



Somebody, Please Tell Me Who I Am

By Harry Mazer, Peter Lerangis

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A teen soldier returns home from Iraq forever changed in this poignant and pivotal novel that *Kirkus Reviews* calls “as illuminating as a hand grenade, and just as powerful.”

Ben lives a charmed life—effortlessly landing the lead in the high school musical, dating the prettiest girl in school. When he decides to enlist in the army after 9/11, no one thinks he’ll be in real danger. But his decision has devastating consequences: His convoy gets caught in an explosion, and Ben ends up in a coma for two months. When he wakes up, he doesn’t know where he is—or remember anything about his old life. His family and friends mourn what they see as a loss, but Ben perseveres. And as he triumphs, readers will relate to this timely novel that pairs the action and adventure of the best war stories with the emotional elements of struggle and transformation.

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Editorial Review

Review

* "The tight focus on one soldier does not oversimplify but rather captures the human drama in the personal...The book's power is in the honesty and hope conveyed. As illuminating as a hand grenade, and just as powerful."--"Kirkus Reviews", starred review

"Provides a moving portrait of a young soldier's sacrifice and struggle. With realistic dialogue, relatable characters, and subject matter relevant to teens, this book is a worthwhile addition to library collections."--"VOYA"

"Mazer and Lerangis use strong characters and storytelling to explore the slow and painful recovery of an injured teenage soldier...the journey is powerful and worthwhile."--"Publishers Weekly"

"An easy read about a difficult and important subject, with realistic characters whose depth is implied more than explained. Although the reader may despair at the tragic turn of a young man so full of promise, the ending offers a glimpse of light at the end of what will be a long, dark tunnel."--"Booklist"

"This is one of the best books I have read recently...the story of struggle, recovery, and relationships; of love, perseverance, and overcoming astronomical odds."--"Library Media Connection"

"Somebody, Please Tell Me Who I Am" tells a bold war story without being overtly political or taking sides; as such it's a great choice for discussion groups. It's also an exciting, intelligent, fast-paced read that should appeal to both avid and reluctant readers, providing gripping action and food for thought."--"BookPage"

"Its accessibility and directness may help readers understand how many things aren't over just because a war ends."--"Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books"

"Has the power of prose distilled into its purest essence. An easy-to-read war novel that respects its readers and challenges them to understand the true consequences of war."--"The Horn Book"

About the Author

Harry Mazer is the author of many books for young readers, including *Please, Somebody Tell Me Who I Am*; *My Brother Abe*; the Boy at War trilogy; *The Wild Kid*; *The Dog in the Freezer*; *The Island Keeper*; and *Snow Bound*. His books have won numerous honors, including a *Horn Book* honor and an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults citation. Along with his wife, Norma Fox Mazer, Harry received an ALAN award in 2003 for outstanding contribution to adolescent literature. He lives in Montpelier, Vermont.

Peter Lerangis is the author of many books for young readers, including *wtf*, *Smiler's Bones*, the Watchers series, *The Sword Thief*, and the *New York Times* bestselling 39 Clues series. Peter lives with his wife and two sons in New York City. Visit him at PeterLerangis.com.

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Somebody Please Tell Me Who I Am



May 5

The knife came out of nowhere.

Ben Bright sprang back. His arm knocked the weapon into the shadows and nearly clocked his best friend, Niko Petropoulos.

“Nervous, are we?” Niko said.

Ben felt his heart race. His best friend was Sharked up, his hair slicked back and a cigarette pack rolled in his sleeve. Up close he looked ridiculous, and on a normal day Ben would have laughed in his face.

But not today. Today he wanted to shove Niko through the curtain. Or weep. Instead, the two impulses met in the middle and canceled each other out, and he said, “You scared me.”

“That makes two of us. Look what you did.” Niko lifted his shirt, revealing an ugly, purplish bruise. “I would like you to stab me again. And do it right this time.”

The bruise looked like a piece of steak or a great big rotten cabbage. Or the map of a distant, dead planet. “I did that?” Ben said.

“At dress rehearsal. You had your finger hooked around the blade, so it didn’t retract.” Niko was staring at him strangely. He lowered his shirt and leaned forward, raising an eyebrow. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Ben lied.

“You look like you’re about to pass out, or get sick. Which is okay. Nerves are normal. People hurl on opening nights, all the time. Just don’t do it here. You’ve already abused me enough. You’re graduating. I’ve got another year for humiliation.”

“I don’t have to hurl. I’m okay.”

“Ladies and gentlemen.” Niko pantomimed holding a mike. “Tonight. West Side Story. Eastport High School, New York. A performance that redefines Method acting—Tony actually kills Bernardo. Casting for replacement. Must be unbelievably buff and own a Kevlar vest. Details at eleven.”

Now everyone was staring: The sophomore playing Riff. Three Latino cast members practicing the Mambo. The weird little wardrobe kid who smelled like wet shoes. Which just made Ben feel worse. He hated keeping secrets. He hated doing things without telling anybody. He had to make it through this day, just this day. He could tell people tomorrow.

For now, he wanted to freeze time. To photograph them all and hold this moment tight, so he could retrieve it a month from now. So he could feel everything—the opening-night mania, the way Niko’s comments made him tongue-tied and unclever, the curve of his girlfriend Ariela’s back as she stretched at the barre. The way everyone shut up and paid attention whenever he appeared onstage. All the stuff he would be leaving behind.

He spun and trapped Niko in a headlock. “I’m a spaz, okay? I don’t belong on the same stage as you.”

“Murder!” Niko cried. He jerked loose, shaking his finger. “This is your inferiority complex. It makes you passive-aggressive. Or just aggressive. You need someone to convince you, for the trillionth time, that you’re God’s gift to the theater. Oy. Someone, please get him a Tony Award before he kills me!”

“Save the award, I’m getting the plastic knife,” Ben said, turning away.

That didn’t make sense. Everything out of his mouth felt off, like a bad taste. He walked carefully, threading through the squealers and warm-ups and grim line-reciters. His knife would be somewhere among the thicket of legs.

“Be-e-e-enntyyyyy!” Wendy Leff enveloped Ben in a massive hug. Justin Milstein jumped in on the action, too, then Sarah Welch. The entire cluster nearly collided with Ariela Cruz, who was sitting on the floor near the back wall.

“Unhand the Wonk,” Ariela said. She was in a full split, leaning over a show poster she’d just signed.

Ben gently pushed aside his friends. “You’re my hero,” he said. “But . . . Wonk?”

“I have this new theory,” she said matter-of-factly. “There are three types of people who do theater. Type One is the Needies.” She wagged her fingers at Wendy. “They’re in it for the love and hugging. Two is the Bloviators, who get off on the attention. That would be cough cough, Niko, cough. And Three is the Wonks, like me and you, the process junkies. Acting, singing—we just like doing it. It’s a good Wonkness.”

A shrill voice pierced through the noise, “Half hour, please! Half hour!” Jeannie Lin, their stage manager, wound her way through the crowd, clutching a clipboard. Seeing Ben, she held out a tired-looking plastic knife and recited in her same announcer-voice, “And hold on to your props, people!”

Ariela smiled at her as she marched away. “I hate when she calls us ‘people.’”

“Me too,” Ben said. “Lords and Ladies’ would work just fine.”

“Ha.” Ariela held out the poster, with a Sharpie balanced on top. “This is a present for Ms. Moglia. Sign under my name, okay? So Tony and Maria will always be together.” She batted her eyes with an irony that felt somehow comforting at a time like this.

Ariela’s name was huge and bold, with a heart sign over the i and a gushy, theater-y message, but Ben signed only his name in quick, tiny scribble.

“Modesty, in a guy, is so hot,” Ariela said with a sigh.

“I suck! I so totally suck!” Niko’s voice eagerly piped up from behind Ben. “At everything.”

“Modesty,” Ariela said, “not idiocy.”

“Look what your modest boyfriend did to me,” Niko said.

Ben could tell by Ariela’s nose crinkle that Niko had lifted his shirt again.

“He’s gentler with me. Well, mostly,” Ariela said. Standing up, she handed Niko the poster. “See if you can find room for your whole, long Greek name. Or just write ‘Douchebag.’ It’s shorter. And pass it on when you’re done.”

With a sly wink at Niko, she gave Ben a kiss and moved to an emptier spot at the barre. “Don’t say anything,” Ben murmured.

“You mean, like, ‘Lucky bastard’?” Niko said. “Okay, I’ll just think it.”

“Compliment accepted. I think.”

“So, have you guys set a date?”

“Just sign the poster.”

Niko leaned in closer. “I’m serious. We’ve talked about this—”

“Hypothetically. And in private.”

“Nobody’s listening. I find the idea fascinating.” Niko carefully signed his full name, Nikolaos Dimitrios Petropoulos. “You and Ariela . . . settling down, getting married, auditioning, living together in some rat-infested love nest in Brooklyn . . . down the block from me and Taylor Swift.”

Ben was in no mood for Niko’s predictable unpredictability. “Later, okay? She’s going to be in Ohio next year. And you know it. If you want to rehearse, come find me.”

He began walking away to look for a quieter, less annoying spot.

“And you? Where are you going? How come you never talk about that?” Niko barreled on, following close behind. “I mean, you and Ariela have been together since you were in diapers, you still love each other’s asses, and you both know you couldn’t do better. So . . . you wouldn’t do anything stupid to screw that up. Am I right?”

Ben whirled around. “If this is some kind of nut-job acting exercise, it’s over. Now let’s do the scene or go back into your hole.”

Niko had a weird look. Ben knew the look. Sometimes when Niko wanted something, he didn’t give you the pleasure of stating it outright if he could make you guess it.

“Are you jealous?” Ben said with exasperation. “Is that what this is all about? Can you hold it in until after the show?”

“Come at me.” Niko struck his fight pose. “Come on, Tony, you greasy slimebag, Polish gringo. Come and get Bernardo, the brother of your sexy true love.”

“Twist my arm.” Making sure to grip the knife with the handle only, Ben lunged at him. Niko flew back, just as rehearsed, and Ben lunged again. He aimed away from the bruise, a couple of inches closer to Niko’s midsection, and plunged the knife inward. He could feel the blade retracting smoothly into the hilt on a spring. He’d done it right this time. Niko was supposed to flex his torso and freeze for a moment, letting the

audience see that he'd been stabbed. But instead, he grabbed Ben's arm and flipped him to the floor.

"Hey!" Ben shouted.

Niko was on top of him, pinning him to the dust-covered floorboards. Which was unfair because Niko wrestled varsity.

Ben forced a laugh. "Okay, okay, we're even. Let go."

"Not yet," Niko said, his voice a raspy whisper. He leaned closer, his eyes narrowed and angry. "You got your notice, didn't you?"

Ben felt himself grow suddenly cold and numb. "What?"

"You don't want to say anything because it's opening night," Niko said. "Right? Because you're such a friggin' modest Boy Scout. Because you're so It's not about me."

"Asshole." Ben struggled but couldn't move.

"I know what you did. Tell me the truth. Because there are only two things that could make you act so weird. One is that Ariela is pregnant—so it must be the other thing."

"You're freaking crazy."

"Crazy but not stupid. If I'm wrong, say it. Say 'You're wrong.' Just those words."

Ben lurched forward, ramming his forehead into Niko's brow.

As his best friend fell back with a yowl, Jeannie came running toward them. "Guys! What are you doing?"

Ben forced a smile. "Just rehearsing."

"Nice move." Niko rubbed his head. His eyes had changed, as if a cloud front had moved across them. "It'll come in handy with the ragheads."

"Don't use that word," Ben snapped.

"You can tell them, 'Hey, terrorists, it's not about you.' Teach them the Gospel of Ben and save the world from Islamists."

"Um, you guys? We're almost at fifteen—" Jeannie said.

"We know, okay?" Ben snapped. "Go away."

As she huffed off, Niko glanced over toward Ariela. "Have you told her? I'm sure she'll be okay with the fact that you're giving her up. Not to mention your friends and your future. To join the freaking Army and fight a war we never should have gotten into! And Chris. What's he going to think? Did you ever think about the fact that your brother needs you more than the Republican party does?"

“It’s not a party, it’s a country,” Ben said. “And I’m not going anywhere but boot camp. Just because you and everyone else in this school aren’t doing what I’m doing, doesn’t make you all right and me wrong.”

“You want to know what’s wrong? It’s wrong to waste talent. It’s wrong to keep it from the rest of the world. It’s selfish.”

“There are thousands of people who can act and sing.”

“There are thousands of people who can take a bullet for no good reason.”

Do. Not. Let. Him. Get. To. You.

“Fifteen minutes, people!” Jeannie shouted. “Fifteen!”

Ben stood calmly. “I need to get ready. Do you want to do the scene again?”

Niko looked at him dully and turned away. “Break a leg, Private Bright. And crack a skull while you’re at it.”

Users Review

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In this 21st century, people become competitive in every single way. By being competitive now, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of typically the crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. Yeah, by reading a e-book your ability to survive boost then having chance to stand up than other is high. In your case who want to start reading a book, we give you that Somebody, Please Tell Me Who I Am book as nice and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

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