

CHAPTER ONE

“Hope!” my mum calls up the stairs. “Get down here! I need to take your photo for the first day of school!”

“You’ll have to take it later,” I hear my dad say. “We’re busy.”

“But it’s a special, precious day – Two cappuccinos, was it? Takeaway. No problem.” Mum is quickly distracted.

I should probably mention here, my family run a café. And 8 a.m. is a very busy time.

I head down the steep, narrow staircase that separates our flat (home) from our never-ending work, and emerge into the brightly lit, bustling **CAFÉ CRUMBLE**.



I am very proud of my family and how hard they work. But it does mean everything gets planned around the schedule of when a café is busy. We can only really do things when it's *quiet*. (Especially now money is tight since we had our **BAD QUARTER**.)

Mum once ran out of the hairdresser's with wet hair because Dad texted her that a coach full of pensioners on their way to Warwick had broken



down in our town and they'd all sat in our café to wait it out.

And, look, this always comes up eventually so let's just rip this plaster off now –

my surname is Crumble and my family's business is called **CAFÉ CRUMBLE**.

I know. OK? The decision at the time was to lean into

it. Also, because my Grandma Margery makes a mean apple crumble. It's the signature dish they built the café around. She won an **AWARD** for it, actually. Anyway. I don't particularly think puns are big and clever but here we are.

My family are a nice bunch. *Ish*. You know, for a load of chaotic, distracted loudmouths who are obsessed with the **BOTTOM LINE** and who don't appreciate my **MAGIC TRICKS**. They do provide meals, shoes and the occasional bit of advice, like "What's for you, won't pass you" (when they're refusing to fork out £126 for concert tickets, for example).

I'm the "quiet" one in the family. Or, as my sixteen-year-old cousin Connor would describe it, I have "no USP" (which stands for unique selling point, and is supposed to be the one thing that makes your product better than its competitors). I prefer to think of myself as **WITTY** and **GOOD WITH WORDS**.

"Ah, great, there she is!" Mum waves as the digital code lock clicks shut on the door behind me.



CONNOR



"We have soy milk and coconut milk at the moment if you don't want dairy," she tells her current customer.

I watch my mum serve three more people and realise I will need to leave soon if I want to walk to school with my best friend, Leila (and I *do* want to do that).

Connor, my **BUSINESS-OBSSESSED** cousin, appears behind me and the door clicks shut again.

"Out the way," he says.

"Connor!" Mum calls out. "Can you come and serve for a sec, so I can take a photo of Hope?"

"Sorry, Auntie Bren, I don't have time," replies Connor.

"Americano takeaway, yes. Can you take a photo of her for me?" Mum says.

"Sorry, Auntie Bren, I don't have time for that either," replies Connor. "I have to go. I'm sure the queue will go down in a moment."

"That queue isn't going to dissipate any time soon," I tell him.



"Woohoo," he says, a bit high-pitched, implying I have used **TOO FANCY** a word.

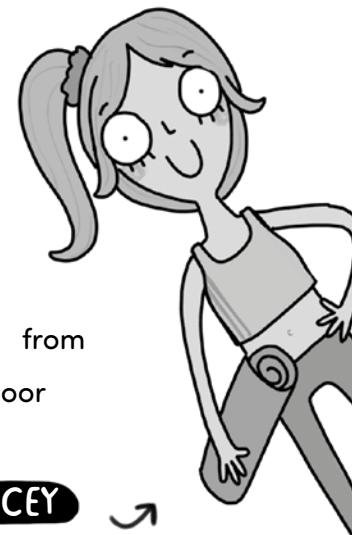
But come on, which is it, Connor? (I think sarcastically in my head.) I have no **USP**? Or I actually have a **FANTASTIC** and **UNIQUE** grasp of language? (I don't say this out loud.) We're not supposed to start arguments in the café. Any more.

"All right, have a good first day of school, Muggle," Connor says, then leaves.

OK. There may or may not be an *outdated* family joke that I was quite fervently hoping for a letter from Hogwarts. Which evidently has **NOT** arrived since I am about to start Beanfore High School. (**BIN-FIRE** as it's affectionately – or worryingly – known to everyone who goes there.)

As Connor leaves, my nineteen-year-old sister, Stacey, comes in from outside, clad in yoga gear. The café door tinkles again.

STACEY





"Great! Stacey! Can you please cover for me real quick?" Mum beams. "Six cappuccinos coming right up. I need to take a photo of Hope."

"Mum, have you seen that delivery outside?" asks Stacey. "Is that for us?"

"What? No. It's two hours early if it is. I can't— Hang on. Stacey, get behind here *now*."

Stacey saunters over to the counter. "This isn't my real job," she tells the waiting customer. "I'm actually an **ACTRESS**."

"Stacey – six cappuccinos," Dad barks from the kitchen. Stacey starts serving, but she's much slower than Mum. "Faster," encourages Dad.

"Pretend you're up for a role of someone who cares about their job," I suggest.

I can hear Dad scoff from the kitchen, even though it's **NOISY**.

It's not that I don't love Stacey. It's not that I don't respect her pursuit of the **ARTS**. She wants to be an actor. That takes a lot of **EFFORT** and I salute her for it. My issue is that on more than one occasion during

Year Six, she picked me up from school dressed in a **FULL GOWN AND BONNET** to "get into character" for an audition she had coming up.

It was so

EMBARRASSING.

I know this because Skyla Lipton said, "Oh my goodness, that is soooo **EMBARRASSING**" so that I (and, well, **EVERYONE**) could hear.





Mum sticks her head back in the café. "I don't *believe* this. I'm going to have to sort it." She vanishes.

"Do you still want a photo of me for my first day?" I call after her.

She reappears momentarily, looking **STRESSED** and **DISTRACTED**. "I do! Please... Umm... Take a selfie! Have a great day! I love you." And she's gone.

I hold up my phone and take what I can't help but feel is a slightly bleak selfie. I look sad. I take another one where I at least raise my eyebrow like I'm taking a sideways look at this **RIDICULOUS** situation.

A customer tuts at me and shakes their head, like they think I'm being a typical teenager, all vain and too extremely online. "My mum told me to," I explain. But the customer pretends not to hear me.

I can't *wait* to start secondary school and get out of here and have some actual

STRUCTURE.



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I'm fairly certain that at secondary school – for example – they won't suddenly bin off lessons to make us all unpack stock instead.

This actually happened at my eighth birthday party at the café.

My party was on a Sunday afternoon and we were *supposed* to be decorating cupcakes while the café was closed. But then Mum realised there wasn't space for us all to decorate cupcakes because a **GIANT** delivery had arrived that morning, so she switched our activity to opening boxes.

Mum even gave us box-cutter knives, which a couple of people thought was cool, until Skyla Lipton said it was so **EMBARRASSING** and a little bit **DANGEROUS**.

But then (luckily) Leila and I turned it into a fun game where we all had to pretend we were unboxing for YouTube. Except instead of unboxing cool toys, like Ryan, we were mainly unboxing tins of beans and loo roll. Though a few lucky people did get to unbox crisps.

Anyway. Onwards to secondary school. Where there are **RULES**.



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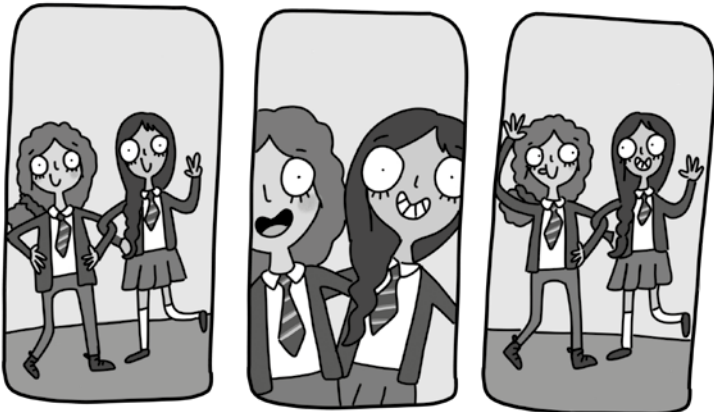


"Babes!" Leila opens her front door and twirls for me (she has already made her uniform look so much cooler than mine). She switches up the twirl to some *vogue* posing, then finishes with her arms in the air, like her body is saying "*ta-da!*"

I cheer and give her a round of applause. Her **POSITIVITY** is too infectious not to.

"Is that Hope?" I hear Leila's mum, Sara, call out from the living room. "Come in, darling! Let me take a picture of you both! First day of school!"

I come in and Leila and I pose in a bunch of different ways, including hugging, pouting and totally deadpan, and eventually her mum tells us to stop.



We are officially ready for school. We have to go to school.



"Are you sure you don't want a lift on your first day?" asks Sara.

"No, Mum," says Leila. "It's not exactly far. We are **SOPHISTICATED**, **CONFIDENT** women."

"My baby." Sara dramatically puts her hand on her chest and looks like she might be about to cry. She sighs wistfully, then snaps back to attention. "Do you have enough money?"

"Yes."

"Snacks?"

"Yes."

"Take these just in case." Sara suddenly thrusts packets of crisps at us both.





"Bye, Mum." Leila grins as we put the crisps into our new school bags.

"Bye! Be good. Be polite. But stand your ground. And—"

"I know, I know." Leila rolls her eyes and hugs her mum.

Sara keeps waving from the front door as we walk away. "Be kind! And have fun!"

"Your mum is the **BEST**," I tell Leila.

"I know," Leila agrees, turning one last time to wave. "I'm a big fan myself."

I love how close Leila and her mum are.

At some point towards the end of primary school, it started to become sort of "cool" for everyone to complain about their parents. (I think Skyla Lipton started it.)

Like, people would roll their eyes and say things like, "Oh my gosh, my mum is so embarrassing. She thinks she can pull off skinny jeans." Or "I nearly died! My dad asked me if I like Justin Bieberlake. What an idiot." And Skyla was like this arbitrator, agreeing and encouraging everyone.



And more and more people would join in, finding stuff they didn't like about their parents, just so they could be part of the conversation. But Leila **NEVER** did. She would always just say simply, "I love my mum. She's **AMAZING**."

And the incredible thing was, because Leila is so **CONFIDENT** and so **HAPPY**, everyone had to adapt to *her*.

So instead of teasing her and saying, "Oh my gosh, you *like* your mum, how embarrassing," Skyla had to just go, "Oh. That's cool. You have a nice mum, you're lucky."

And *then* some people started saying, "Actually, I like my mum too." Like Freddie Patterson. But some people still did seem to **GENUINELY DISLIKE** their parents. Like George Hargreaves. He said his mum was "Darth Vader with a perm" because she grounded him for getting mud all over her newly steam-cleaned carpet.

But this is one of the things I love about Leila. She's so **STRAIGHTFORWARD** and so **FUN**. She's just my

 **BEST PERSON.** 





I feel instantly happier when I'm around her. I'm so glad we're starting secondary school together.

And I'm so glad Skyla Lipton is *not* coming to Beanfore. She basically ended up being my

UNOFFICIAL NEMESIS

by the end of primary school.

And I didn't mind that much. I mean, I know not **EVERYONE** is going to like me and that's fine.

But what made it unfortunate was she also seemed to be in charge of what counted as **EMBARRASSING** or **COOL**. I'd much rather have a nemesis that wasn't in charge of anything important, like how to pronounce "scone" or something.

Her family are moving abroad because her dad got some new job where he was going to earn

MEGA BUCKS

(she was very pleased to tell us).

So I'm **FREE**! Free from being told my laugh is too **LOUD**; free from being told I run like a granny; and free from being told I'd be **PRETTY** if I dyed my hair blonde, because "it's the only thing that might save that kind of face."

The closer we get to our new school, the more we see other pupils on their way, and the more **NERVOUS** I start to feel. Eventually we are right outside the gate, surrounded by throngs of students clad in brown and yellow. (Yes, the uniform is pretty tasty.)

OMG we're walking into school! It's OK. I'm ready for this. It will be fun. Hang on, isn't that—

"Hey! Leila! Hope!" Skyla Lipton is standing by a huge recycling bin, waving at us.

