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Opening extract from
**The Taming of
Lilah May**

Written by
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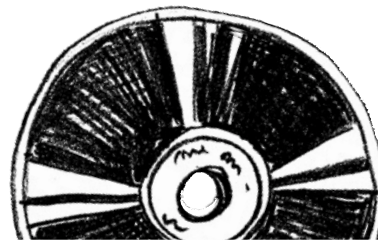
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The
TAMING
of
Lilah May



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Vanessa
Curtis

F
FRANCES LINCOLN
CHILDREN'S BOOKS



For Susan, in memory of Sarah.

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CHAPTER ONE

Uh-oh.

I've done it now.

And I don't even really care.

I step over Amelie Warner where she's lying stunned on the floor and I sit back down at my desk, heart pounding and hands clenched.

Miss Gorman is bearing down on me like a swirling tornado of wrath, all flapping grey cardigan and flopping pearl necklace. I catch a whiff of the revolting perfume that she insists on wearing and I begin to feel like a bowl of instant whip being whisked up into a stiff peak, except that instead of being pink and sweet, I'm angry and red as if somebody's bled into the bowl.

'May!' she says. 'Get to the front of the class. NOW.'

I get up and drag my feet towards the blackboard and make vile faces while my back is turned to the rest of the class.

'Copy the first page of this book onto the blackboard,' she says. 'And make it quick.'

She hands me a Natural History book and I start writing up some rubbish about frogs and ponds with a piece of chalk that makes the hair on my arms stand to attention every time I scratch it across the board. I can't be bothered, so I just chalk up the words 'I can't be bothered', over and over, until the class starts sniggering and she turns around.

Next, I write the word '*Groo*'. No, even that word isn't strong enough for me today.

I woke up in the blackest, foulest mood you can imagine.

The wind was howling up and down our street and the sky looked as if somebody had switched the lights off for good.

My mother forced me to eat lumpy porridge while she applied her weird make-up at the kitchen table, and my father left for work with a dart gun over his shoulder. I was left staring at the picture of that boy on our fridge, and asking myself for about the zillionth time, *Why?*

And as usual, there was a silence only filled by the hum of the fridge, and the kitchen threatened to swallow me up with my own thoughts, so in the end I slung my bag over my shoulder and headed here to school to try and drown out my anger.

And now the Gorman has stormed up to the blackboard and is hanging over me like a grey boulder rocking out of balance on the edge of a craggy cliff – one more push from me and she'll tumble down, crushing all life out of my weary body.

Go on, says the angry voice in my head. *Just do it.*

I drop the chalk on the floor and slowly grind it to a white, powdery mess under my black school shoes.

There's an audible gasp from the more sensitive members of the class.

Out of the corner of my eye I see my best mate, Bindi, bury her dark head in her arms and shake it slowly from side to side.

Miss Gorman gets a dustpan and brush and sweeps up the chalk with short, abrupt gestures.

Then she grabs me by the shoulders, propels me out of the door, down the corridor with its lines of lockers and smell of old cabbage, and onto the bench outside the headmistress's office.

'I don't know what's got into you, May,' she says. The anger has gone out of her now, and she's kind of sunk into a pile of grey clothes next to me. Her warm shoulder presses up against mine. I don't move, even though I kind of want to.

'I mean – we know about your situation at home. But surely you must be ready to try and get on with your life by now? Was there really any need to push another pupil off their chair?'

An image of Amelie Warner lying stunned on the floor, her eyes wide with fear, flashes through my head and I feel the first wave of horrid guilt wash over me.

'She was teasing me about my parents,' I say. 'She said that it's no wonder I've turned out to be a freak.'

Miss Gorman sighs and shakes her head.

'Oh, Lilah,' she says. 'Striking out is not the answer. You do know that, don't you?'

For a moment I catch her eye and she looks concerned, like a real person and not just a teacher. I feel bad for about a nano-second. It's not her fault that I'm angry. She carries on with her firm gaze and it's tempting to tell her everything.

But I'm too tired. How can I explain that I'm sick

of my parents being obsessed with their jobs, and that there is a huge great vacuum in our house that just won't fill up?

The light outside the headmistress's office changes from red to green.

That's my cue to go inside.

I get up and let Miss Gorman open the door for me.

'Lilah May, Miss Hendricks,' she says with a weary smile. 'Again.'

Then she pushes me inside and disappears.

I hear her heels clicking back down the shiny corridor and the faint bang of the classroom door.

Then I sit down in the black leather chair to await my fate.



CHAPTER TWO

LILAH'S ANGER DIARY MARCH 6th

ANGER LEVELS: 9/10

I got another detention. The headmistress told me that if I get one more, I'll be expelled. I felt kind of excited when she said that 'cos I hate school. Then I felt guilty thinking about Mum and Dad, and how they save and budget so that they can afford to send me there.

Then the guilt and the excitement just got drowned in another big wave of red rage, so I skived off the last lesson of the day and sat on the swings in the park, kicking at the gravel until the black leather on the toe of my shoe was all streaked with white dust.

Adam Carter, the hottest boy in the entire world,

was sitting on the swings when I got there. He was bunking off Chemistry, so we got talking, and now I've agreed to meet up with him later on. Mum will go mental if I tell her about it so I'm going to have to rope in Bindi to do some covering up for me.

Bindi texted me to find out where I was. She came and sat on the swing next to me and asked me what my anger feels like. But I couldn't explain it while she was looking at me with her big, serious eyes, so I've saved it to write in my diary instead.

This is what my anger feels like:

Kicking a door really hard when I've forgotten to put my trainers on.

Someone's nails digging into my palm until my eyes water and the blood rushes around my ears.

A screw stuck into my chest and being tightened with a screwdriver.

A barbecue set alight in my stomach, and little spits and hisses of heat shooting up around my soft guts.

Burning hot rain falling from a dark red sky.

I've been angry for two years.

I'm angry most of the time.

No.

Not most.

Make that all.

