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ANNIE
AND
MAEVE
ARE *Definitely*
NOT
FRIENDS

OLIVIA MUSCAT



FREMANTLE PRESS

Sunday 14 July

Hello?

Journal?

Dear Journal?

Dear Diary?

Hi. It's me Maeve ...

You don't know me I suppose. And I don't know you. But you're a Notes folder on my iPad. So what's to know??

I don't get this journalling thing. There is nothing much to write ... I'm eleven years old. Nothing really happens to me. Aunty Em swears I'll be glad I kept a journal one day but it's so much work, and my life isn't that interesting you know? I go to school. I come home. I eat dinner ...

What can I tell you? Aunty Em. She's my aunty ... obviously. She is my mum's younger sister. But she's not like a regular aunty. She's lived with us (Mum, me, Liam

and Violet) since Violet was a baby. She helps look after us kids when Mum is working. Mum's a nurse so she works all sorts of weird times, like whole entire nights and Saturdays. I love Aunty Em like she's my second mum. She bakes with me and helps me with my homework and all the stuff other people's parents do. But I still reckon she's wrong about this journalling business.

'One day Maeve, my love, you'll be enthralled by the simplicity and drama of your own life. You will learn from your past self and marvel at your innocence, your joy in life, your tragedies and triumphs.'

Those were her exact words. She said them to me while giving Violet a bath. I often hang out in the bathroom during Violet's bath time. It's sometimes the only time I feel like my family is still. I sit in my spot on the closed loo, and I can actually talk to Mum or Aunty Em while they can't go anywhere or be distracted by something.

What else do people write in these things?

The school holidays are over. I hate the Sunday night before term starts. I always get a sick feeling in my stomach. Like something bad is about to happen. Which is weird because I actually genuinely really like school. I don't like waking up early in the morning and rushing to put my uniform on, and getting lunch ready, and

listening to Aunty Em tell Liam to put his shoes on or no Minecraft for a week for the fifth time in ten minutes. And I don't like that I have to leave behind Morris and Ursula and not see them all day. Morris is our labrador. He's big and golden and did I mention big? He's taller than Violet and he loves cuddles. Ursula is our cat. She doesn't like cuddles so much, but she likes to sit near me while I read. I wish I could bring them to school. But I do like school, especially this year. Ms Cheung is the best, kindest teacher I've ever had, and she has let me sit next to Persie all year! She barely ever tries to separate us, which is great because Persie and I really don't do well when we're separated. We neeeeeeeeeeeed each other!!!! We've been friends since we were two years old and our mums were playgroup friends. We met at the finger-painting table and have been friends ever since, even though Persie liked to do very detailed paintings, and I just liked to smear blobs of colour everywhere.

Persie's mum died when we were five and Persie even came to stay with us for a little bit. She had a blow-up mattress on my floor, but most nights she climbed into my bed because she couldn't sleep. I was excited. It was like a three-week sleepover. But Persie was so sad ... she didn't even want to watch *Frozen*. It just made her cry. And I get it. If my mum was dead, I would die. But I was only five. I was excited for my best friend to be living in my house. I feel bad about it now and I've tried to

apologise. But Persie reckons she hardly remembers it. Sometimes I think she's just saying that to make me feel better. She's like that. The best friend in the world.

So, I like school. I like my friends. I like learning. But I always feel queasy on the last night of the holidays. Queasy! Great word! QUEEAASSY! Mum uses it a lot ... I looked it up in the fancy-pants Cambridge English Dictionary.

Queasy (adjective)

feeling that you want to vomit.

feeling worried, unhappy, or uncertain about something.

Yep. I definitely feel queasy. But I know deep down that school is great and term three will be amazing because term three means camp!

I am beyond excited for school camp, and Science Week, and Book Week. Any excuse for a costume ... see how could it not be great?

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Annie wasn't sure how she'd got here. Sweating her way through a brand-new school uniform that was itchy and slightly too big. She was starting to get a headache from how tightly her mum had pulled her hair into two plaits that morning, and she was pretty sure she was going to vomit any second. Why had she agreed to her parents' grand plan to move her to a different school in the middle of grade five? Nobody did that except delinquents who got expelled and kids whose parents moved them across the country. She was neither of those things. She still lived in the same quiet, tidy house that she and her parents had moved into when she was three years old. The one that her mum was obsessed with keeping tidy.

Sometimes Annie thought privately that her mum had quit her job as a GP so she could spend all day cleaning the house. If she was scrubbing and tidying, mopping and straightening, Annie knew she was stressed

out. And this morning Rosie had been vacuuming before Annie was even out of bed. Every last piece of hair and school uniform had been straightened and tightened and re-straightened and re-tightened to the point where Annie's dad had said, 'I think you can stop now, Rose,' in what Annie had come to think of as his *fed up* voice. Annie knew that both her parents were probably just as worried about this new school situation as she was. The three of them had all been silent that morning. They were probably all thinking the same thing: What if this is a terrible idea? What if everything is the same here as it was at St Lucy's? Why did this have to happen to any of us?

Annie was not ready. She'd never wanted this.

'I know it's tough,' her dad had told her in the car when she couldn't stop the tears from falling. 'Maybe you don't feel ready. But you're brave and clever and strong and it will be a good thing. You'll see.'

Annie didn't feel clever or strong. She wasn't brave. She was sad and terrified. And she definitely was not ready.



The principal, Mrs Terlizzi, came to meet Annie and her parents at the school entrance. As the four of them

stood at the front reception that smelled of old carpet and photocopying, Annie thought about her life this time last year. The first day of term three. Running across the playground to where Samara had been sitting in her rightful place on top of the monkey bars, waiting for Annie to join her so they could watch everyone else arrive. Surrounded by their friends, knowing everybody wanted to be their friends, dissecting sleepovers and birthday parties that happened over the winter holidays. Annie's tenth birthday had been the most talked about. Everyone had wanted an invitation. And thanks to Annie's mum, everyone had got one. But only the select few had received the exclusive invitation to the sleepover that happened after most people had been picked up.

Annie hadn't known it was possible to be jealous of your own life, but here she stood. She was gripping her mum's arm so tightly her fingers were going numb. She didn't want to let go. Didn't want to face the new hoard of kids that would laugh at her behind her back, and ask her how many fingers they were holding up knowing full well she couldn't see. She wasn't listening to what the adults were saying. She was too wrapped up in her own misery. She didn't need to hear the principal tell her parents how excited she was that Annie was joining the North Avenue Primary family. She didn't need to hear

her mum and dad say one more time that they were sure this was going to be a good change.

Her leg was throbbing and she desperately wanted to sit down with a heat pack. Then Mrs Terlizzi said her name.

‘Antoinette! I’d like to introduce you to someone we’re very excited for you to meet.’

Annie wasn’t sure if she was meant to respond. So she chose not to. Who were they going to introduce her to? By the level of excitement in Mrs Terlizzi’s voice, you’d think it was Taylor Swift. But not even that could make today better.

She kept talking, ‘Antoinette, this is Maeve. She’s in Ms Cheung’s class with you. We’re just so excited for the two of you to meet. Maeve is one of our most capable, brightest sparks and we’ve decided to assign her as your buddy.’

Great, Annie thought. This was probably going to be a Samara-type girl. A girl like the old Annie. Confident, popular, nice to all the adults, the perfect student, but secretly mean to everyone and anyone when no adults were looking. Annie didn’t even try to hide her sigh. This was it, the moment when all the name-calling, the silent looks, and the giggling started. This was going to be no different to St Lucy’s at all.

There was complete silence for what felt like way too long.

‘Hi!’ said a bright, clear voice. ‘I’m Maeve.’

Annie felt the pressure of her dad’s hand on her shoulder.

‘Nice to meet you, Maeve,’ he said in his *isn’t this great, how great is this?!* voice. ‘I’m Andrew, Annie’s dad. It will be so nice for our Annie to be able to be friends with someone who can really understand what she’s going through. Won’t it, Annie?’

Annie wasn’t sure what he meant and she didn’t care. What could this random girl possibly understand about what she had been through? Why was her dad so set on pretending everything was fine when it clearly wasn’t? People who were fine didn’t move schools in the middle of grade five. People who were fine didn’t want to throw up at the thought of their parents leaving them at school for the day. People who were fine didn’t need their mummy to tie their shoelaces or their daddy to make their Milo.

‘We thought the same thing, Andrew,’ Mrs Terlizzi was saying. ‘We think that Annie and Maeve will have a lot to teach each other and I think they’ll form a marvellous friendship.’

‘Annie darling,’ her mum said in a voice Annie

thought was more appropriate for a frightened, injured rabbit than an eleven-year-old daughter. ‘Maeve is using a cane. She’s blind, just like you.’

Just like me, Annie thought. Really? Annie didn’t think that was possible. Annie doubted that this girl was just like her. This girl probably wasn’t totally fine and normal one day and then completely useless the next thanks to a driver who didn’t watch out for kids enjoying a bike ride with their dad. This was humiliating.

‘Yes. That’s right!’ Mrs Terlizzi was giving Annie a headache with her enthusiasm.

Why were they assigning a blind girl to be her buddy? How dare her parents find a school with another blind girl? What was their problem? Of course! Of course they had done this, it was just like them. Annie felt the tears coming. She took a deep breath.

‘She’s just shy,’ her dad boomed. ‘I’m sure they’ll be friends in no time.’

There was more silence until Maeve said, ‘Well, it’s nice to meet you.’

‘Excellent!’ Mrs Terlizzi said, clapping her hands. ‘Time to say goodbye to mum and dad, Antoinette.’

Annie froze. Her hands stopped dead where they had been fidgeting with the hem of her new school jumper. She wasn’t ready to leave her parents. She felt as if they

were chucking her in the deep end of a pool with no swimming lessons and expecting her to win gold in the 100-metre butterfly.

She grabbed onto her mum's arm for dear life. Her dad patted her on the back again. She wished he'd stop doing that. It just made the vomiting sensation worse.

'Don't worry darling,' her mum said softly. 'The day will be over before you know it. And it will be a good change. You'll see.'

'Come on now,' her dad enthused. 'It's exciting!'

'You don't want to be late on your first day!' Mrs Terlizzi said in an *I'm joking but I'm actually serious* voice. But Annie couldn't make herself let go of her mum. Going with these strangers was scary, and Annie would know – she had been through some pretty scary stuff. Her mum wrapped her up in a hug and Annie felt the tears finally spill out of her eyes. They soaked into her mum's soft jumper that smelled like green tea and roses. She felt her mum's hand with its many rings rub circles on her back. Annie was toast. Crying in front of the principal and this Maeve girl on the first day would not be good for her image. Not that she had an image at this school. She wasn't popular or good at netball, or the girl who got a solo at every music concert. She was pathetic, a nobody.

‘It’s time to go, my sweetheart,’ her mum said. ‘I’ll be here waiting for you at the end of the day.’

That was six and a half hours away. She didn’t think she’d make it. Her mum let go and Annie thought she’d fall over.

‘Let’s go introduce you to the rest of your class,’ said Mrs Terlizzi. ‘Ms Cheung is very excited to meet you. And mum and dad will be ready to hear all about it this afternoon.’

Annie still didn’t move. Did they expect her to follow them? She didn’t know her way around this place. She’d been here once and she really hadn’t been paying attention.

‘She’ll need to take your elbow,’ Annie’s mum said in the tone of voice that Annie had come to think of as the *my daughter is disabled and must be protected at all costs* voice. ‘Are you sure we can’t walk with you to the classroom?’

‘No,’ said Mrs Terlizzi, ‘that’s alright. We’ll look after her, won’t we, Maeve?’

‘Sure,’ the Maeve girl said. But she didn’t sound very sure.