The Truth and Lies of Ella Black

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First published 2018
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Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Paperback ISBN: 978–0–141–36700–2
Ebook ISBN: 978–0–141–36701–9

SAMPLER – NOT FOR RESALE

1

40 days until she dies

I'm walking home when my ears start to ring. This is bad and it has to stop. Sometimes I can make it stop. I try.

It gets louder.

It

gets

louder and louder.

And although I am walking home from school hand in hand with Jack, and even though I look like a normal girl, I know that I'm not a normal girl and that I have to get to the safe place (my bedroom), with the door closed. I have to be on my own.

I squeeze Jack's hand, and he squeezes back because he has no idea about any of this. We are walking together to my house, and the sun is shining between the clouds and the shadows are getting longer and it should all be lovely. A moment ago it *was* lovely. A minute ago I was really quite happy.

Please go, I say internally. *Go now. You can come back later.*

She makes my vision go a bit blotchy around the edges, and that's her way of saying, *NOT. LATER. NOW.*

'Actually,' I say to Jack, 'I need to do some painting.' I'm trying to breathe evenly, to appear normal. He doesn't seem to have noticed anything different. I do wonder whether he sees it but doesn't ask because he knows I don't want him to.

'I love what an artist you are,' he says. He flings a hand dramatically across his brow. '*I need to paint! I live for my art!* Are you saying you want me to bugger off?'

'Would you mind? I mean it in a nice way.' She is pressing on the inside of my head. I have to get him to go. I wish I could tell him the truth but I can't.

I can't because I'm not brave enough. In the part of me the world sees I'm a people-pleasing walkover, easily bullied, easily ignored. That's the better version of me: I don't dare to try and be stroppy, particularly at a time like this, because anything could happen. My other self might come pouring out and poison all of it. That would be the end of everything.

I am not the person they think I am. I pretend. If you pretend to be something it's the same as being it. I pretend to be normal, and most of the time I am normal.

'Come in for a minute anyway,' I say, feeling Bella

listening carefully to every word I say, 'and then – well, then yes, you can bugger off. I've got, like, a whole painting to finish and you know I'm not very sociable when that happens. Only Humphrey can come anywhere near.'

Jack laughs. 'You spoil that cat,' he says.

Then it's raining so we run the last bit, hand in hand, up the hill to my house. We run past a woman with long tangled hair who's struggling to put up an umbrella, and a man pushing a bike with a toddler on the back. The toddler waves at us and shouts: 'I gettin' wet!'

I wave with one hand and feel Bella in the other, gripping Jack, trying to use her powers to electrocute him, wishing he would die because he is normal and happy and that's not fair.

Jack is not really normal and happy, but he is, compared with Bella. I love him. Along with Lily he is my best friend. Everyone thinks he's my boyfriend, but he's not: he's better than that. We have a thing that works for both of us.

I don't want a real boyfriend. My school is a posh girls' school, but a lot of the sixth-formers live in a world in which they defer absolutely to boys. It's pathetic and it makes me mad, but not mad enough to say anything obviously (that's me doing a little eye-roll

at myself). Actually, if I tried to argue with them, Bella would jump out and smash the nearest simpering handmaiden with the nearest fire extinguisher, so it's probably best that I bite it back.

Jack is blond haired and blue eyed and he likes the best side of me, which is what he sees. Hanging out with me has helped him in all sorts of ways, and for a while he raised my status so I was not a top-level target. Then they got used to it and started on me again. I've never told him about the things that happen at school. He would only get upset and mad, and nothing would change, apart from one fragile person (Jack) being a little less happy. I want Jack to be happy. Only Lily knows what happens, and Lily protects me from it as much as she can.

When we burst in Mum is standing in the hallway, pretending she just happens to be there, holding something in her hands and smiling in smug anticipation.

I look at it. 'My phone!' I say, and she grins and holds it out to me.

'Someone handed it in,' she says. 'The police called and I picked it up. It restores your faith, doesn't it?'

Mum is just saying that because it's a cliché: she doesn't need her faith restored because she's not disillusioned or cynical about anything. She has no dark side at all, as far as I can tell. I take my phone from

her and quickly check it; everything's exactly as it was when I last saw it. I lost it two days ago.

I don't think she's looked through it. I hope she hasn't.

Bella is inside my head, clearing her throat, demanding attention. I push her aside.

Mum doesn't look as if she's had a shock insight into my school life. She is happy to see us, Jack and me. She lives for us. She stands around in the hall waiting for me to come home because I am her life. It's weird. Obviously it's nice. But sometimes I try to imagine my way into her head, and I just can't.

She would be so upset if she knew what happened to me. That's why I can never tell her. Right now Bella is knocking on the inside of my skull and I need to get away.

As soon as we are through the door Mum clicks all the locks shut behind us. No house is quite as secure as ours.

Keeping me safe is pretty much Mum's career. She is compelled to make sure I am always safe; always, always safe, all the time. It's almost funny that she relaxes when I'm tucked away in my bedroom, considering that this is actually the danger zone.

Jack is grinning back at her. 'Hello, Mrs Black,' he says in his polite way. 'You're looking lovely.'

She loves that. Mum adores Jack. She wants us to get married and make her lots of grandchildren. Again, she has no idea, which is sweet. I mutter something because I can't talk very well at the moment.

'Biscuit?' she says. 'I've just made some. Still warm from the oven.'

I'm not going to stop to have a biscuit, but I'll save some for Bella because she might like them later. Unless they're the spelt-and-sweet-potato ones Mum made last week, in which case no one will ever, ever want one.

'No thanks,' I say.

'Yes please,' says Jack at the same time. He's hoping for the chocolate-chip cookies, I know it.

While he follows her into the kitchen I walk straight ahead and go into the loo and close the door and lock it and lean against it and try to breathe. I have to get rid of them both. I have to make Jack go home in the next few minutes. My head tightens. Black spots dance across my vision.

He is sitting at the table flirting with Mum. They both do that. I think Jack finds it funny. God only knows what Mum is up to. She grins at him and looks coquettish and reminisces about her youth, and he laughs in all the right places and says the right things back to her. Neither of them particularly cares whether

I'm bothered or not; and luckily for them I'm not.

The biscuits are ginger and sultana. That's just about acceptable, so I take three and wrap them in a piece of kitchen roll.

'Sorry, Jack,' I say, and under Mum's approving eye I walk over and kiss him. 'Got to do the painting. You know, like I said. See you tomorrow.'

He laughs. 'Sure. See you tomorrow, Ells. I won't hang around.'

'You're welcome to –' Mum starts to say, but I silence her with a glare and leave the room, gasping for breath, taking the stairs two at a time.

I close my bedroom door and try to breathe. My head is ringing so I wouldn't hear anything else, not even a fire alarm or a nuclear siren, and maybe one of those things is happening and I don't care if it is. I roll up the sleeves of my school jumper and look at the tiny lines on the insides of my arms. I'm ashamed of them. I'm never going to let that happen again.

Be nice, I say to Bella.

BE NICE, she replies, imitating me. *BE NICE. ALWAYS BE NICE.*

Oh, please stop.

PLEASE STOP. PLEASE STOP. PLEASE STOP.

Leave me alone.

LEAVE ME ALONE.

Leave
me
alone.
LEAVE.

I don't know what is me and what is her.

I put my hands to the sides of my face and scream silently like the painting. All I want is to be normal.

I draw in a shuddery breath and press the palms of my hands on the carpet, feeling the floor, being here in this second, myself in my room. One thing I have learned over the years is how to pretend; and when this door is locked I don't have to pretend any more. It can all come out.

I pull the pictures out from under the bed. They are meticulous explosions of horror. They are filled with death and maiming and nightmares. Bella drew them and she likes to look at them. Perhaps I can distract her with them.

I call it 'Bella' because it feels like the dark side of me. It's Ella but not Ella. It's Bad Ella. Bella. I thought of that a few years ago and it made things a little better; before that I called it the Monster. Anything is a tiny bit better when it has a name. Even Bella is slightly better than the Monster.

Bella is desperate to own the whole of me: I am alert and battling all the time. Sometimes I have to let it out

before it explodes, and after that happens I feel calm and peaceful and, I think, kind of happy. Everything is balanced for a while. That's when we draw these pictures. I look at them now. They are done in black ink – huge sheets of tiny detail like Hieronymus Bosch, but with modern bits in them. Children are decapitated here. Body parts are everywhere. There is blood and murder. These pictures take us ages and I hope no one ever finds them, but they're definitely the best art I've ever done.

She doesn't want to look at them now. *LATER*, she says.

It's hard to breathe. I push my hands down on the carpet and try harder. Humphrey is here, I see. Humphrey always turns up when Bella's here.

'Have a biscuit,' I say desperately, and I unfold the kitchen roll and let them fall across the carpet and grab one and shove it into my mouth, but Bella spits it out because she's seen something much better than a biscuit.

The cat has carried a terrified bird into my bedroom, somehow getting it past Mum, who would have screamed and shooed him away if she'd seen. The bird is tiny. It looks like a baby. I wonder if Humphrey pulled it out of its nest, whether its mother is missing it.

It is flapping its little wings and trying to fly away, even though its body has been punctured by Humphrey's teeth.

He does this often, my cat. He's very much on Team Bella rather than Team Ella. He knows.

I manage to crawl over to it. I can't even hear the ringing any more: it's just a white noise that blocks out the mundane world. I can hardly breathe as I reach for the hammer that I keep under the bed. It's a little hammer that looks ladylike and inoffensive: when Mum found it I said it was part of my sculpting kit for art, and she totally believed that.

This is for the bird's sake. I pick the tiny thing up by a feather and place it on top of a history essay, which is on top of a textbook on the floor. I straighten it, stroking it with a finger.

'Hello,' I whisper.

Humphrey gives me a look. He is excited. He is a bad cat and he never pretends.

My breathing quickens as I stare at the little bird.

I can't hear anything. I can't see anything but the bird.

And I know what I'm going to do. I wouldn't have arranged the creature and got out the hammer if I didn't. I know what I'm going to do because it is what I live for.

The world is dark around the edges like a spooky photo. Everything else has faded away. Bird, book, cat, hammer. Bella.

I feel sick, but not in a normal way. Nothing about this is normal for anyone but me.

I can see the bird trying to fly away, and I know it will never fly again. I am Bella, and I can do anything. I have the power of life and death.

I pick up the hammer, wait for a moment with it raised just high enough, savouring every second, and smash it down on top of the creature.

I

feel

it

crunch.

I

watch

it

shatter.

I stare. I love doing this.

'Thanks,' I breathe to the cat, and he inclines his head towards me in a *you're-welcome* sort of way. A *we're-in-this-together* way.

This is what it's all about. I love it when I get to take over. I want to be her forever; I want to stop being Ella Black and let Bella step into her shoes. I could do anything.

The white noise starts to fade. I try to hang on to it.

I hate doing this.

GO AWAY.

I am scared.

NO YOU'RE NOT.

'Ella?'

The voice slices through everything and the ringing is back, but it's quieter. I am cross-legged beside my bed, on the other side of the room from the door. It takes me seconds to come back to myself, to know that I am Ella again and not Bella, and when I do I push the hammer under the bed and jump to my feet. My legs wobble. My heart pounds so hard they must be able to hear it downstairs.

Lily is standing in the doorway.

I look around, gasping for breath, drawing in great lungfuls of air and trying to use them to pull myself back into real Ella. I am in my bedroom. The walls are pink and blue, with anime posters. My clothes are on the floor. There is a photo collage of me and Lily and Jack, laughing, doing ironic duck-faced pouts, posing with our arms round each other. Everything looks normal.

Everything

looks

normal.

Nothing is normal.

I don't know what she's seen. I don't know if she saw me lift the hammer and kill the bird. I try to force the last bits of Bella away. Lily cannot see her. She cannot see this. She cannot. I push it away, away, away.

In my head I say the words that bring me back to myself. They only work when Bella has nearly gone.

The universe the universe the universe, I say.

The universe.

The universe.

The

whole

universe.

The only thing that chases Bella away is that cosmic perspective. If I think of the entire universe and how tiny I am, everything feels manageable because nothing matters. Nothing at all matters. Ella doesn't matter and neither does Bella. Unfortunately this only works when she's on her way out. It doesn't stop her arriving.

I discovered the universe thing by mistake. I was in the downstairs loo, aged about eleven, battling a demon I understood even less than I do now. I had my back against the locked door and I was pulling the wallpaper off the wall because I couldn't control myself and I had to destroy something. As Bella started to fade I read a poem that is still stuck on our downstairs loo wall.

Whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.
No doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.
The universe is unfolding.

It made Bella leave me alone. Now I've refined it to just the words *the universe*. I say them over and over again.

Bella has gone. I needed her to go right now and she did. She went because of the universe.

My lips move but I don't think any sound comes out.

I must be nice.

Be nice.

Be normal.

I

have

to

be

normal.

Smile.

You

must

smile.

'Oh, hey, Lily,' I say. My voice trembles but the words are kind of right. 'Um. Don't come in!'

I snap the last bit as she steps into the room. She stops. I wobble to my feet then sit on the bed because my legs give out.

'Oh, Ella.' Lily is lovely. She is confused by my snapping at her because I never do that. 'Oh my God,

are you OK? Your mum said I could come up. I just came by because you haven't got your phone and I wanted to –' I see her notice my phone on my bed. 'Oh, you got it back?'

'Yes. Back. Um.'

Be normal.

'Sorry,' I say. I form the word carefully, trying to say the thing that Ella should say. 'The cat brought in a bird. It's *really* grim. It's made me sick. Sorry. Really don't come in. I had to put it out of its misery. I . . . had . . . to . . .'

It's too difficult to come back to myself. It's harder every time. One day I won't make it. One day I will just be Bella.

The ringing is fainter still, and then it just about stops. The edges of the world are sharp again.

'Oh, shitting hell,' says Lily. Lily could never understand, and I would never tell her because if I did she might not be my friend any more and I need her. *I need her*. She pulls me back, often, without knowing. 'Oh, Ella. You poor thing. I've got a tissue. Hang on.'

She is walking towards me. Humphrey crouches, then runs, streaking past her legs and out of the room and down the stairs.

I pull her down to sit next to me on the bed and take her face in my hands. I cannot let her look at what I did.

Her springy hair on my fingers grounds me. I am with Lily now.

'Seriously,' I say, my face right in front of hers. 'Don't look. Really don't look. I'll clean it up. Could you maybe run down and get a plastic bag from my mum?'

I am hiccupping. It is all too much. I've always managed Bella better than this. I've always kept Lily away from her.

'Sure. Shit, Ella. You poor, poor thing.' She puts an arm round me, and just for a moment I lean in and bury my face in her shoulder. Her hair is loose. It tickles my face. I cling on, and then I force myself to let go.

When she has left I put my head in my hands. This is awful: I can't keep it up. Jack must have wondered why I needed him to leave tonight. Lily actually walked into a room and found Bella in it. Next time it will be worse and then everyone will know. I can't get my thoughts straight or stop shaking, but I have to clean this up. I love Lily and she cannot know. I love Jack and he cannot know either.

They cannot know.

They

cannot

know.

I leave the poor smashed bird where it is, and fold the history essay around it. I am shaking, and a feather

falls out of the grotesque package. I kick the textbook out of the way and try to pick up the stray feathers, though I really need to vacuum to get the carpet clean.

Mum will be pleased to see me spontaneously using the vacuum cleaner. So that will make everyone happy for a bit.

When Lily comes back with the bag I drop in the bird in its essay coffin, and I pick up most of the feathers and drop them in too.

'I'll just wash my hands.'

Lily ties the handles of the bag and takes it downstairs while I lock myself in the bathroom and try to breathe without it catching, without gasping or taking such shallow breaths that I feel dizzy. I wash my hands with lots of soap. I wash my face with cold water and soap, and I put on some moisturizer to make it soft and smooth. I take off my old make-up and don't put on any new. I breathe in and out. In. Out. In, deeply. Out, deeply. I close my eyes. I remember smashing the bird. It made me happy.

I do not want to be this girl.

2

37 days

'Ella!' she shouts up the stairs. I notice that Lily is keeping discreetly away from my room after what happened on Wednesday. I grab my bag and run down the stairs, smiling, ready to be relentlessly nice all day long.

'Hello!' I say, super enthusiastically.

She grins. 'You look gorgeous.'

I don't, but it's lovely of her to say so.

'*You* do,' I tell her. She's wearing skinny jeans and a big white shirt. 'You really do. Classic and beautiful.' I immediately feel messy beside her, in my leggings and long-sleeved T-shirt. I feel like a child, but that doesn't matter.

Lily and I have been best friends for nearly ten years – that's more than half our lives. We became proper friends at the age of eight, when we were put together for a school nature walk and let loose in the forest with a sheet of paper and a list of random things to collect. We went further and further from the base. I wanted to

get lost to see what would happen (Bella was young then too, and she took a more random approach), and Lily was happy with that plan because she likes an adventure.

It didn't go brilliantly, but we ended up friends.

As we walk into the kitchen to say goodbye to Mum and Dad, they stop talking and plaster on fake smiles. I wish they'd just argue properly – they are always breaking off a whispered fight as I come into a room. Dad is off work today because of something, and that means they get an extra day to hiss at each other, which is nice.

'Hello, girls!' says Mum.

Dad looks up from his paper as if he were absorbed in it. He might as well be holding it upside down because he definitely wasn't reading it.

'All right?' he says.

Mum is clattering about cooking. I wish that sometimes she would read the paper while he cooked, but no. They just don't do it like that. I'd like her to have a break sometimes. Dad does occasionally offer, but she insists on doing it all herself: she'll only let us lay the table or take the compost out to the wormery.

Yes. My mother seriously has a wormery. It's like three hundred pets that eat all our kitchen waste and poo out compost. I love them. Sometimes I take off the

lid and stare at them. Once Bella tried to make me pour boiling water on to them and I had to run all the way to my room and slash one of my own paintings to pieces with a craft knife just to save them.

So Mum is cooking. She's tall and blonde, just like I used to be (I am still tall unfortunately, but no longer blonde), and she beams as we walk through the kitchen, and says: 'Would you like some soup, girls?'

Lily says: 'That's really kind of you, but we're just off to Mollie's.'

'It smells great though,' I say, even though it really doesn't. Mum's lentil soup is so thick you can literally use it as wallpaper paste. Once I stuck a sketch I'd done to the wall with it, just to see if it worked, and it's still there today. It's a picture of Humphrey stalking a mouse, and it's on the wall to the left of the window.

Mum was out and I was messing around with Jack. I bet him that it would stay up, and it has, for months now. We laughed so much we cried. I do love Jack.

Dad and Mum both pretend we haven't walked in on another silent argument, so it feels insanely awkward. Dad smiles at me and Lily and turns a page of his paper. Generally he is so much easier to live with than Mum, because he does his thing and gives me all the space I need, which is a lot. I can talk to Dad about things and he'll engage with me. The other day he said

abstract art was rubbish, and I told him why he was wrong and he totally got it and changed his mind.

'Watching movies?' he says now.

'Yep,' I say.

'It's *Psycho* today,' says Lily.

'The Bates Motel,' says Dad.

I don't answer. Lily humours him for us both by singing a version of the shower music and Dad makes a stabbing motion, which I notice he aims at Mum.

We get on our bikes and cycle off. I love cycling. Even when you're wearing a helmet the wind is in your hair. I like the way your legs hurt and you feel as if you've done something good. Sometimes I have even managed to cycle Bella away from me.

As I follow Lily, her hair springing out from under her helmet, I think about the fact that Mum and Dad are unusually happy to see me leave the house today, and I know it's so they can carry on their secret arguing. I was always glad that my parents weren't divorced like most people's because I'd rather live with Dad (judging by what happens to other people I'd probably have to live with Mum), but now I wish they'd just do it already. I'm seventeen so I could live where I liked. I have no idea what is going on and why, and I certainly don't want to think about one of them having an affair (oh God, *no*!), so I guess I'll just leave them to it.

Lily hasn't seen her dad since she was eight, though she still gets money from him. That must be horrible, but she says it's all she knows and so it's perfectly fine, and she is indeed one of life's happy people.

A couple of hours later we are sitting in Mollie's massive living room watching the exciting part of *Psycho*. I can't relax here because I don't belong: I know I'm only here because I'm with Lily. Mollie and the twins and Lily are all A list and I'm a hanger-on, so I sit quietly on the squashy sofa with Lily, our legs pressed together, and that grounds me though I couldn't say so. Mollie's dad put a bowl of Maltesers in front of us a minute ago and they're already half gone and I've taken most of them out of nerves. Everyone's staring at the screen so they don't even notice. I will do extra exercise later to make up for it. Mollie will be angry if she sees that I've taken all the Maltesers.

I know they hate me because I'm boring and scared and awkward. I look like one of them (or I did), but I'm not one of them. I say the wrong thing, or I say nothing at all, and generally they just act as if I wasn't there. They don't hate me though, so that's something.

Mollie is applying for film studies at college and she's trying to watch every important film ever made so she'll be able to talk about them at interviews and get offers from everywhere. We are all watching them with

her (or rather, she invited Lily and the twins to watch them with her, and Lily brought me along) because we will be off to uni next year too, and they all like the idea of being seen as cool and stylish film buffs. I do too, obviously, but mainly I just enjoy switching off and watching the movies.

The idea of going away from here is weird. Unlike Mollie, I don't know what I want to do or who I want to be. I only want to apply to art school, but you can't exactly have a career as an artist (not according to the careers advisers at school anyway). Whatever it turns out to be, I can't wait to leave this town because I only have Lily and Jack here and everyone else hates me, and if I went away from Kent I might be OK. I might become a full-time Bella or, just maybe, I might finally manage to fight her and kill her off. I could be Ella all the time. I could be someone good.

I take a deep breath. Perhaps I should apply for film studies too. I'm enjoying this film. I wish the rest of them would stop talking so I could concentrate, though of course I can't ask them to.

Unfortunately Lily is telling them about the bird. She didn't tell them after it happened, but she's telling them now.

'God, Ella,' says Mollie, looking as if she's actually a bit scared of me – and perhaps she *should* be. 'That is

so fucked. I mean – here's a bird in distress.' She laughs. 'Let's get, like, *Ella Black* to put it out of its misery.'

She and the twins all burst out laughing. I look at Lily. She mouths, 'Sorry.'

'But,' says Nisha, 'that is seriously so gross. I literally couldn't have done it.' She looks at me as if I might be a monster, as if this is a story that might travel like a bush fire around the common room, as if it is something that could make my life just that little bit worse, and I know it is.

I try to give her a bright smile, though I'm sure it comes out all wrong. 'I just did what I had to do,' I say. 'That poor thing.'

I think those were the right words. I have to measure my words all the time when I'm with the Alpha girls. The slightest misstep and they become vicious. These aren't the worst, not at all; but they are still bad, and everything is reported to everyone.

I imagine for a second what might happen if I told them that it wasn't actually me who killed the bird, that it was my other self, Bella. My inner monster. It would be the beginning of the end of everything. Within a couple of minutes I would be notorious throughout the school and beyond it.

The woman in the film has just got into the shower and I know this means the famous scene is about to

happen. Everyone seems to have lost interest in me and we all stare at the screen as the *Psycho* music starts and Janet Leigh is murdered.

'Ella, I'm so sorry,' Lily whispers, right into my ear. 'I didn't mean them to –'

'It's OK.' I cut her off. 'Truly it is.' And it is. I could be annoyed with her for telling them about the bird, but I'm not. She said it to make them sympathize with me, and it's not her fault it didn't work.

She takes my hand. 'Love you.'

I spend the rest of the day as the hanger-on, being as nice as I possibly can. I always try to do that. Because I'm scared of the bad thing that lives inside me, and because Lily walked in when I was under Bella's control, I work on being normal more than ever before. I concentrate all my efforts on being kind and helpful – not that anyone but Lily cares what I do. I sit with Mollie and talk her through the essay on *Sons and Lovers*, which I've done and she hasn't, and she accepts my help and says, 'Thank you.' That feels like a breakthrough.

'Why *did* you do that to your hair?' she asks, picking up a strand of it in her fingers as we work side by side, and looking at it in distaste.

I shrug. 'I just fancied a change,' I say. That is the biggest lie ever. My hair used to be long and blonde like

Mollie's, but now it's lopsided (much longer on one side than the other) and purple. The lopsidedness came after a horrible incident at school with Tessa, whose hobby is making my life, and the lives of everyone else who doesn't quite fit in, as difficult as she can. The purple was part of a complicated accommodation I made with Bella to stop her attacking Tessa back with her own knife. Anyway, my public position is that I fancied a change, and actually I like the purple. I'm different from everyone else, so I might as well *look* different.

'Right.' Mollie is smirking. Actually I can't wait to get away from here.

'So it's about Mrs Morel controlling Paul even after she's died,' I say. 'That's what I put. I looked it up online and that's what it said. She ruins all his relationships because she wants to make sure he loves his mummy the best.'

'Hey, Anusha,' says Mollie. 'That sounds a bit like Dean.'

Everyone looks at Anusha and laughs about her boyfriend, and the heat is off me and I am pleased.