

*The GIRLS stand at the front of the stage facing the audience.*

GIRLS Slut

Skank

Sket

Ho

Prossie

Whore

Slag

Tart

Tramp

Hussy

Floozie

Ho-bag

Slapper

You deserve everything coming to you

Skanky Scarlett

Slutty Scarlett

Scarlett the Harlot

Slut

Slut

Slut

Slut

Slut

Slut

Slut

Slut.

*Beat.*

*Music. 'Run the World (Girls)' by Beyoncé. The GIRLS put on headphones. The GIRLS sing along and dance – a routine they've clearly practised before. The music suddenly stops. The GIRLS take off their headphones. Five years old.*

When Scarlett arrives her hair is in these two messy pigtail braids, and she has Ribena stained around her mouth.

We are five years old. I am by the sandbox making a princess castle that more accurately resembles a large horse's shit.

I am by the water tub – I like the way the water feels when it runs through the little blonde hairs on my wrist.

I'm on the carpet picking my nose still unsure why this lady who looks like Nanny McPhee is to replace my mother when another girl makes a beeline straight for me. She sits right next to me, our knees touching. And I know I am special. I have been chosen.

My mother told me not to pick my nose in public.

My mother told me not to bite my nails.

My mother told me not to be so loud.

What my mother told me means nothing on the first day of reception at St Helen's School for Girls.

Clearly my mother is an idiot. I have been duped. Because the girl picking her nose with the chewed-down pinky is now sitting next to the most popular girl in class. I will never listen to my mother again.

St Helen's is a special school. I know this because my mother told me so.

St Helen's is a special school because it only accepts twenty five-year-olds each year, selected for our gifted academic ability and creative potential to think outside the box, demonstrated through a test with questions like 'Sophie has a car with only one working door. She has five friends who each take forty-five seconds to enter through the door and get in their seat. How many of them will be seated ninety seconds after Sophie unlocks the door?'

All of them. The car is a convertible.

St Helen's is special because me and these twenty girls

These twenty girls and I will progress through the next seven years of primary together, always the same classmates, the same twenty girls, forging long-lasting friendships, and bonds of camaraderie and sisterhood. My mother would call this special. I would call this hell.

Twenty girls from different parts of the city, different backgrounds, who might not otherwise have ever crossed paths.

If only.

But here at St Helen's, in this grey classroom we will become a family. A Benetton ad. In prison.

I live on a farm. We have chickens. And every time we get some new hens, it starts again – it lasts no more than five minutes, but they battle it out, to determine the pecking order. They jump on each other's backs, push the other with their chests, rip feathers out of each other with their beaks. They go until it's clear who goes where in the hierarchy. My brother, he's older, he's seven, he cries whenever this happens, tries to pull them apart, the referee. But I am a five-year-old girl. I stand back and watch. I understand.

At St Helen's we are civilised little girls. We humans are much more clever than hens. We do not need to fight. We know it, the pecking order.