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opening extract from

Best Friends

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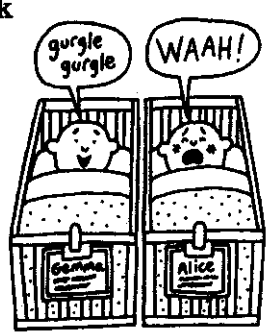
Corgi Yearling

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One

Alice and I are best friends. I've known her all my life. That is absolutely true. Our mums were in hospital at the same time when they were having us. I got born first, at six o'clock in the morning on 3 July. Alice took ages and didn't arrive until four in the afternoon. We both had a long cuddle with our mums and at night time we were tucked up next to each other in little weeny cots.



I expect Alice was a bit frightened. She'd have cried. She's actually still a bit of a crybaby now but I try not to tease her about it. I always do my best to comfort her.

I bet that first day I called to her in baby-coo language. I'd say, 'Hi, I'm Gemma. Being born is a bit weird, isn't it? Are you OK?'

And Alice would say, 'I'm not sure. I'm Alice. I don't think I like it here. I want my mum.'

'We'll see our mums again soon. We'll get fed.

I'm *starving*.' I'd have started crying too, in case there was a chance of being fed straight away.

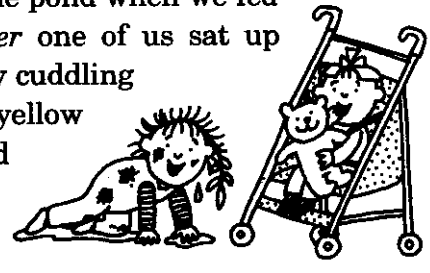
I suppose I'm still a bit greedy, if I'm absolutely honest. Not quite as greedy as Biscuits though.



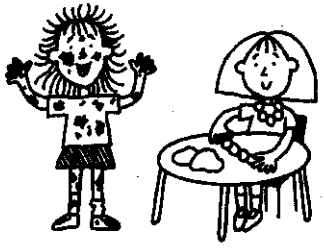
Well, his real name is Billy McVitie, but everyone calls him Biscuits, even the teachers. He's this boy in our class at school and his appetite is astonishing. He can eat an entire packet of chocolate Hob Nobs, munch crunch, munch crunch, in two minutes flat.

We had this Grand Biscuit Challenge at play time. I only managed three quarters of a packet. I probably could have managed a whole packet too but a crumb went down the wrong way and I choked. I ended up with chocolate biscuit drool all down the front of my white school blouse. But that's nothing new. I always seem to get a bit messy and scruffy and scuffed. Alice stays neat and sweet.

When we were babies *one* of us crawled right into the rubbish bin and played mud wrestling in the garden and fell in the pond when we fed the ducks. The *other* one of us sat up prettily in her buggy cuddling Golden Syrup (her yellow teddy bear) and giggled at her naughty friend.



When we went to nursery school *one* of us played Fireman in the water tank and Moles in the sand tray, and she didn't stop at Finger Painting, she did Entire Body Painting. The *other* one of us sat demurely at the dinky table and made plasticine necklaces (one for each of us) and sang 'Incy Wincy Spider' with all the cute hand gestures.



When we went to infants school *one* of us pretended to be a Wild Thing and roared such terrible roars in class she got sent out of the room. She also got into a fight with a big boy who snatched her best friend's chocolate and *made his nose bleed*! The *other* one of us read *Milly-Molly-Mandy* and wrote stories about a little thatched cottage in the country in her very neat printing.



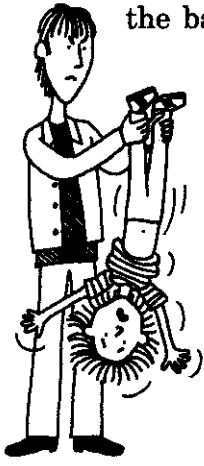
Now we're in the juniors *one* of us ran right into the boys' toilets for a dare. She did, really, and they all yelled at her. She also climbed halfway up the drainpipe in the playground to get her ball back – only the drainpipe came away from the wall. They both went *crash clonk*. Mr Beaton the headteacher was NOT pleased. The *other* one of us got made a

form monitor and wore her silver sparkly top to the school disco (with matching silver glitter on her eyelids) and all the boys wanted to dance with her, but *guess what*! She danced with her bad best friend all evening instead.

We're best friends but we're not one bit alike. I suppose that goes without saying. Though I seem to have said it a lot. My mum says it too. Also a lot.

'For heaven's sake, Gemma, why can't you stop being so rough and silly and boisterous? *Boy* being the operative bit! To think I was so thrilled when I had my baby girl. But now it's just like I've got three boys – and you're the biggest tearaway of them all!'

There's my big brother Callum who's seventeen. Callum and I used to be mates. He taught me to skateboard and showed me how to dive-bomb in the swimming baths. Every Sunday I'd balance on the back of his bike and we'd wobble over to Grandad's. But now Callum's got this girlfriend Ayesha and all they do is look into each other's eyes and go kissy-kissy-kiss. Yuck.



Alice and I played spies and followed them to the park once because we wanted to see if they did anything even yuckier but Callum caught us and he turned me upside down and shoogled me until I felt sick.