

OUR CLASS

by Nika Matanović

THE YEAR 2013

Sabrina

The odd one.

The first of September. Here again. What may be a completely normal day for some is an enormously important day for school kids. The day when we are cruelly torn from the carefree leisurely holidays. The day when the joys of swimming, relaxing in the shade and the feeling of airy, endless light-heartedness, as though you are made out of cotton wool come to an end. Then all of a sudden POOF, and the wicked claws of teachers' drag us back in. The monotony of tests, exams, dusty textbooks and studying that, no matter which way you look at it, has no point. Here comes the staring into the scowling faces of teachers, the faces of class Barbies (who you can recognise by the panda-like black liner around their eyes and meticulously combed hair), and the faces of childish boys whose gazes have started moving away from computer games and towards the girl's backsides.

I awoke as soon as the sunlight shined on my closed eyes. Or at least I guess so, as there are roller blinds on the windows and the sun's rays are pouring through their tiny little holes. I found it hard to open my eyes and when I realised that the two months of no Barbies and idiots was over I gave up, pulling my blanket over my head and shutting my eyes tight again. If I go to sleep, I might just wake up around half past twelve and by then it will be so late mum won't be able to make me go to school.

The supermodels and zombies will be rotting away listening to the words of wisdom delivered by (tough) teachers while I lie here in this lovely, solitary darkness.

"Well, I see you're up already!"

Oh, no! The wonderful black darkness was suddenly cast away by light and the shadow of my mother appeared. Mums really are impossible. Even if you don't say a word, they are right there, breathing down your neck. That, or I might just be having regular panic attacks.

Mum goes to sit on the bed and starts stroking my hair. I hate people doing that! I hate my hair! They are so long and ridiculous. If I didn't wear an oversized top, beret and torn jeans (that I, by the way, drew on myself), you wouldn't be able to tell me apart from the Barbies.

"Muuuum..."

"Yes?"

"I'm not feeling well. It feels like elephants are stomping around in my stomach and my head weighs a ton!"

"Don't be silly! You're just nervous."

She sighs blissfully and stares into the wall with a giddy smile on her face.

"Just think how lucky you are, honey. You'll get to see your friends again, you'll enjoy yourself. I wish I was in your shoes!"

"Yeah, cos' there is nothing better than rotting away behind a school desk, listening to the pointless blathering of the old geezers teaching us, then also having to listen to the limited vocabulary of the Barbies and idiots!"

“You may think you’ve got it tough, just wait until you start going to work and have to look after a husband and children day and night! In comparison to that, school is like a holiday!”
“You’re just exaggerating!”

She rolled her eyes. Her mum then promptly changes the topic of the conversation. How typical of her!

“Maybe we can do something together after school. What do you say to finally redecorating your room?”

My room is not the typical room of a thirteen-year-old girl. When I was younger, I had wallpaper covered in ponies that I’ve since torn off in places, while in other places the faded memories of my childhood still remain. Instead of walls covered in posters of singers and actors, mine were covered in Greenpeace slogans, pictures of endangered animals and hungry children from around the world, as well as some of my dad’s pictures. To be clear, they are not picture OF my dad, but HIS pictures. He is a photographer and works for *National Geographic*.

I miss him. Other kids my age get to see their dads every day, I only get to see mine on birthdays and holidays. I’m not complaining about my mum, but I sometimes get a bit sick and tired of her cliché parenting methods where she tries to turn me into a typical thirteen-year-old girl.

Luckily there are days when my dad takes a break from all the indigenous people, exotic plants and colourful animals and comes home to see mum, my brother and me, never forgetting to bring me some of my favourite chocolate from the airport.

The next day we go to the cinema, go round the shops, to McDonalds and, if the weather is nice, on a trip. Considering that we are usually a few continents apart, he bombards my brother and me with all sorts of questions.

“How is school going?”

“Have you read any good books?” (This one is mainly for me, my brother couldn’t care less about the written word.)

“And how about your football?” (Aimed at my brother as I couldn’t care less about sport.)

“Any new crushes?” (A question for both of us, but if you ask me it’s my brother who should answer as I think boys are GROSS.)

“How are things with mum?” (Aimed at me. He always asks this when mum isn’t around and my brother is preoccupied playing GTA.)

Everyone has a confidant in their lives. Someone to confide in at any time. Someone who won’t judge you. Someone who will always be on your side. The majority of girls my age have a best friend who they plan their life together with like Beverly Hills celebrities. But for me, it’s my dad who is my closest friend.

Time always passes too quickly when we are together. We leave no topic untouched, and after discussing films, books and life in foreign lands we move on to more serious things.

For example about how I don't quite fit in at school, and what he thinks of my drawings, and then we begin talking about mum.

My mum. What can I say about my mum, she is a warm, kind person and full of energy. But what she lacks is understanding.

Even when I was small and still drawing with crayons – if anyone had asked me then what puberty is, I would have said it was surely a kind of space ship –, she was already ready and prepared for those teenage years, the awkward stage, hormonal years, adolescence...also known as puberty.

She read every possible parenting book. We have enough at home to fill a library. She can list every physical change that a teenage girl goes through and – what is more important – she can describe every single psychological change. She is ready to face any challenge: first time going out, first boyfriends, best friends... In fact, she couldn't wait until her little girl started experiencing all of these things.

But unfortunately, this is where I let her down. On Friday nights I like to stay at home reading books or watching Oscar-winning films, boys look at me like I'm E.T., and the less I say about best friend options (of which there are NONE), the better.

But it can't be my fault that I happen to be a little different from those girly, squealing and pink teenage girls, can it? Just because some stupid book has something written in it, it doesn't mean that we all have to follow it to a letter. I bet that somewhere, maybe in the neighbouring street, maybe on the other side of the planet, a girl my age is sulking in her room, bitterly hiding her uniqueness and stifling it in the bland colours of other people. Well, it's not like I haven't accepted the fact that I can't be like everyone else in the world, but still, every so often, the gnawing feeling of low self-esteem creeps up on me.

"Dad, can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Am I normal?"

"Sweetie, you're better than normal. You are completely un-normal and that is the best thing about you!"