

Praise for the



series!

‘A funny, sweet and touching “big school” book,  
ideal for 9+ fans of Jacqueline Wilson.’

*Guardian*

‘This funny and touching coming-of-age story will reflect  
the experiences of many youngsters making the transition to  
secondary school or experiencing changes in the family.’

*BookTrust*

‘Williamson’s empathy for young people shines  
through . . . As good as Jacqueline Wilson at her best.’

*The Bookseller*

‘Heartfelt and funny, this is a story about staying true to  
yourself, no matter what – and about real friendship.’

Sinead O’Hart, author of *The Time Tider*

‘This warm, true-to-life story will hit the  
spot with so many readers!’

Karen McCombie, author of *Catching Falling Stars*

‘A fresh, funny story filled with feelings around the  
highs and lows and ins and outs of friendship.’

Jake Hope, *Youth Libraries Group*

‘A delight! It’s warm and engaging, and perfectly  
pitched. We are all Lola and we all know a Cleo!’

Abie Longstaff, author

# Lisa Williamson

‘A warm, funny and bittersweet story of growing up and growing apart . . . just loved it.’  
Tamsin Winter, author

‘Williamson shows a rich insight into the emotional life of a Year 6–7 child . . . I can’t wait to get this into my school library.’  
Jenny Jones, librarian, Clifton College

‘A perfect read to show how tricky that timeless, gut-wrenching experience of changing friendships can feel.’  
Ros Roberts, author

‘It made me laugh and cringe in equal measures . . . I absolutely loved it. A perfect transitional read!’  
Jo Clarke, author of *The Travelling School Mysteries* series

‘Another perfectly observed and pitched story of Year 7 life, funny, warm and true.’  
*Lovereading*

‘Funny, relatable, tender and sometimes painfully honest . . . Entertainment and reassurance in one perfectly created book.’  
*Lancashire Evening Post*

‘Daniel Littleton navigates challenges at home and Henry Bigg Academy in this relatable early secondary school story. Children aged 9–12 will connect with Daniel’s journey of self-discovery.’  
*School Reading List*

# Secret CRUSH



illustrated by  
**Jess Bradley**



**GUPPY  
BOOKS**

BIGG SCHOOL: SECRET CRUSH  
is a GUPPY BOOK

First published in the UK in 2024 by  
Guppy Books,  
Bracken Hill,  
Cotswold Road,  
Oxford OX2 9JG

Text copyright © Lisa Williamson, 2024  
Inside illustrations © Jess Bradley, 2024

978 1 916558 298

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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GUPPY PUBLISHING LTD Reg. No. 11565833

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

Typeset by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Books Ltd

*For Nikki*

LW

*For my Ultimate Crush, JP*

JB

# Chapter One

'In conclusion, *The Legend of Cahearah* by Astrid Chaney is not only a thrilling read for all ages, but a literary classic in the making. Thank you very much.'

I bowed my head and waited for the applause. When none came, I was confused. Didn't the class realise I had finished?

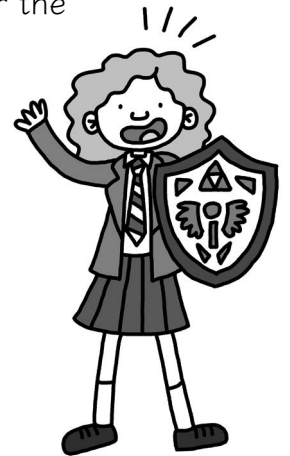
I turned to Mrs Lyons who was perched on the edge of her desk looking ever so slightly dazed.

'I'm done,' I said.

'Thank you, Astrid,' Mrs Lyons replied, blinking rapidly. 'That was very . . . er . . . enthusiastic.'

I beamed. 'Thank you, miss.'

I was the sixth person to present my book



review to the class today and I really didn't think it was big-headed of me to say that mine had easily been the most entertaining. For a start, no one else had thought to do a dramatic reading or made the effort to bring along homemade props.

'Now, does anyone have any questions for Astrid about her review?' Mrs Lyons asked the class.

Cleo Bayford raised her hand.

'Yes, Cleo,' Mrs Lyons said.

'I thought we were supposed to review a book that we'd actually *read*,' Cleo said in that snooty voice of hers.

'I have read it,' I pointed out. 'I've probably read it a hundred times.'

'I thought you said that you *wrote* it,' Cleo said witheringly.

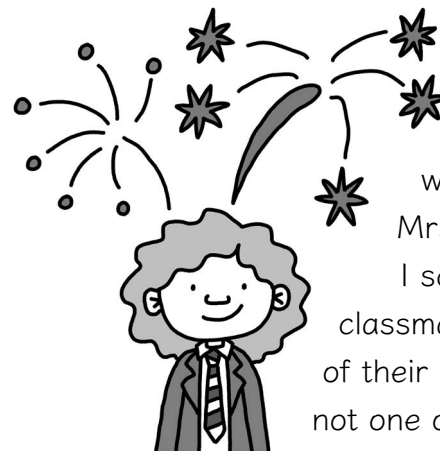
'I did. I wrote it *and* I've read it. It *is* possible to do both, you know.'

'But it's not like it's even a proper book. You can't buy it in a bookshop or anything.'

'Maybe not right now, but one day. And, anyway, at no point did Mrs Lyons say that our review had to be on a book that's available to *buy*.'

'That is true,' Mrs Lyons said, frowning.

Cleo pulled a face but didn't say anything else, and I felt a little burst of triumph explode like a firework in my chest.



'Does anyone else have something they would like to ask Astrid?' Mrs Lyons said.

I scanned the faces of my classmates, eager to answer all of their burning questions, but not one of them raised their hand.

Hmmmm, perhaps my review

had been *too* thorough.

Mrs Lyons waited a couple more beats then looked back down at her list.

'OK, moving on then,' she said. 'Up next, we have Rafiq.'

As Rafiq shuffled to the front of the room holding the same book about football that two other boys in the class had already reviewed, I headed back to my seat clutching my papier-mâché shield.

'Fancy reviewing your *own* book,' Cleo said loudly, as I sat down. 'So bizarre.'

A few people sniggered but I pretended not to hear them.

The thing is, I'm used to people thinking I'm a bit strange. What they don't realise is that I *like* being different, so if anything, being called weird or bizarre is actually a massive compliment.

When the bell rang for home time, Mrs Lyons asked me to stay behind.

As I pulled on my coat, I hid a smile. I expected she wanted to congratulate me on my book review in private so that no one else felt bad about theirs.

I gathered up my props and made my way to the front of the room where Mrs Lyons was loading a pile of marking into a canvas tote bag.

'You wanted to talk to me, miss?' I asked eagerly.

I couldn't wait to hear which part of my presentation she'd liked the best.

Mrs Lyons stopped what she was doing and grabbed an exercise book from the top of the

big stack on her desk. It was only once she'd opened it and thrust it under my nose that I realised it was mine.

'What is the meaning of this?' she asked, jabbing at the inside cover.



I was confused. Why did she seem so annoyed all of a sudden?

'It's a map, miss,' I said.

'I realise that, Astrid. A map of what?'

'Of Haldaerk, miss.'

'And what's Haldaerk when it's at home?'

I blinked in surprise. Had Mrs Lyons not listened to my review? I'd mentioned Haldaerk at least five times! Perhaps she was losing her marbles? She was pretty old – fifty at least.



'Haldaerk is the kingdom in *The Legend of Cahearah*,' I explained as patiently as I could.

'That still doesn't explain why it's scrawled all over your English book.'

Scrawled? That map had taken me the whole of Tuesday's lesson! I couldn't exactly say that

though, because then I'd have to admit that I'd spent the entire hour drawing instead of listening to Mrs Lyons drone on about *Macbeth*.

She let out a heavy sigh.

'Astrid, I applaud your passion for these little stories of yours, I really do, but there's a time and a place.'

Little? Little?! There was nothing 'little' about any of my stories!

'I'm not sure what you mean,' I said, trying my best to keep calm.

'I *mean*, it's time for you to start focusing on your actual schoolwork, at least while you're in my classroom. Not everything can be about Cadearah.'

'Cahearah,' I said.

'I'm sorry?'

'It's not Cadearah, it's Cahearah – *The Legend of Cahearah*. With a 'h'. It means female warrior in Irish.'

Instead of apologising for getting it wrong, Mrs Lyons tutted.

'Either way, Astrid,' she said, 'my point still stands. And if you graffiti on your book again, I'll

have no choice but to issue you with a conduct mark. Now, off you go.'

'Graffiti!' I cried, as I walked out the school gates with my friend Lola.

'This is some of my best drawing!'

'Mrs Lyons is clearly bananas,'

Lola said. 'Your map is brilliant.'

Honestly, Astrid, she doesn't know what she's talking about.'

I shot her a grateful smile.

'Thanks, Lola. You're the best.'

'You're welcome. What did the class think of your presentation?'

'I'm not sure,' I admitted.

I told her what Cleo had said.

'How very rude!' Lola exclaimed.

Cleo stole Lola's best friend Evie from her at the beginning of Year Seven and Lola has hated her ever since.

'Yeah, it was pretty rude,' I agreed. 'And it's not like I was mean about *her* review.'

'What book did she talk about?'

'Some gooeey love story.'



'Ugh, yuck!'

I grinned. I *knew* Lola would be on my side. We'd only been friends for a couple of months, but I felt like I'd known her way longer.

'Do you have to go straight home?' I asked.

'I don't think so. Why?'

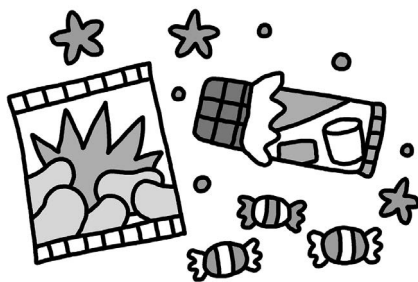
'Fancy coming to the high street with me? I've got something to collect from The Book Burrow.'

'Can we stop off for sweets on the way?'

Lola liked sweets almost as much as I liked books.

'Of course.'

'Then you have yourself a deal.'



## Chapter Two

The moment I saw the glowing lights of The Book Burrow, I felt in a much better mood.

The Book Burrow is one of my favourite places in the entire world. From the outside, it looks tiny, but inside, it's actually massive with loads of nooks and crannies; all of them crammed with books on just about every topic you could imagine. The wooden shelves are ten feet high and if you want something from the top, one of the booksellers has to climb a special ladder to reach it, like Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. The very best bit though is the children's section right at the back. It's super cosy with big squishy beanbags and hundreds of twinkling fairy lights and a red and gold storytelling throne. I could

