Phoenix rubbed her eyes as they flitted open, and she groaned as she realized her headache from the night before just got even worse from a good night’s rest. She contemplated the consequences of her absence from school, wondering if she could just ditch for a day to get better, but she knew that Mr. Adams, her Calculus teacher, would be furious if she skipped again today since she already missed a whole week of school already.

“Phoenix, wake up!” called her mother from downstairs. As Phoenix stretched her arms toward the ceiling and shot up from her bed, her mother stormed into the room with her arms crossed, a frown etched at the corners of her lips. “Come on, dear, you missed so many days of school. I can’t allow you to miss any more.”

Suddenly, her mother’s voice came into her mind. *I bet she’s just faking her illness to get away from going to school.*

“What?” demanded Phoenix, surprised by her mother’s remark.

“I didn’t say anything,” her mother replied. “Hurry and get dressed. You’re going to be late.”

Phoenix blinked a few times as her mother exited her room. What just happened?

Strange as it was, her mother was right. Quickly, she changed into her favorite hoodie and sweatpants, too groggy to even try to look decent for the day. Her mother was just ready to drive her to school, and Phoenix arrived to school just on time with five minutes to spare. She found her best friend, Alexia, standing by the entrance of Westfield High, flailing her arms about to greet her.

“Hey, Phoenix!” Alexia ran up and flung her arms around her, squeezing her tight. “Are you okay?”

*She looks terrible,* Alexia’s voice echoed in Phoenix’s mind. Phoenix gasped, “I can’t believe you would say that.”

“What?” Alexia said in disbelief, scowling. “I just asked if you’re okay. I guess you really aren’t.”

*Wow, she should have just stayed home if she was going to be grumpy.* There it was again. Alexia’s voice, and it sounded very disappointed with Phoenix.

“Something’s up,” muttered Phoenix. “I have to go to the restroom.”

Before her best friend could say anything in response, Phoenix zoomed past several students, not even bothering to say “Excuse me.” She rushed over to the closest restroom, the one near her locker, and several girls were waiting in line to use the stalls before class started. They all turned their attention toward Phoenix, who was out of breath and had disheveled hair.

All of a sudden, dozens of girls’ voices clouded her mind all at once, insults and coos of sympathy about her appearance. It was too much for Phoenix to handle. She restrained from screaming at the top of her lungs, confused and angry about all these strangers’ thoughts that bombarded her head, making her headache even worse than ever.

“God, what is wrong with me?!” grumbled Phoenix, just as the bell rang. It was time for calculus, and maybe the exam would keep her mind off of this newfound power of…mindreading?

She and the student body crowded together and walked into their respective classrooms. Mr. Adams wore a heavy frown on her face as Phoenix entered the room with wide eyes.

“Um, hello, Mrs. Adams,” she whimpered at the sight of her teacher.

“How nice of you to join us again, Ms. Parker,” said Mr. Adams in a monotone voice.

*Her mom must have forced her to come take the exam after I called their household so many times,* Mr. Adams voice echoed, triggering tears that began to sting Phoenix’s eyes.

“Well, I’m sorry, okay? I just didn’t feel well for the whole week!” she hollered, fed up of everyone’s secret judgements in her mind. The tears had immediately began streaming down her face again.

“Are you alright?” Mr. Adams asked, sounding very concerned.

“No, I’m not!” screamed Phoenix, capturing the attention of all her classmates. Now, even more thoughts were ringing in her head, causing her to be even more self-conscious about herself and her new power of mind-reading.