

PRAISE FOR HOLLY BOURNE

**"The queen of British YA"
THE GUARDIAN**

**"Holly Bourne's novels are always
bang on trend for our times"
THE DAILY MAIL**

**"Utterly page-turning and relatable"
THE OBSERVER**

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this isn't just for YA readers"
STYLIST**

**"A must-read for any young feminist"
SHOUT**

**"Holly Bourne is doing God's work"
DOLLY ALDERTON**

**"An important and honest read"
THE SUN**

**"Holly Bourne is something special. She's got it"
PATRICK NESS**

To C,
This book grew into being as I grew you into being.
Every day I'll fight for a better world for you.

First published in the UK in 2023 by Usborne Publishing Limited, Usborne House,
83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England. usborne.com

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20,
93049 Regensburg, Deutschland, VK Nr. 17560

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Author photo © L. Bourne

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

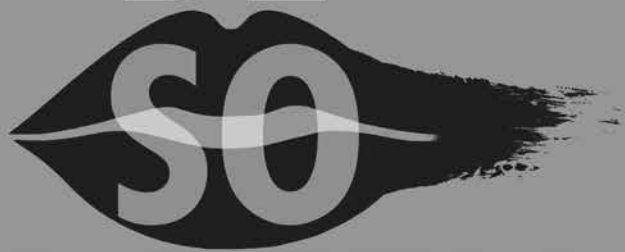
ISBN 9781474966832 05375/1 JFMAMJJ SONDD/23

Printed and bound using 100% renewable energy at CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY.



holly bourne

**YOU
COULD
BE**



PRETTY

USBORNE

YOU COULD BE SO PRETTY

is a work of fiction but it deals with many real issues including eating disorders, domestic abuse, pornography, misogyny, sexual harassment and assault, which some readers may find distressing or offensive.

THE DOCTRINE

states that the Bad Times are over and True Gender Equality has been achieved.

The Doctrine has issued guidance on how women and girls can best integrate themselves into this new world of Empowerment.

Of course, the Doctrine is only guidance. It is not law. It is every individual's choice whether they want to embrace it or not.

We must celebrate every girl's choice, without question.

That is what we all fought for.

BELLE

I'll never forget the sound of my mother's scream.

It woke me with a shrillness that pierced my bones and I scrambled up in bed. I was initially too terrified to move, my heart a frantic hummingbird in my chest, until I heard a wail that soured the air of our house. I kicked my covers and teddies off, ran to the door and listened at the crack, waiting to hear intruders, but the house was still apart from my mother's quiet sobbing. With shaking hands, I reached up to twist the doorknob and padded out into the corridor.

"Mother?" I whispered.

I found her in the corner of the bathroom. A huddled mess on the bath mat, bent over like a dropped doll.

"Mother?"

She flinched and looked up, the moonlight hitting her beautiful tear-streaked face. She reached out an arm, and I went to her instantly. My mother clutched me to her ribcage and wept onto my shoulder. "Oh, Belle," she gasped.

I tried to pat her back. I didn't know how to help. I was only seven years old.

“Mother, I’m scared. What’s wrong?”

“I can’t...I can’t...Belle, what am I going to do? They’re going to...they’re going to make me an Invisible.” She let me go and reached up, holding out a thin hair on her head. “Do you see it? Oh, Belle...” In the night’s shadows, it took a second to make out the source of her scream. There, in my mother’s manicured fingers, was one stray grey hair. It was the same pale colour as the moonlight glowing through the window. I took it between my fingers, not understanding at first. It felt different to the rest of my mother’s hairs. Wirier, denser, and stripped of all pigment. A howl erupted from her throat and she collapsed in on herself again.

I sniffed up my own tears, feeling the most desperate helplessness. I didn’t fully understand what an Invisible was yet. I wished my father was there, but he was never there. Always away, working, doing his part for the Industry. And even though I was young, I knew she wouldn’t allow herself to be like this if he was around. Then a solution occurred to me. I told my mother to wait and I ran into my room, raiding my desk drawer for my colouring pens. I returned and paused in the bathroom doorway. My mother was still crying, while holding out her strand of grey hair like it would contaminate the others.

“Mother.”

I sat cross-legged next to her and she seeped into my shoulder again.

“I don’t want them to make me an Invisible, Belle. I can’t.”

“Mother, this might help.”

I took the pen lid off with my teeth. She watched me take the offending strand between my pudgy fingers.

“You’re not invisible, Mother,” I told her, as I held the felt tip to the hair and started to colour.

It was an awkward job. The strand kept dropping from my fingers and I’d have to rummage to find it again. And it was a crude solution; the colour was hardly a perfect match. But the ink took to the hair surprisingly well, sinking into the porous texture, transforming it back to vitality, until it fell back, blended, into the other hairs.

“There we are, all done,” I said, using the voice she used on me when I grazed my knee and needed a plaster.

My mother gathered herself from the floor, slowly rising until she was level with the sink. She leaned towards the mirror, examining her reflection. Even with her tear stains, even in the bad light, even without her Mask on, she was so beautiful. She turned her head this way and that and then smiled before twisting back to me.

“My beautiful girl,” she said, bending down to scoop me up into a hug. I wrapped myself around her like a spider monkey. “Thank you,” she whispered into my hair. “Thank you, my beautiful, *beautiful* girl.”

JONI

I clung to Mother's leg while we both watched my father leave. She stood like a marble pillar, her eyes following him around the house, as he packed his things and told her all the reasons why she was disgusting and pathetic and how no one could blame him for leaving. His New One loitered by the front door, her arms crossed defiantly, shooting my mother looks of repulsion, her young, sculptured chin jutting out, all like, *I don't blame him either*. But Mother stood resolute, her hand shaking on my shoulder, and gave him nothing back. It was safer that way. He might want to inflict one final blow as a parting gift.

She did flinch, however, when he slammed the door behind him, leaving us in an empty house. But she recovered, squeezed my shoulder and stood motionless again, waiting...waiting...

Only after half an hour did she trust he'd actually gone. Her legs caved and I fell to the floor with her. "It's going to be okay," she whispered, kissing my cheeks, stroking my hair. "It's going to be okay, it's going to be okay."

I started crying, relieved and yet missing him already, and she hugged me to her, rocking me until I was calm again. Then,

out of nowhere, she stood resolutely, a look of determination carved into her face.

“Mother?”

She walked upstairs, and I followed at her feet like a hungry kitten, until we reached the bathroom. The floor was littered with bottles Father had flung down in his haste to leave his family. Mother located a vial of Mask Remover in the corner, emptied it onto some cotton, and I sat on the toilet as she slowly, carefully, wiped her Mask off. I gasped as unseen parts of her revealed themselves. My mouth dropped open as she wiped and wiped, until a pile of coloured cotton clogged the sink. Then, smiling at her reflection in the cabinet mirror, she opened the door and took out a pair of scissors.

“Mother, no!”

She ignored me and stared ahead as she hacked off all her hair, letting it fall on top of the stained cotton.

When she was done, my mother’s new face turned to me and everything about her was different. It wasn’t just the lines I could now see that I hadn’t before, or the shape of her skull through her new haircut...but her eyes...they were bright and dancing.

She brought me in for a kiss, and there was a lightness in her touch. A fresh way of holding herself, like she’d lost stones of Sin.

“We’re free, Joni,” she whispered to me. “Now we are free.”