



Please Don't Tell Mum That I Have Become A Government School Teacher – She Thinks I'm Still at Law School

Hugh Bachman

Dog Ear Publishing

(212pp)

978-1-4575-5728-6

For all of its cynicism and humor, Please Don't Tell Mum has something real to say about education.

Think your school days were a nightmare? Well, let's hear the other side of the story, from a teacher's point of view. Narrator Harry Mann, the main character in Hugh Bachman's *Please Don't Tell Mum That I Have Become a Government School Teacher—She Thinks I'm Still at Law School*, offers a chronicle that is observant, startling, hopeful, and almost always funny.

Taking an open-ended break from law school, Harry Mann applies for a teaching job in a government school. He soon discovers why his job was easy to get, as his is the worst kind of government school—underfunded, underdisciplined, and underachieving. On entering the building for the first time, he's told to get out or face physical violence—a greeting delivered not by a student, but by a fellow teacher.

As the book unfolds, so does the world surrounding the students, a milieu that includes not only the teachers who've written them off, but parents whose alcohol addiction leaves no money for new shoes or who are in jail for murder. Mann's growing realization that his students have been let down and abandoned by the adults responsible for them causes him to redouble his determination to provide a glimpse of a bigger world, adding drama and gravity to the story.

The subject has plenty of grim potential, but the book maintains a lightly humorous tone. Despite being hazed, ignored, and greeted with strings of obscenities by students and faculty alike, Mann remains determined to share the joy of learning. His admirably naïve goal makes him something of a Don Quixote with a high capacity for self-irony.

The pace is swift, with each chapter focusing on a separate incident. These incidents, though self-contained, almost always work on a dual level to create a unified story arc. Late in the book, for example, a sympathetic take on the difficulties encountered by a new teacher also serves as a measure of the narrator's own growth.

The cast of students and teachers is large, but characters are developed enough to be convincing. The students especially come alive and win compassion without straining credibility. Also convincing is the fresh, realistic dialogue, which keeps the story flowing and plays a large role in establishing characters as distinct individuals.

Well-drawn Roy Lichtenstein-style illustrations accompany the text and work well with the more serious epigraphs that introduce each chapter.

For all its cynicism and humor, *Please Don't Tell Mum* has something real to say about kids, their education, and the adults who supposedly nurture them—and has the ability to say it in the context of a highly readable book.

SUSAN WAGGONER (September 28, 2017)

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