Helping your children choose books they will love



Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Manifesto on How to be Interesting

Written by

Holly Bourne

Published by

Usborne Publishing Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.



chapter one

Bree supposed it was quite an achievement really – to be a failed novelist aged only seventeen.

Most people her age didn't have a clue what they wanted to do with their lives yet. Let alone know, work really hard for it and then fail miserably. She was miles ahead in the life-ultimately-sucks realization that takes most people their twenties and thirties to figure out.

But Bree wasn't most people. Well, she didn't think so anyway.

She looked at the rejection letter in her hand, hoping, somehow, if she stared at it hard enough her longing would melt the ink on the page into a "yes".

Dear Bree
Thank you for your submission. We regret to tell you that your novel isn't something we think we can take forward

BLAH BLAH BLAH.

Generic response. They hadn't even bothered personalizing it. That's how much of a failure she was.

Four years ago, when Bree decided to become a novelist, she'd done what she'd always done – obsessively planned, researched and plotted a no-fail manifesto. She'd read everything she could about writing, including a book by Stephen King, aka GOD. He'd apparently been rejected LOADS – so much that he hammered a nail into the wall above his desk to spike all the "no" letters on. Delighted at the self-deprecation of it all, Bree also hammered a massive nail into the perfect plastering of her bedroom wall. And, month by month, year by year, the nail got clogged up with her own swell of rejection letters.

Ha ha, just like Stephen King, she'd thought, spiking the first "no" letter and flipping it the middle finger.

Then more came, and more.

"I can't wait to talk about this emotional part of my journey when I'm being interviewed by the *Guardian* about my number one bestseller," she'd told the clogged nail as she impaled another rejection letter. Yes, she'd got to the point of talking aloud to it. Like it was a person.

Now that *Guardian* interview seemed as likely as J K Rowling asking Bree to be her best forever friend. Her first novel had been rejected by every agent and publisher in the UK.

Then her second.

What the hell was she going to do now?

"Bree?" Her mother called up the stairs. "You're going to be late for school."

She stubbed the new letter onto the nail, pushing hard to make room for it.

"It's alright. I'm almost ready," she called back.

"Well I can't give you a lift. I've got Bikram yoga this morning with the girls."

She always did. Bree thought how ironic the usage of the word "girls" was to describe her mum and her mates.

In a rush now, she rummaged in her drawer and pulled out a pair of pink and black striped tights. She pulled them on quickly, wincing as the fabric brushed against last night's fresh cuts on her thighs. It was the first time Bree had done it for a while. She would pay the price in pain whenever she sat down or stood up for the next two days.

Her phone went. It was a text from Holdo. No doubt double-checking they were still walking in together despite the fact they did so every day.

Sure enough:

> Good morning, Bree. Shall we meet at our regular corner at the usual time? Please let me know. From, Holdo.

Holdo didn't "do" text-speak – considered it an aberration of the English language. He wrote everything out in full, with proper punctuation marks. Once, he'd forgotten to use a comma and Bree was subjected to a mammoth apology.

She fired back a response.

Sure. C U there.

She deliberately used the "C" and "U" to piss him off. She wasn't sure why. Bree put on her school blazer and was about to run out of her bedroom door when last night's list caught her eye.

She'd forgotten about it – it lay abandoned on the carpet. She made so many lists, it was hard to remember them all. She'd written this one on an adrenalin comedown. That familiar sensation of calm had reminded her that things weren't that bad and so the list was meant to jog her memory for next time – hoping it may prevent a next time.

Reasons why I shouldn't be so bloody miserable all the time

1. I live in a massive house, the kind that makes strangers jealous
2. I suppose, in their own sort of way, both of my parents love me
3. I could be pretty if I wanted…
4. I'm much smarter than most people
5. I know what I want to do with my life
6. I have Holdo

That was it. She'd wanted to list ten – because it just feels nicer, doesn't it? But she couldn't think of any more reasons. This, Bree supposed, could be the start of a whole other list.

Reasons to be bloody miserable all the time

1. My life is so crap that I can't even think of ten stupid things that give me reason NOT to be miserable

But she didn't have time for that list. Not now. She was late.

Bree ran down the stairs and into the kitchen. She ignored the bowl of muesli, fresh fruit and organic yogurt her mum had left her and took a Pop-Tart out of the cupboard instead. Strawberry. Just what she felt like. She shoved it into her mouth and held it there as she packed her school bag. Then she set the alarm and half-jogged out of the house.

As she waited for the security gate to open, she thought a bit more about her list. How stupid she could be sometimes – thinking her life wasn't that miserable. Yes, she could list six reasons why things weren't that bad. But those were just starting points for further elaboration. Elaboration that would ultimately collapse each point.

Take number one, for example.

I live in a massive house, the kind that makes strangers jealous

That, on the surface, was true as true could be. Her house *was* gigantic. And on a private road as well. Ashdown Drive was the sort of road poorer people deliberately detoured through so they could stare at the houses. Hers was one of the most impressive. It had a security gate with intercom to

get through to the sweeping circular driveway. They didn't have a garden as such – "grounds" was a more appropriate word. It took about five minutes to walk past the property. The outstretched dark-green-light-green-dark-green-light-green stripes of lawn were hidden by carefully manicured privacy hedges. It was the sort of house that everyone peers at, trying to get a glimpse of the lucky ones who live there, and thinks: *Wow. Those people must have the most perfectly wonderful lives. I bet they don't know what a problem looks like. If I lived there, everything would be okay. All the time.*

The truth though? Bree hated the house. Nobody tells you that large houses have this horrible habit of making you feel utterly alone. Constantly. She could scream and nobody would hear her. She knew this, she'd tried once. (On a particularly low day.) And the only response had been her own yells echoing endlessly, bouncing around the marble entrance hall.

The security gate felt like a prison gate. She often wondered what it would be like not to be so rich and figured it would be a lot more fun.

"Shut up, Bree," she told herself.

The gate closed behind her and she walked to meet Holdo. It was October and it was cold. She wished she'd doubled up on the bright tights today. Her mum always despaired of Bree's fashion choices, which led her onto point two…

I suppose, in their own sort of way, both of my parents love me

It depends how you view love, doesn't it? Bree had never wanted for anything. Did that mean she was loved? Her dad worked his arse off pretty much 24/7 so she could live in the aforementioned large prison house. He left home before she woke every morning, even Saturdays, and wasn't usually back until after midnight. She wasn't exactly sure what he did. In return, her dad barely knew how old she was. The extent of their communication went as follows:

Dad: (*In rare moment they bump into each other on the stairs*) You behaving yourself in school?

Bree: Yes.

Dad: Good.

Or, there was that time on Christmas day…

Dad: (*Carving the turkey*) Do you want leg or breast?

Bree: I'm a vegetarian, remember?

Dad: Don't be so ridiculous. (*Carves off a bit of leg and dumps it on her plate*)

Then there was Mum. At least she was around – in physical manifestation anyway. Her mum was a full-time yummy mummy. That's what she liked to call herself. In Bree's unhumble opinion, the word "yummy" shouldn't be associated with anyone over the age of forty.

Her mum spent her time doing a variety of increasingly oddly-named exercise classes, getting facials, fillers and Botox done on her regular day trips to Harley Street, and reading about celebrities in garish magazines she left all over the house. She communicated her love to Bree with a constant stream of gift-wrapped packages left on Bree's bed.

Tiffany necklaces, Hollister jumpers – once Mum even got her some lingerie. Lucky, huh? But to Bree it was as welcome as a cat proudly leaving a beheaded mouse oozing blood on your doorstep. She knew people wouldn't understand. Who wouldn't want a mother who loaded you with gifts? Especially top-notch ones most girls her age could only fantasize about. But Bree didn't want necklaces, overpriced knitwear or fancy knickers. She wanted a mother who helped her with her coursework. Someone who made her a cup of tea after school and asked her about what she'd learned, rather than grilling her about whether she'd made any new friends. All the time. Like being popular was the most important thing ever.

All she got was:

"Why aren't you wearing that jumper I got you?"

Or:

"Is Holdo coming round *again*? Don't you have any girlfriends?"

Or:

"You're so pretty. Why don't you just DO something with yourself? You're putting yourself to waste."

Which led Bree onto…

I could be pretty if I wanted

She could. Now. But she didn't want to be. She'd tried to be pretty once before, on her first day at secondary school, in some deluded burst of naivety that it might change things. Still blubbery with puppy fat, she'd hoicked her skirt up, carefully painted darker stripes through her hair

with a home-colouring kit, smothered her face with blue eyeshadow and pink lipstick and shoved two socks down her bra. The result was the worst first day of secondary school the world had ever known. Jassmine Dallington and her cronies had positively dribbled with delight when they saw her, spluttering on their laughter and rushing to lob new and nastier names at her.

She'd been so stupid to try. And now, puppy fat gone and her face fully grown into, she wouldn't bother trying again.

What *pretty* person achieved anything of merit anyway? Who cares what a writer looks like as long as their words are beautiful?

So, much to her mother's despair, Bree made herself as unattractive as possible.

If you control what they laugh at, invite them to dine out on you…well, then, Bree found they usually stop laughing.

She would wash her hair, on occasion. It was a lanky mouse shade at the moment but had been an array of absurd colours in the past – pink most recently, which still hadn't quite washed out. She wore the clothes of a frumpy forty-year-old going through a mid-life crisis – all neon this, and novelty-hair-bobbles that. She ate what she wanted, meaning her skin had a near-constant scattering of spots and her thighs rubbed together when she walked. And none of this mattered because…

I'm much smarter than most people

Being pretty was only important at school. And school wasn't a part of Bree's life she considered essential to her

development. It was a time to endure before the beautiful world of adulthood opened its arms to give her a great big hug and a two-book publishing deal. School was a mere drop in the ocean of a human life. And for the pretty girls at school, their moment would soon be over. They were peaking in their happiness-levels much too early. Which is why Bree stayed ugly – to delay the peakage to a more useful age. Another reason why Bree was much smarter than most people.

She needed to hurry up though. Bree was smart but she wasn't very punctual. Like, ever. While Holdo was quite the opposite. She wrapped her blazer tighter around her to keep out the cold, barely allowing herself to think about the penultimate entry on last night's list.

I know what I want to do with my life

But what if it doesn't want you? All she had ever wanted to do was write. Well, for the past four years anyway. To have people read her words. To leave a tiny imprint of herself on whoever read them. What better way to validate your existence – to prove you had one? But maybe it wasn't to be.

She wasn't quite ready to accept that yet.

Though, in the meantime, *she had Holdo.*

There he was, waiting for her, like he always did. His trademark yellow headphones cupped his ears, and he was wearing that Velvet Underground banana T-shirt over his school jumper – an essential wardrobe item for any wannabe-indie boy. Holdo spotted her, pulled down his

headphones and tapped on his watch.

"You're late again."

"I'm always late."

"It's disrespectful, you know, to keep other people waiting."

"It's only been five minutes."

They began walking towards school, each too stubborn to break the silence. Holdo, of course, broke it first. After a record holdout of five entire minutes.

"So what did you get up to last night?"

Bree stared at the pavement. "I got another rejection letter. It was waiting for me on the doormat when I got home."

She could see Holdo forgive her lateness as his eyes melted instantly. He never stayed mad at her for long.

"I'm sorry, Bree. I don't understand it. You're so talented."

"I know," she said, giving him a wry smile as an apology. "I don't get it either."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really." Not with Holdo anyway. When she was this upset, she always found his well-intentioned advice grated rather than helped.

The fallen autumn leaves crunched under her Dr Martens and she stamped to make the crunch louder.

"So what did *you* get up to last night?" she asked, kicking up a pile of yellow and orange ones and watching them float back down to the pavement. They didn't have fallen leaves

on her road. The handyman jointly hired by the residents blew them away every morning with a special reverse-vacuum machine.

"I watched *Apocalypse Now Redux*. The three-hour version. It's so enthralling. Have you seen it?"

"Of course."

"But have you seen the extended rough-cut?"

"Yes." She was lying. Bree had only watched the regular cinema version and found the film more puzzling than enthralling. She would never tell Holdo that though. (She'd rather die.)

"Well, we're in the minority. Most people struggle with the regular one just because it's over ninety minutes long. Honestly, the attention span of cinema audiences these days is insane. If there isn't a massive explosion, or a gratuitous sex scene every five seconds, people just don't want to know…"

Bree let Holdo's well-exercised rant wash over her. She'd heard it at least twenty times. It was one of his favourites. Along with the ones about how reality TV was destroying the music industry, how Dan Brown should be hanged, drawn and quartered for his *Da-Vinci-Code*-shaped crimes against literature, and how the film industry had no original screenwriters any more as they spent all their time adapting bestselling novels rather than investing in raw talent.

She sighed. Holdo was her best friend. Her *only* friend, if she was being honest. Bree knew she wasn't a very likeable person, but it didn't bother her mostly. Yes, of course there

were moments of crippling loneliness. And, yeah, it would be nice to have a girl to talk to from time to time. But generally she was happy with Holdo.

"…and it just makes me so angry that the Vietnam War was ever allowed to happen, you know? It was just so completely immoral and it's not like America has learned from it, have they? You'd think they would—"

Ahh. The war. She'd wondered when he would start ranting about the war.

Holdo was your stereotypical rich-kid-rejecting-his-upbringing. The indie sort that honestly believed, if he and Morrissey were to meet, they would become the best of friends. His real name wasn't Holdo – it was Jeremy Smythe. He'd renamed himself – yes – after Holden in *The Catcher In The Rye* (although the "o" on the end apparently made it "more original"). But Bree loved Holdo (in a strictly friendship way). He was the only person around who shared her intellect levels and desires to DO something with their privilege instead of resting on the laurels of wealth. Holdo was designing a computer game – he actually knew how to write code for it and everything. It was a cross between *Grand Theft Auto* and *Bugsy Malone*. As Bree understood it, the game involved a bullied geek running amok at school with a splurge gun, squirting bullies with cream. Holdo was eventually going to be a self-made millionaire. Bless him – he just needed to get through school first.

She interrupted his war monologue.