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Dramatic Publishing

THE SPARROW



DRAMA BY
CHRIS MATHEWS • JAKE MINTON • NATHAN ALLEN

“This show is among the very best original theatre pieces I’ve ever seen in this town ... a thrilling, riveting celebration of the power of imagination that adults and teens can enjoy, and understand, together.” —*Chicago Tribune*

“This is a play about finding release from grief and guilt. It’s about forgiveness. And it contains moments ... so honest, so genuine they will take your breath away.” —*Daily Herald*

THE SPARROW

Drama. By *Chris Mathews, Jake Minton and Nathan Allen.* Cast: 6m., 7w., 1 either gender. Ten years ago Emily Book, the lone survivor of a horrible school bus accident, was sent away from the tiny town of Spring Farm. Now, in her senior year, Emily must return in order to graduate from high school. When she arrives, shy and guarded, Emily is unwillingly thrust into the whirlwind of Spring Farm High. Guided by her biology teacher, Mr. Christopher, and befriended by head cheerleader, Jenny McGrath, Emily must learn to fit in with her classmates while yearning to stay out of the spotlight. But when Jenny’s life is threatened in a dangerous stunt at the homecoming basketball game, Emily reveals her true powers as she saves Jenny’s life in a stunning display of telekinetic heroism. Thus, Spring Farm’s own darling superhero, “The Sparrow,” is born. Can this strange girl with even stranger powers be the hero that her town is longing for, or will her dark secret destroy them all? *The Sparrow* taps into the fundamental aching of adolescence—fearing that we’re somehow different while hoping that we’re somehow special. “*The Sparrow* presents the best of fresh theatre storytelling. It’s original, imaginative and entertaining.” (*Miami New Times*) “‘She’s got astonishing magical powers.’ That’s what they say of Emily Book, heroine of *The Sparrow* ... But truly, the phrase should be applied to the creators of this piece for they have spun together a piece so imaginative, enthralling and just plain fun that goggle eyes and bated breath rule the auditorium.” (*Miamiartzone.com*) Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes. Code: SIL.

Cover: *The House Theatre of Chicago*
premier production featuring *Carolyn Deffin*.
Photo: *Michael Brosilow*. Cover design: *Susan Carle*.

ISBN 10: 1-58342-857-7
ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-857-3



www.dramaticpublishing.com



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311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
Phone: (800) 448-7469
(815) 338-7170



Printed on recycled paper

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Drama by

CHRIS MATHEWS, JAKE MINTON
and NATHAN ALLEN



Dramatic Publishing Company

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Bret Adams Ltd., 448 W. 44th St.
New York, NY 10036 • Phone: (212) 765-5630

ISBN: 978-1-58342-857-3

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the authors of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the authors *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the authors, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“*The Sparrow* was originally developed and produced by
The House Theatre of Chicago.”

“You can smell and taste something new, something passionate, something original, something strong, something fresh, something true and, above all, something young. ... This show is among the very best original theater pieces I’ve seen in this town. It is a thrilling, riveting celebration of the power of imagination that adults and teens can enjoy, and understand, together. ... *The Sparrow* is a sci-fi high-school story, owing formative debts to the likes of *Carrie* and *Mean Girls* and *Wicked* and the works of Ray Bradbury.”

—Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*.

“This is a play about finding release from grief and guilt. It’s about forgiveness. And it contains moments ... so honest, so genuine they will take your breath away.”

—Barbara Vitello, *Daily Herald*.

“Nathan Allen and his co-authors, Chris Mathews and Jake Minton, take a more compassionate view of the adolescent ‘outsider’ to forge a parable of trial and redemption ... What sets *The Sparrow* apart from previous efforts by this undeniably talented ensemble is the depth of its intellectual dimensions, expressed in multifaceted characters of classical complexity.”

—Mary Shen Barnidge, *Windy City Times*.

“*The Sparrow* is a refreshingly strong story told with terrific production values that blends humor, music, drama and telekinetic powers into a thrillingly clever theatre piece. Kudos to The House Theatre of Chicago as they continue to expand their theatrical craftsmanship. Their ensemble gives new meaning to daring collaborative efforts. *The Sparrow* soars!”

—Tom Williams, *Chicago Critic*.

“A fantasy story about acceptance, teenage angst, and the power of being who you are wrapped with telekinetic powers is a fascinating concept to bring to a live stage ... *The Sparrow* presents the best of fresh theatre storytelling. It’s original, imaginative, and entertaining.”

—Chris Joseph, *Miami New Times*.

The Sparrow premiered on January 13, 2007, at the Viaduct Theatre, produced by The House Theatre of Chicago.

Cast

Emily Book Carolyn Defrin
Jenny McGrath Paige Hoffman
Dan Christopher Cliff Chamberlain
Joyce McGuckin, Evie Sullivan Kat McDonnell
Albert McGuckin, Jonathan Simpson Michael E. Smith
Charlie McGuckin, Carol Schott, Elizabeth Gilbert Sara Hoyer
Driver, Skye Thompson, Mark Gilbert Patrick Andrews
Principal Skor, Louie Nash Stephen Taylor
Margaret Rosenthal, Phoebe Marks Lauren Vitz
Sheriff Rosenthal, Brad Gomer Johnny Arena
Allison McGrath, Michelle Allen Lauren McCarthy
Tammy Adams, Shannon Baker Ele Matelan
Coach Gerald Adams, Stuart Edgerton Dennis Watkins
Grandmother (voice) Martha Lavey

Production

Director Nathan Allen
Choreographer Tommy Rapley
Composer Kevin O'Donnell
Sound Design Michael Griggs
Lighting Design Ben Wilhelm
Scenic Design Collette Pollard
Object Design Tracy Otwell
Magic Design Dennis Watkins
Technical Director G. Warren Stiles
Dramaturg Kelly Kerwin
Production Manager Dixie Uffelman
Stage Manager Brian DesGranges

The Sparrow

CHARACTERS

EMILY BOOK: High-school senior, a bookworm. She is weighed down by the past.

MR. (DAN) CHRISTOPHER: Biology teacher at Spring Farm High. He used to be an excellent dancer.

JENNY McGRATH: Junior at Spring Farm High. She is friendly, excited and ambitious.

JOYCE McGUCKIN: Wife and a mother.

ALBERT McGUCKIN: Owns a hardware store.

CHARLIE McGUCKIN: 9-year-old who loves tomahawks and headdresses.

PRINCIPAL JIM SKOR: First a principal, second a . . . principal . . .

COACH GERALD ADAMS: Was a great coach—is a great coach.

GRANDMOTHER: Raised Emily for as long as she could take care of her.

DRIVER: Has watched Emily grow up.

ANNOUNCER

TOWNSPEOPLE: All suffered the loss of that day.

SHERIFF ROSENTHAL

MARGARET ROSENTHAL

MARK GILBERT

ELIZABETH GILBERT

ALLISON McGRATH

TAMMY ADAMS

STUDENTS: Including the junior class of Spring Farm High.

SPARROWS BASKETBALL TEAM

BRAD GOMER

JONATHAN SIMPSON

SKYE THOMPSON

STUART EDGERTON

LOUIE NASH

SPARROWS CHEERLEADERS

MICHELLE ALLEN

PHOEBE MARKS

CAROL SCHOTT

SHANNON BAKER

EVIE SULLIVAN

SCENES

ACT I

1. PTA MEETING
2. RIDE HOME
3. WELCOME HOME EMILY
4. MCGUCKIN FAMILY DINNER
5. EMILY'S DREAM
6. SPRING FARM HIGH
7. THE HEART IS A MUSCLE
8. LEAVES OF GRASS
9. WALKING HOME 1
10. JENNY & EMILY
11. CHIEF CHARLIE
12. DODGEBALL
13. DETENTION
14. SPIRIT BOX
15. BASKETBALL GAME
16. LOCKER ROOM
17. CHEERLEADER CRISIS
18. THE SPARROW
19. FLYING IN THE FIELD

Intermission.

ACT II

20. SPRING FARM HIGH, PART 2
21. PIG DISSECTION
22. HELD AFTER CLASS
23. CORSAGE
24. HOMECOMING DANCE
25. SLOW DANCE
26. WALKING HOME 2
27. CHIEF CHARLIE ATTACKS
28. ON THE PORCH
29. TEARS
30. THE BOOK HOUSE
31. THE ACCIDENT
32. FINAL EXAM
33. WALKING HOME 3
34. FALLOUT
35. GRANDMOTHER
36. ESCAPE
37. SHERIFF KNOCKING
38. CAUGHT BY DAN
39. STANDOFF
40. SHOT THROUGH THE HEART
41. FLOAT
42. TRAIN RIDE

SETTING

The story takes place in various locations throughout the small farm town of Spring Farm, Illinois.

AUTHORS' NOTES

Greetings, and thanks for your interest in *The Sparrow*. This play was a labor of love for its original creators, complete with all of the struggle and strife that great love demands. It was written and rewritten, edited and improved, even as it was being workshopped, rehearsed, previewed and performed during its original 2007 run with The House Theatre of Chicago. We are deeply grateful to all of the original designers, actors and crew who worked so passionately and gave so generously of themselves to make *The Sparrow* fly.

We're honored, now, by the life you will bring to it and hope it serves as a deeply rewarding artistic endeavor for you, your fellow artists and your audience.

We'd like to offer a few notes about our writing style. Because we are often writing and rehearsing, rewriting and re-rehearsing, we use a shorthand with one another and our actors so that we can all more quickly decipher the thoughts and intentions of any given line of dialogue. The shorthand is simple, but it uses punctuation and structure just differently enough that the following might be helpful:

Line Endings. Often, lines of dialogue will flow naturally from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line as they reach the limits set by the margins. But sometimes

Sometimes the line will break early,
before reaching the margin.

Like this.

This is always purposeful

And is meant to indicate a punctuation of thought

Or a small break in the flow of speech while a character searches
sometimes

awkwardly

for the right words.

We've found that these line breaks can be honored and traversed at almost any speed, and are only rarely worthy of an actual pause.

Blank lines. Every now and then, a character's speech is broken up by a blank line, as seen above. This is to indicate a breath (physically, emotionally or intellectually) between thoughts and can be filled as seen fit. On whatever scale, just as with every line of dialogue, something is happening with the character.

Ellipses. Similar to blank lines, at times we have given an ellipsis a line to itself:

...

Whether the characters are rendered speechless, stopped in their tracks, searching for the right thing to say, or holding on to something they can't let go—the ball is in their hands while they figure out what to do with it. Again, it is not to suggest the absence of thought or action—quite the opposite.

We hope these devices give access to the characters and their journeys. They're meant to offer insight. Artists should feel free to use them (or not) insofar as they are helpful. Which brings us to ...

Impossible stage directions. We believe in your creativity. There will be some stage directions that are plainly straightforward. Easy: Do them or don't. There are others which hope to suggest landscapes, emotional states or, quite simply, impossible feats to create on a stage. These are open to interpretation and treatment using any theatrical devices you like. Literal adherence might not always be the best way for your company to tell that piece of the story. But tell the story you must, and at a bare minimum, we hope they provide an opportunity for collaboration as you and your fellow artists search for the best way to tell the story to your audience.

Again, our gratitude and best wishes.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The script of *The Sparrow* is full of moments that would be right at home on the pages of a comic book or in the frames of a science fiction movie: a girl with mysterious powers that allow her to levitate objects, spawn explosions and fly; flashbacks to a horrible accident involving a school bus and a train; and, apparently, a musical number?! Among the names and titles offered for comparison in some of *The Sparrow*'s earliest reviews are *Carrie* (the Stephen King horror flick), Ray Bradbury (that science fiction master with limitless imagination) and *Wicked* (the Broadway juggernaut with a budget to match).

And yet, we've seen productions of *The Sparrow* by high-school drama departments that redefined the entire play for us in inspiring ways. A big acknowledgment to the Young Company and Dan Winkler's 2010 production at Chicago's Whitney Young High School—so awesome! Our very first production of the show at The House Theatre of Chicago was built on a shoestring budget and, with the collaboration of our plucky and ingenious designers, composer, choreographer and honest-to-goodness in-house magician, we accomplished every magical moment that we had in mind. In fact, a huge part of the show's appeal, in our opinion, is the surprise and delight that comes to the audience from seeing how each moment of spectacle required by the story is accomplished onstage through theatrical conventions.

By the way, our attitude regarding theatrical conventions is this: be unconventional. And by all means, don't feel the need to be literal in your interpretation of our stage directions (especially the more "impossible" ones). When Emily takes flight, don't feel like you have to strap her into a harness and lift her up on wires. If you've got the means and expertise for that sort of wire work, you may just decide to go for it. But don't forget that the whole town gets to fly for a few moments at the end—that's a lot of rigging. In our production, we decided on a physical metaphor. Dancing meant flying. Every time Emily took flight in the story, the actress playing her would dance across the stage. It helped, of course, that we had a brilliant choreographer on the team and the actress we cast as Emily was already a beautiful and experienced dancer. But what made that particular

metaphor really pay off was the moment when all of the townspeople, played by actors of all different body types and levels of movement experience, danced and breathed in unison at the end. We've yet to see another production of the play in which Emily didn't dance across the stage, so feel free to use that metaphor if it works for you. But if you come up with some other way to "fly" that communicates story and resonates emotion, go for it.

Speaking of metaphors, we used a lot of them. We're big fans of any sort of nonliteral design elements as long as they, as noted above, communicate story and resonate emotions. We won't condescend to you by listing the ones we found successful. We've said it in the authors' notes and we'll say it again: We believe in your creativity. So bring all your toys, and play.

One final note on music: We used a lot of original music in our production—for underscoring, for scene transitions and for those moments when people break into flight/dance. Our answer to the impossible stage directions that we gave ourselves almost always involved music, and all of it was written by the amazing composer Kevin O'Donnell. You don't have to use O'Donnell's music for your production, but if you choose to (a choice we highly encourage), then *The Sparrow's* gorgeous, authoritative and ready-to-order accompaniment CD must be specifically licensed for your production by The Dramatic Publishing Company, Inc.

The Sparrow

ACT I

1. PTA MEETING

AT RISE: *Lights up on the PTA meeting with the TOWNSPEOPLE, JOYCE and ALBERT McGUCKIN, COACH GERALD ADAMS and MR. DAN CHRISTOPHER. PRINCIPAL JIM SKOR speaks into a microphone, though it is entirely unnecessary. The TOWNSPEOPLE are scattered throughout the audience, making everyone a part of the meeting.*

ALL. ...

SHERIFF ROSENTHAL. How old is she now?

TOWNSPEOPLE. Seventeen.

SHERIFF ROSENTHAL. Right, I know.

I mean, of course she is but—

Is she a senior now, or ...

PRINCIPAL SKOR. The sisters at St. Clotilde's have assured us that she's ready for senior level coursework.

ALLISON MCGRATH. Does that mean we have to—

ELIZABETH GILBERT. Do we have a graduation then?

COACH ADAMS. If she's a senior, then it won't be a ghost class.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry everyone.

I'm not sure what to call them.

PRINCIPAL SKOR. They're the senior class.

And we'll come up with something that feels appropriate for the occasion.

MARK GILBERT. I think we have to go ahead with the memorial service as planned ...

MR. CHRISTOPHER. I think we can probably do both, Mark.

PRINCIPAL SKOR. Mr. Christopher has offered to serve as a special counselor in order to make sure we are meeting state standards for her diploma. Dan? (*Offers the microphone to MR. CHRISTOPHER.*)

MR. CHRISTOPHER (*speaks without it*). Resources being what they are, most of her coursework would fall alongside the junior class. So I'm working out a syllabus that should meet her specific needs. Looking at her Iowa test scores, it's clear she's a bright kid. If she wants to go to college, I think she'll have her pick.

TAMMY ADAMS. How do we know she wants to be here?

PRINCIPAL SKOR. We don't.

We just know that she needs to graduate from a state-certified school to attend college.

St. Clotilde's mentioned that she might be a little anxious about returning. All the more reason, I think, that we should all agree on whether or not we will be able to welcome her back.

ALLISON MCGRATH. Where's she gonna live? Now that her grandmother has passed.

MARGARET ROSENTHAL. She can't live in that old house all alone.

PRINCIPAL SKOR. St. Clotilde's was actually hoping that we could find her a host family.

ALL. ...

JOYCE. She can live with us.

PRINCIPAL SKOR. ...

That's very—

You're sure?

(JOYCE checks in with her husband ALBERT, who does not necessarily convey any sort of blessing.)

JOYCE. Yes.

PRINCIPAL SKOR. That's very kind of you, Joyce.

Albert.

OK then.

Knowing that there are still several details to work out between St. Clotilde's

And the McGuckins—

MR. CHRISTOPHER. And Emily ...

PRINCIPAL SKOR. And Emily.

Of course.

Are we OK with all this?

ALL. ...

PRINCIPAL SKOR. Can we take a vote then?

ALL. ...

SHERIFF ROSENTHAL. I don't think we need a vote, Jim.

PRINCIPAL SKOR. Well, Margaret has to put something in the minutes.

ALL. ...

I vote yes.

Me too.

Aye.

Aye.

Of course.

Yes.

Aye.

Yes.

...

PRINCIPAL SKOR. OK. Well.

Let's bring her home.

2. RIDE HOME

(A car travels along a county road somewhere in Illinois. EMILY BOOK stares out the window next to her as rows of corn pass by. Rows of corn give way to silos. Silos give way to barns. Barns give way to houses. Houses become the small town of Spring Farm, Illinois. The car stops in front of Spring Farm High. The DRIVER puts the car into park and turns off the engine.)

EMILY. I want to go back.

DRIVER. ...

Emily—

EMILY. Take me back, please.

I can't
tell them.

I can't be back here.

DRIVER. You're already here, Emily.

EMILY. I don't want to—

DRIVER. Emily, we've done everything that we know how to do for you.

You have to be here.

You have to tell them what you did.

EMILY. ...

DRIVER. ...

You're carrying more weight than anyone should ever have to carry, Emily.

EMILY. I don't know how to let go of it.

DRIVER. I'm not telling you to let go of it.

It's yours to carry.

EMILY. ...

DRIVER. It's time to push you out of the nest, Emily Book.

We know you can fly.

You just have to do it while you carry the weight.

(EMILY stands and picks up her suitcase.)

DRIVER *(cont'd)*. We're all very proud of you.

EMILY. Thanks. *(Opens the door and steps out of the car. Before she closes the door, she speaks.)* Thank you.

3. WELCOME HOME EMILY

(EMILY stands there, face to face with the audience, seemingly paralyzed, both hands clutching her suitcase. The car pulls away behind her. Waiting there behind are TOWNSPEOPLE of mixed ages standing on the front walkway that leads to the steps of the school. As EMILY turns, they cheer and applaud at her arrival. PRINCIPAL SKOR steps forward and offers EMILY a handshake. EMILY sets down her suitcase and obliges as the crowd looks on. PRINCIPAL SKOR and EMILY introduce themselves. They simultaneously reach down to retrieve EMILY's suitcase. The latch snaps open and the suitcase suddenly spills out its contents: dozens of books. They both lurch forward to correct the mess (as if, if they move fast enough, they could prevent what's already happened) and bump heads. They replace all the books into the suitcase, clasping it shut. PRINCIPAL SKOR takes the suitcase up for EMILY. It seems heavier in PRINCIPAL SKOR's hands than it did in EMILY's.)

PRINCIPAL SKOR. On behalf of the people of Spring—

(JOYCE steps out of the crowd and approaches EMILY. ALBERT stands with 10-year-old CHARLIE MCGUCKIN at his side.)

JOYCE. My goodness, you've gotten so tall!

PRINCIPAL SKOR. Emily, this is Joyce McGuckin.

(EMILY puts out her hand to shake. JOYCE embraces her instead. PRINCIPAL SKOR gives the crowd its cue, and it bursts into applause once more. The TOWNSPEOPLE of Spring Farm introduce themselves as EMILY and the McGUCKIN FAMILY prepare for dinner.)

4. McGUCKIN FAMILY DINNER

(The McGUCKIN's and EMILY are seated for dinner.)

JOYCE. Albert?

More salad?

EMILY. These are nice plates.

JOYCE. Oh, these?

Thank you.

EMILY. You're welcome.

And thank you for putting me up.

It's really very generous of you.

JOYCE. Well we're just thrilled.

CHARLIE. These are the Christmas plates!

JOYCE. It is like Christmas, isn't it?

We have a family guest.

She's brought her luggage with her ...

Her presence is

like a present

for us.

Charlie, eat your soup with a spoon.

So, Emily,

do you have any big plans for your first day at Spring Farm High?

EMILY. Um,

Well, I was just thinking I would go in early and get my schedule and, I'll probably need a map to find all my classes. And get books.

CHARLIE. And then are you leaving?

JOYCE. Charlie!

Albert has to go to the hardware store about the same time you go to school, sweetie. He can give you a ride if that would be fine.

EMILY. Hardware store?

ALBERT. McGuckin's Hardware Store.

It's my store.

EMILY. Oh.

Thank you.

JOYCE. I know first days can always seem daunting,

But I'm sure you'll fit in

Just like you'd never left.

And Dan Christopher's going to be your counselor?

You'll get along with him. He's a good man. And a good teacher.

You've got nothing to fear.

We're all just so glad you've come home.

CHARLIE. Why?

JOYCE. Why what, Charlie?

CHARLIE. Why is she here?

JOYCE. She lives here now, Charlie.

Eat your vegetables.

CHARLIE. They're gross!

I'm sick of corn. Corn makes me throw up.

ALBERT. Charlie!

EMILY. I like the corn.

CHARLIE. Nobody cares!

ALBERT. Sit

In—your—chair

CHARLIE. ...

JOYCE. Emil—

EMILY. I'm a little bit tired.

From the trip.

Do you mind if I ...

JOYCE. Of course, sweetie.

Your bed is all made up.

EMILY. Thank you. (*Quickly moves toward the hall, then stops.*)

Which room is it?

JOYCE. Sara's room.

CHARLIE. Sara's room!

You can't go in there!

ALBERT. It isn't—

It's just a room.

CHARLIE. I'm not allowed to go in there!

JOYCE. Why would you want to go into Sara's room, Charlie honey?

You have your own room.

And it's Emily's room now.

CHARLIE. But that doesn't make any sense!

This house is so—

illogical!

JOYCE. That word doesn't mean what you think it does.

EMILY (*has retrieved her suitcase*). Which room is it?

JOYCE. Oh, here let me take that for you.

It's just right up the stairs and to the right here.

Charlie, help your father clear the table.

Don't pay him any mind, sweetie.

He's rambunctious.

You two will be the best of friends soon enough.

And here we are.

Here's your bed.

I hope you still like pink.

The closet and here's the dresser, and mirror.

My,

look at you.

All grown up.

And you have glasses now.

EMILY. I've always had glasses.

JOYCE. Of course you have.

Well, all right, Albert and I are just down the hall if you need anything,

OK, sweetie?

You have a good night and sleep tight.

We're so glad you've come back to us.

EMILY. Mrs. McGuckin.

I'm not Sara.

JOYCE. I—

...

Goodnight. *(Exits.)*

(EMILY switches the bedside lamp, but instead of turning off, it switches to night-light mode. It's one of those rotating gobo lights that casts shooting stars and sparkles around the walls and ceiling of the room. It's accompanied with music box twinkles. EMILY lies on her back, tucked in, motionless, eyes looking around the room. She closes her eyes for sleep.)

5. EMILY'S DREAM

(EMILY dreams about the school bus. She is being picked on by other schoolchildren as she walks down the endless aisle to the front of the bus. They throw things at her and sing songs at her. Something about living on the wrong side of the tracks. Something about living with her GRANDMOTHER. A child reaches into the aisle and grabs EMILY's lunchbox. He throws it out the window.

EMILY steps off the bus and goes to pick up her lunchbox. The kids continue to tease and throw papers at her from inside the bus. EMILY looks to the house. Her GRANDMA stands in the doorway. The railroad crossing lights begin to flash and ring into ...)

6. SPRING FARM HIGH

(The empty halls of Spring Farm High. EMILY hears PRINCIPAL SKOR address the building over the PA system.)

PRINCIPAL SKOR. Good morning, students.

Principal Skor here.

Remember ... if you ever need guidance on your principles,

you can always talk to ... your principal.

(The school bell rings. Spring Farm High bursts into morning bustle. Lockers, girls looking on, boys unadjusted to their recent growth spurts and burgeoning Adam's apples. Varsity jackets and pleated skirts. Some kid has a pocket protector. Teachers with hair buns. Posters advertising the big homecoming basketball game with phrases like "This is the Year!" and "We Believe in Our Team!" EMILY feels like an outsider as the life of the school swirls around her. She arrives at a classroom and a desk.)