



# JUST WATCH ME

 VideoKids

1.3K 21 SHARE SAVE

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Hey! Wanna play?

Hey! I can't...



# ERIN SILVER

# JUST WATCH ME

Erin Silver



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**To my boys, Ari and Josh, the funniest,  
most resilient kids I know. You are the  
reason I persevere.**

# Chapter 1



**“Hey internet, it’s me, Simon.** Simon Rosen. Welcome to my first VideoKids post.”

I stare into the camera, but my smile quickly fades as a familiar sound filters down the hall.

“You never help around here!” Mom shouts from her bedroom.

“How would you know what I do? You’re never home!” Dad screams back.

I leap off my chair and shut my bedroom door. Nobody at school needs to hear that. I plop back into my seat. I’m at my desk on my computer recording my first livestreaming video for my Grade 7 technology project. These videos are

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a school assignment, but we're supposed to log on outside of class hours to create what our teacher calls "engaging content"—basically, videos where people share things that other kids want to watch. The site is kind of cool, I guess, and if you happen to be online while someone is creating a video, you can watch live. Viewers can post comments and the videos become interactive. Otherwise, you can watch later, kind of like a reality TV show. Not that I need any more reality TV in my life—my parents' constant fighting is plenty of drama for me. But never mind them. The point of the project is to figure out how to get the most views and likes.

I'm desperately hoping everyone is still asleep and that nobody will watch my first video in real time. With any luck, my video will be buried underneath all the other content kids in my class are likely to post today. I'm not one of those kids who likes the spotlight. I've never dreamed about being a YouTube celebrity who becomes famous for opening toys or posting embarrassing videos. I clear my throat and continue.

"It's Saturday morning, September 15, and this is where I spend most of my time."

I push my chair to the side and sweep my arm in an arc to show viewers what my room looks like. Mostly it's a mess. There's dirty laundry on the floor, my bed is unmade, and old *Star Wars* posters are peeling off the wall. Ah, well. It's too late to worry about that now. I turn back to my computer, unsure of what to say.

"I like YouTube—I mean, who doesn't—but VideoKids is school-approved because only our class has special access to our posts. On YouTube the whole world can watch, but I,

er, guess you already know how YouTube works.”

I realize I’m rambling a bit, and I scratch my nose—a dumb, annoying habit. Then I remember I’m streaming live. My face heats up like I’m being microwaved.

“This is a lot more pressure than I thought it would be,” I mumble.

The assignment is supposed to be fun, but I can already tell it’s going to be torture. The thing is, we don’t even get to edit our videos before they go live—we record it, and up it goes online for our class to see. This is supposed to teach us how to be organized. Our teacher, Mr. Sayo, says he’s preparing us for the future and that this assignment will give us real-life experience about how to use social media responsibly. Honestly, I think creating our own livestreaming social media channel is a stupid assignment. How am I supposed to create “engaging content” when I have no clue what other kids will want to watch? I was sure I’d be struck with a genius idea when I was on camera, but maybe I should have been more prepared.

I scratch my nose again and clear my throat. I figure I may as well be honest.

“Guys, I really need an A in this class. Straight As all year, actually. Thanks to my high-ranking score in an epic game called *Rage of War*, I qualified for the Canadian Video Game Championships. They’re being held in Vancouver this summer, and my parents agreed to take me if I get all As.”

Now that I’m talking about video games, I’m getting so excited I nearly slide off the edge of my chair. I wriggle back into my seat and keep talking.

“The city’s main sports stadium is converted into this

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amazing battle arena where you can compete against the best players from across the country for a total of \$25 million in prizes. I'm only twelve, so I don't expect to win—at least not the grand prize—but one day I will. Last year's winner won \$6 million! When I'm older, I'm going to play video games for a living.”

Suddenly, I'm distracted by the thump of feet stomping down the stairs. The front door creaks open, then slams shut, rattling the light fixture in my room. I flinch at the bang. My golden retriever, Meg, barks. I know what that slammed door means: Mom has stormed off after another fight with Dad. Mom is an emergency room doctor, so she'll probably camp out at the hospital. My dad is a social worker, so he'll shut the door to his home office, as usual.

While I definitely want to win the grand prize at the Canadian Video Game Championships, there's something I want more: to get my parents to Vancouver so they can fall in love again. That's where they were living when they met. They used to tell me about how “romantic” it was, with mountains and fancy hotels and stuff. My parents have been fighting so much lately that I think—I hope—a vacation to Vancouver might spark old memories. Maybe they'll hold hands like they used to, when I was little. Or share a bed again. Or even kiss. Gross as that is, it's the sort of thing parents do when they're happily married.

The livestream camera icon flashes on my screen and I realize I'm still filming. Great. I've been staring at my legs thinking about my parents. It probably looks like I have a bad internet connection.

*Ping!* Something hits my window. I look out to see the Mendelson twins, Jeffrey and Owen, throwing pebbles at



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the glass. I get up and open my window just a crack.

“Uh, excuse me!” I stammer. “That’s dangerous!”

They snicker and toss another pebble my way. I shut the window, then pull the cord on the blinds. The shades come slapping down.

“Just ignore them,” I mutter to myself as I sit back down in my chair.

Still, I can’t help but feel rattled. Those boys are such jerks! I shake the thought of them from my head. I’ve got to get back to my live video. I wave to the camera. Why did I wave? That probably looked dorky. I scratch under my nose—even dorkier.

Sighing, I look down at the tip sheet Mr. Sayo handed out to help us get started. I scan the page for direction, but the white space is mostly filled with doodles: a stick man (me), a stick girl (Jocelyn), a few hearts. My heart thumps in my chest as I slam my hand down over the paper. I tug at the collar of my grey t-shirt. I scratch my nose. I breathe in and out until my heart rate steadies. I remind myself why I have to keep going: I need to get a good grade. I need to get my parents to Vancouver. I need to keep my family together. I adjust the brim of my favourite baseball cap—it has the PlayStation 4 logo on it—and squint at my page. Finally, I’m ready.

“Er, so, as I’ve already said, I play video games. I’ve taught my dog, Meg, a few cool tricks. Even though I’m severely lactose intolerant, I can eat five hot Pizza Pockets in under three minutes. I guess eating five frozen ones would be more impressive, even if cheese didn’t make me sick.”

I chuckle, then continue. “I live in a house with my parents . . .”

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My voice trails off. What else could I say that might be interesting? I tap my chin and roll my eyes toward the ceiling in thought. That my shoes are a size ten, but that I'm still waiting for the rest of my body to catch up to my feet? I shake my head no. That I do push-ups and sit-ups in my room at night, but I'm still so scrawny the Mendelson twins call me Rosie? I shake my head again. That would be TMI—too much information.

Just then, Meg prances into my room. She plops down at my feet with a thud. Meg's busy chewing something (surprise, surprise!), so I ignore her. I lift my hand off the page and take another quick peek at Mr. Sayo's tip sheet. Ah! *Who, what, when, where and why*—these are the things I should be thinking about while I livestream. I look up from the tip sheet and address the camera.

"I'm going to be shooting a series of live videos for my technology assignment, just like everyone else."

I offer what I hope is a winning smile. But now that I'm looking at an enlarged image of myself on screen, I'm not so sure I have a winning anything. I see a kid with braces, patches of raw pink skin under my nose where I can't stop scratching, and curly orange hair. How did I end up with hair this colour? My mom's hair is straight and brown and my dad doesn't have any. I readjust the cap that's covering my mop. I scratch under my nose again, then mentally scold myself. (Stop scratching, Simon!) How am I going to get through this video?

Meg growls at my feet.

"What have you got there, girl?"

I nudge her with my foot. She growls again.

"What are you chewing?"

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I reach down to grab the pink fabric in her mouth, but she won't give it up. I tug harder, yanking the material from side to side to loosen it from her grip. She's got a good hold on it. I get down on my knees and wrestle her to the ground. My hat falls off and Meg lunges for it. I lose my balance and land with an *oof!* on my back, holding up the piece of fabric in the air.

"Meg! Give me back my hat!"

She dashes out the door. I plop back down on my swivel chair. What the heck am I holding? I shake out the pink material. It's very stretchy.

I pinch a corner and hold it up . . . and . . . oh no!

I hit the blinking camera icon to stop recording, but it's too late. Everyone has already seen Mom's underwear. There is no way I'll get an A for that!

*Bing!* An alert from my computer. I stare at my screen. Oh great! Someone from my class has watched my video, and they're commenting in real time. The blood pulses in my ears as I'm gripped with panic. Everyone will hate my video. They're going to think I'm a nerd. What if they think this underwear is mine? I scratch my nose, then place a shaky finger on my computer trackpad to read the comment.

*Nice panties, Rosie,* writes Jeffrey.

Standing up, I peek out my blinds. Damn it! Jeffrey and Owen are on my lawn, typing on their phones and howling with laughter. I get back to my computer just as Owen likes Jeffrey's comment with a thumbs-up emoji.

In under a minute, six more likes appear next to the comment. I bury my face in my hands. I never want to go to school again.

# Chapter 2



**Jocelyn and I meet on the sidewalk outside** my house—red brick with baskets of purple flowers hanging from the porch. Other houses, like the Mendelson's, are sportier, with Toronto Raptors or Blue Jays flags in the windows. There isn't much traffic on my street, so the bigger kids play basketball or road hockey while the little kids cover the sidewalks with chalk. Today, they're all riding bikes or scooters to school. Jocelyn lives a few doors down and passes by on the way to Sterling Heights Public School. I'm usually happy to walk with her, but I've been dreading Monday morning all weekend. Even though it's a warm, sunny day that reminds me of summer, I feel too sick and anxious to

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enjoy it. It's like I have a boulder in my gut. I scratch my nose, then clutch the straps of my backpack as we fall into step. Jocelyn is talking, but I can't focus on anything she's saying.

My armpits are dripping with sweat. Did I use deodorant today, or even body spray? Very casually, I tilt my nose toward my armpit and take a whiff.

No! I got so caught up playing *Rage of War* this morning that I forgot. I'll smell bad on top of everything else. And just how many people have seen my video? I wonder. At last check, there were fourteen likes! The Mendelsons will definitely pick on me when I get to school. Those guys are evil. Best-case scenario: they'll laugh at me. Worst-case scenario: they'll tape women's underwear to my locker. My heart starts to pound even harder.

"Hello? Hello? Earth to Simon."

"Huh?" I look at Jocelyn as if I'm seeing her for the first time today. Her long, shiny black hair is tied up in a high ponytail. She's wearing a sleeveless white dress and runners. I can't help but see she has bigger biceps than me. I guess all her mixed martial arts training is paying off.

"I was just asking if you wanted to walk home together after school today, but you're not listening."

"Sorry," I mumble.

By now we've already walked the three blocks to school, and we're standing at the edge of the grassy yard. The metal gate clangs as Jocelyn closes it behind us. Kids are playing soccer and chasing each other across the field, enjoying their last minutes of freedom before the bell rings. They're in t-shirts and shorts, and their backpacks are flung all over the yard. They look like they're having fun, but I'm so not in

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the mood for fun.

“It’s that video I made for tech class,” I confess as we walk farther into the yard.

“Simon, you can’t let it get to you. It was funny. You made people laugh.”

“It was humiliating.”

“Just act like it was your plan all along,” says Jocelyn. “You need to learn to laugh at yourself.”

“Ha ha ha,” I say with a hint of sarcasm. “If you made a livestreaming video and got caught examining your mom’s underwear, you’d be mortified, too.”

“C’mon, Simon. I loved it—” she starts to say but she’s interrupted.

“Hey, Rosie! Catch!”

I look up just in time to see a football spiralling full speed toward my head. It hits me right between the eyes. I stumble backwards and fall on my back.

“Ouch!” I yelp.

Jeffrey holds up his phone while Owen talks to the camera.

“And that, everyone, is how you throw a football,” Owen tells his online audience.

Owen has mean green eyes and spiky blond hair, just like his brother. He’s so big he could easily be wearing shoulder pads under his jersey, but he’s not. He and Jeffrey are just oversized bullies. Owen keeps talking.

“On my channel, I’ll be teaching you how to become an all-star like me and my brother.”

I push myself up to a seated position, but I’m still seeing stars.

Jerks, I think as I rub my forehead.

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Jocelyn glares at the twins, saying out loud what I'm too afraid to even whisper.

"That was so not cool!" she shouts to Jeffrey and Owen.

"Yeah?" says Owen, getting into Jocelyn's face. "What're you gonna do about it?"

My heart thuds in my chest. I should get up. Protect Jocelyn. Defend myself. Instead, I stare at Jocelyn while my mouth hangs open. The look on her face is terrifying. Her jaw is tense and her eyes flash like black diamonds. She holds up her fists. They're clenched and ready to fight. "You really want to be filmed getting beaten up by a girl?"

"I'd like to see you try."

While Jeffrey stands there like a mannequin with a phone, Owen twists his head back to shout at his brother. "Yo, bro, are you recording thi—"

But before he can finish his sentence, Jocelyn slides behind Owen and twists his arm up behind his back.

Owen squeals.

By now, a crowd has formed around us. They gape as Jocelyn gives his elbow an upward shove.

"Apologize to Simon," she says between gritted teeth.

Owen's face turns red. "Never!"

She squeezes the meaty pressure point between Owen's thumb and forefinger.

"Ooow!" he screams.

"Say sorry!" she demands.

"No!"

"Say it!"

"Sorry!" he finally sputters. "Sorry!"

Jocelyn lets go of Owen and shoves him. I get to my feet. Part of me is relieved to have a fearless friend like Jocelyn.

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But a bigger part of me is humiliated. My best friend—a girl—just beat up a bully for me. This is worse than getting nailed in the head and holding my mom’s underwear, combined.

And Jeffrey is still filming, so now I’m the star of two mortifying videos. Mr. Sayo said there would be consequences for inappropriate content, but there’s nothing he can do about it now since it’s all happening this very second.

“You’re lucky your girlfriend came to your rescue,” says Jeffrey, pointing a thick finger in my direction.

I ball my sweaty hands into fists. I’m angry and embarrassed and there’s nothing I can do about it.

“You ruined my video, Rosie,” adds Owen, pointing at me. “You better watch your back!”

I shudder at the threat. He’s not serious, is he?

Jeffrey pans the crowd with his phone, capturing the whole scene even though the drama is over.

“What’re you all looking at?” growls Owen. “Get lost! All of you!”

He shoos the crowd away with a forceful wave of the hand. Everyone disperses before he can single out another target.

The twins are still arguing as the shrill morning bell rings in our ears.

“My channel is ruined! Why didn’t you stop recording?” yells Owen.

“You didn’t yell ‘Cut!’ It’s your fault,” says Jeffrey.

“It’s *your* fault! Hey! Are you *still* filming? Shut that thing off!”

I brush the dirt off my legs, then scratch my nose.

“Jocelyn, you’ve really gotta let me fight my own



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battles,” I tell her, looking down at my grass-stained runners.

“Seriously?” She puts a hand on my shoulder to stop me from walking away. I raise my eyes. Yup. She’s arching an eyebrow at me in disbelief.

“You defending me makes me look like a total wimp,” I say. “And Owen told me to watch my back. I’ll never be able to walk home alone again. You made things worse!”

She drops her hand and sighs in frustration.

“I’m the one with the MMA training. What difference does it make if I’m a girl? And you”—she jabs her finger into my chest—“were already on the ground looking like roadkill when I stepped in.”

She’s right. I didn’t defend myself at all. I didn’t even try.

“Thanks for your help,” I grumble as we head inside the school. I’m so embarrassed I can’t meet Jocelyn’s eye. The truth is, I’m impressed by her skill, and I think it’s amazing that she’s so strong, but at the same time I don’t want her to think I’m weak.

“No problem,” she says cheerily. She slaps me lightly on the shoulder. “Hopefully getting straightened out by a girl will keep the twins off your back.”

Um, right, I think. That will do it.

We file down the crowded school hallway, trying not to step on anyone’s heels.

“See ya!” Jocelyn says with a smile and a wave as she turns toward her French class. As I turn the opposite way for my own class—math with Mr. Dickerson—I feel a tap on my shoulder.

“Hey, Simon.”

I turn around, still feeling off-kilter, and find myself

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face to face with my overly friendly classmate, Vivian. She's wearing a headband with a big polka-dot bow on top. It reminds me of Minnie Mouse.

"I think it was so cool of you to let a girl come to your rescue in the yard just now," she says. "Not many guys would have the confidence to do that." She smiles, fluttering her eyelashes in a really weird way.

"Do you . . . have something in your eye?" I ask, confused and a bit concerned.

She shakes her head and bats her eyelashes again. I feel like she's waiting for me to say something.

"Your bow, is, ah, super stylish," I offer clumsily, desperate to put an end to this awkward discussion. "I'm sure Mickey Mouse would love it."

"Simon, how rude!" she says. "I made it myself!" Her face falls into a frown, and she turns away, flouncing toward class.

I furrow my brow and then shrug. I was only trying to be nice!