

What if the perfect playlist could change everything?

THUNDERHEAD



SOPHIE BEER

Thunderhead is a triumph: an intelligent,
funny and heart-twisting story, told by
a character that readers will love.'

PETER CARNAVAS

'A poignant and personal story that
sings with originality, humour and heart.
I adored this book.'

PIP HARRY

'A spectacular book with an irresistible voice.
Quite simply, a fantastic and addictive read.
Thunderhead is the representation
we need right now.'

KATE FOSTER

'I'm such a big fan of Sophie Beer!
Thunderhead is a skilfully crafted character,
brought to life by flamboyant, energetic prose.'

ANNA ZOBEL



THUNDERHEAD



SOPHIE BEER

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Allen & Unwin
Cammeraygal Country
83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100
Email: info@allenandunwin.com
Web: www.allenandunwin.com

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www.sophie-beer.com

*For Reuben.
I'm so glad that you exist.*



TUESDAY, 2 JANUARY 2024, 10.11 PM

🎵 PLAYLIST FOR THE ABYSS

- 1. 'Space Oddity' – David Bowie**
- 2. 'Supersonic Rocket Ship' – The Kinks**
- 3. 'Supermassive Black Hole' – Muse**
- 4. 'Major Tom' – The Space Lady**
- 5. 'Cosmic Dancer' – T. Rex**

Hello

Hellooooo

Hellooooooooooooo

Can anyone hear me? No?

GOOD.

That's the way I want it. I'm not writing this for anyone else but me.

Here I am, shouting into the abyss. Well, I'm *typing* into the abyss.

The abyss of the internet.

And I like it! It feels nice to have somewhere to roll up my thoughts and cast them into the vast blankness, like I'm throwing them dramatically into the vacuum of space.

ZIP
SCHLOCK
ZUP

That's the vast, uncaring vacuum of space eating up my worries. Thanks, uncaring blank vacuum of space. Say hi to Einstein and Stephen Hawking for me.

Why the internet? A diary hidden around my room might be picked up by Pop during an overly enthusiastic spring-clean, or nested on by my cat Tugboat. Or worse, Mum might find it and try to have a Talk About Feelings with me. A diary left at school might be found by a teacher, trying to help out the Poor Widdle Sick Kid (PWSK).

It all ends the same.

Me being dragged, spitting and hissing, into the counsellor's office for biscuits that taste like cardboard and watery sympathy, entirely dependent on how good the coffee was at the counsellor's favourite cafe that morning.

NOTHANKYOUVERYMUCH.

It's much safer to say what I really think here without the minuscule possibility that anyone I know might read it. So, the ancient art form of forum posting it is.

Anyway, I love Jack Ruffian, so using their forum as a diary seems kinda cool. Retro. Gran used to be a bootlegger of their concerts in the nineties, following them all around Australia. That's how I know about them. That's how I know about ALL good music, actually. Gran had the best taste. She would have totally used this forum if she knew how to work a computer for anything besides looking at the BOM radar to check if it was okay for her to surf.

No one has posted here in eleven years?! I guess no one likes Jack Ruffian anymore, not since the lead singer changed his name to The Holy Cavoodle, dyed all of his body hair purple and decided that his music was the only method of communicating with extraterrestrial life. So, here I am, typing all my worries up on a dead forum because I'm too scared to write them out for real.

Besides, my fans might find this if I post somewhere else online that's more alive. I don't want them knowing about any of this yet.

Yet.

I don't want anyone to guess who I am, so I'm not going to give away anything about me. Not my age, not

my gender (or lack thereof), not anything. I just want to word vomit this all out so it doesn't swirl around in my head like a surging, plunging vortex of worry, sucking me down further and further every time it circles.

Being anonymous is kind of awesome. For all you know, I could be the most interesting person you've ever met. And I assume, being the internet, that you've met pretty much everyone.

In that case, please observe the following facts:

- ⚡ I'm a rockstar
- ⚡ I'm a dirt-bike rider
- ⚡ I'm a dog lover
- ⚡ I'm going to become deaf
- ⚡ I'm a billionaire
- ⚡ I have purple armpit hair like The Holy Cavoodle.

Only one of those things is true. Not telling you which.

How do I sign this off without giving away my name? Guess I'll just use my username; that seems fitting. It's a name I chose for myself. My secret superhero identity.

Shooting stars and peace signs,



2

THURSDAY, 11 JANUARY 2024, 2.57 PM

**HEYYYYYYYYYYY DID YOU SEE
MY BUTT ON THE NEWS THIS
AFTERNOON??????????**

turns out my butt is so big and stinky that it made the news oops

kinda awkwardddddddddddd lololololol

3

THURSDAY, 11 JANUARY 2024, 5.32 PM

🎵 **PLAYLIST FOR MOONFLOWER**

1. 'Moonage Daydream' – David Bowie
2. 'Les Fleurs' – Minnie Riperton
3. 'Moon Dude' – Jessica Pratt
4. 'Sunflower' – Post Malone
5. 'Moon Song' – Phoebe Bridgers

SORRY ABOUT THAT PREVIOUS POST.

I didn't write it, it was Moonflower. She found my laptop while she was at my place this afternoon. I must have left the forum open. I would just like to assure anyone reading that my butt did *not* make the 5 pm news.

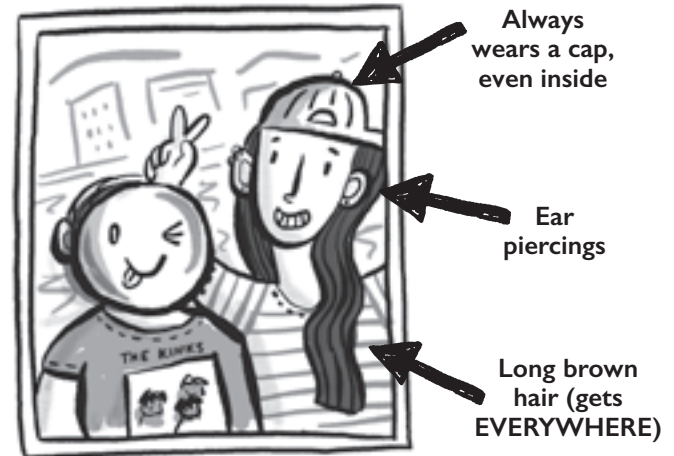
OH MY BOWIE. I CAN UPLOAD PICTURES ON HERE?

And I can **CHANGE** THE FONT?!

A M A Z I N G

It'll help me make this little corner of the internet more **ME**.

Here's a photo of me and Moonflower (FYI I don't have a case of the rare Emoji Face Syndrome, I just want to be ANONYMOUS right now so I'll use my phone to add an emoji on top of my face):



To answer your burning question, no, Moonflower isn't actually her name. It's her username. So, in the interest of not giving away anything about myself (apart

from, y'know, all of my deepest, darkest secrets), I'm going to call her by the name she chose for herself.

You can tell so much about someone from the few words they've strung together to represent themselves in the alternate reality of the internet:

⚡ **Song lyrics?** Imaginative and interesting, has a rich inner life, probably secretly writing poetry that will echo through the aeons. Aka, MINE!

⚡ **Just your name?** You think you're going to become famous and you need to grab that handle while you can.

⚡ **A play on your own name?** You don't take yourself too seriously, up for a laugh, the type of person who would offer to be the one to take the photo when you're in a group setting and want a pic.

⚡ **A random string of letters and numbers?** Are you a serial killer? Seriously, ARE YOU?? I bet you have different passwords for each of your apps.

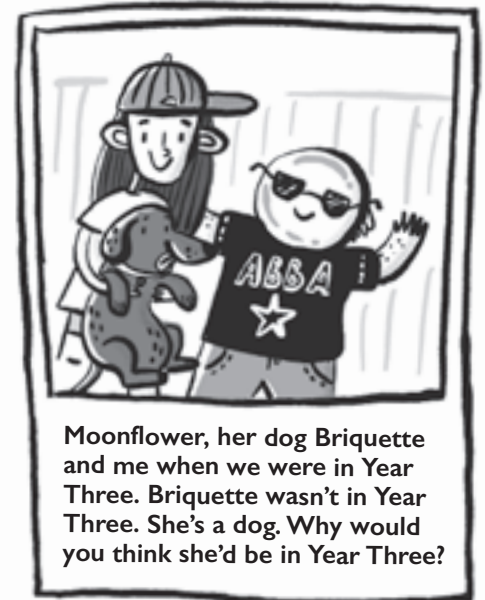
Moonflower has been my best friend since Year Two when we tried out for the school choir and were turned away for being wholly incapable of holding a tune. While cursing the music teacher afterwards, we discovered something magical: we were both obsessed with ABBA.

I've been her sidekick ever since, even though Moonflower has outgrown her ABBA obsession (me, not so much).

Moonflower is the coolest person I know, and I'm totally not even saying that because I might leave this laptop open again and she could read this. She has her ears double-pierced and wore Converse sneakers to school, despite getting in trouble for it all the time. She's also the smartest person in the school. She's won lots of maths competition awards and the teachers are always coming up to her, latest test in their hands, saying how well she did. I couldn't believe she wanted to hang out with me. So, that was how it was for all of primary school.

Me and Moonflower. Moonflower and me.

Until . . . Moonflower up and left me, like a sad, out-of-date chicken thigh tossed into the rubbish. She was moved from our high school a month ago, at the end of Year Seven. Her parents booked her into a Fancy-Schmancy religious private school, where the girls have *etiquette lessons*, which I assume



Moonflower, her dog Briquette and me when we were in Year Three. Briquette wasn't in Year Three. She's a dog. Why would you think she'd be in Year Three?

are lessons on how to hold a teacup with your little pinky sticking up into the air.

So, I've been cast out to fend for myself in the wilderness that is our high school. Let's call it the School of Woe and Torture (SOWAT for short). Term one, day one, hour one of Year Eight starts in a week and a bit. I'm as nervous as a shaking, asthmatic chihuahua in a dust storm because . . .

I don't have any friends besides Moonflower.



Moonflower sent me this pic of her buying her new uniform, posing outside her new school's gates. I'm sure their school motto is **ONLY FANCY GIRLS ALLOWED. UNFANCY ONES, TAKE A HIKE!!!***

*I consider myself unfancy and perhaps not a girl. Am currently taking a hike. The trees are nice out here.

ZADA.

Zilch.

Nada.

She was it.

I really wish that wasn't the case, but I'm just bad at making friends. Whenever I talk to someone, I can never think of anything to say next. My mouth gums up, my heart zooms and my face shines with embarrassment.

I hate hate hate hate hate hate it.

Then, the person I'm talking to stares at the gasping, gaping, red-faced galah in front of them and writes me off as an awkward clot.

The only reason I never get this feeling with Moonflower is that she never stops talking, so I don't have to cringe with mortification and dread the silent, horrible dips and gaps in conversation.

Moonflower came over this morning to 'help me get ready for school'. I know it was really because Mum had begged Moonflower's mum to let her come over to get my mind off everything. Yes, **EVERYTHING**. (No, Moonflower leaving isn't the reason I'm writing in this forum, but it certainly isn't helping the matter. I'll get to all of THAT later.) She also came over because I suspect she thinks I would be tragically uncool without her help.

'You would be tragically uncool without my help,' Moonflower had crowed as she riffled through my limited wardrobe (mostly old, retro band shirts, which, according to Moonflower, constitute a crime punishable by death. Or a public dakking.)

She had brought over some kinky-stompy combat boots, which didn't fit her anymore, for me to have.

What's extra starry about Moonflower is that she hasn't treated me differently ever since



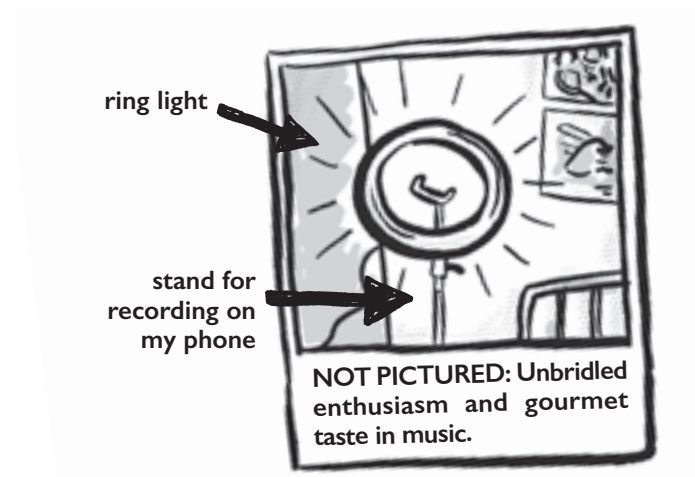
I found out about . . . well, **EVERYTHING** that is going on with me. I don't have to talk about it all. I can just push it into the dark, little box at the back of my head.

'Wanna do a video on the new Big Thief record today?' Moonflower asked. She fiddled around a bit with my video recording set-up, rearranging the vinyl I have in the background.

Another thing I can let slip about myself:

I'm famous.

No, REALLY!



I run a successful MeTube music review channel where I upload videos rating new albums. And, NO! I'm not linking it here. I don't want my fans to somehow find this.

Moonflower was the reason I started my channel: we work on it together, sometimes recording at her house. I had the idea for it and she was the one who pushed me to do it. Now, it's so big I sometimes want to quit school to work on it. Moonflower says she's my producer. She bought me a ring light and made me a little sign to hang up in the background of my reviews. Honestly, I doubt my channel would be as popular without her help.

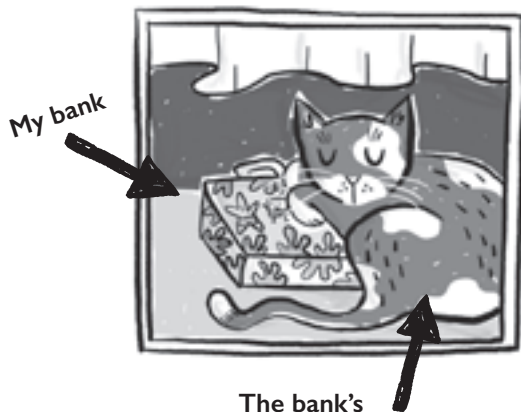
Getting ready to record, I started packing up my new textbooks into my schoolbag.

'Your mum still hasn't got you a new bag?' She eyed

my old, patched army surplus bag. 'Take out some money from your Nina Simone vinyl* stash!'

She ACTUALLY SUGGESTED THAT! I NEVER touch the money in my bank account**.

'I like my old one!' I had said to Moonflower, but really I've had the same scrappy backpack since primary school. I would gargle a bag of toothpicks if it meant I could get a new one. Pop says I shouldn't care about appearances. I say that's the kind of talk you'd hear from a fifty-eight-year-old man whose nostril hairs could be harvested for hair extensions.



The bank's branch manager

Moonflower had whipped out a Sharpie. 'Let's decorate it, then,' she'd grinned, all notion of recording a video forgotten.

We spent all afternoon

* A 1965 first pressing, mint-condition edition of Nina's *Pastel Blues* from Beatnick Records on Main Street (the only record shop in town). It's going to be mine one day. I help our downstairs neighbour Mrs McFee with chores for a few dollars a month, so it's slow going saving up.

** My old *SpongeBob SquarePants* lunch box from primary school, hidden under my bed, where Tugboat likes to sleep.

colouring in my old bag with twisted spirals and tendrils, flowers, patterns, stars and moons. I took twenty minutes to carefully write out some Bin Night lyrics in the very middle of the bag. Here's a pic of the finished product! I'm SO PROUD of it!



'It looks SO AMAZING!!!!!' Moonflower always speaks in exclamation marks. She had paused as she read the lyrics, then laughed. 'No one at SOWAT likes Bin Night except you and me! Well, only you now.'

I groaned like a dying marmoset. 'Why do you have to remind me?'

'Why don't you hang out with Simon and Jess? They like good music.'

'Remember when we saw them a few weeks ago down on the Esplanade? They just said hello to you and couldn't even remember my name. They called me Angus.' The Esplanade is the central street in town, a long row of cafes and gigantic pine trees that runs next to the main beach. It's where all the **COOL, HIP YOUTH** hang out.

'It's a strong name. You should consider it as a nickname. They're obsessed with Taylor Swift, anyway, so no big loss,'

she trilled, twirling around in one of Mum's flowy, hippie dresses. She borrows them whenever Mum's not around.

Taylor Swift is a great songwriter, I had wanted to say. But I didn't.

I just nodded. I always agree with Moonflower.

'You'll make friends, Angus! Four out of ten people say that they met their best friends for life in high school. What about orchestra? You could find a new group to hang out with there!'

'It won't be the same without you,' I said. And it won't. I know myself; I'll hardly open my mouth during rehearsal now.

'Just remember,' she had said, getting all serious, pointing her finger at me like a teacher, 'the trick to being cool is that you have to *not care what people think of you.*'

Easy sneezy for her to say. I care **SO MUCH** about what people think of me that it keeps me awake at night, remembering cringe, ridiculous things I've said, twisting myself inside out with embarrassment. If I could sue my mouth for defamation, I'd be marching straight to a lawyer's office right now.

Moonflower added: 'And no talking about *Tetroworld.*'

'Pfft, only babies still play *Tetroworld.*' I said.

As I was playing *Tetroworld* after Moonflower left, I made a list in my head of things I could do better this year

to make more friends. I scribbled the list down as I went to the kitchen to get more Milo.

That's it, Abyss of the Internet!

I'm leaving
Awkward Socially-
Stunted Muppet
Thunderhead in the
past!

This year I'm going to be:

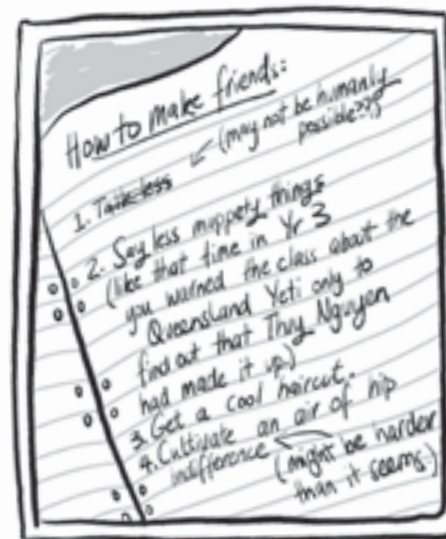
**INTERESTING
CHATTY**

**SOPHISTICATED
WELL-GROOMED**

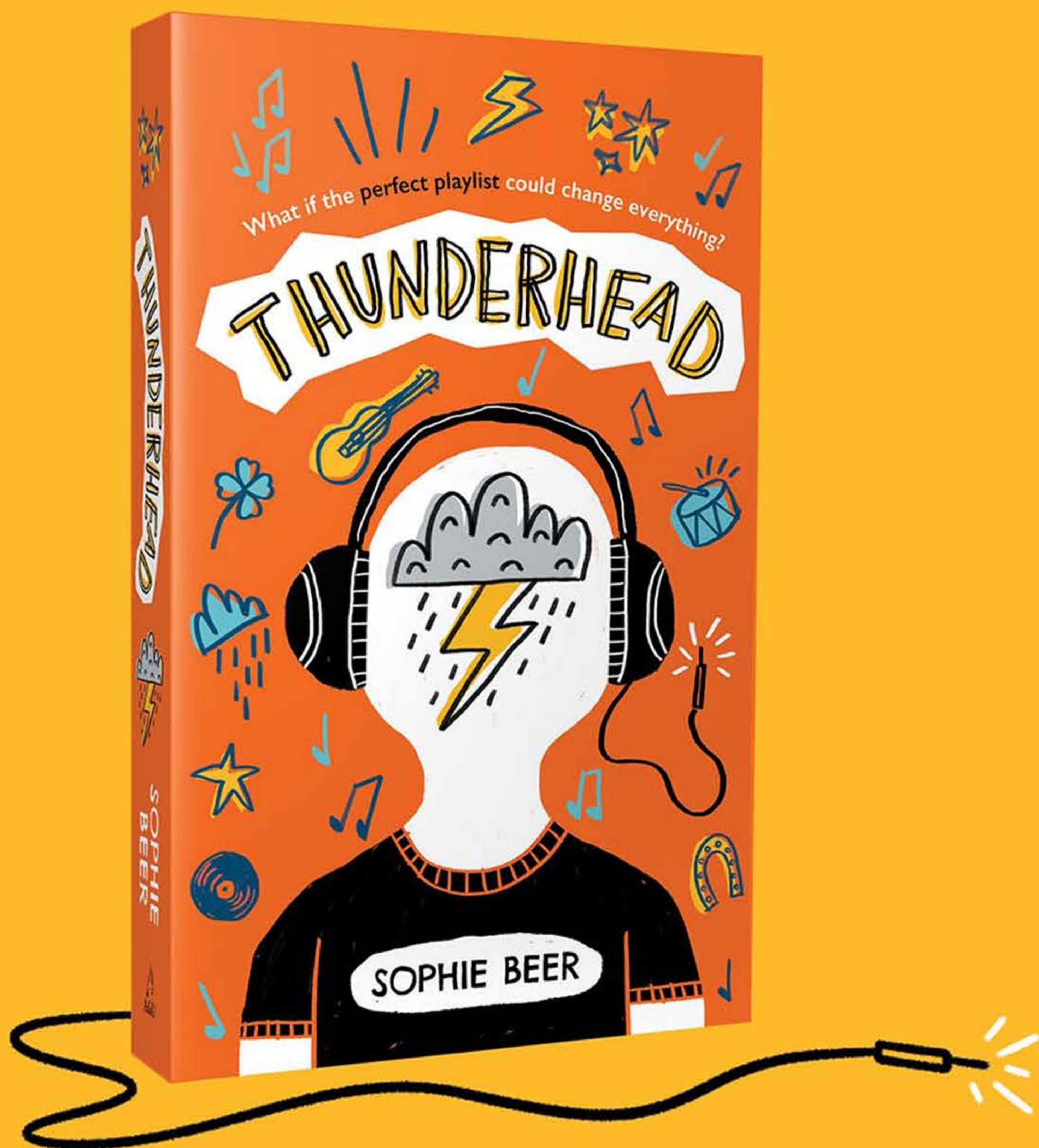
I will wear matching socks! I will not get pooped on by birds! I'm going to make a new set of friends **SO COOL** that Moonflower will tearfully beg on her knees for her parents to let her come back to SOWAT.

Back to me.

Sophistication and Lack of Bird Poop,



SOMETIMES YOU NEED
TO FACE THE MUSIC




ALLEN & UNWIN