

CATHERINE WILKINS



For Hannah, Taylor and Amanda,  
my favourite #femaleworkplace. CW.

First published in the UK in 2022 by Nosy Crow Ltd  
The Crow's Nest, 14 Baden Place  
Crosby Row, London, SE1 1YW, UK

Nosy Crow Eireann Ltd  
44 Orchard Grove, Kenmare  
Co Kerry, V93 FY22, Ireland

[www.nosycrow.com](http://www.nosycrow.com)

ISBN: 978 1 78800 786 3

Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered  
trademarks of Nosy Crow Ltd

Text copyright © Catherine Wilkins, 2022  
Cover illustration copyright © Thy Bui, 2022

The right of Catherine Wilkins to be identified as the author of this  
work has been asserted.

All rights reserved

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of  
trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form  
of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. No part of  
this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or  
transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written  
permission of Nosy Crow Ltd.


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

Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.  
Typeset by Tiger Media

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in  
sustainable forests



1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



# CHAPTER ONE

At 7 a.m. I am practising my comedy eyebrows in my  
bedroom mirror when I hear the sound of smashing  
plates and I know it's because they've fallen off the  
draining board again.

"It's OK, it's OK, I'll get the broom!" I hear my  
mum yell from downstairs. Then: "Well, *why* hasn't  
it been put back? DON'T COME IN HERE WITH  
BARE FEET! What on *earth* was it doing there?  
Mummy is NOT shouting!"

The plates get cleaned and stacked to dry with  
really good intentions, I'm sure. But then no one  
ever puts them away and the draining board ends up  
like a buckaroo of balancing crockery. It's the same  
with the bins.

I roll my eyes at my family and get back to

practising for my *exciting audition*. I don't know if I will actually *have* to audition or not; I'm not quite sure how it works. But it's best to be prepared.

I, Amy Miller, am *always* prepared. (Unlike my family.)

Today is a day I have been looking forward to for *years*. (I mean, I look forward to a lot of days, to be fair.)

I, Amy Miller, am a *very* positive person. But this is still up there.

It's official. The list is opening for entries for the Lower School Comedy Show.

I remember when I was in Year Seven and I first watched the comedy sketches put on by the older kids, how I fell in LOVE. How funny it was! How *daring*, how FUN. I couldn't *wait* to be a part of it.

And now I, a sophisticated Year Nine, am finally eligible to do it and I'm so excited!

Not that I haven't dabbled with comedy writing and stuff in the meantime. You have to hone your craft. I used to write quite a lot with my friend Anil. We made a spoof radio show, which we recorded on our phones. Though we've drifted apart a bit lately.

Anyway, whatever. I also sing, so I'm a triple

threat. Well, double threat. I can dance a tiny bit, so maybe double and a half threat. Whatever. Not the point right now.

I do a little tap dance to myself in the mirror and end on a power pose. By the time we are finally allowed in the kitchen, I'm on top of the world.

Mum gets cross about my older sister Caz having her phone at the table, but Dad inadvertently yet deftly defuses the tension by trying to eat a yoghurt with a fork because we don't have enough clean cutlery.

"Anyway." Dad frowns and wipes yoghurt off his tie. "Caz, don't wind up your mum when she has a big presentation today."

Mum is still chuckling at Dad eating the yoghurt in such a weird way, and she smiles affectionately at him.

Dad looks relieved, and then necks his Berocca like a weary cowboy downing a shot of whisky. A big fight has been avoided. All is calm again at the saloon. For now. Caz subtly goes back on her phone, holding it under the table.

My parents seem to take it in turns to flip out about their jobs. It's Mum's turn at the moment.

As the middle child, I have spent a lot of time studying everyone. Although, you don't exactly have to be an anthropologist to spot that leaving everything to the last minute is a terrible idea. I have learned from their mistakes.

I, Amy Miller, am a *very* organised person.

You'd never catch me staying up all night writing something for the very next morning! Unthinkable.

I am just contemplating how glad I am that their general nonsense doesn't affect me too much, when something truly terrible happens. I shall call it: *Milkgate*.

I pour lumpy, stinky, out-of-date "milk" on to my Crunchy Nut Cornflakes. (And *yes*, this is of the magnitude that it deserves a *gate* suffix.)

"Ewww!" Caz actually looks up from her phone. *That's* how bad it is.

And, look, *you* know I am a very positive person. Ask anyone. My two best friends Sadie and Mai have actually described me as "annoyingly cheerful". So if *I* think something is bad, people should really listen.

I had been *trying* to turn a blind eye to the chaos of family. I *know* everyone is busy and trying their best. But for some reason this infraction cuts through the

general noise and I am *outraged*. They have *ruined* my breakfast. This time it's PERSONAL.

"OK, look." I address my parents seriously. "This isn't cute any more. This is officially an Adverse Childhood Experience. You have crossed the line from narcissistic tendencies to outright NEGLECT. I'm pretty sure if I rang Childline right now, you'd get arrested."

Everybody looks up from their breakfast at me. There's a pause. I assume they are thinking how to phrase their apology. But then they all laugh. All of them. Even my little sister Bel, who thinks I'm cool.

"How dare you laugh at me," I say.

This makes them laugh more.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." My mum tries to stop laughing. "It's just, you're so..." She trails off.

"Pompous?" supplies Caz.

"I was going to say *dramatic*," clarifies Mum.

"You can't ring Childline because we've run out of milk," chortles Dad.

"That *isn't* the issue," I state. *Do I really have to say this?* "Rancid milk is a *bad* thing to keep in the fridge. How much money are we wasting on new crockery? Why does a basket of clean washing just


sit next to the ironing board like a constant, help-yourself laundry buffet? Why is there always post and paper and stuff *everywhere*? Look at your lives! Look at *yourselves*!”

There is a contemplative silence for a moment. Then: “Are you volunteering to help out more?” asks Dad.

Urgh. This old chestnut. Any time you try and ask your parents to be better people and do more stuff for you, they try and flip it around on *you*. I bet he thinks he’s snookered me with this tedious distraction. It can’t be *that* hard to help out more. I bet I’d be *brilliant* at it.

“If that’s what it takes,” I reply loftily.

And with that, I take an almost-brown banana from the fruit bowl and swish importantly from the room.



## CHAPTER TWO

I *love* school. Mainly. I mean, lots of good things happen here. And as discussed, I am a very positive person.

I get to sing in the choir, play hockey for the school and I have great friends, Sadie and Mai. (We’re officially *nerds* but that is sort of just school-speak for “really brilliant and clever”.)

And that’s what Socrates himself said.

Well, he said: “When the debate is lost, slander becomes the tool of the loser.”

I know he wasn’t exactly talking about All Saints High, but I think it still applies perfectly.

And that’s why people sometimes call me a nerd. Or bossy. Or fat.

Because of the Socrates thing.

(And, sure, maybe partly because I frequently quote the Socrates thing.)

And I especially love school today because in our Year Nine assembly our drama teacher Mrs Hague finally announces that the Lower School Comedy Show audition list is open.

I glance at Sadie and Mai, and grin.

“So, long story short.” Mrs Hague flaps her hands at us. “It’s over to you.”

Mrs Hague has a habit of saying “long story short” without actually giving you the short version of the story either. There’s just no story at all.

Which is kind of weird if your subject is *drama*. It’s literally all about stories. I guess brevity is the – oh, here we go. Mrs Gascoyne, our head of Year Nine, has spotted the paucity of facts. She stands up.

“Uh ... Mrs Hague, could you perhaps give the pupils a bit more ... information? About what they will be *doing*? What acts you’re looking for? Who is holding the auditions?” She flaps her hands back at Mrs Hague.

“Um...” Mrs Hague looks pained for a moment. “No, I don’t think so. They’ll find out when they get there.”

“Really? Nothing?” Mrs Gascoyne persists.

“Well.” Mrs Hague sighs. “We always do a revue for summer term. For some reason, a few years ago I thought it would be easier than staging a play. I can’t remember why now. Anyway, think of it as an Alternative School Play if you like. It will comprise of skits and sketches, possibly songs and dances if that’s what you want to do, which you will write and perform.”

A murmur of excitement ripples through Year Nine. People nudge each other and grin. Some roll their eyes, like they’re above it. But lots seem excited.

“Time really does fly, doesn’t it,” says Mrs Hague absently.

“OK! That’s fine, thank you, Mrs Hague.” Mrs Gascoyne gestures for Mrs Hague to come and sit back down. Mrs Hague gives her this look that seems to say, “*Oh, NOW you want me to stop talking.*”

Sadie, Mai and I look at each other in curious amusement. “Did...?” I whisper, not sure how to phrase this. “Did Mrs Hague once *forget* to organise a Lower School play? And then put on the first revue to cover it?”

“*Right?*” Mai grins; Sadie nods. We’re a little

incredulous, but we also wouldn't put it past her.

⚡  
“Definitely forgot!” Mai is utterly convinced. “I’ll be amazed if this show even happens.”

They stand next to me, chuckling, as I write our names on the sign-up sheet. First three names on the list. We went straight there after assembly. (I wrote their names but they didn’t stop me.)

“It says the first meeting is tomorrow afternoon,” I read out loud to them.

“If Mrs Hague remembers,” laughs Sadie. Mai and I chuckle and we start heading to our first lesson.

We are still discussing it when we arrive at our French classroom.

“She is an odd lady,” says Sadie, plonking her bag and sitting down.

“I’m so excited!” I tell them again.

“We *know*,” replies Mai.

“It’s going to be so *fun*,” I assert. I do a quick impression of Adele, singing, to show I am *showbiz*, then I sit down too.

They shake their heads at me, chuckling. “You’re still coming with me, right?” I ask them. “We’ll all do something.”

“Yeah, sure,” says Mai uncertainly.

“It will be fun writing,” says Sadie. “I’m not acting or singing or anything though.”

“*Hell*, no,” agrees Mai. “I could *never* do that. I’d be too embarrassed.”

“Me too,” says Sadie. They both shudder.

I stare at them pityingly.

“It’s so weird how you never get embarrassed,” says Mai.

I mean, that’s not *quite* true, but I do seem to have a different “embarrassment threshold” to them. They are quite shy and sort of want to keep their heads down at school. Whereas I...

I do my impression of Miranda Sings for good measure. I do it a tiny bit loud.

“Shhhhhh!” They both hush me and then look around to see if anyone cares.

“Haters make me famous!” I quickly add her catchphrase, before acquiescing to their request to be quiet and inconspicuous like them.

My restraint is too late. A few people in the classroom stop what they’re doing to look at me and some of them roll their eyes. Sadie and Mai look down, embarrassed.

“Oh, yeah? You doing the revue?” a nearby boy called Riley asks.

“Yes,” I reply factually.

“Well, I suppose the show isn’t over till the *fat* lady sings!” he retorts, and the boys he is with snigger.

*Classic* Socrates thing in action. I roll my eyes.

All the girls in earshot have gasped and are staring between me and Riley. I’m aware this is one of the worst things they can imagine being called.

I’m aware I’m supposed to feel that way too.

But I don’t.

“Well, first of all, my BMI is perfectly healthy for my height,” I inform Riley. “It’s actually right in the middle. But even if it wasn’t, that’s *my* business. Second, yes, I may not be *stick thin* like, for example, supermodel and influencer Ashlee Eklund. But if Ashlee Eklund and I were shipwrecked on a desert island together, my fat reserves would supply me with energy, which means I would survive longer than her, and I’d be more likely to be rescued. So—”

“*Bonjour, la classe!*” Madame West has arrived.

That’s a shame, I’m pretty sure I was about to win that argument.

Sadie and Mai have their hands over their faces

and are peering at me through their fingers. They look like they want the ground to swallow them up.

Poor Sadie and Mai. They just don’t know how to handle school yet.