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opening extract from

Double Act

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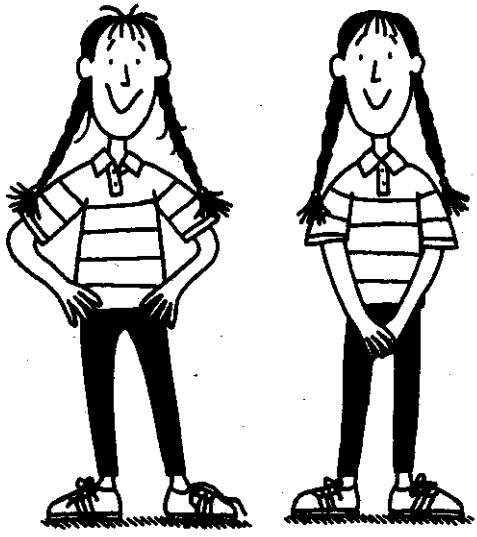
Corgi Yearling

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ONE

We're twins. I'm Ruby. She's Garnet.



We're identical. There's very few people who can tell us apart. Well, until we start talking. I tend to go on and on. Garnet is much quieter.

That's because I can't get a word in edgeways.

We are exactly the same height and weight. I eat a bit more than Garnet. I love sweets, and I like salty things too. I once ate thirteen packets of crisps in one day. All salt-and-vinegar flavour. I love lots of salt and vinegar on chips too. Chips are my special weakness. I go munch munch munch gulp and they're gone. So then I have to snaffle some of Garnet's. She doesn't mind.

Yes I do.

I don't get fatter because I charge around more. I hate sitting still. Garnet will hunch up over a book for hours, but I get the fidgets. We're both quite good at running, Garnet and me. At our last sports day at school we beat everyone, even the boys. We came first. Well, I did, actually. Garnet came second. But that's not surprising, seeing as I'm the eldest. We're both ten. But I'm twenty minutes older. I was the bossy baby who pushed out first. Garnet came second.

We live with our dad and our gran.

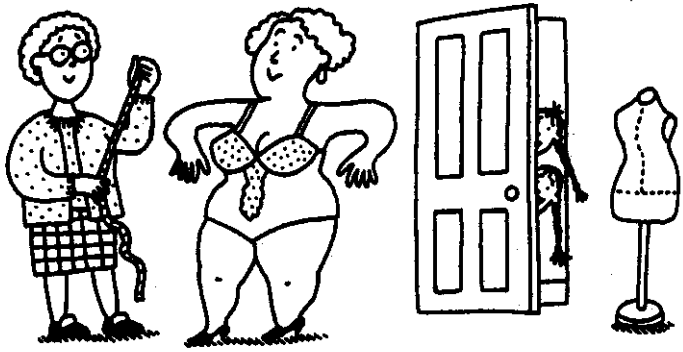
Dad often can't tell us apart in the morning at breakfast, but then his eyes aren't always



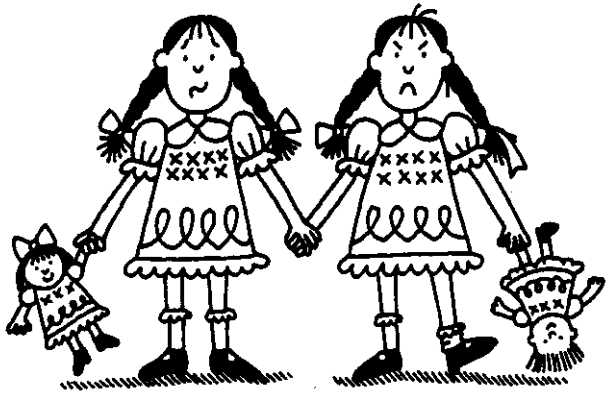
open properly. He just swallows black coffee as he shoves on his clothes and then dashes off for his train. Dad works in an office in London and he hates it. He's always tired out when he gets home. But he can tell us apart by then. It's easier in the evening. My plaits are generally coming undone and my T-shirt's probably stained. Garnet stays as neat as a new pin.

That's what our gran says. Gran always used to have pins stuck all down the front of her cardi. We had to be very careful when we hugged her. Sometimes she even had pins sticking out of her mouth. That was when she did her dressmaking. She used to work in this posh Fashion House, pinning and tucking and sewing all day long. Then, after . . .

Well, Gran had to look after us, you see, so she did dressmaking at home. For private customers. Mostly very large ladies who wanted posh frocks. Garnet and I always got the giggles when we peeped at them in their underwear.



Gran made all our clothes too. That was *awful*. It was bad enough Gran being old-fashioned and making us have our hair in plaits. But our clothes made us a laughing stock at school, though some of the mums said we looked a picture.



We had frilly frocks in summer and dinky pleated skirts in winter, and Gran knitted too – angora boleros that made us itch, and matching jumpers and cardis for the cold. Twinsets. And a right silly set of twins we looked too.

But then Gran's arthritis got worse. She'd always had funny fingers and a bad hip and a naughty knee. But soon she got so she'd screw up her face when she got up or sat down, and her fingers swelled sideways and she couldn't make them work.

She can't do her dressmaking now. It's a shame, because she did like doing it so much. But there's one Amazing Advantage. We get to wear shop clothes now. And because Gran can't really make it on the bus into town, we get to *choose.*

Well. Ruby gets to choose.

I choose for both of us. T-shirts. Leggings. Jeans. Matching ones, of course. We still want to look alike. We just want to look normal.

Only I suppose we're not really like the normal sort of family you read about in books. We read a lot of books. Dad is the worst. He keeps on and on buying them — not just new ones, but heaps of old dusty tomes from book

fairs and auctions and Oxfam shops. We've run out of shelves. We've even run out of floor. We've got piles and piles of books in every room and you have to zig-zag around them carefully or you cause a bookquake. If you have ever been attacked by fifty or a hundred very hard hardbacks then you'll know this is to be avoided at all costs. There are big boxes



of books upstairs too that Dad hasn't even properly sorted. Sometimes you have to climb right over them to get somewhere vital like the toilet.