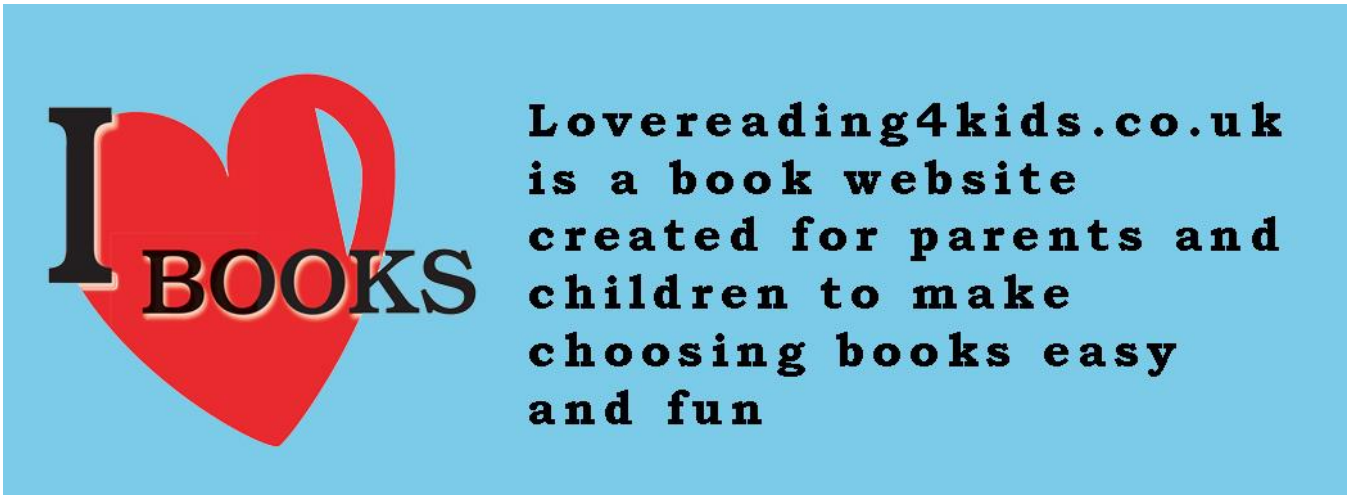


Opening extract from

The Private Blog of Joe Cowley: Straight Outta Nerdsville

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For the baby formerly known as Larry.

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THE PRIVATE BLOG OF JOE COWLEY



STRAIGHT OUTTA NERDSVILLE

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Monday 3rd February

Oh, blog.

BLOG!

You have NO IDEA how happy I am right now. I'm smiling so much, I look like the Joker in a wind tunnel.

GET A LOAD OF THIS.

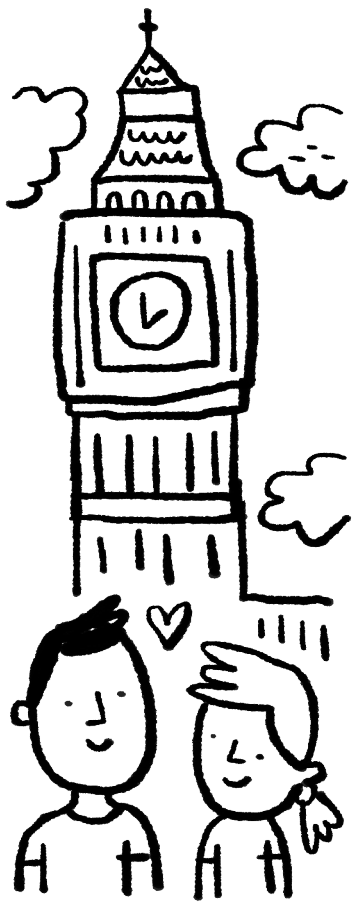
• Since the beginning of the year, Harry, Ad, Greeny, and me have been living in our own flat, right in the middle of London. Amazing, or what? We're living the dream in the Big Smoke, independent for the first time in our lives. I mean, yes, we do have to live with Mrs Gleba, our chaperone, and yes, she is incredibly strict, and yes, we do have an eleven o'clock curfew, and yes, she did once whack me with a spatula for mild blasphemy, but the point is, the small-town rubes we once were are dead and gone. We are now city-slickin', hard-hustlin', tube-ridin', good-timin', not-even-missin'-our-mummies-one-little-bit London boys.

• It's all because the SOUND EXPERIENCE (Harry, Ad, and Greeny's electro-techno-dubstep-whatever-the-hell-they-are group) has been signed up by PGS Records. They've already recorded a demo with MC Camelface, but soon we will be launching their career—signing their first record contract with the executive who is going to be in charge of their careers.

• What's even better is I am their manager. Me. Joe Cowley, with my four Bs, three Cs, and two Ds at GCSE, a big-time music manager. Well, not manager, exactly. The term the record company is using is 'intern'. But it sounds proper important, doesn't it?

• The other week, I got rid of my braces. Finally, my teeth are free of the mouth cage of doom!

• You'd think that would be enough, but it isn't. Check this out, blog. I have a girlfriend! And I am proper mad about her.



Of course, this is just between you and me. I would never tell the guys. It would totally ruin the cool, bachelor vibe we've got going on, but I really am. Mila is so amazing. Since we met at BUZZFEST, and she punched Mr Boocock in the face when he was trying to beat me up at my mum's wedding (long story), we've been inseparable, Skyping every night when I was still in Tammerstone and exploring London together. We've done all the touristy stuff—held hands on Tower Bridge, gazed at each other lovingly on the London Eye and tongue-kissed in the Tate Modern.

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I mean, yes, Mrs Gleba has a strict NO GIRLS ALLOWED rule, and Mila's dad is back living with them, along with her two sisters, so we can't exactly have any 'alone time', but that will work itself out, I know it.

All the rough times are in the past. I've left Tammerstone and all the other losers behind, and now I can reinvent myself. I mean, check this out: remember that control room in my head that used to help me make decisions and basically wreck my life? It has completely disappeared. Gone forever. And do you know why? Because I don't need it any more. That's right, blog. It's goodbye, nerd Joe, and hello, sophisticated man-about-town Joseph.

The world is my oyster. It's time to show it who's boss.

Tuesday 4th February

Had a bit of a mishap today.

I was walking through Covent Garden after lunch with Mila. She had gone off to meet some friends, and I was heading back to the flat. It had stopped raining and the air was nice and crisp. I must have been too busy enjoying the sights, because the next thing I knew, I had bumped into this bloke. I apologized and went to move on but he called me back.

'You bloody idiot,' he cried. 'You broke my glasses!'

He picked them up off the floor. Sure enough, the lens had fallen out. Ah crap.

‘I am so sorry,’ I said. ‘I didn’t see you.’

The man puffed his cheeks out. His face was all red and he smelled like dusty farts. ‘I can’t afford to get these fixed. What am I supposed to do?’

I swallowed hard. This was a bad situation. I had to try to put it right. ‘How much would it cost to repair them?’

He held the glasses up to the light. ‘Forty quid.’

I pulled out my wallet. ‘I’ve only got thirty.’

He leaned over and snatched the notes out of my hand. ‘That’ll do.’

I walked away, relieved. It shows how streetwise I am now. Tammerstone me would have handled that horribly.

9.30 p.m.

Thought the flat could do with some sophisticated furniture like bookshelves and stuff, so headed out to the *IKEA* in Wembley. The others wouldn’t come with me because they were halfway through a *Game of Thrones* marathon. Idiots.

Anyway, *IKEA* is kind of like *Game of Thrones* if you think about it. It’s confusing, there are loads of weird names, and everyone looks like they’re about to do a murder.

Sadly, I soon realized that there was no way I’d get a flat-pack on the Tube, so all I ended up with was a bellyful of meatballs, a couple of candle holders, and as many tiny pencils as my pockets could hold.

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Thursday 6th February

Last night, me and Mila went to see this new experimental play called Isolation. I'd explain what it was about, but I have no cocking clue. It was just a bloke in a leotard flapping around on stage pretending to be a duck. Crap. Plus, they didn't sell little tubs of ice cream in the interval. I mean, what kind of crummy theatre was this?

When we got outside, Mila kept going on about how 'thought-provoking' it was, and I didn't want to seem like a dumbo, so I agreed with her. I overheard this bloke in the toilets going on about how it was reminiscent of Marx so I repeated that.

Mila gasped and said, 'Wow, you're so insightful.'

Thank you, toilet man. To be honest, I don't even know what Marx's first name is. For all I know, it could be Skid.

'You know, Joe,' Mila said to me, swinging my hand as we walked. 'I'm meeting a friend on Tottenham Court Road first thing tomorrow morning.'

'Um, OK.'

'And that's really close to your flat, isn't it?'

'I suppose it is.' My knowledge of London is a little shaky. Turns out it's way more complicated than Monopoly boards would have you believe.

'Well,' she went on, 'don't you think it would be easier if I stayed over with you?'

Blood rushed to my face, neck, and various other

locations. I mean, stay over? What did that mean?

'B-but Mrs Gleba says you're not allowed in,' I said.

Mila stopped, pulled me close and kissed me. 'Listen, Joe. Mrs Gleba can't stay awake all night, can she?'

I gulped. 'No?'

'Well then let's go,' she said, as Big Ben donged for the tenth time.

My heart pounded like mad all the way home. I don't know why. I was probably just going to sleep on the floor and let her have my bed. The only reason she was staying was convenience.

When we got in, everyone had gone to bed. Phew.

We tiptoed across the open-plan living room/kitchen and into the corridor where the bedrooms are. Luckily, mine is the first one you come to, so we didn't have to cross Mrs Gleba's doorway.

I grabbed my knob and twisted it.

Hold on, you do know that by knob, I mean doorknob, right? I've just realized that last bit sounds pervy. And painful.

As I was saying, I was about to enter my room, when a creaking door and a toilet flush cut through the silence.

Oh no! Not Mrs Gleba!

I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw the figure silhouetted in the bathroom light. It was just Ad. He stopped dead in the doorway and cocked his head.

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‘Is someone there?’ he yelled.

‘Yes, Ad,’ I whispered. ‘It’s Joe. Now please, be quiet.’

Ad squinted into the darkness. He wasn’t wearing his glasses, which meant he was basically blind. ‘How do I know it’s really you and not some burglar?’

Mila giggled behind me.

‘Um, because a burglar wouldn’t have my exact voice,’ I said.

Ad rubbed his chin. ‘You might just be a burglar that’s proper good at impressions, though. I’m going ask you a question only Joe would know the answer to.’

I thought about just going into my room with Mila and closing the door, but Ad would probably follow me. One thing I’ve learned about him these past few weeks is that he doesn’t have the same boundaries as other people.



‘All right, I’ve thought of one,’ he said. ‘Who is Joe’s favourite ***STAR TREK*** captain?’

I sighed. ‘Captain Picard.’

‘Wrong,’ said Ad. ‘Kirk.’

I couldn’t take any more of this. Ad is always getting Kirk and Picard confused and he knows how angry that makes me. I turned on the light.

‘There,’ I said. ‘It’s me. Can I go now?’

Ad squinted at us. ‘Oh yeah, all right, Joe. Hey, Mila!’ he yelled. ‘How’s it going?’

Before she could say anything, Mrs Gleba’s bedroom door flew open and she stomped out. As scary as she looks in the day, night-time Mrs Gleba is something else altogether—like a rhino with curlers in.



‘So, you think you can pull the wool over Mrs Gleba’s eyes, eh?’ she barked. ‘No girls.’

‘But, Mrs Gleba,’ I protested, ‘she’s not my girlfriend. She’s my . . . tutor. She’s tuting me.’

Mrs Gleba shook her head and grabbed Mila’s arm. ‘The only thing she teaches you is how to be idiot. And you already big idiot.’

Mila yelped in pain as Mrs Gleba squeezed, but before she knew it, she was out the door.

On her way back to her room, Mrs Gleba pointed a saveloy finger at me and said, ‘I catch you disobeying me again, there’ll be big trouble, you understand?’

I nodded, wallowing in the horrible knowledge that I won’t be eighteen, and thus, chaperone-free, for over a year.

I went to Ad’s room to have a go at him for dropping me in it, but when I got in there he was doing naked press-ups and a little bit of me wished I was blind.

Friday 7th February

We decided that because the hard work of elevating the SOUND EXPERIENCE to global superstardom was about to start, we should have one last weekend of carefree city fun. Last Saturday, we played Epic Warfare and built blanket forts, but I decided that we have outgrown such childish things now. Tonight, we are playing poker.

I headed into town to buy a deck of cards and some

smokes. The cards weren't a problem, but the cigar shop was another thing entirely.

'Give me a box of your finest Cubans, squire,' I said to the bloke behind the counter.

That's how I talk now, blog. I am super mature. Then again, I've always had a wisdom beyond my years. I remember this one time when my Science teacher said 'penis' and I didn't even giggle. And it was a really odd thing to come out with at a parents' evening.

The cigar guy looked up at me over his copy of the *Sun*. 'How old are you?'

'Eighteen,' I replied, making my voice all deep and manly just to be sure.

He pulled a face like he didn't really believe me but couldn't be arsed asking for ID. 'A box of our best Cubans costs five hundred pounds.'

FIVE HUNDRED? Time for a rethink.

'OK, how about a box of your cheapest Cubans?'

'A hundred.'

I gulped. Why the hell are cigars so expensive? They are basically tubby cigarettes.

'OK,' I said, still trying to maintain my cool dude stance. 'I'm going to level with you, my friend. I need a box of your cheapest cigars.'

The bloke grunted and fetched me a box of Sutkuses—four for a tenner. Now, that's more like it.

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