

Section A: Reading Passage Insert

The following is taken from a novel that deals with themes such as growing up and relationships. In this passage, Lottie begins to question her friendships.

‘Lottie? Lottie, are you all right?’

It’s a girl called Hannah, who sits behind me in maths. We’ve never even spoken before. My friends – Saffy, Topaz, Melanie – are all too busy squealing and flapping their hands under their noses, hoping to delay the start of class, to notice that anything is wrong.

- 5 Hannah grabs my bag and marches me to the door. ‘Miss! Lottie’s having an asthma¹ attack! I’m going to take her outside!’

The supply teacher doesn’t know the protocol. She should be the one taking me to the nurse. She wavers while Hannah opens the door and pushes me gently into the corridor.

‘I’ll take her to the school nurse,’ she says firmly.

- 10 ‘I could take her,’ I hear Saffy say, but we’re already outside.

‘Is your inhaler in your bag?’ she asks. She sounds so calm. No wonder the teacher trusted her.

I can’t speak, but I nod and gesture to the outer pocket. Hannah finds the inhaler and hands it to me. I inhale. My lungs feel like they are bursting, but when I count to ten and let my breath out, I find that I can breathe again. Gradually, I stop panicking. The medicine is working.

- 15 Hannah is watching me carefully. ‘I don’t think we’ve ever talked before,’ says Hannah. ‘Which is strange, as we’re in all the same sets.’

Obviously I can’t tell her why we haven’t spoken. That my friends call her weird and laugh at her short hair and round glasses. ‘I know,’ I say. ‘It is strange we’ve never spoken.’

- 20 As I say it, I despise myself for falling in so quickly with my friends’ judgements. When I arrived at the school, I ended up making friends with anyone I could, because I was scared of being alone. I was so relieved when Saffy, Topaz and Melanie included me in their group. But we’re like a matching set of suitcases from the outside – with completely different contents.

‘At least we’re talking now,’ I say.

- 25 And so we sit and chat, until the bell rings and the door opens and my friends are upon us. ‘Are you OK? Sorry you got stuck with that weirdo!’

I look around, worried that Hannah overheard. But she’s gone.

We walk to the dining hall, with Saffy going on and on about how she should have been the one looking after me, and she would have been if Hannah hadn’t grabbed me.

- 30 I feel sick, and yet sort of ashamed and embarrassed too. And upset with myself because – to be completely honest – I know that I ought to say something.

But I don’t.

I’m too scared.

¹ asthma – a condition in which your airways narrow that can make breathing difficult and cause coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath