

The William Project

2/10/17

Dear William,

I don't know why I'm doing this. You're not even real. Mum just said that it would be a good idea if I wrote letters to someone about my feelings. If I got my worries down on paper. Like that would help.

It's not like I can tell anyone – words come from my mouth not quite right. Disfigured, ugly, crude, like a baby's first words. I wish you were real. I wish you weren't just a random name picked from a name generator online. If you were real, I could talk to you and you wouldn't mind if I couldn't quite pronounce my vowels, or my R's or my S's. You would hear me the way I used to sound.

Like before last year.

From Avery, your ever loyal creator.

3/10/17

Dear William,

Have you ever been alone?

I mean really alone. You're surrounded by people but they just drift by like ghosts. Or they tease you with their cold, careless, confident voices.

I guess I'm alone. My old friends have long since deserted me. It's probably because I can't join in their conversation about last night's Starless Skies on the new Shine channel. It's probably because I won't join in their fund-raising photoshoots. It's probably because I'm in all the lower classes now.

I'm not stupid, I'll grant you that. I don't understand why the teachers dumped me in all the lower sets just because my face looks different. Everything's too easy. I breeze through all the work and yet they keep me in set seven, like I'm in prison. I want to get out and re-join my old society.

From Avery, like it would be anyone else.

5/10/17

Dear William,

Sorry I didn't write yesterday – my mum wanted me to get to know my new therapist, Kaitlin. I want to call her Miss Turner, like all of the other teachers, but she insists I call her by her first name, like I'm her friend. I'm not. She's my fifty-two year old therapist, and I am her fourteen year old patient. Nothing more. It's a business relationship and that's all.

However, today was a good day. That's what Kaitlin tells me to call them, so I remember the alright parts more. I was finally accepted into guitar club after weeks of my Mum practically grovelling at the music teacher's feet. Mum told me that I needed to do something I enjoy and make some new friends. Guitar club was okay. At least my hands work the same as they did before, or I'd be stuck, and Kara

was there, which was nice. She's my cousin on my British Dad's side. At the club she didn't talk to me or anything, but I knew her, which, as I said, was nice. Nice not to be completely isolated for a change.

The best thing about the day was that Jonny gave me his spare chocolate bar. It was after I fell face first into the grass outside my tutor room, granted, but it made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. For once, I didn't care if it was out of pity, I just felt happy to be cared about.

From Avery, your ever-loving friend.

9/10/17

Dear William,

~~I'm sorry I didn't write for ages. I~~

11/10/17

Dear William

I looked in the mirror this morning and all I saw was an ugly, messed-up face. Twisted and scrunched up, tired and old and wrinkled and everything.

Kaitlin said I should be kinder to myself. That I am my worst critic. But I can't help it. Instead, I wish I could peel off my skin and become a new person. Like a snake shedding its skin. I wish my brown skin would just shed away and become pearly white like everyone else's. Just because my Mum is from Syria it doesn't mean that I am different or evil. She came here for refuge and asylum, not to blow people up.

But still, that man pulled up and suddenly I was Ugly and twisted. "Go back to your own country!" he yelled. This is my country.

From Avery, as usual.

12/10/17

Dear William,

This was definitely a Good Day. Mrs Ruebens finally moved me up a set in Geography. Only three more sets to go and I'll be at the top again. Like it was before last year.

I still can't get my head around why they moved me down when I became Ugly. I can't speak as well, yes, but just because I look different does not mean I am suddenly less clever than I was before.

I can do everything I could do before. More, if anything. I know more about the world.

And the people. I know a lot more about the people.

From Avery, obviously.

13/10/17

Dear William,

Imagine Sharpay from High School Musical mixed with Draco Malfoy from Harry Potter mixed with Margo Roth Spiegelmen from Paper Towns. That's Marnie Crescent. I call her that. I don't know her real name because she's in the year above me. She's probably called Ethel Brown or something. But just from watching her I've come up with this whole character.

She's the ultimate celebrity. She's dated a different person each year since she was ten. She's mean, but doesn't care, and shows it. She just paints on her make-up and tousles her stylish dark hair, then leaps up on stage and plays her part. She enters school inconsistently but if she ever leaves school, she has her boys by her side and a cigarette between her lips.

Today I saw her kiss a good looking boy, and I wondered if anyone would ever love me the way I loved them? Or would I always be classed as one of the updateables, someone who no one is ever attracted to?

From Avery

14/10/17

Dear William,

Kaitlin has given me a new strategy to boost my confidence, speaking out. I guess this doesn't mean speaking in any more. No more swearing or yelling in my head when someone has a go at me.

This means telling people how I feel. And I'm not sure if I'm okay with that.

From Avery

15/10/17

Dear William,

Today I had an idea.

Speaking out is one way of getting my view across, but what about public speaking? In a few days' time there's going to be a public speaking competition at school. Its open to all years, and the task is to create a speech that can be spoken in an assembly of choice.

Kaitlin says I should push myself to do it, and so does Mum. But it seems so far away. Like I'm walking on a hazardous road where cars come zooming past, and I'm trying to get to the barrel of gold at the end of it.

But what is the barrel of gold anyway? Me being totally cured? That will never happen. I will always look Ugly and I will never be able to speak properly again. I will never get a good job or a good partner. But maybe the barrel of gold isn't that. Maybe it's happiness.

From Avery x

16/10/17

Dear William,

I'm not going to do it. I can't decide on what to talk about and people will only laugh at me. I'd rather stay cowering in the corner where I'm safe.

From Avery

20/10/17

Dear William,

I'm going to do it.

Kaitlin and I had a big chat. She sat me down with a mug of hot chocolate and a plateful of biscuits, then gave me a piece of paper and a pen. She told me to draw something I'm interested in. Anything. I drew a picture of Harry Potter of course.

Then she did something that went way beyond the limits of Dumbledore's magical skills.

She said, 'Write five words to describe the story of Harry Potter.' So I did. Then she suggested I write a small paragraph for each word. Then she suggested I read them out loud. Then she said, 'There's your speech.'

From Avery x

21/10/17

Dear William,

Mum and I looked at my speech and tweaked it to make it more sophisticated. We spent hours looking up interesting words on good old Google to add to it. I also threw in a few jokes, facts and figures, and suddenly it was three pages long.

I'm okay with reading it to her, but when she invited the neighbours over to hear it too, I couldn't say a word. It was like they were caught in my throat.

So I called Kaitlin on my new iPhone and we had a talk about nerves. She said, 'Take it one person at a time.' Now every time I read it a new person listens. And that's okay.

From Avery xx

22/10/17

Dear William,

I've reached up to five people now. The frustrating this is. I know them all. Mum, Dad, Kaitlin and Jack and Mickey next door. The thing I'm most worried about is Marnie Crescent, who will be in the audience when I read out my speech because I've been allocated with year ten.

Before I wasn't scared of her. Now I am.

I was walking up the corridor this morning when she was walking down the other way and she smirked at me. I said, 'What?' and she asked me whether I'd had an accident. The sarcasm in her voice was humiliating. But that wasn't all.

She reached into her Chanel bag and pulled out a plastic bag of plasticine. By then I was already on my way, quickening my pace, but she pulled me to a side and showed me her shaping something out of the plasticine.

A face. My face.

I ran off then but she began throwing the stuff at me in little balls.

"You need to be with your own kind!" she yelled, laughing. The plasticine got stuck in my hair, my nose, my ears. All over me.

I was drowning in myself.

From Avery

23/10/17

Dear William,

I didn't tell anyone about Marnie apart from you. Mum wants me to show my speech to my English teacher but I don't want to. I don't want to do the speech anymore.

From Avery

30/10/17

Dear William,

It's Halloween tomorrow and I'm dreading it. Year after year my family go out trick or treating, and I put on a simple black cloak, but still, people scream the most at me.

I heard a rumour circulating around school last year that the Wat twins in year eight had seen a zombie. A real life zombie.

Turns out, they had seen me.

And now I'm not doing the speech, I have nothing better to do with my time than worry. Worry all day, worry all night.

Every single atom of my existence is full of fear.

From Avery

1/11/17

Dear William,

I stayed in yesterday instead of trick or treating. Mum asked what was up and I opened up about Marnie. I ended up crying quite a lot. Mum hugged me and phoned up Kaitlin, who's coming round today for a chat.

The thing is, I need to do that speech to prove I still have self-worth. After all, for light to be seen, there has to be dark.

From Avery x

2/11/17

Dear William,

I'm doing the speech very soon, and guess what, I showed my English teacher what I'd written!

She smiled in kind of a sad way, and said I was definitely going to be moved up a set! She said she was going to miss me. She was going to miss me.

Today has been very good overall. But what really made my day was the new student, Jordan Green, letting me sit with them at lunch. Jordan Green has a nice smile, and seems kind.

I hope I become better friends with Jordan Green.

From Avery xx

4/11/17

Dear William,

Monday is the day! My speech will be spoken. I'm really nervous but Mum, Kaitlin and Jordan Green have been very supportive. I don't care in any way, shape or form if I lose, I just have an urge to speak out, even if it is about Harry Potter! ☺

From Avery xx

8/11/17

Dear William,

I did it. I spoke out in front of hundreds of, in all honesty, brutally judgmental teenagers.

And it was good!

My legs were trembling so much that even my eyes were shaking and I couldn't see properly. But I got the words out. I don't care about the sniggers from Marnie or her followers – they mean nothing to me anymore. They are silly glitches in the game of life.

And in that game, I'm on Cloud Nine.

From Avery xxx

9/11/17

Dear William,

I'm going to say bye now. For good, I mean. What I see in the mirror is a unique face and I've accepted who I am. I may not look like an angel but at least I'm me again. Jordan Green and I are always together, I don't need Kaitlin anymore and Marnie's out of my life. (Turns out her name is Chrysanthemum)

What I look doesn't matter to me anymore.

Here I am. I'm alive. I'm shining.

For the last time, From Avery xxx

P.S Thank you, William.

**By Freya, Year 9
Penrice Academy**