Dear I exist,

I exist too. I found your red pen messages and think we might get along. I leave messages in books too.

Meet you in the pages of The Perks of Being a Wallflower? We can exist together?

From,

Someone who gets it

xxx

To Libraries, and everyone who has ever needed to hide in one

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p5 quote from *The Cocktail Party* by T.S. Eliot / p42 quote from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee / p127 quote from *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli / p252 quote from *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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HOLLY BOURNE

THE YEARBOOK

SCHOLA EST

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The Yearbook is a work of fiction but it deals with many real issues including emotional abuse and bullying.

Links to advice and support can be found at the back of the book.

Half of the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't mean to do harm, but the harm does not interest them. Or they do not see it, or they justify it because they are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves.

T.S. Eliot

I bet the author has never even read T.S. Eliot and has just inserted this quote to make the book sound more intelligent.

Most likely to be...

A SUPERMODEL:

Grace Langdon

A C.E.O.:

Amelia Murry

FORGOTTEN:

Paige Vickers

ST BENEDICT'S SCHOOL YEARBOOK

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Look, you don't need to read this to be reminded what secondary school was like. Just close your eyes and you're there. Like it or not, you're there. With your popular kids, your smart kids, your sporty kids, your drama kids, your obsessively-into-graphic-novels kids, and that quiet one you all suspect will become a serial killer one day. Someone says the word "school" and we're all there. In the churning chaos of the corridors, the Darwinism of the lunchtime canteen and the toilets with the locked cubicle and muffled crying coming from under the gap. The unspoken social hierarchies deciding who gets to sit where on the grass slope next to the Astroturf. You can smell the stale reek of the PE changing rooms. The earnest stink

of a newly-trained teacher who cares too much; the stench of the jaded teachers who stopped caring long ago. Hear the jolting trill of the bell, the whispers as you walk past, the loud echoes of everyone demanding to be heard above each other. The dramas, the traumas, and the untrue rumours. The endless, predictable terribleness of it. Getting up each morning, putting on that damn uniform and having to march yourself into this prison, wondering what psychologically-damaging memory you're going to make that day. A government building chock-a-block with scared teenagers, desperate to know who they are, and if they matter, and whether they're going to get out of there alive.

So with all this in mind, you can't blame me that, for many years, I wanted absolutely nothing to do with school. Let alone this yearbook, and everything this yearbook represents.

Until, of course, I did this…

CHAPTER 1

It was yearbook photo day and the English block toilets were clearly not the best place to hide from the fiasco. I'd planned to lock myself in a cubicle with a library book and dodge the whole thing. But, as I pushed into the mint green arena, I found a cluster bomb of girls, fighting for mirror space and panicking about the state of their faces.

"Can I borrow your mascara? My eyelashes look like they've become freaking…vegan?"

"My hair! Why is it doing this to me?"

Entire contents of make-up bags were dumped into the sinks. The air stank of a pungent mixture of hairsprays. I bumped into Grace, who was leaning over the mirror with the best lighting.

"Sorry!"

I watched her weigh up whether I was worth disciplining before she half-smiled to accept the apology and returned to contouring her face. Though she raised her eyebrows at Laura on the neighbouring sink.

I was stuck. If I went to the loo now, they'd notice I'd stayed in there and no doubt spread a rumour I'd missed the photos due to chronic diarrhoea. My only option was to pretend I also needed to overhaul my appearance and wait until they'd finished. Getting to a mirror was tough, however. Grace, Amelia and Laura held three out of the four available – one each, of *course*. One mirror for the pretty one, one mirror for the scary one, and one for the sheep. All three of them united in their commitment to unnecessary awfulness. The remaining mirror was being fought over by three others – not daring to complain. Chloe had a true talent for applying eyeliner under exceptional circumstances. She'd managed to load up her smoky eye perfectly despite access to only the mirror's top corner. Her best friend, Hannah, squatted under her, piling concealer onto a chin spot. Both ignored me as I loitered. I had no lipstick to blot. No mascara to reapply. So I stood on my tippy-toes and punched my hair to try and give it volume.

Punch punch punch.

Why won't they all hurry up?

I could only see a tiny fraction of myself in the mirror.

Punch punch punch.

Amelia pulled out a mini bottle of hairspray and fumigated her head. My eyes stung as the chemical mist drifted over and we all held back coughs. Amelia was the scary one. I glanced at my battered watch and took a step backwards, ready to inch my way into a cubicle, when the door slammed open with Mrs Collins on the threshold.

"Right, girls, come on. Preening over," she barked in her thick Irish accent. "And do ANY of you remember the school rules about no make-up?"

Amelia, unruffled, continued to spray her hair. "But, miss, it's the yearbook pictures."

"Yes, and you were due in the hall five minutes ago." She clapped her hands. Chloe jumped and ruined the corner of her eyeliner. "Out!" She started guiding us out like a sheepdog.

"I need the loo," I protested, as she tried to shepherd me with the rest of them.

"No, you don't. Come on. Picture time."

And with hair full of fruitless punches, I got frogmarched away.

In the hall, everyone had broken the no-phones rule to use them as mirrors. The teachers were too slammed to stop us – pulling off the gigantic task of lining us up, firstly in alphabetical order for our individual shots, and then in height order for the year group photo. Photographers clicked away in two corners with their silvery umbrellas that somehow made us look slightly better, even with our acne and experimental haircuts. I shuffled to the back of the queue, jumper sleeves pulled over my hands, looking for Joe Vividichi and Lily Welsh. After five years of alphabetical lines, I knew to slot myself between them. In Year Seven, Joe and I once spoke about the annoyance of having a

surname near the end of the alphabet because you always have to go last. Then he got attractive and popular and we'd never spoken since. Not that I've spoken to anyone much, especially since Ruby left.

We inched forward as pupils squatted on a stool and pulled their most attractive face. We all knew the significance of these photos. The yearbook headshot was the photo that comes to define you in history.

I didn't want mine to be taken.

I really did not see any point. No one knew who I was, no one would remember me anyway. The most I'd be in our year group's shared history was, "*Oh yeah, that girl who never really spoke.*"

But I was stuck in the line now and had no choice.

Soon enough, it was my turn to insert my forgettable face into nobody's memory.

"Paige Vickers?" The photographer's assistant looked up from her sheet and I stepped forward.

"Hello, Paige." The photographer's voice was way too boomy. He was all red and sweaty. "Come over here and sit on the stool for us, my love."

I didn't like that he'd called me "my love" but I sat down obligingly, wanting it over.

"Right, if you just swivel your knees round. No, not that way, the other way. That's great, my darling. Okay, now twist your head towards me. No, too much. To the right a bit. Brilliant." He lurched up from behind his lens and mimed pulling each side of his mouth up. "Now big smile, missy.

Come on, more. That's better." *Snap snap snap.* The umbrella flash created lightning throughout the hall. "Even bigger smile now, come on."

Here was the problem. I did not know how to smile, especially for a photo. I'd had next to no practice.

"Huge grin. Come on! It's your last year of school. You've got your whole future in front of you… Alright then. Never mind."

I got off the stool to make way for Lily and compliantly joined the height-order line. Mrs Collins was in her bossy element, herding us all into size-appropriate clumps. I accidentally caught Amelia's eye and she gave me a dirty look for the crime. Despite being one of the most popular girls in school, Amelia knew who I was. My only minuscule claim to fame was that I was chief reporter for the school newspaper and nobody read it more intently than her group. Though I'd never been stupid enough to write anything other than wonderful stories about them. I stared at the dusty wooden floor and, ten minutes later, we were instructed to climb onto some dodgy metal scaffolding. The super-talls were led onto it first, boys joking about pushing each other off the back row, while teachers barked detention threats.

Mrs Collins pointed at my group. "Right, you lot next. Up you go. No funny business."

I climbed the steps and siphoned myself into the second row, taking in the giant poster on the back wall reminding us to ask ourselves what Jesus would do. The scaffolding

creaked and Sam Hutchins encouraged all the boys to jump. The shrieks thrummed in my ears as Mrs Collins issued him a detention.

"Stop it. All of you. You're Year Eleven, for Christ's sake. Bloody act like it," she told us all.

Mr Photographer did not speak to us like we were Year Elevens.

"Right, boys and girls, I need you to squeeze together for me. Squidge squidge squidge. Come on, don't be shy. A bit more, a bit more…" We all gradually formed one big clump of navy blue jumpers, an impenetrable wad of literal uniformity. The teachers took their seats at the front, sandwiched by the shortest students. "Okay, everyone. I want to see huge smiles. On the count of three – one, two, three." Umbrellas crackled around us, blinding us collectively. In an instant, we all became history, staring out into the future. We blinked from the flash, and when we opened our eyes, we'd already aged past the moment of capture.

The photographer grimaced at his camera screen. "Come on, let's not be silly now."

"What's happened?" Mrs Collins barked.

"It appears some of your students thought it funny to give someone 'bunny ears'."

We looked around to discover the epicentre of the drama. Laughter rippled out from the front, near Joe Vividichi and Ethan Chambers. It appeared we had our suspects. And, judging by the red face of Charlie Shaw in front of them, it appeared we also had our victim. Charlie had muddled

through school okay until he got drunk at the Year Nine disco and passed out in the boys' toilets, soaked in his own urine. He'd since had a sizeable bullseye on his back.

Mrs Collins twisted around in her chair. "Grow up. Honestly, what are you lot like?"

"Let's try again, boys and girls. Big smiles now. One, two, three." We were dazzled again, but he was already frowning. "Come on, not again."

Actual snorts echoed around the hall, starting a contagion. Girly giggles joined the harmony, and Grace's high-pitched squeal pierced the air to my right.

Mrs Collins stood up. "Right, you lot. No more. Act your age. I'm sorry," she told the photographer, "I don't know what's got into them."

School, I thought. *That's what's got into them.*

She threatened us with a year group detention, which only made everyone laugh harder. Joe was in peak-Joe mode – showing off, puffing his chest out, spraying his alpha scent everywhere. Charlie's red face seeped down the neck of his shirt.

"One last time. No bunny ears. Eyes on me. Say cheese. One, two, three."

The hysteria was so loud at this point that you couldn't even hear the flash of the bulbs. About twelve people surrounding Charlie were craning over to give him bunny ears. I kept myself to myself, stared at the poster, and wondered what Jesus would do – whether he'd have given Judas bunny ears while posing for a Da Vinci painting?

Mrs Collins jumped up again, shouting in such a thick Irish accent none of us could understand her. People started mocking her accent. The photographer crossed his arms with resigned disgust. Miss Bell, a new maths teacher, jogged out quietly to drag Reverend John in to tell us off and pray for us. And through all of this laughter and mayhem, I craned my neck to take in Charlie Shaw. A grin stapled to his face, no choice but to take the hit and laugh it off. Soon enough, Reverend John would come booming in and give us a year group detention. We'd have to sit through a twenty-minute lecture about letting down the school (and don't forget God). Then, after a mass apology to the photographer, we'd all say cheese and the bulbs would flash for a final time. This would be the shot they'd use in the yearbook. In the future, people would pick out their own face first to see how attractive they'd managed to look. Then they'd pick out the faces of their crushes and enemies, taking it all in, before shoving the yearbook in a drawer somewhere to age like a fine wine.

I thought about Charlie. How whenever he looked at that photo, all he'd remember was how he was given bunny ears repeatedly until we got a year group detention, which everyone then blamed on him.

That was what his lasting memory would be.

That was why I'd wanted to stay in the toilet.

It was better to be forgotten than scarred.

CHAPTER 2

It was lunch by the time we were allowed off the scaffolding. I grabbed a cheese and pickle sandwich from the canteen and hurried up to the library. The crazed lunchtime corridors faded to hushed bliss as I pushed through the doors. Books beckoned me in from where they were stacked high up to the ceiling – commanding peace and quiet in exchange for the privilege of being around them.

"Hi, Paige," said a giant pile of books on the front desk. "I think that's Paige, anyway. Hang on, I can't see you." Ms Gordon, the school librarian, removed the top book and appeared in all her dramatic glory – her cropped haircut and thick-rimmed glasses coming into view. Ms Gordon had an…intense relationship with fashion. Every outfit was like its own piece of performance art. She was the only teacher I could imagine existing outside these walls; whereas part of me still believed Mrs Collins slept in her biology classroom. I was quite fond of Ms Gordon. She ran the school newspaper, she let me eat my lunch in the library