

'I couldn't put it down'  
VOGUE WILLIAMS

'Spiky, witty'  
PANDORA SYKES

# ALL THE OTHER MOTHERS

Shoutie  
Mme

SARAH HARMAN

# ALL THE OTHER MOTHERS HATE ME

Sarah Harman

4th ESTATE • *London*

# Copyright

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## Praise for *All the Other Mothers Hate Me*:

*A Sunday Times Style* 'Hottest Book of 2025'

*A Stylist* 'Must-Read Book that will be Massive this Year'

'Spiky, witty, a breath of fresh air'

PANDORA SYKES

'I couldn't put it down'

VOGUE WILLIAMS

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JESSICA KNOLL, author of *Luckiest Girl Alive*

'An absolutely wild ride. Imagine if the writers of *Motherland* tried their hands at a missing-person mystery'

*Independent*

'A sparkling debut. I loved it and found myself laughing one moment and gripped with tension the next. Florence is a brilliantly flawed heroine and I hope readers love her as much as I did'

EMILY EDWARDS, author of *The Herd*

'A madcap romp with an antiheroine you'll hate to love. The most fun I've had reading in ages'

KIRAN MILLWOOD HARGRAVE, author of *The Mercies*

‘A pace so blistering and a voice so funny that you can’t help but wonder if she’ll be able to sustain it throughout the entire novel. Reader: she does! This is the rarest kind of story: one that gets better with every page, that makes you laugh out loud, that keeps you up late at night, and that is full of heart and surprise. An absolute gem’

KATY HAYS, author of *The Cloisters*

‘The witty debut you won’t be able to put down’

*Service95*

‘I was gripped at every twist and turn’

JODIE HARSH

‘Beautifully written, perfectly paced, hilarious, moving and so gripping. I cannot tell you how much I loved Florence – what an incredibly drawn, fully dimensioned character she is, with flaws we’re all secretly harbouring – and how much I was rooting for her’

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‘Gossipy and gripping, with a protagonist who toes a daring line between relatable and reprehensible’

LAUREN BRAVO, author of *Preloved*

‘A fabulously imperfect heroine, beautifully irreverent humour and a plot that sinks its teeth in’

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RACHEL KOLLER CROFT

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‘A sharply insightful page-turner. Infectiously relatable’

KIMBERLY MCCREIGHT

‘Delicious, wicked, darkly funny, a wild ride’

SASH BISCHOFF

‘Hilarious, poignant, relatable. Goes from laugh-out-loud to heartbreaking while never losing the fast-paced plot’

HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN

‘Hilarious and heartfelt’

CAITLIN MULLEN

‘Darkly funny, irresistibly suspenseful’

CLÉMENCE MICHALLON



# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Praise for \*All the Other Mothers Hate Me\*](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)  
[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)  
[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)  
[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)  
[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)  
[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)  
[Chapter Thirty](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-One](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Four](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Five](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Six](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Seven](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Eight](#)  
[Chapter Thirty-Nine](#)  
[Chapter Forty](#)  
[Chapter Forty-One](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Two](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Three](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Four](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Five](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Six](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Seven](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Eight](#)  
[Chapter Forty-Nine](#)  
[Chapter Fifty](#)  
[Chapter Fifty-One](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)  
[About the Author](#)  
[About the Publisher](#)

# Prologue

THE MISSING BOY IS TEN-YEAR-OLD Alfie Risby, and to be perfectly honest with you, he's a little shit.

I realize that's a horrible thing to say about a child, particularly one who is missing. But – and I'm not proud of this – if I'd had to choose a boy in Dylan's class to vanish in broad daylight, Alfie would've been top of my list.

There are some kids you just kind of want to punch, and Alfie was one of them. Perhaps it was his hair – that pale red shade we used to call strawberry blond. Or his dull, raisin-colored eyes. Or the way his sharp little teeth gave him a distinctly ferret-like appearance.

Their sharpness is a point of fact: last year he bit his nanny, Cecilia, so hard she needed stitches. For weeks, she appeared at afternoon pick-up like a sad ghost, clutching her bandaged forearm.

The one time I volunteered to chaperone a school trip, a class picnic to Hampstead Heath, Alfie leaned over a plate of sausage rolls and told me, very casually, as if we were two adults at a bar, that he 'quite liked my slag fingernails'.

And then there was his family. They weren't just run-of-the-mill, St Angeles rich. They were in a whole other league.

'Like richer than God,' one of the other mothers had whispered to me during last year's spring fundraiser, as we arranged sugar cookies on tiny plastic trays.

But if I'm being honest, my feelings about Alfie had nothing to do with his hair or his wealth or his ferret teeth. No. My dislike of Alfie stemmed entirely

from the way he treated Dylan, my precocious, sensitive only son, like he was a bug to be crushed.

And nobody crushes my kid.

# One

*Shepherd's Bush, London*  
*Friday, 7.45 a.m.*

I WAKE UP WITH A Girls' Night song stuck in my head. To be honest, 'The Quake' never took off like the label had hoped. It didn't help that a devastating, 8.9 magnitude tremor had ripped through Southern California the same week our single was released, collapsing a multi-story parking garage like a soufflé and trapping 346 people inside. The song itself is still a jam, though.

*You're like an earthquake,*  
*Richter 10 heartbreak*  
*Said you wanna 'short break'*  
*Then takin' up with that skan—*

I hum to myself under the covers, imagining that I'm performing to a sold-out Wembley Stadium, instead of about to take a lukewarm shower on the ground floor of half a Victorian terraced house. Not even the whole damn house.

'Dylan!' I shriek. 'Get up! You're gonna be late for school!'

My son appears in the doorway, fully dressed, right down to his St Angeles cap and tie.

'Ha ha, very funny, Mum.' He rolls his eyes and presses a cold can of Red Bull into my hands.

I take a sip. Our morning ritual complete, I pull the warm duvet back over my face.

‘Seriously though, can we not be late today?’ my son pleads. ‘Ms Schulz says the coach won’t wait this time.’

A dim memory of a permission slip surfaces, of scrawling my initials in eggplant-colored eyeliner and checking the ‘not available to chaperone’ box.

‘Because of the field trip?’ I murmur, from beneath the duvet.

‘Yes. Wetland Centre. Bird-watching. Can you get up now, please?’

‘Right. You excited?’ I’m stalling, but he’s in an even bigger hurry than usual. Perhaps this means the bullying has finally stopped.

Dylan turns his pleading green eyes on me. ‘Can’t I just walk by myself?’ he says, half-question, half-whine.

I remove the duvet from my face for a second time. Dull, late-autumn light is filtering through the shutters now, piercing my retinas. I drag myself upright. Why does it have to be so *bright* in the mornings?

‘Dylan. We’ve been over this. You’re ten. You’re not walking to school alone. You wanna end up in some hairy old pedophile’s basement? Hmm? You wanna spend the rest of your life—’

Dylan interrupts me: ‘It’s called a *cellar* here, Mum. Only Americans say basement.’

The way he wrinkles his nose when he says the word *American* is like a tiny hatchet to my heart.

I chug the rest of my Red Bull and toss the can toward the sprawling collection on my dresser. Dylan glares at the row of empties as if they’re discarded yellowcake uranium cartridges.

‘You’re going to recycle those, right? Aluminium is one of the most energy-intensive materials on the planet. Mr Foster showed me this documentary—’

‘Not now, Greenpeace. We’ll be late.’

Dylan groans loudly as he stalks toward the kitchen. ‘Fine,’ he sighs. ‘But Mum,’ his voice floats down the hallway, ‘can you puh-leez just wear a *normal* shirt today? Like the other mums?’

I glance down at my *Girls' Night 2008* tour shirt. Of all my band shirts, this one's my favorite. It's from the early days, before the whole Rose debacle. The front has a screen-printed photo of my own, much younger face. On the back, my name, FLORENCE, is spelled out in block letters, like a football player's jersey.

I slide the offending garment over my head, allowing a taurine-tinged burp to escape. A sparkly orange crop top catches my eye from the pile on the floor.

'You got it, kid.'

## Two

*Shepherd's Bush*  
*Friday, 7.58 a.m.*

THE AIR OUTSIDE IS COLD and clear, that dreadful slice of mid-November when the clocks have gone back but the Christmas parties haven't started yet.

Dylan races out the front door ahead of me, his backpack swinging loosely on one shoulder. Our neighbor, Mr Foster – the aforementioned aluminium documentary fanboy – is standing in front of his house, sorting his cans into a bin. Dylan gives him an enthusiastic wave. I wince. I'm not thrilled that the seventy-six-year-old local recycling zealot is currently my son's best friend. I'm even less thrilled that he keeps giving Dylan live crickets to feed his pet box turtle. But that's a battle for another day.

'Oh, Florence,' Mr Foster says, looking up from a pile of cans. 'Did you see that—'

'We're actually in a bit of a rush,' I call over my shoulder without stopping. There will be hell to pay if Dylan misses that bus.

Mr Foster grunts and turns back to his bins. 'Course. Don't let me keep you.'

As we get closer to Dylan's school, our neighborhood's familiar chicken joints and betting shops give way to organic butchers and natural wine stores. Before long, Dylan and I are passing the grand white mansions that



house the Uzbek embassy and the Beckham family. Dylan's school is just a few blocks past all that, tucked away on a dead-end road.

St Angeles is a 150-year-old, all-boys prep school, housed in a sprawling Victorian mansion straight out of a Dickens novel. The school's only concession to modernity is the incongruously cheerful blue front door, hastily painted after a private equity firm took over a few years ago and tried to drag it into the twenty-first century.

Morning drop-off at St Angeles is choreographed with the precision of a North Korean military parade. It's a strictly-no-cars-allowed situation, which means all the parents – no matter how busy or important – scramble for street parking several blocks away and then approach the imposing iron gates on foot, like religious pilgrims descending on Mecca.

By the time we arrive, the parade of supplicants snakes around the block. We're late, but we're not late-late. Dylan will still make the bus, and I will make my crucial next appointment. I just have to avoid Ms Dobbins, the new head of 'pastoral care'. I've been dodging her calls for weeks now. Whatever she wants, it can't be good.

Dylan and I settle into line behind Allegra Armstrong-Johnson and her pallid son, Wolfie. I maintain a healthy distance, hoping she doesn't turn around. It wouldn't be fair to call Allegra my nemesis – that honor is reserved for Hope Grüber– and anyway, I don't know Allegra well enough to hate her. But she's the kind of St Angeles mum I go out of my way to avoid. The kind with glossy brown hair, a Hurlingham Club membership, and a 200-acre horse farm in Norfolk. Her husband, Rupert, writes Churchill biographies, which is apparently not only an actual job, but one that allows them to live in a swanky townhouse in South Kensington.

'Running late again, Florence?' Allegra clucks, all merry and faux-polite.

I look up at her. This morning Allegra is wearing buttery leather Hermès riding boots, a waxed Barbour jacket, and an expression of complete self-satisfaction. Her anorexic whippet dog is off leash and dressed in a quilted vest.

When I don't answer, Allegra purses her lips and says quite loudly, 'You're looking very glamorous this morning. Big plans after drop-off?'

Something about her tone makes me feel like a child who's been sent to the principal's office. It doesn't help that I'm a decade younger than most of the St Angeles moms, none of whom got pregnant by accident at twenty.

I ignore Allegra's question and pat her hideous dog on the head. 'Good boy, Wolfie.'

She flinches. 'Wolfie is our *son's* name,' she says with a frown. 'Not our dog.'

I begin to hum under my breath, the opening bars of 'You're So Vain'. When I get to the chorus, Dylan shoots me a death look.

'Mum!' he hisses. 'Stop!'

'What?' I say innocently. 'Carly Simon is a classic!'

I should be nice to Allegra. The fact is, she's an endangered species around here: an actual British person at St Angeles. Most of her kind, the ones without aristocratic titles or hedge-fund husbands, have retreated to Surrey now. This pocket of London is weird like that: an exotic blend of people from all over the world with mysterious sources of income. Frankly, you're more likely to rub shoulders with a Bahraini prince or a Greek shipping heiress than an actual person from, say, Yorkshire. There was a rumor a while back that St Angeles was discounting the tuition for the few remaining British pupils, almost like a bursary for needy students. It's not that far-fetched. Foreign parents want to believe they're getting an 'authentic' English experience when they send their kids to school dressed in knee socks and straw boater hats. No point in turning your child's education into an extended exercise in nostalgic British cosplay if *all* the other kids are also from Melbourne or Paris or Hong Kong or Helsinki.

Personally, I find the whole English obsession with schools ridiculous. Where I grew up, in a cramped two-bedroom apartment on a sun-drenched stretch of pavement outside Orlando, Florida, kids just went to whatever school was near their house. Grown men definitely did not spend entire

dinner parties trying to work out where their host learned his multiplication tables.

If it were up to me, Dylan would go to the local primary a block from our flat, and I would sleep in an extra twenty-five minutes each morning. When I mentioned this to my ex-husband Will, he acted like I'd suggested that Dylan be removed from formal education to perform a decade of hard labor on a communal farm. Will was a St Angeles boy, you see, and he'd insisted on the same for Dylan.

'Fine,' I'd shrugged. 'You're paying.'

Anyway, the uniform *is* cute.

When we reach the front gates, the deputy head, an ancient brontosaurus called Ms Schulz, offers us a tight-lipped smile.

'Morning, Dylan,' she says primly, peering up at me from beneath a helmet of permed gray hair. She's dressed exactly like Mrs Doubtfire and smells vaguely of mothballs.

'Have fun today, kiddo!' I call to Dylan, as he disappears through the gate and into a sea of identical blazer-clad boys. 'Knock 'em dead!'

Ms Schulz winces. 'Mrs Palmer,' she says, nodding in my direction.

'It's Grimes,' I remind her. 'Dylan is Palmer. Like his father.'

Beneath her owl-eyed glasses, she blinks. 'Of course,' she says blankly. Like she hasn't seen me every weekday morning for the past five years. 'My apologies. Enjoy your day.'

I hurry away from the gates, willing Ms Dobbins not to appear. A few feet away, Hope Grüber, the PTA president, is regaling Farzanah Khan and Cleo Risby with the riveting tale of one of her triplets' perfect score on a mock St Paul's entrance exam.

'We didn't even tutor!' Hope crows, batting her lash extensions.

Hope is a try-hard social climber from Brisbane. Before she met her husband, an Austrian property tycoon thirty years her senior, Hope was a struggling catalogue model who lived above a chippy on Goldhawk Road. We ran in the same circles for a while after I left Girls' Night, and while we were

never friends, we lived parallel lives: shopping at Primark, partying at Fabric, always keeping one eye open for the next good thing. The difference, I suppose, is that Hope found it.

Today, Hope has three sons, drives a baby blue Bentley with custom BOYMUM plates, and refers to herself on Instagram as a #Model, #Philanthropist and #GirlBoss. She still speaks with a naff accent and wears too much leopard print to fully pass as a member of the 'quiet luxury' set, but she's managed to ingratiate herself with the other St Angeles mums by being keen with a capital K. Need a charity gala organized or a bake sale scheduled? Hope is your woman. It doesn't hurt that she and Karl Theodor have a spare, eight-bedroom chalet in Verbier that she lets the other mums borrow, even in peak season. In exchange, her awful triplets – Trip and Teddy and, I dunno, Tryhard – are never excluded from a birthday party. Unlike Dylan.

'Ms Dobbins says he's naturally gifted!' Hope bleats. The mention of her name sends a little shiver up my spine. I need to get out of here.

Beside her, Farzanah Khan lifts one perfectly arched eyebrow, not bothering to hide her skepticism. 'Is that right?'

Unlike Hope, Farzanah has an actual job, as a 'dermatologist to the stars', with a skincare line at Harrods and her own offices on Harley Street. Farzanah is easily the most polished human being I've ever seen up close, with luminous skin, gleaming white teeth and a curtain of dark hair so shiny you can practically see your reflection in it. Her father was the Pakistani ambassador to London in the late 90s, and Farzanah attended an all-girls boarding school in Berkshire, where she developed the same crisp enunciation as the Dowager Countess of Grantham. To top it all off, her son, Zain, is an actual genius, and has won the school's 'Lego Engineering Challenge' three years in a row. Hope despises Farzanah, but in a completely different way than she hates me.

Beside them, Cleo Risby is only half listening, rummaging around in her oversized bag for something. Cleo is the coolest of all the St Angeles mums. She's nearly a foot taller than everyone else, with icy blonde hair and a