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Opening extract from

All That Glitters

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1

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glitter [glit-er] verb, noun

1 To sparkle with reflected light

2 To make a brilliant show

3 To be decorated or enhanced by glamour

4 Tiny pieces of shiny ornamentation.

ORIGIN from the the Old English *glitenian:* 'To shine; to be distinguished'

1

My name is Harriet Manners, and I am a genius.

I know I'm a genius because I've just looked up the symptoms on the internet and I appear to have almost all of them.

Sociological studies have shown that the hallmarks of extraordinary intelligence include enjoying pointless pursuits, an unusual memory for things nobody else finds interesting and total social ineptitude.

I don't want to sound big-headed, but last night I alphabetised every soup can in the kitchen, taught myself to pick up pencils with my toes and learnt that chickens can see daylight forty-five minutes before humans can.

And people don't tend to like me very much.

So I think I've pretty much nailed this.

Other symptoms of genius I recognise include:

1. Difficulty sleeping
2. Random temper tantrums for no reason at all



3. Messiness
4. General strangeness.

"I'm confused," my father said when I triumphantly showed him my ticked-off list. "Aren't they also the symptoms of being a sixteen-year-old girl?"

"Or a baby," my stepmother added, peering over at the list. "Your sister also appears to fit the list."

Which just goes to show why so many of the intellectual elite are misunderstood. Even our own *parents* don't recognise our brilliance.

Anyway, as the biggest sign of a high IQ is asking lots of questions and I got to the page by googling…

Am I a genius?

…I'm feeling pretty optimistic.

Which is good, because this morning is my first day back at school so I'm going to need all the extra brain-power I can get.

That's right, I am now an official sixth former.

By my calculations I have spent exactly eleven years of my life at school so far: 2,145 taught days, or approximately 17,160 hours (not including homework or the free tests I downloaded to take on holiday).

In short, I have invested *over a million minutes in education* in preparation for this precise moment. The day when all my carefully collected knowledge will be valued and appreciated, instead of just irritating people.

Finally, school is getting serious.

Gone are the homework-haters and eye-rollers, and – thanks to an influx of new students from other schools – in their place are people who really *want* to learn. People desperate to know that gerbils can smell adrenaline and a caterpillar has twelve eyes, or that there's enough carbon in your body to make 900 pencils.

People just like me.

And I couldn't be more excited.

As of today, I have five A levels to study, two universities to introduce myself to early and a bright career in palaeontology to begin pursuing in earnest. I have statistics to analyse and frogs to dissect and thigh exercises to start so I don't get cramp when I'm brushing soil away from dinosaur fossils in the not-so-distant future.

I have brand-new, like-minded friends to make.

It might be the same school with a lot of the same people, but things are about to change. After eleven years of scraping insults off my belongings and retrieving my shoes from the cisterns of toilets, this is my chance to

start all over again. A new beginning.

A chance to shine.

This time, everything will be different.

Luckily, one of the really *great* things about being a genius is that it's easy to multitask.

So this morning I decide to make the most of it.

I learn that there are forty different muscles in a bird wing while I'm getting out of bed.

I discover that a sea urchin can walk on its teeth while I'm combing my hair, and that parasites make up 0.01 per cent of our body weight while I'm brushing my teeth.

Clothes, socks and shoes are all picked out and donned as I fully absorb the fact that a snake smells with its tongue and hears with its jaw. I study the names of British kings and queens as I run down the stairs, and by the time I reach the kitchen I'm on to Secret Service code names (Prince Charles is "Unicorn", which is a shame because I was hoping one day they'd use that one for me).

"Did you know," I say as I lean down to kiss Tabitha on her little round cheek, "that the average person will eat 500 chickens and 13,000 eggs in a lifetime?"

My baby sister clearly didn't, because she gurgles happily at this new and unprecedented information. Then

I reach over her fluffy head to grab a hard-boiled version of the latter listed from the table.

"Harriet," my stepmother says.

"And we'll each eat thirty-six pigs," I continue as I start peeling the egg with one hand. "And thirty-six sheep."

"Harriet."

"And eight cows."

"Harriet."

"And 10,000 chocolate bars." I pause with the egg halfway to my mouth. "I think I may have eaten my rations for that already, though. Maybe I should become a vegetarian to balance it back out."

A hand lands on my arm.

"Good morning, Annabel. How did you sleep? I'm fine, thank you. Isn't it a beautiful day today? Thanks for making me breakfast, even though I am now leaving bits of shell all over the kitchen floor for you to clean up."

I blink at my stepmother a few times, then at Dad. I've lived with Annabel since I was five, yet sometimes she is still a total mystery to me.

"Why is Annabel talking to herself?"

"She's an alien unsuccessfully trying to fit in with the rest of the human race," Dad says knowingly, dipping a bit of toast in egg yolk and then dripping it on the table. "Is there anything in your book to help us figure out what

she wants with us poor earthlings before she sucks our brains out with her tentacles?"

I start flicking eagerly through the chunky tome in my hand. There are 729 pages and I'm only 13/20ths of the way through, so there's almost definitely some kind of precedent.

Or at the very least something interesting about spaceships.

"Sadly, all signs suggest that your brain is already gone, Richard," Annabel says grimly. "So I'm probably going to starve."

Then she pulls a chair out and gestures at it.

"Put your fact book down, Harriet, and have some breakfast. I start back at work tomorrow morning and none of us have heard a sensible word out of you for the last twenty-four hours."

I don't know what my stepmother is talking about. Every single sentence I've said has been scientifically and historically accurate. There's a bibliography proving it in the back.

I shove a piece of toast into my mouth.

"Can't," I say through a spray of buttered carbohydrates. "No time. Things to learn, places to go, kindred spirits to meet."

Quickly, I stomp into the hallway and grab my satchel

from the corner whilst simultaneously discovering that in 1830, King Louis XIX ruled France for just twenty minutes.

"Look how awesome she is," Dad says proudly as I open the front door. "That's my daughter, Annabel. My genetics, right there. Harriet Manners: model and style icon. Fashion legend. Sartorial maverick extraordinaire."

I stick one ear of my headphones in.

"Harriet," Annabel says. "Hang on a second. Where are you going?"

I'm not entirely sure how I'll use the Louis XIX information, by the way. Not everything I read is potentially useful or relevant, even to me.

"School!" I put the other ear in. Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* starts blaring out at full volume. "See you this evening!"

And my first day as a proper sixth former begins.

2

So, I've done a little studying on the art of making new friends and I'm happy to report that there appear to be a few basic rules for us all to follow.

I have boiled it down to: find things in common, smile and laugh lots (this indicates a sunny and welcoming personality), ask questions, remember details and never wear the same outfit as them without asking first.

Which sounds deceptively easy.

Over the last sixteen years I've successfully made just four friends: my stalker classmate, Toby Pilgrim; my dog, Hugo; a Japanese model called Rin (who would happily befriend a sausage); and my Best Friend Nat, who I met when I was five and literally couldn't have less in common with if I tried.

So I think it's fair to say I need all the advice I can get.

The way I see it, the fact book in my hand isn't just fascinating trivia, relevant to the trials and tribulations of daily living (which it also is). It's a *bridge* between me and



other people. With these scientifically proven nuggets of information, I'll be able to find things in common with *everyone*.

Oh, you like tennis? Well, did you know that the longest ever match lasted eleven hours? You're a big fan of keeping fit? The most push-ups ever performed in one day was 46,001!

Have a cat? Cats kill more than 275 million creatures a year in the UK alone!

It doesn't matter whether it's film or sport or songs or animals or a fondness for fizzy drinks (they dissolve teeth!): somehow, I'll be able to find a connection. A link between me and them. Something to pull us together.

All friendship requires is focus and dedication.

And a little bit of knowledge.

I learn all about crocodiles as I wander down the road to school and past the bench where Nat usually meets me (except now she's at fashion college on the other side of town).

Caterpillars get a brief look-over as I quickly glance around for Toby – there's no sign of him – and pull my phone out of my pocket to check for texts from my modelling agent, Stephanie (as per usual, absolutely zero – my fashion career appears to have fallen into

some kind of coma).

US presidents fill in the gap as I clumsily open and walk through the school gates.

The world's largest lakes occupy my opening of the stiff front door and stroll down the silent corridor into my empty classroom.

Then I take a seat, turn to a page about the London Underground, and wait.

I've specifically chosen to get to school early today so I have plenty of time to adjust before my new form arrives. Thanks to Dad's job at the time, I was living in America for the first few weeks of term – being tortured by a tutor who turned out to be a fake, and fainting on fairground fashion shoots – so I really need the extra time. This way I can acclimatise to my new environment, cram some last-minute knowledge in and maybe stop my stomach from rolling over and over like a sick guppy while I'm at it.

Nervously, I clutch my book as tightly as I can.

Focus, Harriet.

The London Underground is the world's first underground transport system. It has a network of 402 kilometres, carries 1,265 billion people a year and is actually more overground than it is undergr—

"Harriet Manners?"

I swallow. This is it. This is where my new beginning

starts. *Be cool, Harriet. Be casual. Be as full of relevant yet breezy information as physically possible.*

With a deep breath, I plaster on my biggest and friendliest smile and put my book down.

"Good morning," I say in my brightest voice. "It's super nice to meet y—"

Then I stop.

Because standing in front of me is a group of what appear to be fully grown adults, holding clipboards and pens.

And every single one of them is staring at me.

3

For the first few seconds, I assume my classmates have just aged quite a lot over the summer holidays.

That's how weird teachers look in casual clothes.

Then – like the Magic Eye picture of a galloping horse Dad has stuck in the garage – strange colours and shapes slowly start to make sense.

Mr Collins from biology in high-waisted jeans and a green polo-neck jumper. Drama teacher Miss Hammond in a beige jumper, tie-dye pink skirt and woolly lilac socks. Receptionist Mrs O'Connor – devoured by an enormous yellow jumper that says DEFINE 'NORMAL'!!! – and my English teacher Mr Bott in his standard black suit, white shirt and thin black tie, like a magician on his way to a funeral.

I blink as the entire school staff gradually crowds in from the corridor so they can stare at me curiously, the way little children gather around a pink-bottomed rhesus monkey at the zoo.



Any minute now, somebody's going to throw me a banana and ask me to dance.

You know what?

I'm so confused right now, I might just go ahead and do it.

Finally Mr Bott takes his pen out of his mouth. "Would you like to explain what you're doing here, Miss Manners?"

"Umm." I look back at my book in bewilderment. "I'm studying, sir."

"That's as maybe. But the school is closed for teacher training today. You're not supposed to be here."

And – just like that – I suddenly see my morning all over again. The empty roads. The blank phone. The closed school gates. The wedged-shut front door, silent corridors and empty seats.

The fact that Toby wasn't following three steps behind me for the first time in known history.

Annabel's confusion as I left the house.

Oh my God.

There's a special kind of reef fish called the *Enneapterygius pusillus* that glows with a bright red light in order to communicate with the fish around it. From the heat in my cheeks right now, it feels like I'm attempting it too.

Every other student on the planet is trying to get out of school. I'm the only one who accidentally breaks *in.*

I stand up quickly. *Think, Harriet.*

"I was just, umm…" *What?* "Bringing a gift for you all. For the… errr… teachers. To wish you luck. With… the training."

Then I hold out the stupid *Big Book of Trivia for the Loo* that got me into this mess in the first place. In fairness to the authors, the warning was in the title. I probably should have left it there.

Miss Hammond beams and takes it off me. "That's so sweet of you, Harriet! How thoughtful! And *what* a spectacular outfit you've chosen for today," she adds brightly. "You've really harnessed your inner rainbow."

I look down and my cheeks promptly go supernova.

Thanks to getting dressed while reading, I'm apparently wearing a yellow T-shirt, a red jumper featuring a Christmas pudding – in October – a pair of pink pyjama bottoms with blue sheep all over them and the bright purple knee socks Nat bought me "as a joke", slouched down around my ankles.

On one foot is a green trainer.

On the other is a blue one.

My daughter. Model and style icon. Fashion legend. Sartorial maverick extraordinaire.

Maybe I'm not such a genius after all.