

THE POWER OF SILENCE.

‘You guys are just so cool, so you’re coming to my party. What do you say? High fives!’ Arabella went round the group, smacking their hands. Sarah just stood there, saying nothing. Arabella allowed the power of silence to speak with its booming voice, knowing it would hurt Sarah.

‘You’re not coming because you’re not cool,’ said the voice in Sarah’s mind as her head bowed, feigning nonchalance. This was different from the way the boys bullied each other, which was all about name-calling and fights in the school yard. Sarah couldn’t complain to a teacher. It was the right of every girl to decide who was invited to her party.

Arabella’s sidelong glance told Sarah she was not part of the gang, a gang built on attractiveness and physical development, not brute strength. It was all about who could attract attention from the boys, and then laugh at them when they were not there.

‘No boy could ever be as cool as us,’ said Arabella, before she pouted her lips and smiled with a dropped forehead, linking eyes with Sean as he walked by. The power of silence asserted itself again.

That night Sarah sat at home, alone. She would have been scrolling messages and seeing photographs of the ‘in’ people, but her mother had taken away her phone because she was concerned for Sarah’s mental health. Sarah felt even more excluded. What were they saying about her? Her head was home to imaginary emojis with tears of laughter streaming down their faces. If Sarah thought any of the other girls would listen, she would have told them, **‘I just wanna be part of your symphony’**.

The time came for the annual school trip to Snowdonia. It was the regular destination each year for all the Year Nine students. Having arrived at the hotel the previous evening, Ms. Jenkins spoke to the students.

‘You know that we have a long walk ahead of us. We’ll take breaks, of course. You’ve been doing extra training in P.E., so you should all be fit enough.’

‘Fit enough? Sean won’t have probs, then. Know what mean? He sure is a fit guy!’ announced Arabella to the ‘girls’ circle’, as they laughed in support.

Three hours later, they were nearly half-way through their walk. It was Mr. Howe’s job to walk at the back of group, but he had gone ahead, as he had been distracted by two squabbling students. The result was that Sean and Arabella were at the back, with Sarah just behind them.

Then it happened. Arabella stumbled over a stone, lurching into Sean, before he disappeared over the side. Panic ensued.

‘Stand still! No-one move!’ bellowed Mr. Howe.

To everyone’s relief, Sean had fallen into a collection of Common Gorse bushes, and, although he yelled out in pain, he was safe. Contact with the bush, however painful, had saved Sean, as it wrapped itself around him. Stretching arms and clinging hands brought Sean back to the path.

This was a true drama, but another was to unfold when the group returned to school. The investigation examined whether or not Sean had been pushed by Arabella. As each of the ‘girls’ circle’ was interviewed, one by one, it became apparent that Arabella, who was a girl who was used to getting her own way, had felt rejected by Sean. The headteacher, Ms. Khan, pondered the significance of this. The last to be invited in was Sarah. Now was her chance to invoke the power of silence.

‘Sarah, you saw what went on, as I believe you were behind Arabella and Sean. Arabella claims she stumbled over some stones and accidentally fell into Sean. Is this true?’ For a moment the clarion calls of revenge echoed in Sarah’s head, telling her to say ‘I’m not sure, Miss,’ or even ‘I think she pushed him on purpose, Miss.’

The silence was deafening.

‘Well, Sarah?’

Although Sarah had the power of silence at her disposal, her conscience would not let her use it.

‘I saw exactly what happened, Miss. It was a complete accident. Arabella stumbled over some rocks, and that is the truth.’

‘Is that what she told you to say?’

‘She didn’t need to. It’s the truth.’

It was. Arabella was found not guilty by the court of Ms. Khan. From that moment Arabella understood that she had been wrong to reject Sarah. She was included in the group, becoming part of the symphony that echoed the positivity of girl power.

Emboldened lyrics are taken from ‘Symphony’ by Clean Bandit, featuring Zara Larsson.