

Chapter 1

The ring

On Sarah Gregson's sixteenth birthday, her father Robert gave her a gold ring.

'My dear girl,' said Robert fondly, 'I tried to find a ring beautiful enough for you. It was too hard. This was the best I could find.'

Sarah's face went red. Then she smiled. She knew she was not beautiful, but she loved her father. 'I will wear it all day at school,' she said. She put the ring on her finger. She gave Robert a kiss.

'I'm glad you like it,' said Robert.

Sarah knew the ring had cost a lot of money. She hoped her father had not spent too much. Robert had to work hard to look after himself and Sarah, because Sarah's mother had left them when Sarah was very young.

At the beginning of the year, Sarah and Robert had moved to a new city, and Sarah had started at a new school. Sarah did not like the school. She hadn't made any real friends there. Robert had to move to where he could find work. Sarah understood, but she missed all her friends from her old school. She wished she could see some of them again.

There were nasty girls at this school. Jill Cleary was the worst. Jill was beautiful. All the boys liked her. Jill was nasty to Sarah all the time. She bullied Sarah just because Sarah had spots on her face.

It was Monday morning. The students in Sarah's English class were waiting outside their room for their teacher, Miss Hanson. Sarah stood at the back of the line, away from Jill and her friends. Jill saw Sarah and walked over to her. Jill's friends came too, smiling.

'How are you today, Spotty?' said Jill.



'Leave me alone,' said Sarah quietly.

'Don't tell *me* what to do,' said Jill. She pushed Sarah. 'I can talk to anyone I like.'

Jill's friends laughed. Two boys were watching, but they didn't help Sarah. They turned away. No one stopped Jill doing what she wanted. Everyone wanted to be her friend.

Jill saw the ring on Sarah's finger, and her eyes grew wide. 'That's a beautiful ring,' Jill said. 'Who gave you that?'

'My father,' said Sarah. She tried to put the ring behind her back, but Jill caught her arm.

'Very beautiful,' said Jill. 'Too beautiful for a girl like you. It only makes your face look more ugly!'

Sarah tried to pull away, but Jill was too strong. Jill took the ring off Sarah's finger.

'No!' said Sarah. 'Give it back!'

'Why?' said Jill.

Sarah tried to fight her, and Jill laughed. Jill was taller, and she always had her friends to help her. Now Jill's friends held Sarah. Sarah couldn't get to Jill, or the ring. She began to cry. She had to get her ring back! She tried again and again, but Jill's friends still held her.

'What's going on here?' It was Miss Hanson, the English teacher.

'It's just Sarah Gregson, Miss Hanson,' Jill said sadly. 'She was trying to steal my ring from me. A ring my father gave me. The poor girl. She really doesn't know right from wrong.'

'That's not true!' said Sarah.

Sarah knew that Miss Hanson liked Jill. All the teachers liked Jill because she did so well in class.

'Sarah Gregson!' Miss Hanson said angrily. 'Stealing and bullying are not accepted in this school! I want you to think about that. Stand outside the classroom until the end of the lesson. All you other students get into class...now!'



The students went into the classroom. Sarah stood outside in the hall. She tried not to cry. It was her ring!

Down the hall, Sarah saw a strange boy. He was looking at her. He was younger than she was – maybe thirteen. He had short, black hair and his eyes looked too big for his head.

'What are you looking at?' Sarah shouted.

The boy was surprised. He walked away.

Sarah felt bad about shouting at the boy. He hadn't done anything wrong. She didn't want to be like Jill Cleary, making people feel bad for no reason. She was not a bully.

The next time I see him I'll say sorry, she thought.