enjoy the heck out of the rest of my time here. Going dark!”

I turn off my phone. A huge weight lifts from me. I’m not Deadly Dex or Delightful Dex. I’m not Daring Dex, Dangerous Dex, Desperate Dex. I’m just me. Dex. I pull off my T-shirt and chuck it with my phone onto the beach.

Amina sets up her phone against a rock and calls everyone to the water.

Soft sand warms my feet. The vivid ocean and the vast sky fill my mind. I take a photo with my eyes. Hold it close. I'll remember this forever.

Then I let out a whoop and run toward the others.

**@Dropped\_CanTheyMakelt/Amina**

**(o) Livestream**

All six contestants are splashing along the shore. Together. Laughing.





## Author's Note

When I had the idea for *Dropped!* I wrote an outline. As a writer, I like doing these. An outline gives me a road map for my story. I did some research online. I discovered there had been a real reality show called *Dropped*. But it never aired because of a terrible accident. Lives were lost. It was a tragedy. I wasn't sure what to do. Should I change the title of the book? Should I rethink my idea?

I decided in the end that keeping my original title was the right choice. It was a hard decision. Dex is dropped by his ex, his friends and his life (it feels like). And he's dropped into a situation where he

has to figure out who he really is in the world. *Dropped* seemed like the best word. It felt important to share this story with you, though. Do you think I made the right decision for this book?

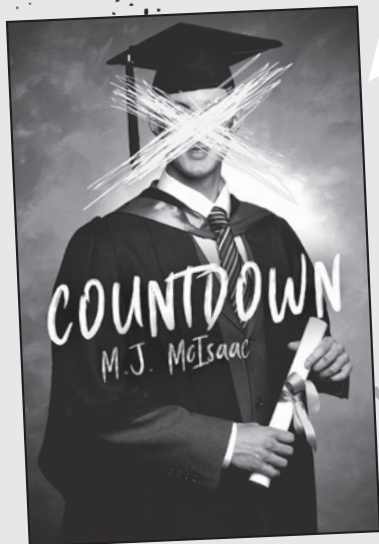
I want you, the reader, to know that sometimes reality is more astonishing than stories. I hope you enjoyed this one.





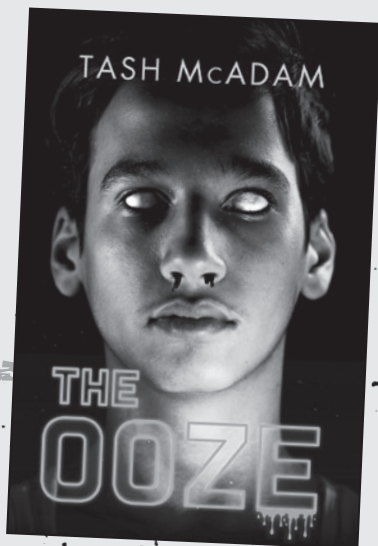
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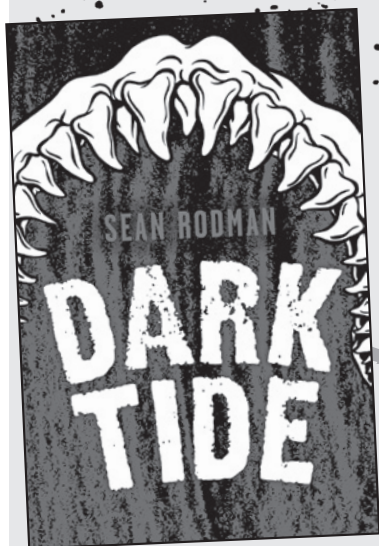
# MORE THRILLING READS!



IF THIS SECRET  
GETS OUT, IT  
COULD CHANGE  
EVERYTHING.

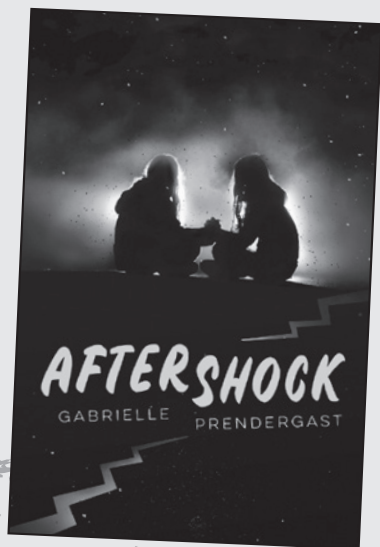
THE CITY HAS  
A SLIMY NEW  
PROBLEM.





**A DEADLY  
PREDATOR HAS  
BEEN AWAKENED.**

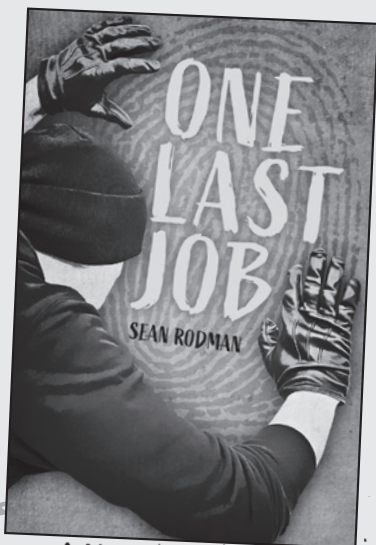
**ESTRANGED  
HALF SISTERS  
BAND TOGETHER  
TO SURVIVE A  
DEVASTATING  
EARTHQUAKE.**

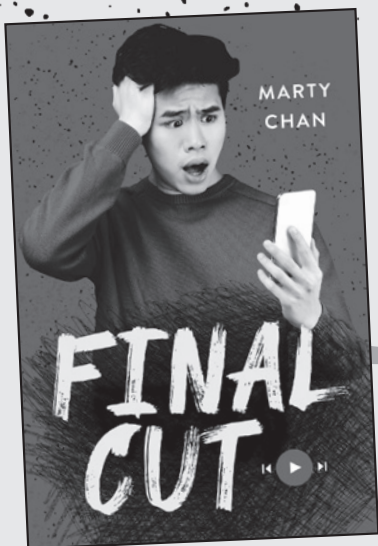




**JAYLIN RECEIVES  
A TEXT MESSAGE  
FROM A FRIEND  
WHO DIED A  
YEAR AGO.**

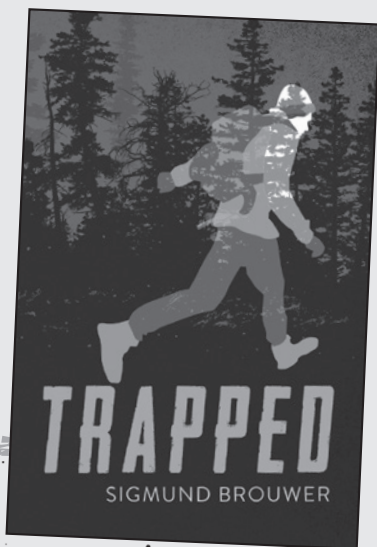
**MICHAEL AND HIS  
GRANDFATHER,  
A RETIRED  
CAT BURGLAR,  
MUST STEAL BACK  
A VALUABLE  
NECKLACE.**





**MASON HAS THE  
PERFECT REVENGE  
PLAN AGAINST HIS  
BULLIES.**

**WHAT SEEMS  
LIKE A DREAM  
COME TRUE  
QUICKLY  
TURNS INTO A  
NIGHTMARE.**









Alice Kuipers is the author of more than ten books for young readers, including the Arthur Ellis Award winner *The Worst Thing She Ever Did*, as well as *World's Worst Parrot* and *Pia's Plans* in the Orca Currents line. Her work has been published in dozens of countries and has also been made into plays and produced for radio. She lives with her family in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.



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