

CALL ME

'm in the wine-bar when my phone beeps. NEW MESSAGE: READ NOW?

I nearly don't, because it's bound to be sad cow Helen saying she's gone straight home to play house with Steve. But that hunky Mike from Sales had said he'd be in touch--so I press YES.

LONG TIME NO C it says, FROM BECKS. And there's a little smiley face at the bottom. I blink, because I don't *know* any Becks, so I ask the others, and neither do they. Funny that. So I answer: MAYB, BUT WHO R U?—and then forget all about it as we get stuck into the Oz red.

Me and the girls come here most nights, straight from the office, have a laugh and bitch about the Admin. Staff. Okay, we knock it back a bit, but so what? We're young with no responsibilities, and it's more fun than telly or reading. There's men, too, loaded and with decent cars, and because I don't want them to see where I live, I usually end up at theirs, and straight in to work the morning after. Course, Mum moans and says I'm heading for trouble, but she really needs to get a life and stay out of mine.

My mobile beeps again. Another text. HAVING A GOOD TIME? BECKS. Faintly annoyed, I reply: YES THANX GR8. WHO U?

More of the Roo's Leap, and I'm starting to feel a bit woozy. Should've eaten before I began drinking, but what the hell. Who needs the calories? I light a fag instead.

As me and Gemma hit the bar, my phone goes off again. U DRINK 2 MUCH U NO, and I start getting angry. This Becks must be here somewhere, watching my every move. I'd turn the phone off if it wasn't for Mike--instead I text her back: SOD OFF, WHOEVER U R. That'll show her.

It doesn't, though. CAN'T REMEMBER? Says the next one. BECKS NORRIS, YR 10, NEW GIRL.

An uncomfortable memory sweeps over me: Rebecca: lardy body, big red face, glasses I'd smashed a dozen times. She'd worn *proper uniform*, and she'd been swotty, the sort I can't stand. But her parents had taken her away, hadn't they, after her arm got broken? So okay, I'd had it in for her, but what a loser. She'd asked for it. So why is she getting in touch now, and with me of all people?

I sit down, because nothing makes sense, and back comes another message: IT'S MY 21ST TOMORROW. LOOK FORWARD TO CING U.

This is really creepy, freaking me out. "Gemma," I say, "remember a girl at school called Rebecca? Glasses? Pork on legs?"

Gemma has to think about it because she's almost as far gone as me. Then she goes very quiet, and nods.

And that's when I lose it, rush blindly out of there onto the street, and I don't see the taxi until it runs me down.

And lying there, freezing cold and with everything fading to shadow, I recall what Gemma's just told me. "Oh, yeah, Rebecca. Fat lump, couldn't take the bullying—left a note and topped herself."

And then my phone beeps one last time: NEW MESSAGE: READ NOW?