



'The Catcher in the Rye for
the digital age' – *The Times*

This is
not a
love story.

Solitaire

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SOLITURE

ALICE

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HARPER TEEN

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DEDICATION

*For Emily Moore,
who stuck by me from the beginning*

EPIGRAPH

“And *your* defect is a propensity to hate everybody.”

“And yours,” he replied with a smile,

“is willfully to misunderstand them.”

—*Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen

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PART ONE

Elizabeth Bennet: Do you dance, Mr. Darcy?

Mr. Darcy: Not if I can help it.

—Pride and Prejudice (2005)

ONE

I AM AWARE as I step into the common room that the majority of people here are almost dead, including me. I have been reliably informed that post-Christmas blues are entirely normal and that we should expect to feel somewhat numb after the “happiest” time of the year, but I don’t feel so different now to how I felt on Christmas Eve, or on Christmas Day, or on any other day since the Christmas holidays started. I’m back now and it’s another year. Nothing is going to happen.

I stand there. Becky and I look at each other.

“Tori,” says Becky, “you look a little bit like you want to kill yourself.”

She and the rest of Our Lot have sprawled themselves over a collection of swivel chairs around the common room computer desks. As it’s the first day back, there has been a widespread hair-and-makeup effort across the entire Sixth Form, and I immediately feel inadequate.

I deflate into a chair and nod philosophically. “It’s funny because it’s true.”

She looks at me some more but doesn’t really look, and we laugh at something that wasn’t funny. Becky then realizes that I am in no mood to do anything, so she moves away. I lean into my arms and fall half-asleep.

My name is Victoria Spring. I think you should know that I make up a lot of stuff in my head and then get sad about it. I like to sleep and I like to blog. I am going to die someday.

Rebecca Allen is probably my only real friend at the moment. She is also probably my best friend. I am as yet unsure whether these two facts are related. In any case, Becky Allen is very pretty and has very long purple hair. It has come to my attention that if you have purple hair, people often look at you. If you are pretty with purple hair, people often *stay* looking at you, thus resulting in you becoming a widely recognized and outstandingly popular figure in adolescent society; the sort of figure that everyone claims

to know yet probably hasn't even spoken to. She has 2098 friends on Facebook.

Right now, Becky's talking to this other girl from Our Lot, Evelyn Foley. Evelyn is considered "retro" because she has messy hair and wears a necklace with a triangle on it.

"The *real* question is, though," says Evelyn, "is there sexual tension between Harry and *Malfoy*?"

I'm not sure whether Becky genuinely likes Evelyn. Sometimes I think people only pretend to like each other.

"Only in fanfictions, Evelyn," says Becky. "Please keep your fantasies between yourself and your blog."

Evelyn laughs. "I'm just saying. Malfoy helps Harry in the end, right? He's a nice guy deep down, yeah? So why does he bully Harry for seven years? Enormous. Closet. Homosexual." With each word she claps her hands together. It really doesn't emphasize her point. "It's a well-established fact that people tease people they fancy. The psychology here is unarguable."

"Evelyn," says Becky. "*Firstly*, I *resent* the fangirl idea that Draco Malfoy is some kind of beautifully tortured soul who is searching for redemption and understanding. *Secondly*, the only non-canon couple that is even *worth* discussion is Snily."

"*Snily*?"

"Snape and Lily."

Evelyn appears to be deeply offended. "I can't believe you don't support Drarry when you ship *Snape and Lily*. I mean, at least Drarry is a realistic possibility." She slowly shakes her head. "Like, obviously Lily went for someone hot and hilarious like James Potter."

"James Potter was a resplendent twat. Especially to Lily. J. K. made that quite clear. And dude—if you don't like Snape by the end of the series, then you miss the entire concept of Harry Potter."

"If 'Snily' had been a *thing*, there would have *been* no Harry Potter."

"Without a Harry, Voldemort might not have, like, committed mass genocide."

Becky turns to me, and so does Evelyn. I deduce that I am under pressure to contribute something.

I sit up. "You're saying that because it's Harry's fault that all these Muggles and wizards died, it would have been better if there'd been no

Harry Potter at all and no books or films or anything?”

I get the impression that I've ruined this conversation, so I mumble an excuse and lift myself off my chair and hurry out of the common room door. Sometimes I hate people. This is probably very bad for my mental health.

There are two grammar schools in our town: Harvey Greene Grammar School for Girls, or “Higgs” as it is popularly known, and Truham Grammar School for Boys. Both schools, however, accept males *and* females into Years 12 and 13, the two final years of school known countrywide as Sixth Form. So now that I am in Year 12, I have had to face a sudden influx of the male species. Boys at Higgs are on a par with mythical creatures, and having an actual *real* boyfriend puts you at the height of the social hierarchy, but personally, thinking or talking too much about “boy issues” makes me want to shoot myself in the face.

And even if I did care about that stuff, it's not like we get to show off, thanks to our stunning school uniform. Usually, Sixth Formers do not have to wear uniforms. However, Higgs Sixth Form are forced to wear a hideous one. Gray is the theme, which is fitting for such a dull place.

I arrive at my locker to find a pink Post-it note on its door. On that, someone has drawn a left-pointing arrow, suggesting that I should, perhaps, look in that direction. Irritated, I turn my head to the left. There's another Post-it note a few lockers along. And on the wall at the end of the corridor, another. People are walking past them, totally oblivious. What can I say? People aren't observant. People don't question stuff like this. They never think twice about *déjà vu* when there could be a glitch in the Matrix. They walk past tramps in the street without even glancing at their misfortune. They don't psychoanalyze the creators of slasher-horrors when they're probably all psychopaths.

I pluck the Post-it from my locker and wander to the next.

Sometimes I like to fill my days with little things that other people don't care about. It makes me feel like I'm doing something important, mainly because no one else is doing it.

This is one of those times.

The Post-its start popping up all over the place. Like I said, everyone is ignoring them; instead, they are going on with their day and talking about