

Chapter 1

shifted my position, trying to stretch my stiff legs out a little bit while slowly and silently turning onto my back. I lifted both feet off the ground as I moved so my boots wouldn't drag on the floor and make a sound. No one could know we were inside. That's when I noticed the writing in green ink on the bottom of the desk. *Jarrold H. is a wiener 1981*. A wiener, really? Who would write that? Obviously someone less than stellar in the spelling department. And how would a student have had the opportunity to get under the desk to diss Jarrod in such a permanent way? Someone clearly felt strongly enough about him to take the time to vandalize school property in his honor. A jilted girlfriend? No, girls don't often use the term wiener. We're too mature. Wiener is a guy's word. And most girls wouldn't chance getting caught crawling under a desk to ink their feelings anyway. Too risky. Bathroom stalls all the way. In my experience, we tend to spread gossip and rumors when jilted, or cry into our pillows. Or maybe back in 1981 girls would've written nasty notes in the margins of their notebooks? We are typically much more passive aggressive with our disses, and sly, and smart. We are all about not getting caught and seeming like we couldn't care less anyways.

I wondered what had happened to Jarrod. Did he grow up to become an even bigger wiener and sire annoying little Jarrolds? Or did he outgrow his wienerness, survive the bullying, and

mature into a normal guy with a day job, a minivan, a wife and three kids, two cats, and a house with a huge mortgage?

Nowadays Jarrods are attacked online. A compromising Instagram pic or humiliating Snap—so many options. Phones across the school would ping as Jarrod’s fate was sealed, all in seconds and all anonymous.

Whoever Jarrod was or is, and whoever had had a hate-on for him, they would never know how grateful I was for the few minutes of normalcy it gave me as I lay there pondering the vintage graffiti, Jarrod’s fate, and why he was a wiener.

For those few peaceful moments, I wasn’t thinking about the blood slowly seeping towards me from the desk in front of me. I had also succeeded in tuning out the incessant muffled whimpering coming from Mary Jane Schmidt. “MJ” was huddled under the desk beside me. She was one of those invisible kids, neither popular nor hated, neither weird nor cool, neither beautiful nor ugly. She wasn’t in any cliques or sports clubs, and she got average grades. If she had gone off the deep end and committed a crime and I had been asked to describe her, I wouldn’t have been able to offer anything. She was just *there*.

I tore my eyes away from the bottom of my desk and stretched my left leg out as far as I could to nudge MJ with the toe of my Blundstone. She jolted and looked over at me, her eyes glistening saucers and her hand clamped over her mouth and nose.

“Sshhh!” I mouthed, librarian style, with my index finger held up in front of my face.

MJ let out one last whimper then rested her head back on the dirty gray vinyl floor. She was probably in shock, as I’m sure many of my other classmates in Grade 11 Homeroom A were. Even during the practice lockdown we had all endured back in September it had been impossible to keep everyone quiet. And some classmates had reacted to the drill with instant panic, either babbling nonsense or blurting “We are all going to die!”

over and over like a mantra of doom. I knew that day that if we ever had a real emergency at school, an emergency that required silence, we would fail miserably. Some people rise to challenges in extraordinary circumstances, some crumble and collapse. MJ was clearly a crumbler, and the jury was still out on which category I fell into.

My mom always said I was strong like her grandma, my great grandma Gwyneth, a Holocaust survivor. I didn't think I was strong. Although maybe if I survived this day, I would be slightly worthier of comparison to Mom's "Gwynnie."

I glanced down at my phone, my lifeline to the outside world. It had been a gift from my dad, a unique model from Japan that a client had given him. Mom still hadn't answered any of my texts. She must have been busy at her library branch; she loved to brag that it was "the busiest and coolest hangout this side of Toronto." Mondays were usually quite hectic for her with returns from the weekend and toddler story times. Any other day of the week I knew she would have answered quickly, but still no reply to the text I had sent at 9:05 a.m.:

Gunshots in hall

I texted her again at 9:06:

Locked in homeroom

Then again at 9:08 as I remembered our fight that morning before school and felt bad for my earlier bitchiness and the bluntness of my first two texts:

ILY to infinity, Mom. SRY for this morning ♥

Don't worry!!!!!!! TTYS

Telling Mom not to worry was like telling the Kardashians to stop with the selfies. Not gonna happen. Since Dad's heart attack, Mom had glommed onto me and started an awkward ritual she insisted we do before we went to bed each night. Mom would say, "Love you to infinity, Gin," we'd fist bump, and then we'd both strike a superhero pose, chests puffed out, and hands on hips. Yes, I was named after Ginerva "Ginny" Weasley, the burden of being born to a librarian and an editor. It was a cross I had to bear. But, glass half full kinda gal that I am, I was pretty grateful to have not ended up a Matilda, or a Ramona, or a Scout. Mom and I had been fist bumping and posing for 945 days now. It was super dorky, and I'd die a thousand deaths if my friends ever saw me doing it, but if it helped Mom deal with her loss, then I'd suck it up. Always made me laugh at least.

I noticed a change in the noise in the room. MJ had gone silent. Had she passed out from the shock or finally calmed down? Either way, a good thing. I eased my leg back and away from her and made another attempt to get comfortable under my desk. If we were in this for the long haul, I'd need to figure out a better position. As I checked for the third time that my phone was on silent and went to tuck it back into the front pocket of my jeans, I noticed the battery icon had grown smaller. No one else had a charger for my model and my cord was sitting on my nightstand at home. My breath caught in my throat as I was reminded that my life-line to normalcy was finite and the minutes were ticking down.

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#BREAKINGNEWS: Reports of shots fired at local high school. Stay tuned. #education

9:12 AM - April 28, 2019. News Talk Radio 956

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