



LoveReading4kids.co.uk
is a book website
created for parents and
children to make
choosing books easy
and fun

Opening extract from
How Hard Can Love be?

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.

LoveReading .co.uk

Situations
that are
destined to fail:

The world's most gruesome hangover

+

An eleven-hour-long plane journey

+

Economy seating

+

Being five foot eleven

One

Don't be sick on the children... Don't be sick on the children...

Their little heads bobbed beneath me in the queue to get on the aeroplane. My stomach lurched again and I grabbed it. If I clutched at my guts hard enough, hopefully they'd not empty themselves over the excitable heads of the kids in front.

I couldn't be certain, but vomiting over innocent kiddlywinks could possibly jeopardize my acceptance onto a long-haul flight.

Why had I done that last shot last night? Why, please? Why? WHY!?

The flight attendant in front checked another ticket and beckoned the passenger past. The line crawled forward under the brutal fluorescent lights of the departure lounge. The aeroplane waited outside the floor-to-ceiling window, looking way too small to carry all these people to America. It was white, like the horse a dashing knight would ride to

rescue princesses in a fairytale. But I was no princess, and I could rescue myself thank you very much. All I needed was this aeroplane to put an ocean between me and my evil stepmother.

My stomach lurched again as I remembered how I'd said goodbye...

"Look at the state of her," my stepmother, Penny, said, loud enough for everyone in the security queue to hear. We were at that annoying bit of the airport process where everyone realizes they can't take any liquids with them so decant all their bottles into see-through plastic bags.

"I am here, you know?" I rolled my eyes because I knew it annoyed her and downed the rest of my water bottle.

She ignored me. "They won't let her on the plane."

I looked at Dad desperately for help. He held back a smile.

"Relax, Penny. Think of all the drunken stags they let onto planes to Vegas every day."

"I'm not drunk!" I protested, causing about ten separate clumps of travellers to stop and stare.

Dad laughed and pulled me into a hug. I clung onto him, nestling into his shoulder, inhaling his smell. It helped with the nausea.

"No, you're not drunk, are you, poppet? Just hungover. You had quite the leaving do. Though you do *smell* drunk." He took a deliberate whiff and pushed me away... "PHEWEE."

"I showered this morning..."

... Which I had. I'd also just happened to sweat out the previous night's sambuca shots on the drive to the airport.

Dad pulled me in for another hug. "In that case, come 'ere."

It would've been a tender moment if Penny wasn't there. But she was obsessed with always being there – like she was terrified if I got one moment alone with Dad, like, ever, that I'd make him realize what a manipulative evil bitch she was. And to be fair, I would certainly give it a go. Of course, Craig was there too – ruining the moment. Because you can't have a clichéd evil stepmother without the standardized evil stepsibling.

As if on cue, Craig looked me up and down and said, "You smell like your mum."

How dare he HOW DARE HE howdarehehowdare hehowdareHE? The crimson mist he always evokes in me descended through my hangover. I saw spots, and my foot went out instinctively and kicked him hard in the shin.

He yelped and fell down – totally, totally faking.

Penny and Dad went into utter-defence mode and the usual chaos broke out.

"AMBER. YOU SAY SORRY, YOUNG LADY."

"CRAIG, ARE YOU OKAY? DON'T CRY."

"You're crazy, just like she is," Craig added from the floor.

Dad held me away from Craig as I launched myself at him again. "Amber, no!"

I strained and struggled against Dad's arms. Penny stood protectively in front of her son – shooting me her demon glare. Like I was just attacking Craig for no reason. Like she

hadn't just heard what he'd said.

People were looking. Security staff included. Dad made hush noises into my ear, stroking my hair, while I yelled, "You take that back, you take that back!"

"Amber, come on. Calm down. They really won't let you on the plane..."

I looked around. A uniformed dude was making his way over. Penny clocked him at the same time. I saw the conflict cloud her face – getting me told off versus making a scene... She chose not making a scene.

"Shh," she said – to both of us.

Craig and I glared at each other, but we both straightened up, and acted casual. The security guard stopped, examined us, then walked back to the little booth he'd come from.

I sighed. I felt so sick. And I'd wanted to say goodbye to Dad – just us two. I threw my empty plastic bottle into the bin provided and didn't look up.

"You apologize, young lady," Penny demanded.

I pulled my rucksack straps tighter to readjust my bag – suddenly *really* angry. With my stupid stepmother. With my stupider stepbrother. With Dad. For not telling Craig off, for never telling Craig off...

"He should apologize too, for what he said!"

"I meant it," Craig called from behind Penny. And Dad had to stop me lurching at him again.

"You know what? I can't be arsed with this." I turned and stormed off into the security queue, knowing they couldn't follow.

“Amber? AMBER!” Dad called.

I ignored him and kept walking.

“Amber, come on, say goodbye nicely.”

“Goodbye nicely,” I fired back over my shoulder, funnelling into the line, getting my boarding card out ready.

It was the last thing I’d say to him in six weeks.

Don’t be sick on the children. Don’t be sick on the children.

The two girls in front were blissfully unaware of their vomit-related danger. They swapped pink puppy cards while their parents fussed with passports, checking and re-checking they were still in the same pocket.

I was so mad at Dad. I was so mad at Dad ten million per cent of the time. What was so crappy was that airport scene wasn’t even extraordinary. Just the normal everyday occurrence of me versus Craig, me versus Penny...with Dad set on keeping the peace, rather than keeping on the side of his only daughter. I was so exhausted from fighting. I was so exhausted from feeling left out.

I was so exhausted from missing Mum...

The boarding queue inched forward again and everyone moved along, dragging their bags behind them. My tummy churned, complaining about the rubbery duty-free eggs I’d eaten while crying silently in the harsh neon lighting of the airside restaurant.

If I could just not vomit...

If I could just look normal enough to be let on the plane...

Then this summer could start. I could be with Mum and figure out what went wrong and how to get her to come back and start to feel whole again.

It was the family in front’s turn and the girls scurried under their parents’ legs, asking the air hostesses how high the plane went, how fast, if there were Disney films on the flight... Not asking the important question: “*Is that sick-looking girl behind us going to blow chunks on our little heads?*”

They were nodded through, out of splatter range. It was my turn. I took a deep breath, scraped back my bush of hair and stepped forward to give them my passport.

Look presentable. Look presentable. Look presentable.

The air hostess had so much make-up on that I couldn’t figure out what she really looked like. I focused on her foundation-caked cheeks as she took my red leather passport. She smiled and her cheek cracked.

“First time flying alone?” She used the same voice she’d used with the children.

I was scared to open my mouth so I just nodded.

“If you need anything from us, please just let me know.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled.

She peered at me curiously. “Are you okay? You look scared.”

I’m scared of flying with the world’s worst hangover...

“I’m a little scared of flying...” I came up with a genius idea. “...I get travel sick!”

“You do look peaky.”

“I’m sure I’ll be okay.”

I'd come up with the perfect cover. Thank God.

"Let us know if there's anything we can do. Seventeen is still quite young to be flying alone."

She beamed at me, and I decided it should be illegal to be that happy so early in the morning.

The headache hit just as I'd squeezed myself into my window seat.

"Ouch," I said, out loud, startling the giant man sitting next to me. He'd struggled to fit into his seat and his knees were practically up by his face as he scrunched himself in. My own long legs already ached in the practically non-existent space. I reached into my bag for an ibuprofen, swallowed it dry, and took out my phone.

I had two messages. One from Lottie, one from Evie. I smiled for the first time that morning.

Lottie: I'M SO SORRY I GOT YOU SO DRUNK. IT WAS ALL AN EVIL PLOY TO GET YOU TO STAY HERE THIS SUMMER. ARE YOU ALIIIIIIIIIVE?

Evie: Don't leeeeeeeeeeeeeeeave us!!!!!!

My smile dropped. I was going to miss them so much! Their messages triggered a flashback to the previous night...
..."I'M GOING TO BE IN THE SKY THIS TIME TOMORROW."

We'd taken a taxi up Dovelands Hill after the pub had kicked us out. It was our hill. We'd all gone up there the night we'd first become friends. I stood up on the bench, tipped my head back and pointed into the inky blackness above me, almost falling over in the process.

Evie grabbed my arm to keep hold of me.

"Amber, get down. I'm far too tiny to catch you."

"AMERICA, HERE I COME!!!"

Lottie was dancing to no music on the sloped grass beneath us – spinning with her arms wide out.

"Amber, I'm going to miss you so much! Can I fold myself into your suitcase and come with you?" she asked, going spin, spin, spin until she fell over with a thump onto the grass and started laughing.

"Help," Evie said. "You are both too wasted for just me to look after. Amber, take my hand."

I looked up at the sky once more, then stumbled into her arms and let her guide me onto the grass. I fell next to where Lottie was lying face-up on the ground. Evie sighed and got down next to us. All our heads were together, and we all looked up.

The stars were spinning.

"One of us better not have nits," Evie said.

"Only you would think of that," Lottie replied... Which was true.

I laughed, and stared upwards, watching the universe above me turn and turn and turn...

"I can't wait to see my mum," I said, quietly. Feeling just

so...good in my stomach. "It's going to be so brilliant."

"How long has it been?" Lottie asked.

"Two years..."

Spin spin spin spin spin.

"Yikes."

"I know..."

I pushed thoughts out of my head. Thoughts like, *She didn't even invite you to her wedding*, and, *You were the one who asked to go this summer, not the other way around*, and, *Why did she have to leave you to get healthy?*

The alcohol, as always, helped me do this.

"We have six whole weeks together," I told the sky. "Six perfect weeks..."

"Careful." Evie's hair tickled my face. "Nothing is ever perfect."

"Especially if you're working in a summer camp surrounded by hyper American children," Lottie added.

"Quiet time now, oh negative ones." I closed my eyes, smiling as I pictured how Mum's face would look when we met at the airport...

The fasten-seatbelt sign wasn't even on yet, so I figured it was safe to message them back before take-off.

I'm so hungover!! What am I doing on an aeroplane?!

Help me! My head hurts so much!

I closed my eyes and listened to the aeroplane noises – the intermittent beeping, the low roar of the air-conditioning, and people politely-but-not-politely organizing each other's luggage in the overhead compartments. All these people, sharing a journey with me. We'd be marooned together in a tin can flying through the sky for eleven hours, then never see each other again.

Flying was weird.

My head hurt.

What would it be like seeing Mum again?

Was she going to, like, explain?

My head hurt.

My phone beeped. Twice.

Lottie: I can't believe you're going to be in charge of actual children! American ones too. Will they be called things like Hank?

Evie: You'll be fine! Just think, any story worth hearing starts with someone our age getting on an aeroplane.

I didn't want a story worth hearing though – I just wanted time with my mum...

I also wanted to ignore the nagging voice in my head, crowing that nothing is ever that simple when it comes to Her.