

PRETTY RUDE FOR A

girl



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CHAPTER ONE

Shoulders back and chin up, I manhandle my boobs into separate entities, determined as they are to lump together and form one sinister super-boob. I check myself out in the mirror on the upstairs landing. A mirror I've had—at best—a challenging relationship with over my fifteen years. We're still hardly BFFs, and there are many days when I hate the motherflipper, but at least now she doesn't *always* stare at me with a judgmental glare. In fact, sometimes I kind of like how she looks at me now. I see myself less as an unfinished, poorly constructed grade school project and more like I'm the real deal, not perfect by any means, but something worth looking at, something that doesn't need to be hidden.

My body hasn't changed—I still sometimes think it's like a collection of overlapping circles, like an upturned Olympics logo—but my view of it most definitely has. I like me. I like my overlapping circles—my lady lumps.

And I like putting them in clothes that enhance my me-ness, like the current ensemble I'm modeling this evening—a Princess Leia T-shirt covered by a tweed waistcoat, ripped jeans, white sneakers, and a red fedora hat. Good God, fashion is a lot more fun when you get over the whole “you MUST NOT wear this if you want to look thin and normal” crap.

Thin and normal are so overrated.

Just as I'm admiring myself, like a puppy wagging its tail at the sight of its reflection in a window, I hear the whirlwind sounds of Mum manically clearing up the day's mess. I freeze. The ominous crashes move from the kitchen into the hall.

I should be in bed (or at least studying). Instead, I'm trying on outfits I *might* wear if I pluck up the courage to do my comedy stand-up routine at the local pub's open mic night on Friday. The pub owned by the dad of Leo, the nitwit crush who used me for my comedy writing skills before breaking my hopeless heart.

But, hey, his dad's pub is the only place around here you can do stand-up. I mean, sure, I *could* just rock up to the corner of my street and start telling jokes to the group of sinister ten-year-olds hanging around the vandalized mailbox, but something tells me they wouldn't be the most receptive audience.

The mum-tornado moves back to the living room and I breathe again.

Mum likes that I do comedy and she likes that I like my reflection these days, but she definitely does not like me “putzing around” with these things when I should be doing something “more important,” like helping her tidy up, studying for exams, or going to bed. Honestly, I love that woman, but her priorities are messed up.

As I debate whether the red fedora might be a little too much even for me, I feel the familiar buzz of a new comedy idea. I silently dance a jig of joy back into my bedroom and scribble down some notes before the idea falls out of my brain and vanishes like joke-flavored ice cream melting on the pavement of comedic regret. Studying can wait. I mean, there’s a whole school year before my GCSE exams, so what’s the rush?

I rummage around in my “floor-drobe” (the “polite” term my delightful mother uses for the impressive landscape of clothes piled around my room) and forage for the perfect outfit to match the new idea. And eventually, after scaling Stinky Mountain and cave-diving through Pants Peak, I unearth just the right ensemble.

I strip down, put on a black strappy vest and pair it with the yellow fake-fur coat I rescued from a pile of old seventies stuff my Granny Mo (or “Grammo” as we

inventively call her) was throwing out. Perfect! Then I make a run for it over to the bathroom and start slapping on Mum's makeup. I'm not aiming for sexy here—I'd say I'm going more for a look that is mad clown meets Kim Kardashian—and, when I'm finally satisfied that my face is weighed down with enough cosmetics to frighten a small child, I turn my attention to my hair. I back-comb and scrunch it up with great fistfuls of mousse, until my hair-to-face ratio is similar to a billiards ball being spooned by a poodle.

I return to the mirror. I look—well, perhaps not ridiculously fabulous, but definitely fabulously ridiculous.

Back in my bedroom, I sit in front of my phone, which is glamorously propped up on my desk against a box of tampons. I pull my mouth into a patronizing grin, press record, and start a brand-new YouTube video.

“Hi, everyone! It's the PFG here. Did you know that seven out of ten teenage girls *hate* the way they look? I know, right, that is *shocking*. Just *terrible*...I mean, the *arrogance* of the other three.

“But seriously, I think we should all celebrate our beauty. Now, I'm a bigger girl in case you hadn't noticed (which I'm sure you hadn't because who really cares about what girls on the internet look like, right?) and I'll tell you what really gets on my tit-end, and that's the shedloads

of blogs and vlogs telling *me* what, as a plus-sized girl, I *should* and *should not wear*. You know the kind of thing...”

Then, with a super happy, preppy accent, I launch into a spoof of all those “helpful” videos.

“Hi, it’s me, Stacy Beeatch, and I’m back with my latest fashion tips for the unfortunate.

“Okay, this one’s aimed at all you gorgeous BIG girls, all you super-sized, sexy, curvaceous fatty-boom-batties! You know who you are! And you should be proud of who you are, while at the same time hiding it—so no one else has to pretend to like it.

“So what I’m gonna do for you today is tell you what you should NOT wear if you want to pass as human. Okay? Okay! How exciting! Let’s start!

“So, first off, you need to determine what body shape you are. There’s the hourglass shape, the inverted triangle, the pear shape...but, as this vid’s for big girls, I’m gonna go ahead and presume you’re potato-shaped, which just means fat all over. Okay? Okay!

“So here are my top five tips.

“One. Invest in some shapewear. Girls, you need something industrial-strength that will suck, tuck, punish, and torture your body into some sort of recognizable girl-shape. Repeat after me: I do not need full use of my internal organs. I DO need to look thinner.

“Two. Wear heels! Chances are you have stubby little legs, and who wants to see those? No one. Literally no one. But good news, jelly-bellies, alarmingly high heels are your friend! They will make you look up to three percent sexier, and they’re only thirty-five times more uncomfortable, and you just can’t argue with that math. So go high or go home, ladies! Though don’t attempt stairs; gravity and inelegance are against you, and you’ll probably end up in an ambulance. Okay? Okay!”

“Three. Speaking of legs, do NOT wear leggings. Same goes for ‘skinny’ jeans—I mean, the clue’s in the title, dummy. These garments are made for good-looking people, not you.

“Four. Wear one color, preferably dark, like black. That way you can melt into the shadows like a roly-poly ninja and people won’t have to endure the sight of your disgusting bulges. Remember, you won’t cause a scene if you can’t be seen.

“Five. Don’t wear anything tight, don’t wear anything baggy, don’t carry a small bag or a big bag; don’t wear patterns, anything cropped, anything masculine, wide belts, thin belts, pleats, stripes, turtlenecks, boat necks, anything with pockets, ruffles, fur, feathers...basically if it’s got personality or charisma, it’s not for you. I know you’re probably desperate for friends, but, trust me, these

clothes are not your friends. They will ridicule you. Behind your fat back. And, really, why bother with fashion at all? You're just shoving a bargain store sausage in Fifth Avenue wannabe wrapping, and that's just deceitful. Okay? Okay!

“So that’s it, girls—have fun with my tips and, if in doubt, just stay at home where no one will have to see you. Bye for now!”

The forced grin falls from my face, back to my usual sarcastic smirk as I return from being Stacy Beeatch. I knowingly roll my eyes and shake my head at the camera.

“See you next time, beautiful people.”

As I stop recording, little excitement puppies scamper through my brain. The audience’s laughter might not be there, but the high of performing feels almost the same as doing a live gig. Also, I can feel that this is funny stuff, even if it is maybe a bit rude to fashion vloggers, who probably do mean well, I guess. But I’ve gotta have an edge otherwise I’m never gonna be noticed.

Not that anyone’s actually watching these videos. I started making them about a month ago under the handle the PFG (like the BFG, but “Pretty Funny Girl,” obvs) and so far I only have a handful of subscribers. Which is why I haven’t actually told anyone, not even my best friends Chloe and Kas, about this. It all seems a bit too dumbass-pathetic.

I'm mostly making these videos for my own benefit anyway. I spend so much time writing new material, but with nowhere to actually use it I needed a reason to keep writing and practice my performing. So far one gig in London and one disastrous (don't ask) local open-mic gig is all my stand-up career has amounted to. But hey, just like applying stretch mark cream, if I keep at it, eventually something good will happen, right? (Right?!)

I grab a fistful of Mum's cleansing wipes and start mopping away the makeup, watching in the mirror as my face gradually looks less like a child's coloring book. Just as my freckly features are revealed, my phone vibrates. It's a message from Chloe, trying to persuade me again to do the open mic on Friday, using about sixteen "*pleeeeeaaaaase's*."

I reply: Argh, I dunno. U do remember last time, when I exploded the stage with my arse, right?

(If you don't know what this refers to, I'm not going to tell you. It's too ball-crushingly embarrassing.)

Kas joins the conversation.

K: But u were great before that happened!

C: Tho' your butt did get the biggest laugh of the set.

K: Chlo!

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H: No, she's right, it did.

My booty could headline at the Apollo.

C: U donut, that made me laugh and smudge
my nail varnish.

H: Sorry.

C: No you're not.

H: SO not.

K: Go on, Pig, it'll be fun!

C: OMG, u used the P word.

K: Fanny-farts.

Sorry, I meant Hay.

H: It's cool.

My name is Haylah, but “Pig” was one of the many nicknames that had been unlovingly hurled at me at school. Then, like a boss, I turned it back on the bullies by claiming it as my own and insisting everyone call me that. But in the end I totally rejected Pig, breaking away from how other people viewed me and debuting the real me. It was a sort of rebranding, a way of saying to the world, “I’m not what you see me as—a dumpy, insignificant girl from a broken home. I’m Haylah, a big, brash, proud comedian extraordinaire, so get used to it or get the hell out of my way before I mow you down with my epic boobs.”

And, sure, I'm still on board with all that, but...don't tell anyone, but now that it's gone...I kinda miss Pig. I'd been called it for so long by so many people—many of whom loved me—that I actually saw it as affectionate. It didn't make me think of fat, disgusting hogs. If anything, it made me think of those trendy little pet micro-pigs—cute, pink, intelligent, lovable—who grow up to be more of a handful than their owners planned for. And I kinda liked that, by being happily called Pig, I was shoving it to all those people who thought being big was something negative. On the other hand, I'm not sure any comedy clubs are going to book a teenage girl called Pig—so I'm sticking with Haylah for now—or PFG.

While I'm pondering this, Chloe continues to try to harass me into doing the open mic. But I'm still not sure. I lie on my bed and shudder at the embarrassing memory of last time—which, as I HAVE SAID, I'm not going to go into, so don't even, okay? And, apart from all that, there is the fact that it's happening at Leo's dad's pub. Meaning ACTUAL LEO—ridiculously good-looking but absolute breaker of hearts and stealer of excellent comedy material—might be there. (Okay, “stealer” is a bit harsh as I did technically *give* him my jokes willingly. But he definitely didn't have any trouble taking them off me, then kissing me, then telling me he had a

girlfriend.) He's not at my school anymore, so thankfully I haven't seen him in a while. He's gone off to the local sixth-form college where, unlike at our crappy school, he might have a chance of getting into a top university like Cambridge. The smug git. Smug, incredibly sexy git.

Stop it, stupid brain!!

But, embarrassing memories and sexy gits aside, why *not* do the gig? I can't afford to be picky; it's not like there's any other stand-up opportunities for teenage girls around where I live. You have to get booked into the open mic nights in London and for that, you kind of have to have actual stand-up comedy experience and be, y'know, an *adult*. So, if I don't go to this pub gig, I'm back to desperately staring at my emails and hoping that something pings in from the impossibly cool comedy-club owner Van, who I met after I entered the London Young Comic of the Year a few months ago. I've not heard anything yet...which does make me worry she's forgotten about me, or realized no one's actually interested in the pathetic opinions of a teenage girl.

But the thing is, in case you can't already tell, I really *haven't* been feeling pathetic lately. I'm still on a high from absolutely frickin' nailing that competition. I'm loving my sweet new sense of style thanks to my recent raids on Grammo's wardrobe. Me and Chloe

and Kas haven't had a fallout for two whole months (although they have both been off on vacation for a lot of the summer, so that's kind of helped), and I turned fifteen a month ago—though it wasn't the world's most captivating moment, as it was celebrated in a caravan in the pouring rain on a hellish trip to Norfolk with Mum, my little brother, Noah, AND Ruben, my mother's, ugh, "boyfriend."

Okay, okay, I *do* like Ruben. At first I wasn't sure—it had been me, Mum, and Noah for so long, and I didn't want to see Mum hurt again after He Who Must Not Be Named (my useless father, not Voldemort—though I think I'd prefer him...) walked out on her. But the truth is Ruben makes Mum happy, he makes Noah happy, and he and Mum aren't super gross and PDA together (he hasn't ever stayed the night—thank GOD!), plus he's only here a couple of days a week so it's all fine. Truth be told, when he's not being a proper twonk, he's actually quite funny. He also gets on well with Dylan.

And remind me who Dylan is, I hear you ask...

Oh, I *totally forgot to say!* I HAVE A BOYFRIEND. Yay! Yes, I, Haylah Swinton—a large, undainty, loud-mouthed non-girlie girl, who believed the world would never see her as girlfriend material (not that I ever quite a hundred percent believed that 'cause, come on, I *am*

pretty epic)—have a *genuine* boyfriend who chooses to be my boyfriend and so far has not chosen to un-girlfriend me. I mean, it's real happy ending stuff, especially when I tell you the whole story. So strap yourselves in, my friends, for the, ahem, love story of the century.