Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Lament

Written by

Maggie Stiefvater

Published by

Scholastic

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Book One

… you've left my heart shaken
With a hopeless desolation, I'd have you to know
It's the wonders of admiration your quiet face has taken
And your beauty will haunt me wherever I go.

—"Bridgit O'Malley"

one

You'll be fine once you throw up," Mom said from the front seat. "You always are."

Standing behind our dusty station wagon, I blinked out of my daze and tugged my harp case out of the back, feeling nauseated. It struck me that Mom's statement was just about the only reason I needed to avoid a career in public music performance. "Keep that pep talk coming, Mom."

"Don't be sarcastic." Mom tossed me a cardigan that matched my pants. "Take this. It makes you look more professional."

I could've said no, but it was easier just to take the sweater. As Mom had already pointed out, the sooner I got

into the auditorium and threw up, the easier it would be. And once I got this over with, I could return to my ordinary life until the next time she decided to take me out of my cage. I did refuse Mom's offers to help me carry my harp, though plenty of the other students heading inside had parental retinues. Somehow it was easier to be utterly insignificant without anyone you knew watching.

"We'll park the car, then. And find a seat. Call if you need us?" Mom patted her dove-blue purse, which matched her plunging dove-blue top. "And Delia should be here soon, too."

The thought of my diva-aunt pushed me slightly closer to the vomit end of the sick scale. *Oh Deirdre,* she would say loudly, *can I help you run through those scales? You really are a bit flat on the upper range.* And then I would throw up on her. Hey, maybe that wasn't a terrible plan after all. Though, knowing Delia, she'd probably correct my form. *Deirdre, dear, really, you need a better puke arc if you're going to ever blow chunks professionally.*

"Great," I said. My parents waved and left me to find the competitors' area. I shielded my eyes and scanned the broad concrete side of the high school. Shining brightly in the early afternoon glare was a huge canvas sign that said *Competitors' Entrance.* I'd sincerely hoped I wouldn't have to return to the school until my junior year started. Yeah. Farewell, mine dreams.

Man, it was hot. I glared up at the sun, eyes narrowed, and my eyes were drawn to the moon hanging in the sky next to the sun. For some reason, this appearance of the ghost of

the moon gave me an odd prickle in my stomach—nerves of a different kind. It had a sort of magic, magic that made me want to stay and stare at it until I could remember why it enchanted me. But staying outside in the heat wasn't helping my nervous stomach, so I left the pale disc behind and I hauled my harp over to the "Competitors' Entrance."

As I pushed through the heavy doors, it occurred to me that, before my mother mentioned it, I hadn't wanted to puke at all. I hadn't even been thinking about the competition. True, I'd had my familiar glassy-eyed, all-attention-devoted-to-not-hurling look on my face on the drive over, but not for the reason my mother assumed. I had still been lost in last night's dream. But now that she'd brought it up, and with the competition in sight, all was right again with the world and my stomach was a disaster.

A woman with two chins and a clipboard asked for my name.

"Deirdre Monaghan."

She squinted at me—or maybe that was her normal expression. "Someone was looking for you earlier."

I hoped she meant James, my best (only) friend. Anyone else, I wasn't interested in them finding me. I wanted to ask what they looked like, but I was afraid that if I talked much, I'd lose my tenuous control over my gag reflex. Mere proximity to the competition area was definitely antagonizing the whole bile thing.

"Tall, light-haired woman."

Not James. But not Delia, either. Puzzling, but not really a priority, all things considered.

The woman scribbled something next to my name. "You'll need to pick up a packet at the end of the hall."

I held a hand over my mouth and asked carefully, "Where can I practice?"

"If you go down the hall past where you get the packet, the big double doors on the—"

I couldn't wait much longer. "Right. The classrooms down there?"

She wagged her chins. I took that as a "yes" and walked farther inside. My eyes took a minute to adjust to the light, but my nose operated immediately. The familiar smell of my high school, even without any students nearby, pricked my nerves. God, I was so dysfunctional.

My harp case rang. The phone. I fished it out and stared. A four-leaf clover was stuck to the back of it, damp and fresh. Not one of the ones where the fourth leaf is stunted, either, and you can obviously see it's just a mutation of a three-leaf clover. Each of these leaves was perfectly formed and spread.

Then I remembered that the phone was ringing. I looked at the number, hoping it wasn't Mom, and flipped it open. "Hi," I said tightly, peeling the four-leaf clover off the phone and putting it in my pocket. Couldn't hurt.

"Oh," James said sympathetically, picking up on my tone. Though his voice was thin and crackly over the line, it still had its usual calming effect. The bile in my throat momentarily retreated. "I should've called earlier, huh? You're puke-a-rella already."

"Yeah." I headed slowly toward the double doors at the end of the hall. "Distract me, *please*."

"Well, I'm running late," he said cheerfully. "So I'm probably going to have to tune my pipes in the car and then run in shirtless and half-dressed. I've been lifting weights. Maybe they'll score high for a defined six pack, if they aren't awed by my mere musical genius."

"If you manage just your skirt, at least the judges'll give you *Braveheart* points."

"Don't mock the kilt, woman. So, did you have any entertaining dreams last night?"

"Uh … " Even though James and I were just friends, I hesitated to tell him. My intensely detailed dreams were usually a source of great amusement for us—two nights ago, I'd dreamt I was being interviewed by a Harvard college counselor who was up to her neck in cheese (Gouda, I think). The mood of last night's dream still lingered with me, in a sort of appealing way. "I couldn't really sleep well enough to dream," I finally said.

Oh. The moon. It suddenly occurred to me that my dream was where I had seen a moon in a daytime sky—that was where the sense of déjà vu came from. I was disappointed that it was something so normal.

"Well, that's typical," James was saying.

"Delia's coming," I told him.

"Oh, so it'll be the whole sister-on-sister catfight thing today, huh?"

"No, it's the whole 'my kid's more talented than you are' thing."

"Neener neener," James added helpfully. "Oh, damn. I really am late now. I have to get my pipes into the car, but I'll see you soon. Try not to spaz out."

"Yeah, thanks," I said. The phone went silent, and I stuffed it back in my case as I arrived at the double doors. Behind them I could hear a vaguely muffled cacophony. I waited in line for my competition packet, pulling my harp behind me. Finally, I accepted my crisp manila envelope and turned to go. I was so eager to get out of there that my harp tipped precariously. Next thing I knew, the student behind me was stumbling under the weight of it.

"Uh—*God*." He carefully set the harp back upright and I realized I knew him: Andrew from the brass section of the school orchestra. Trumpet, maybe. Something loud. He grinned hugely at me—boobs first, then face. "You have to be careful. Those inanimate objects will get away from you."

"Yeah." If he got much funnier, I was going to throw up on him. I pulled my harp a few inches away from him. "Sorry."

"Hey, you can chuck your harp at me any time."

I didn't know how to respond to that, so I just said, "Yeah." Effortlessly, I became invisible and Andrew turned away. Funny how it was just like any other day in high school.

Except that it wasn't. Standing next to the double doors, listening to the roar of voices and instruments behind it, I couldn't forget why we were all here. Tons of students were warming up for their turn on stage. Warming up for their shot at winning a prize at the 26th Annual Eastern Virginia

Arts Festival. For their chance to impress the college and conservatory representatives who would be watching from the audience.

My stomach turned again and this time I knew there was no going back. I fled for the girl's bathroom, the one in the basement below the gym, so that I could puke in private. Leaving my harp by the sinks, I barely made it in time, arms resting on the old gray-yellow toilet seat that reeked of too much cleaner and too many students.

I hate this. My stomach gurgled more. Every time I played in public, this happened. I *knew* it was stupid to be afraid of crowds, and I knew that the throwing up and nerves were all my fault, but I still couldn't stop it. James had looked up "the fear of public humiliation" for me (katagelophobia), and one afternoon we'd even tried hypnosis, complete with self-actualizing pamphlets and soothing music. We'd just ended up slap-happy new fans of New Age music.

I still wasn't done. My stupid hair was falling in my face, and my choppy haircut was too short in front to pull back into my ponytail. I imagined going onstage with chunks in my bangs. I cry only when I'm frustrated, and I was getting dangerously close.

And then, I felt a cool hand gently pulling my hair back from my face. I hadn't even heard anyone come into the bathroom. But somehow I wasn't surprised—like I'd expected someone to come find me here. I knew without looking that it was definitely a guy's hand, and definitely not James.

I started to pull my head away, embarrassed, when the owner of the hand said firmly, "Don't worry about it. You're almost done."

And I was. I finally couldn't throw up anymore and I was left shaky and utterly empty. And for some reason, I wasn't totally undone by the idea of a guy standing behind me. I turned around to see who had witnessed the most unsexy thing a girl could do. If it was Andrew, I was going to punch him for touching me.

But it wasn't Andrew. It was Dillon.

Dillon.

The guy from my dream. Here to save me from public humiliation and lead me triumphantly to a standing ovation.

He held out a handful of paper towels and smiled disarmingly. "Hi. I'm Luke Dillon." He had one of those soft voices that oozed self-control, a voice you couldn't imagine raised. It was, even in the context of a barf-filled bathroom, amazingly sexy.

"Luke Dillon," I repeated, trying not to stare. I took the towels with a still-trembling hand and wiped my face. He had been hazy in the dream, like all dream people, but this was definitely him. Lean as a wolf, with pale blond hair and eyes even paler. And sexy. The dream seemed to have left that bit out. "You're in the girl's bathroom."

"I heard you in here."

I added, in a voice more wavery than I wanted, "You're blocking me in the stall."

Luke moved to the side to let me out and turned on one of the taps so I could wash my face. "Do you need to sit down?"

"No—yes—maybe."

He retrieved a folding chair from the cubby behind the

stalls and put it next to me. "You're white as white. Are you sure you're okay?"

I sank down onto the chair. "Sometimes after I'm done—uh—doing that, I pass out." I smiled weakly as my ears started to roar. "One of my—uh—many charms."

"Put your head between your knees." Luke knelt beside the chair and watched my upside-down face. "You know, you have very pretty eyes."

I didn't answer. I was going to pass out in front of a perfect stranger on a bathroom floor. Luke reached between the tangle of my arms and legs and pressed a wet paper towel against my forehead. My hearing came back in a rush.

"Thanks," I muttered, before very slowly sitting up.

Luke crouched before me. "Are you sick?" He didn't seem particularly concerned about me being contagious, but I shook my head vigorously.

"Nerves. I always throw up before these things. I know I should know better—but I can't stop it. At least I won't throw up on stage now. Might still faint, though."

"How Victorian," Luke remarked. "Are you done fainting for now, though? I mean, do you want to stay in the bathroom, or shall we go out?"

I stood. I stayed standing, so I must have recovered. "No, I'm better. I—uh—really need to warm up, though. I think I've only got forty-five minutes or something until I play. I'm not sure how much time I've wasted." I pointed to the stall he'd found me in.

"Well, let's get you outside to practice. They'll let you know when you need to go on, and it's quieter."