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Opening extract from

The Endless Trials of Tabitha Baird

Written by

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AUTUMN TERM WEEK 1





TUESDAY









First day back at school after the summer hols. Super-duper. Golly gosh. So fabulous to be back.

Yeah, right. It is not. I am joking, obvs. I haven't turned into a Grace over the summer holidays! But it is actually totes brill to be back with Emz and A'isha again every day, for the whole day. Yeah, all right, and Grace too. I guess she is part of our gang now, 'officially' as she would say! We all jumped up and down screaming and whooping when we saw each other this morning before the bell. We were so excited to see each other again. Grace didn't whoop and yell, though. I mean, AS IF. She is sort of one of us now,

but she hasn't had a brain transplant or anything. She hasn't started copying every single thing we three do, thank god. Anyway, even though she knows she's in with us now, she is still, on purpose, wearing that hairband AND her cardigan done all the way up AND the skirt at the correct length. Must do something about that immediately, otherwise she's out. She can be Grace, but she can't be *a* Grace. I'll have to explain it all to her obvs!

It had been, like, nearly three whole weeks since we were all together, because Emz was away for practically the whole time in Croatia (wherever that is?!) and A'isha's gran had taken the whole family back to where she is originally from. Morocco, I think. A'isha says everyone there is Muslim. A'isha reckoned that in a way it was easier wearing her hijab over there because all the girls and women were wearing them everywhere she went, so she didn't feel so cross about having to wear one too: 'Because there it was just like wearing shoes.' She said she's still working on not wearing it sometime soon, like ASAP. Just as soon as she can get her dad to stop being so obsessed with it. A'isha said now was not the right time, though, because apparently

her dad's come back from Morocco extra Messed-up-Muslim because of going to the mosque every day with all his mates over there. She said he never goes over here – weird, isn't it, that people do completely different things in different countries even though they're the same person in both?!



Anyways, guess what? You're not going to guess, obvs – you're a notebook, and last time I checked notebooks can't actually make guesses. Hah, hah. Even though you are a really beautiful new super-special notebook, I will admit. Gran bought it for me, because she'd noticed my old one was a bit tatty. Anyhoo, amazeballs, and not in a good way – it's actually super-bad-amazeballs news. Remember the horrible made-me-sit-on-my-own-in-class-because-she'd-heard-about-me teacher? Yeah, her, Ms Oh-So-Smarty-Pants Cameron. Well, guess what?! She's only been made permanent. She's not a supply any more. She is an actual official teacher at HAC now. So, that

is brilliant news. Not. And we had our first period with her, and, of course, being her, she asked if we'd all read the book we were supposed to read over the summer holidays.

Blooming cheek. She stared straight at me while asking this with a full-on sarky face, like she was saying 'Naturally we all know you won't have read it, Tabitha Baird.'

Well, hah-di-hah, have that, Ms Oh-So-Smarty-Pants, I actually did read it and, what's more, I really liked it. Obvs I didn't say that in class in front of everyone though. AS IF. Like I said, I have not turned into a Grace over the summer holidays. I've got a reputation to keep up, especially now that I'm in Year Nine. I can't have people thinking I've gone soft over the summer and somehow magically turned into a Super Nerd. Not looking like a Nerdy Swot is going to be extra important because now that Emz, A'isha and I are actually mates with Grace it's going to be super hard to stop everyone else thinking we've also turned into Nerdy Knicks like her.

Just between us, though, I can tell you that I absolutely lurvvved the book Ms Cameron was sure

I wouldn't have read. And that is pretty amazing because I usually hate reading. I've always hated reading. I never read.

Actually that isn't true any more. It used to be true, but it's not really now. But I don't want Mum to know I've started liking reading, mainly because she'd go and on about how fantastic and brilliant me now liking reading was. So, I'm going to pretend I still hate reading and then just hide whatever book I'm reading from Mum so that she doesn't get all over-excited and hysterical and suddenly think I'm going to be a professor or something now I like reading! I know that might sound a bit random, but I do not want to do things that please her. That is not my job. Duh. I am a teenager and my job is to do things that annoy my mum, not make her happy.



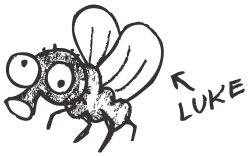
In the days when I actually did hate reading it wasn't my fault anyway. It was Mum's. I hated reading because Mum went on and on and on for as long as I can

remember (definitely from when I was too little to be even able to hold up a book, never mind read it!) about how I'd never be an interesting person if I hadn't read mountains of books.

Hmm, funny that, because when Mum isn't writing The Most Boring Blog in the Entire Universe (hers), then she is always reading and she is definitely NOT the most interesting person in the world. Never mind in the world, she's not even the most interesting person in our house!

Of course Luke, my spotty mankenstein little brother thinks he is that person in our house. Yes, all right, it is true, he is apparently, according to his teacher, 'unusually bright'. (I reckon that's actually her code for someone with no mates.) But interesting he is not. How could he be? He plays Scrabble, and I mean actually wants to play it of his own free will, and not because Gran or Mum have said they'll give him chocolate if he plays it with them. I mean, like, he would rather play Scrabble than watch TV. Hello??!!! And as if that weren't bad enough, get this: he 'prefers fruit to chocolate'. Hah! Oh puuuleeze. Or so he claims, although I don't see much evidence of that

when it's Christmas and the huge tin of sweets Gran always buys comes out!



Anyway, why am I going on about my nerdy, boring brother? So, at school, it was super brill to see my homies. ('Homies' – do you like that? Cool, isn't it? It means your gang of mates. I don't know why it's 'homies', as in home, though. Weird.) All four of us managed to sit together in practically every class all day long, though obviously not the classes you get streamed for. Grace is, of course, you guessed it, in the top stream for everything that has sets, but that's okay. She's cool. Well, she will be once I've sorted out the hairband, cardigan, skirt length, etc. And it's not like she goes on about being in the top set or anything. She just goes off to her separate classes for whatever and then joins us again afterwards. It's fine.

Oh man, it was great fun seeing the look on people's faces whenever they noticed Grace coming towards our table in class. You could just tell they were thinking

Oh my god, what is she doing?! They're going to be horrible to her! And then when they realised Emz, A'isha and me weren't, but were actually saving a chair for Grace it was brilliant. They didn't know what to think! I admit it is pretty random for us – well, me the most, I suppose – to be friends with Grace, but random is cool. It's great that people still don't know and can't guess how I'm going to be or what I'm going to do. That is the coolest way to be, don't you think?

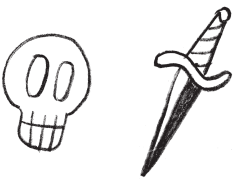
Oh yeah, nearly forgot – don't know how because you could not miss her – there's a new girl in our class and she is sooo out there. Everything about her is screaming 'notice me': the way she sits, what she wears, the way she speaks, or more like, grunts. She's a goth. Well, I think she is. I mean, she's got jet-black hair (really black, you know, like a plastic bin bag – it's definitely dyed) and wears loads of black eye make-up in huge rings round her eyes. She looks a bit like a panda. And she's got loads of piercings up both her ears – in fact, so many you can't see any of the skin of her earlobes – not that I was looking! But I did notice that one of them, a stud, is a skull,

so she is definitely a goth. She must be. Who'd wear a skull earring if they weren't? She didn't talk to anyone as far as I saw and seemed a bit moody and not very chatty – pretty much what you'd expect from a goth, I guess. Apparently her name's Aly, short for Alexandra. So I've thought up a brilliant nickname. I'm going to call her Dark Aly. Hah, hah. Geddit? Dark Aly as in Dark Alley because she's totes goth and scary like a dark alley! That is hilarious. It's so going to catch on. Must tell Emz, A'isha and Grace, although Grace will def not use it. I bet you Grace will think Dark Aly is a mean nickname.

Is it mean? It's not, is it? It's just a joke. Hmm, maybe I'll see what Aly is like before I tell everyone her new nickname. Yes, perhaps that's a nicer thing to do. God, get me, talking about a 'nicer thing to do'!? Must be Grace's influence but it does feel a bit funny. I'm not saying I'm usually horrible, except obvs to Luke and sometimes Mum, but that's only because they completely deserve it. It's just that I don't usually worry about 'being nice' and it sort of feels a bit weird to be thinking about it.

I'm not a mean girl and I'm not a bully. Definitely

not that, unless, I suppose, you count being mean to teachers, but that's not bullying – that's just being funny. Anyway, a kid can't bully a teacher. Bullies are people who are horrible on purpose to people who they think are weaker than them. I NEVER do that. I just like making people in my class laugh and being cheeky and giving a lot of backchat. I never said I was going to be nice to teachers. AS IF. Okay, but just in case, I won't tell anyone my brilliant new nickname for Aly in case she's all right. But if she's not then she's going to be called Dark Aly fo' sho.

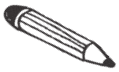








AUTUMN TERM WEEK 1





TUESDAY (LATER)









I'm really cross. I've shut my door and locked it so no one can get in. There's only one key and I have it, so there. (When I'm not in I hide it inside Muzzy. Doesn't hurt her. She's only a toy, so, you know . . .) I am so CROSS. Grrr. I hate feeling angry. It makes me feel all jumbled up inside, especially when I've got no one to talk to. I can't ring any of my mates because I've run out of credit, and anyway Mum goes completely mad if she notices I've had long chats on my phone, which she can see from the bill, worst luck, and then she goes on and on for absolutely years about everyone calling each other on their mobiles,

even when they've seen each other at school all day blah, blah, blah. Complaining about the usual stuff that no grown-up in the world understands.



Okay, so why I'm cross is because at supper I super caj happened to mention that there was a new girl, Dark Aly, in our class and immediately, without waiting to hear what I was going to say or knowing practically anything else about her, Mum chimed in, in that really aggravating sing-song 'I'm-only-teasing-darling' voice that makes me want to scream, 'Ooh, she sounds like trouble. She'll probably give you a run for your money in the naughty stakes,' and then Luke snorted and piped up, 'Huh, and you won't like that.' I could have killed them both. What do they know?! They've never even met her and I hadn't even told them practically one thing about her at all. They've, like, so jumped to conclusions without knowing one single actual fact. They are so annoying and know-it-all.

I might have told them what she'd said to Miss about her 'look'. She only said: 'It's a personal statement and I object to your questioning it.' Okay, it's quite a full-on thing to say but I've actually said and done things loads more cheeky and out-there than that. Mum and Luke are making out like they can already tell Dark Aly is majorly bad and so will definitely get into more trouble than I do at school.

I know this sounds a bit silly and like I'm jealous of her, but I am not. Well, I don't think I am. It's just that – oh god, I don't know, I can only say this in here, to you, if you know what I mean – I'm so happy now at HAC with my mates and feel really settled in, and I know that's mainly because I've made a reputation for myself with all the pranks and jokes and cheekiness and stuff. And it feels like if I stop being special and different because someone else, like Dark Aly, is more special and different than me, then maybe no one will be interested in being my mate any more. I don't know but I feel like I've got to keep doing all that stuff to stay popular. I like being popular. Of course I do.

But now I'm worried that she'll take over from

me and everyone will forget me and I won't be anyone special. I just want to be the naughtiest and cheekiest. You know, like The One in my year that everyone knows will say and do the funniest, most daring things. This probably sounds a bit pathetic and sad, but I'm not going to tell anyone any of this. I am going to make sure Dark Aly does not out-do me . . . Although I'm not really sure how I'm going to do that because, like I said, she is SO rude. I mean, she's, like, extra, and I really don't want to be like that. I try to be funny by deliberately misunderstanding things teachers say and making up things to be witty, but she's just downright horrible, and anyone can be like that. It doesn't take any effort.

Gran's just knocked on the door to tell me there's pudding, so I should come down. She's so great the way she knows how to get me back downstairs when I've had a strop. Mum would never come and get me, least of all for pudding. AS IF. In fact, Mum would make sure all the pudding was finished or hidden away before I came back down to make sure I didn't eat any. Hah, I know what I'm going to do. I'll make

sure I have a huge portion of pudding – that will so annoy Mum! And, best of all, Gran will let me. Yay. I feel much better now.