

NATASHA PRESTON

SILENCE



Silence

By Natasha Preston

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are fictional and any resemblance to
real persons, living or dead is
purely coincidental.

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Dedication

For my mum, Sharon.

Chapter One

Oakley

Most people have heard the phrase, 'Silence is golden'; many would agree with it: people with screaming children running wild around the house or working in a noisy office. For me, however, it meant something entirely different.

Silence consumed my whole life; it suppressed things I could never express. My silence was responsible for my family's happiness. Silence was my prison.

“Are you ready to leave, Oakley? Cole is waiting outside,” my mum said softly. She leant against the doorframe of my room and smiled warmly. Through her smile, however, I could see how tired she looked. Dark shadows were now a permanent feature under her eyes.

Her smile used to be my favourite part of her. Now it was as false as my own, and it was all because of me.

Every single day I want to tell her what has happened. To have her hold me in her arms and promise me that everything would be all right, but reality stopped me every time. The fantasy I had in my head of how things would turn out was just that; a fantasy. I knew that, he had told me enough times.

Placing my hairbrush on the

dresser, I turned to Mum and
nodded my head once. With a deep
breath, I followed her downstairs.

It wasn't until we reached the
front door that she looked at me
again. "Have a good day, okay?"
Almost everything she said to me
was a question. As the words left
her mouth, her eyes widened in the
desperate hope that I would reply,
and every time I responded with a
brief nod, her shoulders would sag.

I grabbed my school bag by the
door and swung it over my shoulder

as I walked outside.

The morning sun beamed down on me as I turned into the street, making me squint at the brightness. It was the middle of July, and almost time for school to close for the summer holidays.

Cole beeped his car horn even though he was parked right outside my house. Thanks, Cole might have missed you without that. He grinned through the window as I made my way to his car, his dark blue eyes glistening in the early light.

Cole Benson and I had been friends since we were babies. Mum had pictures of Cole holding my hand as I learned to walk. He was two years older than me, but he certainly didn't act it. My mum and his mum, Jenna, met in high school, and they had been friends ever since.

“Good morning, sunshine,” he greeted, with a stretched grin. Unlike Mum's, the smiles I received from him never changed. Grinning back was as natural as breathing.

His happiness was infectious; our friendship had always been fun, affectionate, loving, and carefree.

It wasn't always a bed of roses, though. There were times when he would beg and plead with me to tell him what was wrong. He had begged me to talk again. I found that harder than when Mum pleaded with me. As the one person that I could still feel normal with, I hated hurting and disappointing him.

He started the engine and his rusty old car roared to life. It hadn't

been long since he passed his driving test, but he was a good driver and I trusted him with my life – still, I gripped the seat as he sped off. We passed his house, which was just two doors away from mine, and I sighed. I hated school with a passion.

Cole talked almost continuously on the drive to school, chatting away about his car and what we would do later. Occasionally I would nod or smile in response to something he said,

but apart from that I just sat and listened to him speaking. His voice was smooth and calming. Not talking to him was hard. I desperately wanted to return his quick banter with something smart of my own. But I stayed tongue-tied.

As we pulled into the half-full car park, I started to feel sick. People seemed to whisper to each other whenever I was around. I was used to it, but I still hated being the centre of all the jokes and bitchy comments.

“Oakley?” I jumped and looked up at Cole. He smiled. “You gonna be okay today?” I nodded, grimacing slightly. I hated when we had to go our separate ways, and I wished I was older so we would be in the same year.

“Text me if you need anything,” he instructed, kissing me on the cheek, sending little bolts of electricity through my body. Cole knew I wouldn’t text him, but he still said the same thing every single day. “See you later,” he called as he

walked towards the sixth form
block next to the high school.

Once he was out of view, I let
the smile slip from my face. There
was no one to pretend to now. It
was almost a relief not to have to
pretend I was fine. Walking
towards the entrance of school, I
pulled my sleeves down over my
hands and wrapped my arms around
myself. *Just keep your head down.
Not long until school is over for
six weeks.*

The bell rang, signalling the

start of the school day just as I got
inside the old red brick building.

My form room was at the end of a
corridor that seemed to stretch on
for miles. I walked quickly to avoid
being caught up with the people still
loitering around. Taking my usual
seat next to Hannah, I rested my
arms on the desk.

Mornings were the hardest as
there was still so much of the day to
get through. Hannah smiled at me,
and I returned the gesture. We
weren't necessarily friends, but she

was the closest thing I had in school. She didn't judge or treat me any differently. I just didn't think she knew how to act around me most of the time. I liked her for trying though.

"School sucks," she grumbled, tucking her dark black behind her ears. *Completely agreeing with you*, I thought glumly.

"Oakley, what did you do last night?" one of the boys shouted from the back of the classroom. I recognised his voice as Luke Davis,

one of the biggest idiots of the school.

“Sorry, I didn’t quite *hear* you.” The room erupted with laughter, and I rolled my eyes.
Original, Luke.

“Ignore them,” Hannah whispered, squeezing my arm sympathetically.

I smiled at her, and then sighed in relief as Mrs Yates walked into the room. With a quick greeting, she flipped the register open and pulled the lid off her pen. Like with

everyone else, she called my name but looked up at the same time, knowing she wasn't getting an answer. There was never any pressure from the teachers on me to talk: they made sure everything was as normal as possible wherever it could be.

After the register was called everyone chatted, waiting for the bell to ring for the first lesson. "Ready for maths?" Hannah groaned as the bell chimed. *Nope*. My expression mirrored hers.

Maths wasn't my favourite subject, and today was a double lesson. "Do you think we'll ever use anything we've learnt in maths in the real world?" she mused.

Most definitely. Although probably not 'Jimmy left the station at nine in the morning, Jenny left at nine-thirty their stations were fifty miles apart, what time do they pass each other?' questions.

I had most lessons with Hannah. We sat together through them all, but she spoke to her two

other friends more, unsurprisingly since they actually answered her. That was okay with me though. I preferred to do work to pass the time.

“Good morning,” Mr Spice greeted. “Pass these around and get started.” He handed Georgie the stack of papers and went to sit down.

The class seemed to drag on forever. For the whole two hours, we all worked from the sheets. It was almost like doing a test.

Boredom is actually going to kill me. I flipped the worksheet over only to find another one.

Finally, the bell rang, and it was time for the first break of the day. Stuffing my pencil case into my bag, I mentally planned my route to the next class. Helen, Laura, and Tina peered over their shoulders as they walked towards the door, snickering. My heart dropped a little, but I tried not to let them get to me. It wouldn't be long before we would leave school and I

wouldn't have to see them again.

Heading straight to my third lesson, I kept my head down, hoping to go unnoticed. I took the longer route to my next lesson because there were usually fewer people around.

The sun was even brighter than when I left home this morning, and as it shone in my face I cradled my hand over my eyes to create a little shade. Suddenly I slammed into someone who was walking around the corner. Gasping, I stumbled

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