

Dear H

15th July

Dear H,

I hate myself!! Do I shock you? You may think that's an awful thing to say, but it's true. I hate the way I look. I hate to look at myself in the mirror.

If you came to our house, you'd see beautifully framed photographs of my Mum, Veronica, when she was young. They are scattered about all over the place, in the hallway, on top of bookshelves, hanging on the wall. You can't escape from them. She's always smiling happily in these photographs. She had something to smile about.

When she was my age, she was tall, slim and drop-dead gorgeous. She still is. Her long straight hair is as blonde and shiny as ever. It always seems to keep in perfect shape, even when it's windy. Her eyes, truly, are the colour of cornflowers and they are framed by the longest, thickest lashes. She doesn't even need to wear mascara. Wherever she goes, she makes an impact. People turn and stare in admiration, especially the men! I can't imagine any guy would ever look at me in that way when I'm older.

I'm not like her at all. I can't understand who I look like, certainly not like my tall willowy Mum or my super fit looking Dad. I don't seem to resemble either of my parents. I absolutely hate having my photograph taken. I hate

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looking in the mirror. I hate what I see. My face is round, pale and podgy, and it's covered with zits and freckles and I've got small, dark eyes that look like currants! And then there's my hair! Yuck!! I suppose the nearest description to a colour is copper, a bit like the colour of toffee, but it's dull and has a mind of its own. The problem is, it spirals out in all directions. Mum complained again this morning, "Amanda, you really must wash your hair every day. It looks like the back of a haystack!"

She's always moaning about something! If it's not my hair then it's my clothes, my room, my homework, etc. I can't remember the last time she said anything good about me. I suppose when I do really look at my hair, which I try not to do very often, I have to agree with her. It is dull and greasy but every time I wash it, it springs out more than ever so I try not to wash it. I tie it back but straggly bits always seem to escape and it never looks great.

At last, now that I'm home, I can change out of my dreadful school uniform, which makes me look like a parcel tied up with string. I have to wear this disgusting, shapeless, washy-green shirt buttoned up to the neck. Then there's the brown and green striped tie which makes me feel as though I'm choking. I just haven't got the hang of tying it properly and so it always looks as though the knot is slipping and I get into trouble for being untidy. Added to this is a dark brown pleated skirt that has to cover the knees, except that mine seems to not only cover my knees, it's almost approaching my ankles. That's the problem with being so short and podgy. Then there's

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a brown blazer with the school badge emblazoned on the pocket, beige ankle socks, brown flat leather lace-up shoes and to top it all, in winter, there's a brown beret, again with the school badge on the front. I've left the worse item until last. I'm sure you'll laugh – it's a straw boater with ribbon encircling the brim in brown, green and gold stripes. This is part of the summer uniform. I ask you? It sucks!! Before I forget, it's compulsory for us to wear the head gear on our journey to and from school. If we are seen without it, we are given detention. I always feel such an idiot and can't wait to arrive home so I can change.

I've now changed into my favourite tee-shirt, the one with the glitter purple on the front. I always change into this shirt when I arrive home from school, although glitter purple isn't really me and I wouldn't be seen dead in it outside as it's too tight. The reason I wear it is because it reminds me of my favourite singing star. I've seen a photo of her wearing a similar one although she looks a 'million dollars' in hers. Mum bought it for me when I was two sizes smaller. Before Mum arrives home, I cover my shirt with a big daggy old one so Mum can't see how ridiculous I look. I wear it with my track pants. At least they are comfy. Mum hates them and says, "You've got a wardrobe of beautiful clothes. Why do you have to wear those dreadful old pants and that hideous shirt?"

She obviously hasn't REALLY looked at me recently, otherwise she'd realise that all the clothes in my wardrobe are too small for me.

See yer,

Dear H

Mandy

PS

I've just re-read what I've written. I can't believe it! Dear H..... it sounds as though I am writing to a REAL PERSON! I think the 'H' should really stand for 'HELP' because I'm beginning to think that's what I need. I can't believe I've actually admitted it. I'm writing to someone WHO DOESN'T EVEN EXIST!! An imaginary friend at my age! I'd better keep this journal hidden otherwise people will think I'm going crazy! If Mum found out she'd be yanking me off to the nearest psyche.

When I received this journal and matching pen set, for a present from Gran, I hadn't a clue what I was going to use it for. It sat in my drawer carefully wrapped in tissue paper for a long while, and then, the idea came to me that I'd use it as a diary so I can write down all about my secret thoughts and feelings. I'm beginning to think writing to you, H, would be fun. You could be the friend I've always wanted! Help!

Dear H

1st August

Dear H,

Piggy, Piggy, Piggy!!! I can't get it out of my head! I hate it! "There you go again," I can hear you say!

Sorry, but I have to let off steam and I haven't anyone else to rant and rave to. Piggy is my nickname at school. There, I've admitted it. I've really had it up to here! When I stepped off the bus, coming home from school, the school bully, Cassandra, had to shout, "Bye Piggy! Fat bum! Bye Piggy!"

Even people walking along the street heard her and stared at me in a strange way as the bus raced off into the distance. I fixed my gaze on the pavement, pretended to ignore her and everyone else but deep down, I felt as if I wanted to crawl up into a tiny ball and roll away and never be seen again. Have you ever felt like that? I had to try really hard to stop the tears from escaping and rolling down my cheeks. I felt humiliated. It's not the first time she's done it, and I know it won't be the last.

Cassandra is ice-cold and calculating and she knows it gets to me and that's why she does it. She's always surrounded by her buddies and I can feel them smirking at me even if I'm not looking at them. When I walk into a classroom, they're always whispering and then they stop as soon as they see me and burst out laughing. I'd just love to get my own back but I don't

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know how I can on my own. I feel so isolated as if the whole world is against me. I'm going to start crying. I only do it when there's no one around and it's becoming a habit. I will look worse than ever!

I'm feeling a bit better now, even though I've got red circles around my eyes, my cheeks are blotchy and my nose is sore with all the blowing. I'd better splash it with cold water before Mum sees me.

St Ursula's College, which is the private girls' school I attend, is a nightmare from which I never escape. The fear hovers around me from when I wake up to when I go to bed. It's no better at the weekends. I never want to get out of bed, for as soon as I wake up, there is always something to remind me of school, like the homework, and when Sunday arrives, I spend all day worrying about Monday and what terrible things it will bring with it.

Mum insists I carry my mobile phone with me at all times. She says I need it for emergencies. If she only knew my life is a permanent emergency, but she isn't aware of that. Everyone at school has a mobile phone. They are always texting each other with stupid messages which they seem to find hilarious or they are sending really hurtful texts to me. I don't know how they got my number but the texts began to appear. Some of the things they say are really gross – too terrible for me to repeat even to you. I don't feel as though I have any peace from them as they never let up. As if that isn't

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enough, I've been sent threatening emails. I can't understand how they got my email address as I've never given it to them.

I got to the point where I couldn't stand it anymore. I felt as though I was a prisoner in my own home. It was bad enough with the offensive comments on the bus, but with all this other stuff – it's too hard. I've decided the only way to cope is for me to delete the emails without opening them and keep the phone switched off. I've felt so desperate; I've now hidden the phone in a case at the back of my walk-in-robe.

Mum keeps complaining that she can't contact me because my phone is always switched off. I have to keep making excuses. I would love to tell her why but I'm frightened. I'm scared of telling anyone, especially at school, as it's sure to cause a terrible fuss and then Cassandra and her buddies will make my life even more unbearable than it is already. I'm on the edge as it is. If only my favourite singer's lyrics were true,

'Upside down

Inside out,

The warmth of the sun

Will dry your tears,

And there'll be no more fears.'

Love,

Amanda

Dear H

PS

I've been thinking about phoning one of the hotlines for kids to talk to one of their counsellors about what is going on. I copied the number down when I saw it flash onto the TV screen. Every time I think about phoning the hotline, I get cold feet and break out in a sweat. My heart starts beating at twice its normal rate. It's not as though it's just one problem and I wouldn't know where to begin. Perhaps I'll phone another day.

Dear H

1st September

Dear H,

I don't fit in with the majority of the girls at school, not the ones in my class anyway. All they seem to think about is how they appear to other people, whether they look cool, where they are going on holiday, which boys fancy them and the list goes on. I have to admit to you (but to no one else) that I haven't any friends, not one. How desperate does that make me sound?

One Sunday a short while ago, Mum decided to hold a fashion party at our house. Fashion is her life. Did I tell you that she owns a chain of boutiques? It was a charity event which included a three course lunch. A lot of the mothers of the girls from school decided that they would come and - horror of horrors - Cassandra's mother decided it would be a great idea if all of the mothers attended with their daughters. It's bad enough having to see the girls at school every day but having them altogether in our house on a Sunday, I can't think of anything worse. I tried thinking of all sorts of reasons why the girls couldn't come but Mum thought having the girls attend was the most marvellous idea. She couldn't understand why I didn't want the girls there and said, "Amanda, you are such a spoil sport."

Mum then decided that it would be a brilliant idea to include some teen fashions and asked Cassandra and her friends to be models. She really hurt

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me when she said, “It’s a shame you can’t be a model Amanda. Clothes always look better on slim girls.”

I was really dreading the event. Mum made such a big thing of it. She was in her element arranging the lunch menus, the flowers, the music, etc. A week before the event I was having daily migraines and by the time Sunday arrived, I had worked myself up into such a frenzy, I felt as though I would explode. I was so queasy with nerves that during the lunch I had to keep excusing myself and bolting off to the bathroom. Of course Mum kept commenting on it, “Goodness me, Amanda, can’t you sit still for two minutes?”

That started everyone making their own snide comments whilst they nudged each other and tried not to giggle every time I stood up and excused myself. This made the situation worse than ever. My face became redder each time and I contemplated locking the bathroom door and staying there until everyone had left. I knew that would cause more of a fuss than ever, so I had no choice but to put on my brave face and try to laugh it off.

After lunch Mum suggested I take the girls upstairs and show them my room. I replied that I didn’t think they’d be interested but, of course, they all wanted to see it. My room has always been decorated by the top interior designers in consultation with Mum and not particularly in the style I’d choose. I’d prefer my walls to be plastered with posters of my favourite vocalists, and all my stuffed toys scattered around.

Dear H

Mum had to have a 'theme' for my bedroom design. She's mad on themes! So, I've ended up with a 'dream' theme with frills on everything possible, funky beaded lamps, sequined cushions in bright pinks and a mini dream catcher hanging from the bed post! It is very 'girly' and cool if you like that sort of thing, but I'm not that keen. Looking at me, you wouldn't describe me as 'girly' would you?

For once there wasn't anything there the girls could fault me on. You could see that they were impressed with the 'dream' theme by the envious expressions on their faces all except Cassandra who stuck her nose in the air, folded her arms, hunched her shoulders and began taking loud breaths that everyone could hear. She certainly did a good job of pretending to be bored. She's sure to discuss my room, pull it to pieces and convince all of the girls to be on her side and make my life even more miserable next week. Of course Mum had made sure that anyone going into any of the rooms in the house would be impressed. That's what is important to her.

By then, it was time for the fashion parade. Cassandra and the selected models slipped away to change into their tiny size 6 outfits. Cassandra couldn't help but make me feel more of a frump than ever, by announcing loudly in her crystal clear voice, "What a pity there isn't a dress small enough for you Amanda. You'd need elephant size!!"

Of course, everyone laughed even the adults. It's just not fair. It's an awful thing to say, but I don't believe anyone really likes me for who I am. No one

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really knows the real me hidden under all of this fat. I feel like an unborn baby. Everyone knows it's there but it's an unknown identity at this stage. I feel as though I want to be reborn. Don't laugh, I'm desperate to be the real me – all of you Pop Princesses, watch out.

From your 'frumpy fat friend'

Amanda

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