

Bone Song

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CHAPTER 1

Melissa

Probably my whole class is laughing at me right now. Goody-goody Melissa McCardle in detention for three whole days after school. I bet they're dying to find out what I did to get here too, but I'm not telling.

This room is the pits. And it stinks. I mean, it really stinks. It's like two basketball teams have left all their sweaty runners in here to go mouldy, then thrown in a few banana peels and apple cores for good measure. There's one tiny window high up, and the room only fits a dozen desks.

God, I'm sitting in the front row again. Why do I do that? I thought I'd cured myself

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of the habit. Footsteps echo along the corridor. Two sets. There's just enough time to throw myself towards the back of the room, school bag first, and reach for a chair. I miss. Of course. When the door opens, I'm lying flat on my face on the floor.

'Miss McCardle, I presume?'

I recognise the voice straight away. It's Mr Feibler, the PE teacher. As I hurry to get up, banging my elbow on a desk so hard I think my arm is going to fall off, all I see is his tanned, hairy legs and his tight, white shorts.

'Yeah, that's me,' I mumble.

'Here's your cellmate. Deborah Lessing.'

'Dobie!' the girl behind him hisses.

Oh no, it's her. Right away, I feel the water from the hose splattering me all over again, my threadbare T-shirt sticking to me, the boys laughing... The red haze rises up in front of my eyes. I take a few deep breaths,

trying to will it back down again. It's got me into trouble once already at this school. I can't afford to let it take over again. But I remember what Dobie did to me. I can't stand the sight of her. This is going to be the longest detention in history.

I keep my eyes focused on Mr Feibler's snow-white Nikes, because that's safer, and listen as he runs through the rules.

'I hope you've both brought homework to do, or at least a book to read.' A snort from Dobie. 'No talking, no leaving the room. Do either of you want to go to the toilet? Because I've got a basketball team to coach. I can't be running backwards and forwards all afternoon. No? Right. I'll check on you every half hour or so.'

He slams the door behind him and his footsteps speed up. He obviously can't wait to get away from us.

'Every half hour. Yeah, right. We'll be lucky if he comes back at all!'

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Well, she would know, wouldn't she? Miss Deborah Lessing, who insists everyone call her Dobie and ignores the ones who call her No-brain. She spends nearly half her afternoons here in this room. I should've remembered that before I went berserk. It's a double punishment, being here with her.

I sit down at the desk in the furthest corner and get out my maths homework. Count this as a blessing, I tell myself, a chance to actually get my homework done properly, in peace. Sometimes it's nearly midnight before I get Mum settled in bed asleep. Homework, by then, gets done in a mad rush.

'You're not actually going to do work, are you?'

She's sitting on the desk by the door, shaking a bottle of dark purple nail polish. I shrug. It's none of her business. 'Don't talk to me.' It snaps out of my mouth before I can stop it.

'Oohh. Afraid I'll corrupt you, sweetie pie? Too late, you're already in here. In

the dungeon with Big Bad Dobie. All hope is gone!’ She sneers, making the rings and studs dotted around her face wiggle. When she sticks out her tongue at me, I see the stud through it and my skin crawls.

‘Just shut up and leave me alone.’ I turn my back on her so I don’t have to look at her ugly, studded face. She is such a weirdo, and she plays on it. She likes to put her heavy boots up on her desk to drive the teachers crazy. She’s been caught smoking heaps of times.

Everyone said she graffitied the wall behind the teachers’ car park with the words ‘School sucks, and teachers suck...’ Half the kids were busting to add their own list of what comes next, but the principal found it in time and got it cleaned off. What Dobie doesn’t know is that *I know she didn’t do it*. I saw some tenth graders spraying the wall, but she still took the blame. I wondered why, but it served her right. She had to pay for the cleaning, or her parents did. From what I hear, they’re revoltingly rich and she gets

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heaps of pocket money. I hope they made *her* pay for it.

I focus on my algebra, trying to ignore the sharp smell of nail polish. Why am I wasting time thinking about a loser like her? I've got more important things on my mind. Like how I'm going to get home before Mum. Or if I don't, what am I going to tell her? She'll freak out if I tell her I got detention. *Don't call attention to yourself.* She must've said it a million times.

The algebra problem blurs on the page. I blink hard. What time is it? Have I only been here for fifteen minutes? Maybe I'll try English instead. Ms Rogers has been reading *Wuthering Heights* to us in class. She must think most of the kids are too dumb to read it on their own. She's probably right. Now we have to write a poem inspired by the story. I hate this kind of thing. I like to write my poems for myself, not for any stupid teacher to criticise. I close my eyes and force myself to imagine the moors, the wind and the dark trees.

‘Hey, you’re not writing that for Roger Ramjet’s class, are you?’ Dobie leans over me and I smell sour cigarettes on her clothes.

‘What if I am?’ I curl my arm around my notebook.

‘You could write one for me. I might even pay you.’

‘Get stuffed. Why can’t you write your own?’

‘Nah, poetry’s not my thing. I like songs better.’

‘So write a song! Just leave me alone.’

She strolls back to the desk by the door, humming, and dumps her bag down, rummaging through it. I peek over my shoulder, even though I couldn’t care less what she’s doing. She’s flicking through a scruffy notebook, a purple pen in her mouth. She keeps humming the same stupid tune over and over, scribbling every now and then.

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She's put me off writing poems now. I'd rather stab her with my pen to get some silence for a change. I go back to algebra, trying to focus on solving the gigantic problem in front of me but it seems like a big mish-mash of letters and numbers that just won't make sense. Once upon a time, I used to be a superstar at maths.

It's her fault I can't concentrate. How am I going to stand being here with her for three whole afternoons? If I'm lucky, this'll be her last day. I ask, 'How long are you in detention for?'

'Huh? Oh, a week this time, I think. I don't know, I lose track.' When she sees my face fall, she says, 'If you can't do the time, don't do the crime.'

'Why are you here so often? Why can't you just...'

'Behave? Conform? Be a little goody like you?'

'I'm not a goody. I... I have to...'

‘Be Mummy’s little girl?’

‘No! Anyway, what’s wrong with getting on OK with your mother?’ For me though it’s more like mummy-sitting half the time.

She laughs, but it sounds like she’s choking. ‘Hey, that’s why I’m always here. So I don’t *have* to go home to my mother.’ Her face darkens, she looks away. ‘Forget I said that. Go back to your homework, *Goody*.’

Before I can respond, she opens the door and leaves.

I hope Mr Feibler comes back, finds her gone and gives her more detention. It’d serve her right. But somehow I think she wouldn’t care at all. Whatever. Not my problem.

My problem might be to get through these three afternoons without killing her.