

C h r i s t i a n H o l m e s

Please Be Mind

A YOUNG NOVEL

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Chapter 1

David gripped the plastic thermos tight in his right hand as he stared at the school building at the bottom of the hill.

Not another year! I thought this was over... he thought to himself. He had thought the very same thing the last time he was in this parking lot. Things had been more hopeful then. The end of year high had been fresh in his blood and everyone was trying as hard as they could to pretend it was the end forever. The end of high-school, the end of school in general, the end of the bureaucratic pressures and injustices.

His school wasn't just any school, his was a private school. In his school, the teachers cared too much, the parents spoke up too little, and the end result was an over-caffeinated jittery group of insecure teenagers with embarrassingly low self esteem.

"Got everything?" his mother asked, staring at him impatiently as he shouldered his messenger bag. She had been annoyingly stressed out that morning, acting as if David had been the one who scheduled his "back to school" day on her most stressful day of the week.

Aren't Mondays stressful for everybody? David thought to himself as he watched his Mother queue up with the other parents trying to get out of the poorly planned parking lot.

As he made his way to his new locker - the novelty of lockers had died off somewhere around sophomore year - a few people waved at him and a few more laughed. They hadn't

forgotten. Last year, the school drama club, of which he was an active participant, asked him to sing a song accompanied by “The Jockstraps,” a band made up of four pimply freshman, for the end-of-year talent show. He had, as usual, agreed. Anyone could get him to do anything if they asked his ego first.

What they hadn’t told him was that the song the band had chosen was “Mama Said Knock You Out” by LL Cool J. The awkward and embarrassing apex of the performance came when a well-aimed tomato hit David squarely in his groin. The band’s overamped drums had stayed consistently off-rhythm for most of the performance, but when tomatoes started flying the music began to sound like something out of “Morse Code, the Musical”.

David finally managed to get his locker unlocked. As he swung the door open, a gigantic red tomato fell out with a plop onto the hard cement. By some heavenly freak of nature, the tomato stayed intact as it hit the ground and rolled under a vending machine. David sighed.

At lunch, he exchanged nods with a few acquaintances and sat on his own near the cafeteria window. He liked to soak in some of the sunlight after spending three hours in the vampire-enabled classrooms of his morning classes. David had, at one point, had friends. He used to sit at a bustling table of gawky teenagers just like himself. His group had been one of the only co-ed lunch-tables around, and the guys around the cafeteria had always laughed at him for not being “manly” enough to hang exclusively with the guys.

“Why did the good lord give me testicles if I am not going to use them?” he had said loudly to Loic Turnbull once during lunch. Loic was a hardcore Catholic who sat strategically between the gay table and the stoner table so he

could more efficiently inform them of their damned destinies. David didn't have a problem with religion, even the ones that encouraged unprotected sex. He did have a problem with the judgements produced by Loic's very blonde, very thick head.

David tried to remember the comeback, if any, that Loic had come up with after he had heard this sinful remark. Something about judgement day? Being a target for the impending zombie attack maybe? David couldn't hear very well in crowded areas. For some reason, when everyone was talking at once, everyone else could hear each other, but he couldn't hear anyone. For a while he had tried lip-reading, but this turned out to be harder than deaf people made it seem, so he began to learn to read faces and hand movements.

Perhaps in a different setting, this would have been more of a challenge. But teenagers really only say a variation of about six different phrases all day, so his task was reduced to figuring out whether someone was talking about being bored, being hungry, being "pissed", or sex. It wasn't such a bad system really, and the efficiency of cutting out the curses made the process even easier.

All of these skills were useless now. Though there were plenty of people he could try to observe, there was no one sitting across from him. He had his own table today. Many of the students who would usually be forced to sit near him were still on "extended family vacations". His school was attended by rich kids, and rich kids got special treatment. That's just how it worked. Those with the biggest family "endowments" got the most days off for summer break.

The teachers hated it, but the administration forced them to be the late-comer's personal tutors upon their return. Why the teachers put up with it, he had no idea.

It couldn't be the food. David thought, as he pushed his uneaten bits of “tuna casserole” away. He liked tuna casserole, but not this stuff. He had gotten excited when he was it listed as the first meal of the year on the school’s website, but the reality of school lunches had come rushing back to him with the first bite.

The friends who would have shared his disgust had all moved away, flunked out, changed schools, or weren’t willing to commit social suicide so early in the year. Who would chose to sit with the “Mama Said Sing Really Badly” guy? David wished he had thought of that nickname for himself. It had been lovingly crafted and slung at him like a rock as he was walking into his first class that morning.

Sitting alone at a lunch table was way too cliché pariah for David to stand, so he got up, dumped his tuna cardboard, and walked out into the sunlight of the cafeterias courtyard.

“Hey David!”

David couldn’t believe his ears, and didn’t, the first time he heard his name called. He ignored the social grim reaper coming back to haunt him and continued walking.

“Oi! David!” the voice came again from behind him.

David had been described as being “in his head”, but he had never heard voices before. He turned around and saw that it was a teacher who had called his name. David couldn’t place him. He searched his mind trying to remember what class he was from. He had certainly seen him around last year.

The teacher was almost completely bald with tiny bits of hair sticking out of his head at the sides. He wore a checkered blue and white shirt which hung like a curtain on the his wire-

thin frame. David had always called these “teacher shirts” because it seemed like all the teachers shopped at the same special teacher stores. As the teacher walked towards him, David had a vision of a department store with flashy yellow signs adorning it saying things like “TEACHERS SALE TODAY! Buy 2 ugly checkered shirts and get the third free!”

David nodded as the man approached.

“Hi, I’m Mr. Ronald, I teach the elective speech class for seniors. I saw you on the roster for this year. Glad you signed up! I’ve seen some of the performances you’ve done with the drama department. It will be very interesting to have such a performer in my speech class.” He said this all with a knowing grin, as if David was a lab rat and he was a scientist gleefully watching the effects of his experiment. When the teacher said “performances” his grin momentarily became a leer before twitching back into place.

The puzzle pieces were filling in for David. He thought back to the halfhearted glance he had given the available elective options for the coming year. None of the options had been very appealing, but speech class seemed to be the least of the evils.

“Right!” David said as more puzzle pieces fell into place, “I always wondered what you taught.”

This was partially true, but only a very small part. David had remembered seeing an awkward looking bald guy standing in the wings last year when the seniors were giving their required speeches. He hadn’t really thought of him at any other point. Electives didn’t start until the second week of school. David didn’t want to think about any more classes than he had to just yet.

“It’s gonna to be a fun year!” Mr. Ronald was saying. “We’re videotaping the speeches this year, and we’re putting them online.”

Um...yay? David thought to himself as he imagined inviting more school-related paraphernalia onto his already overloaded hard-drive. He didn’t mind being videotaped, though. In fact, he kind of liked it. He had been interviewed on a show at the local public access television station when he was eleven. It had gotten him lots of fame amongst his classmates at the time, when one particularly television-privileged kid happened across the interview during one of its four showings.

“Well, it sounds like fun.” David said, flexing his genuine-sounding-fakeness muscle, “We meet for class in the drama building, right?”

“That’s right David. I’ll see you next week. I am looking forward to a superior year!”

“A superior year? Interesting word choice.” David thought as he walked toward his next class.