1. MEET
Charlie, that was only the first bell -

BEN: Why??

CHARLIE: Yeah... I've gotta go

CHARLIE: Sorry
Dear Charles Spring,

From the beginning of January, all students at Truham will be placed in new ‘vertical form groups’ for registration at 8:30am and 2:05pm every day. Each vertical form will contain 5-6 students from each year group.

New form: Hamlet 5
Form room: B25

Please attend registration in your new vertical form group from the start of the new term in January.
Well, if it isn't Charlie Spring!

Happy New Year!

Hi Mr Lange
Let's see... where did I put you on the seating plan...

Ah yes! You're over there-

—next to Nicholas Nelson

He's in Year 11, so only a year older than you!
A COMIC BY

ALICE OSEMAN
DAY 2

All right?

All right.

DAY 3

morning

morning

DAY 4

Hey!
Hey

Hey!
Why does he always say hello to me every single morning? Is it a joke? Is it like the guys who used to bully me over again? He's probably just making fun of me. Why talk to me? Even in group he probably thinks I'm gonna hit on something.

Er... Charlie?

You don't have any tissues, do you? My pen... er... exploded.
Ah, no, sorry

Oh dear. Nick, you'd better go clean up in the bathroom.
Charlie, can you go with Nick and open the doors for him?
Sorry about this...

It's fine

Hopefully I'll miss some of first period... I have double science

Ugh! Who d'you have?
Mr Hutchins: Oh my god, I had him last year! He smells so bad of cat food!

He REALLY does.

So... how did your pen explode?

It's a fountain pen. They do that sometimes.

Aren't fountain pens really hard to write with?

Yeah, but it makes my handwriting look well nice.

It's not coming off!

Haha!! You're gonna be blue forever.
I look like I'm wearing blue gloves.

You can make it the new school fashion.

I'll pretend it's a tattoo.

I think that might be against school rules.

beep

beep

beep

Oh

We'd better go.
Was that first bell or second bell?

Dunno. I'll check the time.

Library?

Music Room 2?

Charlie where the fuck are you?

??? i'm waiting

can't even be bothered to text me? you're so fucking useless
Charlie??

er- yeah- first bell
Friends?
You're friends with Nick Nelson now?

Flick

Really?
Er... yeah?

But he's one of the rugby lads! He's friends with Harry Greene, for God's sake.

So? Nick's really nice!

COME ON. He's a fucking chav. He calls everyone 'mate' and probably throws food at people on the bus.

...he doesn't call me 'mate,' though.
You have a crush on him.

WHAT.

That's not— I'm— I don't just fall for any boy who's nice to me.
He's probably straight anyway...

..haha..

Oh my god, Ben! Shut up!!
I don't want to meet up anymore

???

sorry

Why??

I don’t understand

ffs we’re not gonna get caught

Charlie!! Don’t ignore me!!!!!

Text message Send
Monday 1st February. 10H/11H P.E. (Physical Education)

Come on, Year 10s!

We’ve been doing this all year and no one’s beaten Charlie’s time yet!
NICK!

Yeah?

What are you staring at?

Nothing
NICK! Pass it!

HUFF

HUFF

HAHA!
Hey, Charlie

I need to talk to you.
Erm... I have a drum lesson right now.

Answer my fucking texts, then! It's been two weeks!

I already said I don't want to meet up with you anymore.
And that's it, is it?
No explanation.

Well... yeah, I guess so-

GRAB

THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH-
CHARLIE?

I've been looking for you!

Er... is everything all right?

I didn't know you knew Ben...
Erm... yes?

we'll talk later, Charlie
Why are you friends with Ben Hope? He's kind of a dick.

We're not friends!!

I... help him with his maths homework?

...ok
So... anyway...

I have something to ask you!

Charlie, you may not know this, but I'm gay too, and I'm in love with you. Will you go out with me? I want to be with you forever.
Do you want to join the rugby team?

We're short of a player! Everyone seems to prefer football...

Er... well... I don't really know how to play. I don't even watch it on TV.

That's okay! I'll teach you!

But... why me?

I saw you run in P.E. You're really fast!
Erm... aren't I a bit small and weak for rugby?

Well, this is only a school team.

So you're saying I'm weak?

No!!

beep
FUCK
I'm missing my drum lesson!

The bell?
Lunch is over already?

Can I think about it?

Yeah, sure!
I'll see you later!

He plays the drums?
ONE WEEK LATER...

Charlie Spring, though?
Why him, though?

I'm sure he's a nice guy, but we actually want to be good!

Like, I know he's popular, everyone loves him, but can he even play?

Does he even like sports? Everyone knows he's gay—
CREAK

Hey!
So there are 4 ways to score in rugby—a try, a conversion, a penalty, or a drop-goal.

A try is where you ground the ball over the line, conversions and penalties are where you get the chance to kick the ball at goal without being tackled, and a drop-goal is where you kick it through the posts during general play.
THIS IS A LOT OF INFORMATION

You'll probably pick it up after a few games!

I hope you're prepared for me to be absolutely crap.

You might be better than me, for all we know!

CHARLIE SPRING!!!
MISS SINGH.
P.E. TEACHER.
EX SEMI-PRO
RUGBY PLAYER.

So.
You're
the
chosen
one.

Um
Year 10

er... no...

I... think so?

No...

What year are you in?

Ever played rugby?

But Nick says you're a fast runner, yeah?

Good. We need an extra wing. Know what that is?

Nick, why don't you use today's practise to take Charlie through the basics?

Sure!
Twist your body a bit more!

Like this?

Yeah! It's like more of an underthrow.

So... like this?

Yeah... but aim it at me.

I'm trying.
That's it! I knew you'd get it.

That was... ok?

Yep! Perfect Pass!

You're a natural! Pfft!
...So we've covered passing and scoring...

We've got about 15 minutes left, so-

-- do you want to give tackling a go?

..Tackling?
It's not too hard — watch the guys, they're playing a match right now.

You just have to take the player with the ball down by grabbing them below their shoulders.

Want to give it a go?
I am definitely too weak to do that.

Excuse me - where is your 'can do' attitude?

Give it a go. Just run at me. I won't dodge!

Go onnnn. I bet you can do it.

...Fine
That was perfect!

Was it!?!?
Let's try it again while running!
TWO DAYS LATER...

FIVE DAYS LATER...
ONE WEEK LATER

He's been doing really well, hasn't he?

You're surprised?

Well all I knew about him was that he's gay.

Mate, I don't actually think being gay makes you bad at sports.

I never said that!! Anyway, I can see why he's popular. He's managed to fit in really well.

Yeah... he's just a really cool guy! 😊
Haha! Your hair's sticking up!

Is it?!

I was thinking about cutting it

What??

It'd just— it'd be a big change

WHAT
So... am I, like, actually any good?

What? At rugby? Of course you are!

Yeah?

Why?

I'm just a bit scared of letting everyone down and I don't even know whether they like me or want me on the team or... yeah.
It's silly.

... 

All of the older boys kinda remind me of the people who used to bully me.
Well! I like you and want you on the team!

Haha!! Good!

"I like you"
"I like you"
"I like you"
"I like you"
"I like you"
Is there anything you think you want to practise a bit more, then?

..Charlie?
You okay?

Charlie??

Wha?

You okay?

Y-yeah- sorry- just got a text from- er- I'm meeting up with someone after this. Sorry!

O...kay
PHYSICAL EDUCATION

You’re at rugby, right? Meet me in the music block afterwards.

Why?

Please Charlie I want to talk.

Fine.
Well, I like you!

What's the point
Charlie

You're wearing a coat? It's not even cold

It's February

LAAAME
What did you want, Ben?
Don't touch me

GOD what is your problem? I'm trying to be nice

I said I don't want to meet up with you anymore —

Yeah, I don't believe you!

...what??

I think you're scared of us getting caught
Why would I be scared? Everyone in the school already knows I'm gay! YOU'RE the one who's scared of getting caught! You're not even my boyfriend! I've seen you with your girlfriend at the school gate!

You don't give a SHIT about me. You just found the nearest guy who was willing to make out with you and went for it!

YOU went for it too. Don't be angry at me for not wanting to come out yet.
I'm not angry about that! I'm angry because you never even slightly cared about my feelings at all. We only ever meet up when you want, where you want—

When you feel like making out with a boy!

I could be ANYONE! You don't give a shit!

That's obviously not true.
It is true! You just heard the rumours about me and was like "Oh, good, there's finally a gay boy I can safely get off with"!!
what the f-

???

- -
Stop it!!

Don't!!

You're so hot when you're angry

Come on Charlie, I really like you

!!?

Stop it
S-stop...

Stop...

What the-
He told you to stop, you fucking prick!
Nick!? 

PUSH

...

Go on, FUCK OFF!
[Two characters in a hallway, one speaking with a thought bubble.]
Are you okay?
I'm fine

Are you sure?

...did you hear all of that?

Well... most of it
I just... kind of followed you... You seemed really stressed out while we were getting changed.

I just started getting worried... er... so... yeah.

FIVE MINUTES EARLIER

[Comics showing two characters in a hallway, one saying 'Get off' and the other reacting with surprise]
I just wanted to check everything was okay.

s-sorry

You have NOTHING to be sorry about!
Sorry!

you know, you say sorry a lot

Don't say it!

I kinda wanna say it

Don't!

ha ha!
Come on, we'll get locked in if we stay here much longer.
Idiot

I'm such an idiot

Such a fucking idiot
Good practice today, Nicky?

Nick?

Mmmh
2. Crush
“Hey, did you hear some Year 9 has come out as gay?”
TEN MONTHS AGO...

"Huh? No?"

"Yeah, d'you know Charlie Spring from 9H? Apparently he's gay."

"Where did you hear that?"

"It's going round the whole school."
“He's been getting a lot of shit for it, I think.”

“I mean, this is an all-boys school! What did he expect?”
"What did he expect?"
Hey so what happened seemed really serious.

Add Files  Add Photos

I don't think you should talk to Ben anymore.

Add Files  Add Photos
Hey, just wanted to check you're okay. Ben's such a dick!!!
yeah, i'm fine, don't worry! :)

tap tap tap

Hey, just wanted to check you're okay. Ben's such a dick!!!
yeah, i'm fine, don't worry!
)
You sure???
You sure??

Charlie Spring is typing...

Write a reply...

You sure??
FIVE MINUTES LATER

You sure??

Charlie Spring is typing...

Write a reply...

uncan

uncan

uncan

uncan

uncan
Hey, just wanted to check in. You're okay, right? Ben's such a dick!

Yeah, I'm fine, don't worry!

You sure??

Well it's...

dick...

Yeah, I'm fine, don't worry...

You sure??

You can talk to me about it if you want?

Yeah, I'm fine, don't worry...

You sure??

Well it's...

Nick Nelson

You sure??

You can talk to me about it if you want?

Sounds like a pretty serious situation

But you don't have to

If you don't want to

But I am your friend and I do care

Well it's...
Okay

But you don’t have to
If you don’t want to
But I am your friend and I do care

*Charlie Spring*
Okay
Might be a bit of a long story lol

*Nick Nelson*
I don’t mind!!
Well it started last September. Everyone at school had found out I was gay by then. The bullying had mostly stopped I guess and people had started to be nice to me (there was a group of Sixth Formers who stopped the bullies) but everyone in the school knew I was gay.

So I was practising my drums one morning before form in a practise room and I look up and see Ben looking in through the door window. He walks in and starts telling me how good I am at playing the drums, and I'm just sitting there like 'what the fuck' because I've never spoken to him before in my life... but also kind of freaking out because I thought he was really attractive...

Eventually he comes in and sits next to me and starts talking to me about me coming out at school, and like, how 'brave' I am and stuff... even though it's not like I came out myself or anything, it just got out because I told a couple of people...

And then next thing I know he's just kissing me.
And yeah, we just continued to meet up sometimes at school before form. And like… I was so excited about it. I thought I had a boyfriend, or, like, I was having some big romance… But I slowly started to realise he was just using me for someone to make out with… because I was the only gay boy he knew…

and then in January I found out he had a girlfriend as well. Some girl from Higgs school. I don’t know if he’s bisexual or gay or whatever but it doesn’t really change anything. He was just using me.

I tried to end it but he just kept pestering me. I thought I’d just meet up with him one last time to tell him to leave me alone but… yeah. That didn’t go well I guess haha
**Nick Nelson**
FUCK I hate Ben so much. I knew he was a dick, but... jesus.
Please don’t ever talk to him again

**Charlie Spring**
I definitely won’t!!!!

**Nick Nelson**
I will kick his ass if he tries to come near you
Thank you for being there.

Generally or in the music block?

Well...

both
<Not a problem 😊❤️

I love talking to you

QWERTY
ASDFG

Not a problem 😊

I'm so glad we're friends

QWERTY
ASDFG

Not a problem 😊❤️
Should I have told him all that?
Maybe he felt awkward.

Maybe he won't want to be friends anymore.

Hey!
Hey!

Charlie, what the **F**UCK is going on!?
What??

NICK NELSON!??

I thought you didn't have a crush on him!

P.E. CLASS

...Please don't say it so loud

You've been all over him for, like, a month!
Texting??
tap
tap
tap

You've started eating lunch together??

And don't get me started on rugby...
NOPE not so fast

Haha!!

We're going this way

NICK!!

Oh my god put me down!!

Nope!!
Okay, let's go 😊

Charlie!!

I'm not being funny, but, like, he's straight.
Just look at him. He's as straight as they come.

I know

You're just causing yourself pain!

I know
Tao and Charlie! Stop chattering and start kicking that ball!

And Tao, take that bloody hat off!

But siiiiir, it's freezing!

This is England, not Antarctica. Deal with it.

Charlie, you need to give up on him

I can't
Yeah, it took me like 3 hours to bake it all but my nan loves cheesecake, so...

Wait, I think I've got a picture of it-

Oh! That's just my dog, haha
You have a dog?

Yeah! Her name’s Nellie ❤

She’s pretty old but I love her

I wish I had a dog. My parents don’t like animals.
You should come round my house and meet her!

s-seriously?

Yeah! Are you free Saturday?

I think so!

MY ADDRESS (wink)
34 River Crescent

SCRIBBLE
Wow, that's only a 10 minute walk from my house!

Is it?

Yeah, I live on Britannia Road!

Saturday, then?

Okay!

Did you two swap seats?
SATURDAY
What are you doing?

Do you think it's too short?

You've had it cut that short before...?
I know, but... did it look better long?

It looks the same, to be honest.

Are you going out?

Yeah, round a friend's

Tao?

No... his name's Nick. He's in my form.
DRRRRING

PRESS
Hey!

Hey
Haha! This is Nellie.

Bork

IN LOVE
Hi Nellie!

You're so adorable.
Did you get a haircut?
1-Is it bad?

No no! No! It— you look— erm— great

Okay come in or Nellie will think we're going for a walk

Okay
I heard it's gonna Snow!

It's so cold.

Oh my god, snow!?

So this is my house!
Argh! Why are you so good at this!?

I have a six-year-old brother. Mario Kart is my life.

And you get to be good at real sports. I get to be good at fake ones.

You're just good at everything, you nerd!
I am so not good at everything.

You so are! Let's see, you're good at video games, sports, maths, essays, making friends, playing the drums, mmph-

Shh!
It's snowing
I. Am. Freezing.

You should have worn something waterproof.

I don't have anything. I'm not outdoorsy like you!
I hope you don't catch a cold...

Haha!! It'll be worth it!

Wait there!
There.

Oh-th-thanks.
Sorry I don't have any joggers to give you, I think they'd all be too big haha...

You should probably go and sit on a radiator for a bit!
You really have to go home?

Yeah... my dad said I had to be home for dinner.

Well... Nellie will miss you.
I'll miss Nellie too

And thanks for the hoodie. I'll give it to you on Monday!

No prob!

Don't slip and die on the ice!

I'll try not to!
Charlie seems like a lovely boy. When did you meet him?

A couple of months ago. He's in my form group.
He's very different to your other friends, isn't he? You seem much more like yourself around him.

Do I?

You do!

sip

…”
Are you okay?
I fell for a straight boy... haha...
THE NEXT SATURDAY

KNOCK KNOCK
Hey!

Hey!
Haha, you're terrible!

I'm trying my BEST!
Here, budge up, let me help.

Look, like this!
There, you're a pro now!
haha... erm... well... that's probably cheating...

Charliiiiiiiiiie

Yeah?
Are you done yet?

Homework is BORING

I've still got three more questions to-

SNATCH
Hey! Give that back!

Noooo unfair!

No way NERD

Hahaha!

HEHEH no you don't

Haha!

...wait

AH-FALL

GRAB

OOF
huff

Why are you so strong?

I'm not strong, you're just small.
It's your fault for being a rugby lad.

Excuse me? A "rugby lad"?

Yeah!!

Oh REALLY. Well why don't we just pop out for a cheeky Nando's, then, mate?

Ayyy, LADS LADS LADS

Ahaha!!

What? It's just banter, init mate, init bruv.
OKAY, okay, stop, you win

blush

blush

haha
ROLL

Mario Kart?
Huh... did I fall asleep?

Yep. You missed the end of the movie 😅

And I kinda need to go home

Oh...
I wish you didn't have to go.

I wish I didn't either.

You look so cuddly like that.

Do I??

Yeah.

183
SLAM

...

*APPEAR*

I don't think he's straight
What is happening to me?

"SHUT!"

Nicky? Did you have a good day?

Yep.

...you okay?

Yep. Fine.

?
CLENCH

TAP TAP

Google

am i gay?
i like girls but now i like a boy???
help me...

APRIL
(TWO WEEKS LATER)
Hey Tao... so... about Nick Nelson

What??? Has something happened???

Well... I think he might maybe like me back

EXPLAIN.

Over the past two weeks during the Easter holidays we’ve hung out like almost EVERY DAY

He’s a lot more... idk... physical? We hug now?

Sometimes I just catch him looking at me...
Look... Charlie... I didn’t want to say anything but... I’ve asked around and I’ve heard Nick’s had a crush on a girl called Tara Jones from Higgs school for, like, 3 years or something
WE WON!!

STAND
...Charlie... I didn’t know you had a crush on a girl at my school for, like,
So Nick has a crush on Charlie, right?

We've all been thinking it!!

They do seem really close
But Nick’s not gay, is he?

Well, I guess we don’t know.

He doesn’t look gay. And didn’t he have a crush on that girl Tara Jones?

You can’t tell whether people are gay by what they look like.

And gay or straight aren’t the only two options.

Anyway, it’s very rude to speculate about people’s sexuality.

Go home, lads.
I can kinda see it. Nick and Charlie.

Are you going to Harry Greene’s party on Saturday?
Well... I was invited, but I... I don't know. There'll be like two hundred people there, right?

PLEASE COME. All my other friends are dickheads and I don't wanna have to spend an entire evening with them.

Sounds like you need new friends.

Well... I have you now, so...
...so will you come?

YEAH DEFINITELY

It'll be fun if you're there!
You on the list?

Um- y-yeah... Charlie Spring?
I've been looking for you!

Haha!

Ha ha ha!
It's so loud in here! D'you wanna go get a drink?

Yeah sure!

Hey Nick!!
Why are you hanging out in here? How DULL.

SAI

CHRISTIAN

I've got some important news.

HARRY GREENE (THE BIRTHDAY BOY)

*SIGH*
What's up, Harry?

TARA JONES IS HERE.
Wh-what?

Remember her? The girl you had a crush on all through Year 7 and 8?

The one you KISSED at the Year 8 Higgs-Truham disco?

Well, now’s your second chance.

RIGHT, CHARLIE?
That was YEARS ago! I haven't even spoken to her since then!!

COME ON, she's just down here!

Plus, she's really hot now

HEY, GIRLS!
TARA! I've got someone who wants to see you.

You remember Nick Nelson, right?

Er... yeah... hi.

hi
[Image of a comic strip with multiple panels showing a conversation between two characters, with speech bubbles indicating dialogue and expressions of surprise or concern.]
Stupid stupid stupid I'm such a stupid IDIOT-

OOF

BUMP

GASP
Anyway,

Sorry about this... Harry sort of dragged me over here

It's fine, I know what he's like!
And I think he must be one of the only people who doesn’t know I’m gay.

Haha, you didn’t know either? That’s my girlfriend over there.

So... I heard you’ve been hanging out with Charlie Spring a lot recently...

Is that... I mean... are you just friends, or...?
er... well...

You can always talk to me about it if you need to...

Where did he go?
Did any of you see where Charlie went?

Why do you even hang out with him?
We're friends—
BUT WHY?
We just are—

But he's just some nerdy little Year 10
He got really popular after all that bullying shit last year, right?

D'you just feel sorry for him because he's gay?

No WAIT, d'you think he FANCIES you!? Oh my God, how SAD.
You know what, Harry?
FUCK YOU.

You're a pathetic, homophobic, self-obsessed DICK and I really dislike you.

Happy fucking birthday.

I actually love him.
um... Sorry...
Your friends were kind of intimidating—

DON'T BE SORRY! They're all dickheads!

I'd rather just hang out with you, anyway

So... I just ran into Ben
SHIT. Are you okay?

Y-Yeah, I mean... I dealt with it.

He... er... he tried to apologise, but...
Look, I'm sorry, okay? Have you finished sulking about it?

Leave me alone.

Oh come on, Charlie!

GRAB

SLAM OOF

DO NOT F**KING TOUCH ME.

...
Then he just walked off, so...

Yeah, I think he got the message this time

I'm so proud
Shut up, now I'm embarrassed
Haha!

It's, er, kinda noisy in here, isn't it

Yeah...

Shall we go somewhere quieter again?
Okay
I'll race you!

To where!?  Anywhere!

Unfair!

You're way faster than me!
I'm only 18 months older!!

Okay, old man
..Woah

Yeah
Jesus... I knew Harry was rich but this hotel must have cost a fuck ton to hire.

He should go on that TV show, 'My Super Sweet 16'!

Is that the one where they cry if their parents don't get them the car they want?

Yep

He'd fit right in.
So... like...

Was Harry being serious? Do you like that girl?
NO! No, definitely not!

We... we kissed at a party when we were like 13 and I liked her at the time but I've honestly barely thought about her since then and I DEFINITELY don't like her that way anymore!

Ah... Okay...
Um... So...

... you don't have a crush on anyone at the moment?

Well... I didn't say THAT...
but... I've heard around
had a crush on a girl called
Higgs school for like 3 years

Haha... what's she
like, then?

...)

You're just gonna
assume they're a she?
Are they not a girl?
...go out with someone who wasn't a girl?
I don't know...

Maybe

Would you...
Kiss someone who wasn't a girl?

I don't know.
Would you kiss me?
Yeah
Nick?
Are you up here?
NICK!? I know you're up here somewhere!

Harry wants to talk to you!
Come on, Nick!!

Why are you hiding?
I've just

I've got to...

SHUT
I'm sorry
I'm sorry