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Opening extract from

How to Update Your Parents

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For Phoebe – a big fan of Louis the Laugh

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Chapter One

No More School

Tuesday December 24th (Christmas Eve)

3.25 p.m.

I've just chucked all my Geography books away.

But don't you dare feel sorry for them, as they've totally brought it on themselves.

Every day of this Christmas holiday, they've been lolling in my bedroom, smirking away about the bucket loads of homework I've got to do.

Until today – when I couldn't take any more. So I've hurled them into the rubbish bin next to a gang of teabags and something very brown and highly stinky, which I hope is soup. And already my room feels bigger, happier.

Only when I go back to school I'm going to be in so much trouble, aren't I? So why on earth did I do it?

Am I mad?

Probably. But there's something you should know about me.

I'm Louis – also known as Louis the Laugh – because even when I was four I was telling silly jokes like:

What does a unicorn call its father?
Popcorn.

Well, it made my aunties chuckle. And it sparked a dream deep inside me. Perhaps one day I could be a comedian. But I didn't move one millimetre nearer to my dream until … I met Maddy.

She's my girlfriend. Been on three whole dates now. Impressive, I know.

But Maddy's also my agent. She's only my age (thirteen) but she knows tons and tons about show business. And she was the one who helped get me on to the top TV talent show, *Kids with Attitude*.

I made it all the way to the final as well. And if I won that I'd have my own half hour show. No wonder I practised and practised until the big

day when … my mobile's ringing.

I'd better take this. But I'll be back.

3.45 p.m.

Sorry about that, but it was Maddy. I'll tell you what she said in a second. But anyway, where was I?

Oh yeah – the day of the final. Well, I woke up with the vilest, vomitiest bug ever. And I really should have spent the day with my head in a bucket. But I couldn't miss the biggest chance of my whole life, could I? So I slogged to the studio, where the show was being broadcast live and then …

Here's a little tip for you – if you ever get to the final of a TV talent show, don't stagger on to the stage and immediately throw up over the host. It distracts attention from your act for a start.

In fact, I never got the chance to tell even one joke, that shaming moment went viral and I acquired a wonderful new nickname at school – Vomit Boy. That was a bad time. And I hate bringing it up (sort of a joke there, sorry) Still, I didn't overreact. I just ran away from home, that's all. Only Maddy stopped me at the station. She had a message for me from Poppy.

Poppy won *Kids with Attitude*. She's a

magician who didn't let being in a wheelchair stop her from performing four magic tricks at once. Her prize, of course, was her own half-hour TV show. But she was allowed one guest.

She chose me.

We recorded it a few days ago. I only had three minutes but I could have stayed out on that stage for three hours. And I left with the audience's laughter ringing in my ears. Best sound in the entire world.

The show goes out tonight – yes, that's right, Christmas Eve no less – at 5 p.m.

And Maddy – who, as I said, knows masses about show business – just called to tell me that even though it's Christmas Eve, my act is so good she is convinced the offers will pour in right away. And she wanted to make sure I was ready for that.

So am I ready to be off touring the world, leaving laughter behind me wherever I go? What do you think?

I know I might have to drop into school now and again, just to keep my hand in. So I'll pop by when I've got a couple of spare hours between flights. And I'll make certain that's never when I've got Geography.

* * *

4.05 p.m.

A lion goes into a restaurant. He sits down and the waiter asks if he'd like to order a starter.

'Yeah, I'll have the salmon please,' says the lion.

'And what would you like for your main?' asks the waiter.

And the lion replies, 'Oh, just a comb.'

That's the first joke you'll hear me say on television. And in less than an hour now!

4.07 p.m.

What do you get when you cross a bee with a giant ape?

Sting Kong.

That's my second joke. (Always follow a long joke with a really fast one.) I'll save the rest until after the show.

4.35 p.m.

Maddy's on her way to my house (she only lives three roads away). She's going to watch the show with my mum, dad and midget brother, Elliot.

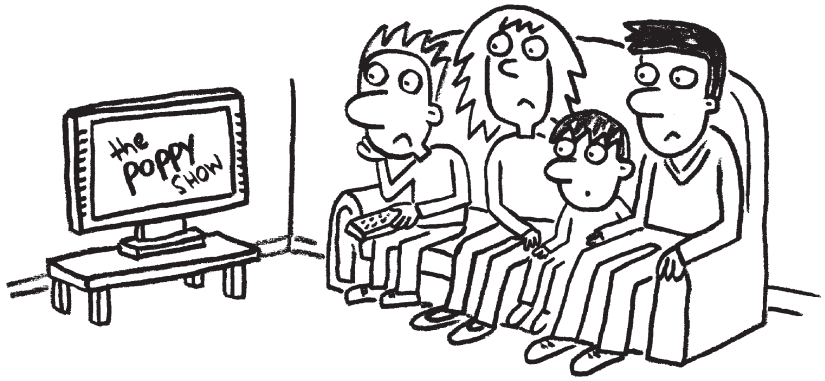
Got tons of relations tuning in too. Plus anyone I've ever breathed near at school. Plus everyone I know on Facebook … I didn't tell them to be

super braggy, though. But this is a moment of history, isn't it?

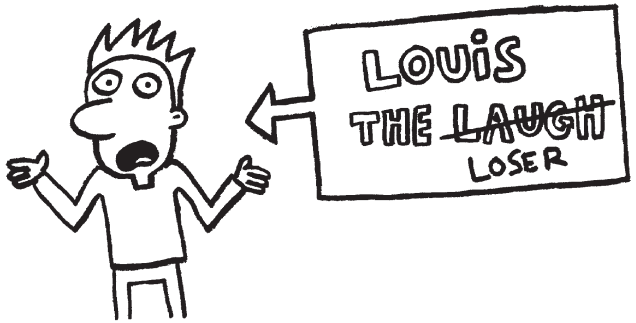
4.40 p.m.
Maddy's arrived. And Mum and Dad have insisted she and I occupy the prime spot on the sofa. So I'm sitting here with my phone on my knee. Can't wait for it to start flashing. Only twenty minutes to go and I've never felt more excited.

6.50 p.m.
Maddy's just gone home and I'm sure you're keen to hear how the show went.

So please read on so you can see exactly what happened…



Chapter Two



Chapter Three

I Become Invisible

6.50 p.m.
That's right.

Nothing at all happened, because I was cut from the show.

Let me just repeat that so the full horror can settle on you.

I. Was. Cut. From. The. Show.

I had no idea of the imminent catastrophe about to engulf me either.

So, we all watched Poppy perform her first trick. Then she was supposed to introduce me.

'I'm on next,' I said, desperately trying to sound chilled about it.

Only I wasn't on next at all.

The show jumped straight from Poppy performing her first trick to Poppy chatting with the audience.

'So where were you?' demanded Elliot at once.

'Ha, ha,' I began, then completely ran out of inspiration. Luckily Maddy chipped in. 'They've obviously rearranged the running order. It's very common in the world of television.'

'They're probably saving you to give the show a big ending,' said Dad.

'End with the best,' added Mum brightly.

Well there was no harm in hoping, was there? And my act would have made a cracking ending.

But twenty minutes later the show was over. Even then I had the tiniest wisp of hope that I might be seen right after the credits rushed past.

Only I wasn't.

I screwed my eyes shut tightly. This had to be a nightmare. Then I opened my eyes again. No, I was stuck with it. The most disappointing moment of my entire life. I hadn't a clue what to say either. Neither, it seemed, did anyone else. So that shocked, appalled silence just stretched and stretched and…

'Hey, I'm filling up here!' I burst out at last. 'Anyone got a tissue? What in the name of Father Christmas is happening? Ha, ha.'

I said, 'Ha, Ha,' three or four times.

Then I saw I had a text from Evie at *Kids with Attitude*. She told me that the show had overrun by seven whole minutes, so they'd reluctantly had to make some cuts. Well, one cut mainly.

Me.

She hoped I wasn't too disappointed and wished me 'a really lovely Christmas'.

I was reading aloud her text when a large cake moved slowly into the living room. It was followed by Elliot. 'We can still eat it can't we?' he whined.

Emblazoned on the cake was 'CONGRATULATIONS, LOUIS THE LAUGH.' Yeah, it had my full name on it.

'It was going to be a little surprise,' whispered Mum. 'But you had no business bringing it out now, Elliot.'

'Why not?' I shouted. 'Come on, everyone, tuck in. It is Christmas after all.'

I've never eaten so much cake in my entire life. Couldn't tell you what it tasted like though.

8.00 p.m.

Lots of messages on my Facebook page already. Some were quite friendly – like the one from Theo, my best mate at my old school. 'I'm sure you'll be on another time. Be sure and let me know when.'

More typical though was: 'I blinked once and missed you, or were you so bad they couldn't show it?'

8.22 p.m.

Poppy's just called, practically in tears. 'I had no idea they were going to cut you.'

'I was pretty surprised too.'

'Oh Louis, I feel really terrible.'

'I bet I feel even worse,' I said.