

FALLOUT

LESLEY PARR

BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain in 2024 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-4801-3; eBook: 978-1-5266-4802-0;
ePDF: 978-1-5266-4803-7

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

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For David Dean

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SUMMER 1980



It was only meant to be a small explosion. Not exactly a nuclear bomb. Mr Mayfield can't take a joke, that's his problem.

He said I did it because I'm bad. He said I did it for attention, but why would I do that? I get enough attention. People are always watching me; in the street, at school, down the shops. That's what happens when you're a Pritchard.

I did it for a laugh. Because it was funny to see

Mr Mayfield go that special shade of red he keeps for his top-level fury. And I did it to get a round of applause from the whole class. Well, almost the whole class; the swots were horrified. And terrified.

Suppose that's why I'm suspended. Because of the terror.

Or because the broken glass flew everywhere and *could have seriously injured someone* (key words: could have).

Or that *science equipment is expensive*.

Or that I *spoil things for my fellow pupils who really want to learn*.

I head home to face the music, but Mam and Dad won't care about the suspension, just about the money to replace the broken equipment. Because to them I really am bad.

Which is just how they want me.

That stupid peace protest is still on the corner, outside the council building. Look at them – waving their banners and chanting. At least they aren't singing today. Swaying to the chorus of 'Give Peace a Chance'

over and over isn't going to make one speck of difference if some maniac presses the button.

BOOM!

Nuclear war. Everything and everyone gone.

But, yeah, wave a placard, shout some slogans, have a sing-song; see how far that gets you. We're not even *at war*. Not really, not like with invasions and tanks and prisoners. This is a *Cold War*, which, as far as I can tell, means world leaders make threats about pushing their nuclear buttons, but no one will. They just want us to *think* they will. And this lot have fallen for it.

Most of the protesters are the same old locals, but there's a couple of new faces. That's not unusual. They travel around, some of these people. Dad says they're a bunch of freeloading hippies who wouldn't know hard work if it bit them on the – Oh!

There's that floppy-fringe girl from the year above me at school. The one who moved here last year. Why's *she* not in lessons?

'Take a leaflet, son.' One of the new men holds out a piece of paper. He wouldn't do that if he knew me.

It says: *Refuse Cruise*. They mean cruise missiles, not sailing about on a big boat. I take it with a smile. I stand back to scan all the placards, then scrunch the flyer into a ball, toss it into the air and kick it – it smacks right into the middle of *BAN THE BOMB*.

Score!

The protesters look shocked, but calm. The girl scowls at me from under her fringe, but that's as aggro as they get. What I don't understand is, if they care so much, why don't they get angry?

Pacifism is weird.