

Chapter Five

By Thursday, I was just about getting the hang of finding my way around school. I was excited to see Evie at lunch because during geography, I'd thought up a really good, really disgusting *Would You Rather?* question and I couldn't wait to see her face when I asked it.

When I got to the canteen, Evie was waiting for me there as usual, only today she wasn't alone – she was standing with an older girl I didn't recognize. The girl was tall with tanned skin and big brown eyes and long dark hair tied up in a pony tail.

'Hey, Lola,' Evie said breathlessly. 'This is Cleo. Cleo, this is Lola.'



Hang on a second, *this* was Cleo? I thought this girl was in Year Nine at least!

‘Hi,’ Cleo said, glancing me up and down.

‘Hi,’ I replied.

‘Cleo’s going to have lunch with us,’ Evie explained.

Once I’d gotten over my surprise that Cleo was eleven, like us, I was pretty annoyed. What about mine and Evie’s deal to always eat lunch together? Inviting random people to join us was definitely not part of that plan! I couldn’t exactly say that though – not with Cleo standing right there.

The entire time we were queuing up for our food, she totally ignored me and rabbited on to Evie about some stupid TV dating show she liked. I mean, how boring can you get? I kept trying to catch Evie’s eye so I could pull a face and make her laugh, but she was too busy being polite and pretending to be interested.

When I got to the pudding station, I couldn’t decide between treacle sponge with custard and chocolate cornflake cake. I was about to ask Evie what she was going to choose, when Cleo leaned across me and reached for a bowl of fruit. I watched as Evie hesitated before putting

a bowl of fruit on her tray too, even though it was mostly melon and I know for a fact that Evie *hates* melon.

‘Aren’t you getting a proper pudding?’ I asked.

‘Not today,’ Evie said, not quite meeting my eye.

‘Why not? It’s got custard on it, and you love custard!’

‘I’m just not in the mood,’ Evie said, looking a bit irritated I was even asking.

‘Well, *I’m* having one,’ I said, picking out the biggest portion of treacle sponge I could find.

There was no way I was having boring old fruit when *this* yumminess was on offer.



Once we’d paid for our food, we looked for somewhere to sit. It was drizzling outside so the canteen was even busier than usual.

‘How about there?’ I asked, pointing out an empty table near the window.

‘Ugh, no way,’ Cleo said with a shudder.

‘Why not?’

‘Duh! We need to be as central as possible.’

‘How come?’

She tutted. ‘Because only the nerds and losers sit on those window tables. Like her.’

Cleo pointed at a girl with frizzy hair the colour of baked beans who was sitting all alone at a table tucked away in the corner.

‘Cleo’s got a sister in Year Ten, so she knows these things,’ Evie said.

‘Year Ten?’ I said. ‘She must know my brother then.’

‘What’s his name?’ Cleo asked.

‘Matthew Kite.’

She wrinkled her nose like she’d smelled something bad. ‘Never heard of him.’

‘What’s your sister’s name?’

‘Yasmin Bayford,’ Cleo replied, tossing her hair over her shoulder. ‘Your brother will *definitely* know her. She’s like one of the most popular girls in the year.’

I could tell by the way Cleo spoke that she thought that being popular was a pretty big deal.

After lots of weaving in and out following Cleo, we finally found a table that she was willing to be seen sitting at.

‘What lesson did you just have, Lola?’ Evie asked as we unloaded our trays.

‘Geography,’ I replied.

‘Oh my God, I hate geography,’ Cleo said. ‘So boring.’

‘Me too,’ Evie added quickly. ‘So boring.’

‘What about when we did that project on Japan in Year Five? You loved that,’ I said. We tried sushi and made origami cranes and learned all about ninjas and anime and Mount Fuji.

Evie went a bit red. ‘That?’ she said, poking at a piece of melon with her fork. ‘That was just kiddie stuff.’

‘Then how come you still have the collage we made up on your wall?’ I asked.

Evie went even redder and widened her eyes as if to say, ‘shut up!’

I was tempted to keep asking questions, but I was worried Evie’s head might actually explode if I did, so I just ate my curly fries, leaving Cleo to yap on about her summer holiday to Hawaii.

‘Did you see dolphins?’ Evie asked.

‘Loads,’ said Cleo. ‘Our hotel was right on the

beach, so I'd watch them swim while I was eating my breakfast on the veranda.'

'Snap,' I said. 'Only it was squirrels not dolphins. And instead of a hotel veranda in Hawaii, it was the view out of my Auntie Hayley's kitchen window in Wales.'



Evie snorted and then looked at Cleo who was studying me carefully.

'Did you not go away this summer then?' Cleo asked.

'Not this year.'

'I was going to say. You don't look like you've been abroad. You're as white as milk!'

'Oh, that wouldn't make a difference,' Evie said. 'Lola can't tan to save her life.'

'Really?' Cleo said, throwing me a pitying glance.

'Yeah. She just goes red and gets loads more freckles,' Evie said, laughing.

Cleo wrinkled her nose. 'Oh God, I would hate that,' she said. 'I can't bear not having a tan.'

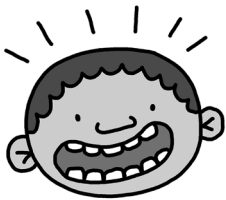
How rude! I didn't go around making comments about her long hair and then bang on about how

disgusting long hair is! Worst of all, Evie seemed to think it was funny!

I was shovelling down my treacle sponge, when suddenly Cleo leaned over and tapped me on the back of my hand with her spoon.

‘FYI,’ she said, ignoring my yelp of pain, ‘some creepy boy has been staring at you for like the past five minutes.’

‘Where?’ I asked, twisting around in my seat.



‘Over there,’ Cleo said. ‘The one with the sticky-out teeth.’

Evie peered over her shoulder. ‘I think you must mean Daniel,’ she said.

‘You know him?’ Cleo asked, pulling a face.

‘He went to our primary school. He’s Lola’s nemesis.’

‘How come?’

‘He’s always teasing her, making stupid jokes about her height and stuff.’

‘Yeah, how short are you exactly, Lola?’ Cleo asked.

I sat up a little straighter, the way I always do when someone draws attention to my size.

‘Four foot two,’ I said.

‘Oh my God, that’s even diddier than I thought,’ Cleo said with a laugh. ‘I think my little sister is taller than that and she’s only eight!’

As she giggled away, anger bubbled like hot lava in my belly.

‘I’m a late bloomer,’ I said, turning red. ‘I’ll catch up eventually.’

‘Thank goodness for that,’ Cleo said, popping a grape in her mouth.



‘Why did you ask Cleo to sit with us today?’ I asked Evie as we walked home from school later that day.

‘Because I wanted you to meet her. And she really wanted to meet you.’

I pulled a face and snorted. That was not the impression I got at *all*.

‘Isn’t she pretty?’ Evie added.

‘She’s nothing special,’ I said with a shrug.

Evie’s eyes widened.

‘Are you serious? I think she’s the prettiest girl I’ve ever met in real life.’

‘You just think that because she has nice hair. I bet if she shaved her head, she’d actually look

really weird and not pretty at all.'

'Why would she shave her head?'

'I'm not saying she would. I'm just saying that if she did, she wouldn't look half as pretty.'

'I don't know,' Evie said. 'I think she probably has one of those faces that can carry off just about anything. After all, her mum *was* a model.'

'Was she?'

'Uh-huh. She was in magazines and everything. And if she grows tall enough, Cleo might be one when she's older too.'

'There's more to being a model than just being tall,' I replied.

'Maybe,' Evie said.

'She's not going to eat with us again, is she?' I asked.

'Perhaps. Why?'

'Well, she wasn't all that friendly. She ignored me half the time, and then she made all those comments about my height!'

'I don't think she meant to be mean,' Evie said confidently. 'In fact, right afterwards, she said you seemed really sweet.'

I wrinkled my nose. I couldn't imagine Cleo

saying that at all!

‘What about her friends from primary school?’ I asked. ‘Doesn’t she want to sit with them?’

‘That’s just it; her best friend emigrated to Australia a few months ago.’

I frowned. I didn’t like the sound of this one bit.

‘You *have* to ask to see her handwriting,’ Evie continued. ‘It is *so nice*.’

‘Nicer than mine?’

I was joking. My handwriting is really messy. I think it’s because I’m left-handed, but Mum says that’s not an excuse and I should try harder to be neat.

‘Everyone’s handwriting is nicer than yours,’ Evie replied, and even though it was true, it still sort of stung to hear her say it.

‘If I ever get married, I’m definitely going to get Cleo to write the invitations,’ she added, a dreamy expression on her face.

The idea of Cleo being given such an important job at Evie’s imaginary wedding, made me feel really cross.





‘Do you know someone called Yasmin Bayford?’ I asked Matthew later at dinner.

‘Yeah. Why? She’s an idiot.’

‘Matthew!’ Mum scolded. ‘Idiot’ is a banned word in our house, along with ‘stupid’ and ‘shut up’.

‘Sorry,’ Matthew muttered. ‘But she is. She thinks she’s God’s gift to the universe just because she’s OK looking.’

‘What does ‘God’s gift’ mean?’ I asked.

‘It means you think you’re better than everyone else,’ Mum said, reaching for the salt.

‘In that case, it must run in the family,’ I grumbled.

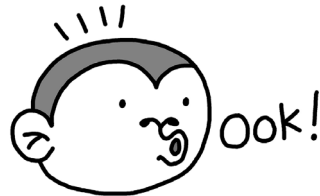
I told Mum about Cleo and how annoying she was.

‘Perhaps she was just a bit nervous,’ Mum said.

‘Nervous?’ I scoffed. ‘I don’t think so!’

‘You never know! It can be intimidating meeting new people, and nerves come in lots of different shapes and forms.’

I snorted. If Cleo Bayford was intimidated by me, then I was a monkey’s uncle!



Chapter Six

I was hoping it was just a one-off, but on Friday Cleo ate lunch with us *again*, and this time she was even more annoying than she'd been the day before. To make matters worse, Daniel was at the next table and kept pulling faces at me every time I caught his eye. In the end I had to swap seats, so I didn't have to look at him.

Evie was the one who brought up the subject of names.

'Is Cleo short for Cleopatra?' she asked Cleo. 'I've been meaning to ask all week.'

'No, I was christened Cleo,' Cleo replied. 'It means "glory".'

'Evie has two meanings,' Evie said. "'Life" or "breathe".'

Cleo turned to me.

‘How about you, Lola? What does your name mean?’

‘I haven’t got a clue,’ I replied.

‘I’ll look it up,’ Cleo said, producing the latest iPhone from her blazer pocket and putting it on her lap, out of sight of any teachers.

She tapped away at the screen for a few seconds before letting out a giggle.

‘What is it? What does it say?’ I asked.

Cleo cleared her throat.

‘Lola is a girl’s name of Spanish origin meaning “Lady of Sorrows.”’

‘Let me see,’ I said, holding out my hand.

‘And risk having my phone confiscated? I don’t think so.’

‘Then how do I know you’re not lying?’

Cleo tutted. ‘Why would I lie about something so dumb?’

‘But are you sure that’s what it said?’

‘Of course, I’m sure. It was literally there in black and white: Lola means “Lady of Sorrows.”’

‘Lady of Sorrows,’ Evie repeated. ‘Do you think your mum and dad knew that was what it



meant when they picked it, Lola?’

‘I hope not,’ I huffed, although I wouldn’t put it past Mum.

‘Speaking of sorrow,’ Cleo said. ‘That strange boy is gawping at you again, Lola.’

This time, when I looked over, I caught Daniel staring right at me. He looked surprised for a split-second then stuck out his tongue.

‘Ugh, he is such an idiot,’ I said, shoving a chip in my mouth.

‘He obviously fancies you,’ Cleo said.

‘I don’t think so,’ I muttered, screwing up my face.

‘Didn’t you say that he teases you all the time?’

‘Yes.’

‘There you go then. It’s a well-known fact that



if someone goes out of their way to tease you, it’s because they almost definitely have a crush.’

‘If it’s that well-known, how come I haven’t heard of it?’ I asked.

‘You probably don’t have as much experience

with boys as I do,' Cleo said, twirling a lock of shiny hair around her finger.

'Cleo has a boyfriend in Year Eight,' Evie said.

I could tell from the way she spoke that she was impressed.

'He's going to be thirteen in January,' Cleo added proudly.

'I don't think *that's* anything to boast about,' I scoffed. 'Teenage boys are disgusting.'

'Well, *Kieran* isn't,' Cleo said. 'Kieran is very mature for his age.'

'Did he tease you before you got together?'

Evie wanted to know.

'All the time. That's how I knew he liked me.'

'Well, I think it sounds totally stupid,' I said. 'If you like someone, you should just be nice to them.'

Cleo leaned over and patted me on the back of my hand like I was some stupid little kid.

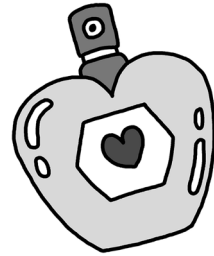
'You'll understand one day, Lola,' she said.

After we'd eaten, we went to the loos although I was the only one who actually had a wee. Cleo just stood in front of the sinks and put on make-up and pulled pouty faces in the mirror while Evie hovered next to her.

As I washed my hands, Cleo put away her lip gloss and produced a pink heart-shaped glass bottle from her bag. She removed the lid and spritzed perfume on her neck and wrists.

‘Ooh, that smells lovely,’ Evie said.

‘It’s my signature scent – Baby Bombshell,’ Cleo replied. ‘Do you want some?’



‘Yes, please,’ Evie said, sticking out her wrists.

Cleo sprayed them, then Evie rubbed them together and sniffed.

‘Mmmmmm,’ she murmured with her eyes closed.

Cleo held up the bottle towards me.

‘Lola?’

‘No, thanks,’ I said, backing away. The smell made me gag.

‘Suit yourself,’ Cleo said with a shrug, spritzing some more on her neck. ‘Oh, by the way,’ she said, talking to me through the mirror. ‘I asked Yasmin if she knew who your brother was and according to her, he’s a massive nerd.’



I thought I'd enjoy hearing someone saying mean things about Matthew, but hearing Cleo say them just made me feel cross.

The last lesson of the day was PE. Evie's class was already there when I walked into the changing rooms.

'I saved you a space,' she said, pointing at the spare peg between her and Cleo.

Cleo had taken off her shirt. She was wearing a proper bra, like the sort my mum wears, with lacy bits and a little bow at the front.

I wear white cotton crop tops from the kids department at Marks and Spencer. I got changed really quickly,



facing the wall so no one could see how flat I am. Cleo flounced about in just her underwear for absolutely ages, making it totally obvious that she just wanted everyone to look at her. I was secretly pleased when the teacher, Ms Khan, came in and told her to get a move on.

This term, the boys were doing rugby and the girls were doing netball. I was really excited. We

have a basketball hoop in our garden and over the summer I'd got pretty good at shooting.

Once everyone was ready, Ms Khan led us up to the netball courts. As we walked, I linked arms with Evie.

'I missed you,' I said.

'But you saw me at lunch,' she replied, laughing.

'So? I still missed you.'

Just then, Cleo appeared on the other side of Evie.

'Have either of you played netball before?' she asked.

Before I got the chance to tell her about all the shooting practice I'd been doing, she started going on about how she did netball at Ferndale (her old primary school) and how she was the best in the class.

'And before you say, it's not just because I'm tall,' she said, flipping her ponytail over her shoulder. 'Although that helps, naturally.'

Ms Khan explained the basic rules of netball then made us do a warm-up. We ran around the court while she shouted out instructions like 'change direction' or 'touch the floor'.

Suddenly, she shouted 'find a partner'. I looked for Evie, but she was right over on the other side of the court and had already been claimed by Cleo. I tried waving to get her attention, but she was too busy laughing at something Cleo had just said.

Just then, the girl from the canteen yesterday, the one with curly red hair, planted herself in front of me.

'Do you need a partner?' she asked.

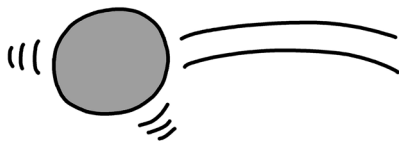
'Looks like it,' I muttered, watching as Cleo forced Evie to give her a high-five, annoyance bubbling inside me.

'Great!' the girl said. 'I should probably warn you though, I'm *really* bad at this.'

'Netball?'

'Sports in general. I'm Astrid by the way.'

Astrid wasn't exaggerating about being bad at sports. I lost count of how many times she dropped the ball or threw it miles over my head. To be honest though, I was so distracted by what Evie and Cleo were up to, I wasn't all that much better.



At the end of the lesson, Astrid asked if I'd be her partner again next week.

'If I'm not with my best friend,' I said.

