

# DEAR READER,

It's hard for me to put into words what **AMERICA'S *NOT-SO* SWEETHEART** means to me. (And yet the first draft of this book was a 120,000-word mess where absolutely nothing happened—go figure!) To the book world, ANSS is my debut contemporary young adult novel, but to me, it's Book #12. I'd say I'd never thought I would get to this point, but that would be a lie: Thirteen-year-old Blair was so confident his writing would land movie deals, cause bidding wars and give him buckets upon buckets of cash—all before he graduated high school, too.

Needless to say, that... did not happen.

One of my middle school self's biggest delusions was that I'd end up on a celebrity version of Big Brother (and unanimously sweep the jury votes after playing a master-class game, obviously), and I think that describes the effect that reality television has had on my life. As much as I relish a brutal betrayal or dramatic blowup, though, I often find myself wondering what happens after the cameras stop rolling and the contestants have to return to their "normal" lives.

If you spend even five minutes scrolling through social media on **Survivor** Wednesdays or visiting the **Big Brother** subreddit, you'll understand why I put "normal" in quotes. Once you go on reality TV, it seems, it's almost like you stop existing as a person. Instead, you become a character, a creation of the editors and the fanbase that's so warped from "reality" that you might not even recognize yourself. Sadly, I think the perils of social media are relatable to many people, even those who haven't appeared on television or harbored secret daydreams of teaming up with Taylor Swift and Janice Dickinson to blindside Shawn Johnson at the final seven. (What can I say? Teenager me had great taste in allies.)

Of course, it's impossible for me to talk about my book without also discussing the Alec and Joaquín of it all. Fair warning: These boys are messy. Rude. Deceitful. Not-so-sweethearts (sorry, I had to). But when I was drafting this book, I made a conscious decision to write characters who were given the opportunity to explore their complicated feelings and lean into their chaotic/devilish sides, even if they swore they'd never stoop so low. To quote a **Survivor** legend, "***Villains have more fun,***" and God, this story was fun to write.

I hope this book, which is filled with over-the-top theatrics and subtle pining and way too many italicized words, will entertain you in some way. I am so incredibly grateful that you have decided to pick up my book, but even more than that, I am appreciative of the efforts you put toward getting stories into the hands of the kids who need them.

Thank you for all that you do.

**BLAIR HANSON**

