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books

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When Isla Meets Luke Meets Isla
Isla and Luke: Make or Break?

THE BAD GIRLS' CLUB

RHIAN TRACEY



Mary

It was my idea, the whole thing. I masterminded it and no one knows, not even Mum. Of course it wasn't like some big bank robbery or anything like that, but it was still my plan and even if I do say so myself it worked really well, until it all went wrong.

I am probably, after Meena, Jazz's biggest fan; that's Jazz as in Jazz's Breakfast Show on the radio. Everyone in our year, maybe even our school, listens to it. Even some of the teachers claim to, but they just say that so we won't think they all listen to Terry Wogan on Radio 2 in the mornings, which they obviously do, saddos!

Anyway I was listening to Jazz's show one morning and she mentioned a new slot they were introducing on the show, a 'Book Club'. Since Harry Potter and all of that, books are now back in and computer games out, so they wanted to have a live book club on the radio every week. All they needed were four Year Ten girls and four Year Ten boys to be the readers and

then come in every week to talk about the books.

I love reading. Ever since I was little my mum has bought me books and encouraged me to read, and I know it sounds geeky but I sometimes prefer a book to *Hollyoaks*. I wanted to be in this book club desperately, but I also knew that no one in my year, not even my best friend Gemma, would do it with me. You had to arrange it all yourself and set it up each month, all Jazz would do is ask you about the books. So it was down to me to convince three other girls in my year that reading a book in a week, discussing it the next week, writing something on the third week and then going into the radio station to talk about it the following week was a good thing. I had no idea how I was going to do this, so I thought I'd ask someone who might – Miss Philips, Head of Year Ten.

Miss Philips is a bit soft but surprisingly hard all at the same time. I can't explain it really, except you don't want to get in trouble with her but you end up liking her even when she tells you off. I don't know how she does it. She is a Scouser, from Liverpool, and she just always seems to make sense even when she is pointing out what you've done wrong. Anyway she is sound, and you can actually talk to her and she will listen, rather than wait for you to stop babbling and

tell you why teachers are right and you are wrong.

So once I had explained it all to her she offered to think about who would be 'suitable candidates for the role'. That's how teachers talk, even her. I s'pose she has to otherwise she wouldn't really get very far in the staffroom with the rest of them.

Miss Philips was the one who suggested Atlanta (the new girl), Meena (the nightmare) and Beatrice (I don't really know what to say about her as no one really knows Beatrice). So I had my book club, but I wasn't sure how or why or whether it was such a good idea letting Miss Philips sort this out. This really wasn't the book club I had in mind at all.

Our first meeting confirmed my worst suspicions. That was nearly a year ago now. I cannot believe how quickly it all went and how differently I feel about it all now. I wonder what the others thought at first?

Atlanta

First thing I knew was I got this note in homeroom, I mean registration, telling me I had to go to the library at lunchtime to meet Miss Philips, the Head of Year. Great! It's only November and already I'm in trouble and I don't even know what for. I hate this place. It's such a dump, and this school is even worse. Why we

had to come here I don't know. All to do with the parents and their jobs.

When I turn up to the meeting, five minutes late just to make a point, there are two other girls already there, and Miss Philips of course. I sit down noisily in my seat, which is probably the most uncomfortable chair known to man. I think English schools must have a catalogue of crappy furniture that they buy just to make the kids' time here even worse.

Anyway, I wonder why we have been called here and look at the other girls' faces to see if there are any clues. There aren't.

No one is smiling except Miss Philips, and she is always smiling. She must be in another place in her head cos being here wouldn't make me smile. Before anyone says anything the door is flung open and another girl storms in, flinging her bag to the floor and managing to sit in her chair with so much more attitude than me. I've seen her around before. Well, I say around, mostly outside the Head's office.

She looks really cool; she has done something with her uniform which makes it look like she is not even wearing uniform, like she is on her way to a party. She has a nose ring and loads of piercings, not just in her ears. I thought that wasn't allowed. I'm always made

to take my extra earrings out. Some people always manage to get away with it and she looks like one of them.

Miss Philips starts talking, so I tune in as I am curious now. I have definitely not got anything in common with this lot, and can't be in trouble with them, so . . . ?

'Thanks for coming,' says Miss Philips. 'The reason I've asked you here is to talk to you about a radio show which has come to my attention. I think you all listen to Jazz's Breakfast Show in the mornings. Well, they are looking for four Year Ten girls to help them run a book club reporting back live on the radio once a month. It would involve you choosing a book to read, reading it, discussing it, writing a review together, recording your show and then starting the whole process off again. They only have funding for six months initially, but if it is successful, who knows? What are your thoughts?'

I don't say anything cos I am too confused. Why me? The others look at the floor or out of the window – not brimming with enthusiasm then. Only the stropky girl asks what we have all been wondering.

'Why me? Why us? What have I done? Do I have to? You can't make me! I don't like books. Books are

for boffs like Beatrice, no offence.

She practically shouts this at Miss Philips. She looks even more bothered than me. Miss Philips gives her a look which shuts her up straight away. Wow, I'd love to be able to do that, must practise it in front of the mirror.

To be honest I don't really mind the whole book thing, it's not like I have got anything else to do with my time. I have no social life here, I'm just 'the new American girl', the 'Yank'.

Meena

There is no way I am going to do it, why should I? Miss Philips can give me all the looks she wants and all the talks, but no one can make me read a book, can they? I hate books, they are boring. We have to read enough in school anyway, who wants to read more at home? I asked her why me? And she just said she'd speak to each one of us in private. I wanted to know why the rest of them were there, it's not as if they ever get in trouble, unlike me.

'Meena, I am sure you can imagine why I chose you to join in with the book club . . .'

Then Miss Philips left this big pause like I was supposed to fill in the blanks.

'Well, we could start with your truanting, disruptive behaviour in class, permanent removal from Tech, make-up, jewellery, trainers, smoking and the worry you are causing your parents with your boyfriends, and then there's your two temporary exclusions already. Now before you contradict me or try and talk me round, let me save you the bother. This is it, Meena, this is your last chance. You are about to be excluded for good – you have had all the opportunities, chances, trials, behavioural contracts and temporary exclusions anyone can have. This is my last chance to keep you in school. If you don't agree to this then I have no choice but to agree to exclude you permanently, and although you may think that sounds great initially, it wouldn't be, because you're too intelligent to think you can get anywhere you want to without GCSEs. I really don't think there is any other choice, do you?'

And I had to admit she had me there. I wasn't really the best candidate for head girl or daughter of the year, but I wasn't that bad either. There were just a few areas in which school was a bit of a drag and I tried to make it more bearable. Maybe my acid experiment in Science wasn't that safe, but following the teacher's instructions seemed so predictable. The fire

alarm definitely wasn't my fault, and as for the school uniform, well I don't think teachers should be the ones giving out fashion tips. Someone should tell them that comedy socks and ties are just too much to bear first thing on a Monday morning (or any morning, to be honest).

So I'd made a few alterations to my skirt, mainly making it as short as possible, and my earrings look stupid with just one in each ear, and what does a few more matter? And if I take out my nose and belly ring they'll close up and I've only just got rid of the pus and scabs around my belly button, which is finally starting to look less red and skanky.

I just find the whole school rules thing so tedious. I know I would work much better if I was in my normal clothes rather than a shirt and tie. I mean when am I ever going to wear a tie? Women don't, unless you are some tough bitch business woman trying to be a man, and why would I ever want to try and be a man? Who'd want to be that stupid?

The books are the things that are really annoying me about all this cos secretly I would love to be on the radio. I listen to Jazz every day without failure. I even listen from 6.30 a.m. when everyone else is asleep. I would love her job. I heard the 'book club' thing she

went on about and laughed, thinking what a bunch of geeks and that it would never work, and now I am being forced to be one of those geeks, reading and writing about books in my spare time and having to meet up with that bunch of losers. I hate my life.

Beatrice

I'm not sure I want to be told what books to read. I hardly get enough time to read my own with Ben and Dad always making such a mess in the house. There is always so much to do when I get home from school – how am I going to fit in picking Ben up from school, cooking tea, making him do his homework, doing my own homework and helping Dad out and then reading these books on top of all that?

I can't believe that Miss Philips blackmailed me into doing this. I knew someone would use this against me one day, but I didn't even do anything wrong, it's not like I wanted to steal, but what choice did I have? And I can't explain why to anyone cos they'd never believe me and it would be too hard.

So now I have a caution against my name which the police won't clear until I am sixteen, and it's not my fault. And to make matters worse it's being used to make me join this book club, something I would