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opening extract from

Starring Tracy Beaker

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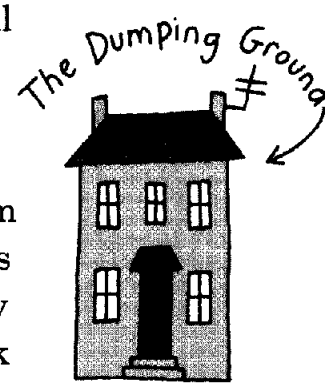
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I'm Tracy Beaker. Mark the name. I'll be famous one day.

I live in a children's home. We all call it the Dumping Ground. We're dumped here because no one wants us.



No, that's total rubbish. My mum wants me. It's just she's this famous film star and she's way too busy making movies in Hollywood to look after me. But my mum's coming to see me at Christmas. She *is*. I just know she is.

'Your mum's not coming to see you in a month of Sundays,' said Justine Littlewood. 'Your mum's never ever coming back because she doesn't want anything to do with an ugly manky bad-mouthed stupid show-off who wets the bed every ni—'

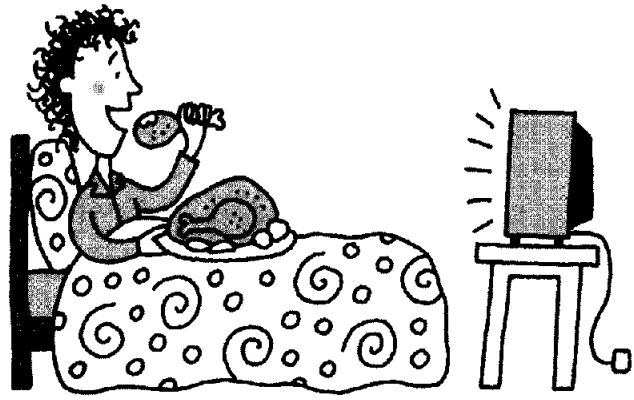
She never managed to finish her sentence because I leaped across the room, seized hold of her hair and yanked hard, as if I was gardening and her hair was a particularly annoying weed.





I ended up in the Quiet Room. I didn't care. It gave me time to contemplate. That's a posh word for think. I have an extensive vocabulary. I am definitely destined to be a writer. A *successful* glossy rich and famous writer, not a struggling scruffy hack like Cam.

I mused (*another* posh word for think!) over the idea of a month of Sundays.



It would be seriously cool to have a lie-in every single day and watch telly all morning and have a special roast dinner and never have to go to school. But then I pondered (posh alternative number *three*) on the really bad thing about Sundays. Lots of the kids in the Dumping Ground get taken out by their mums or dads.

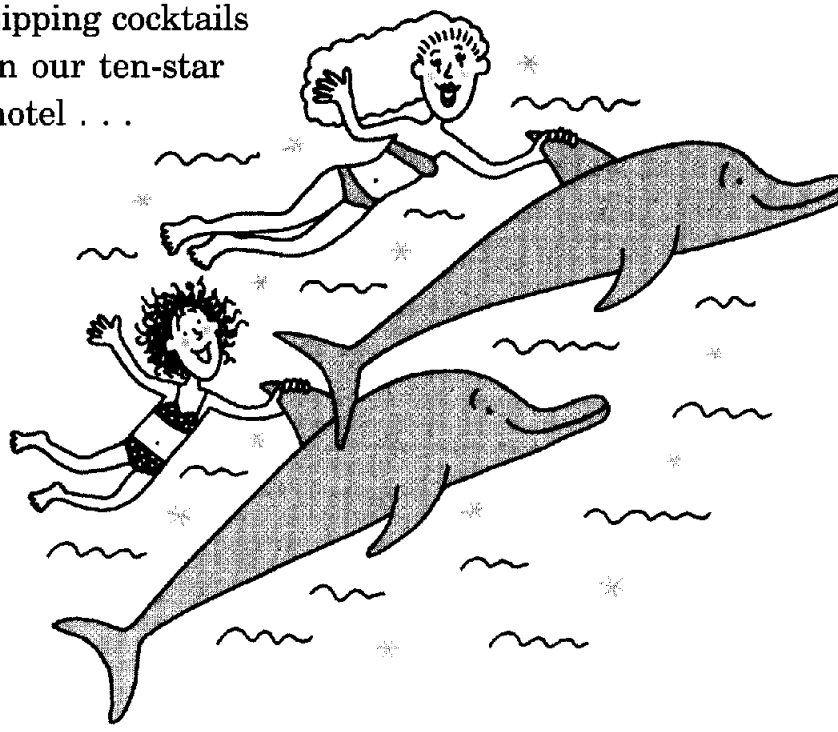
I don't. Well, I see Cam now, that's all. Cam's maybe going to be my foster mum. She's going to classes to see if she's suitable. It's mad. I don't trust my stupid social worker, Elaine the Pain. I don't want Cam to get cold feet. Though she keeps her toes cosy in her knitted stripy socks. She's not what you'd call a natty dresser. She's OK. But a foster mum isn't like a *real* mum. Especially not a famous glamorous movie star



mum like mine. It isn't *her* fault she hasn't shown up recently. She's got such a punishing film schedule that, try as she might, she simply can't manage to jump on a plane and fly over here.

But she *is* going to come for Christmas, so there, Justine Now-Almost-Bald-And-It-Serves-You-Right Littlewood. My mum promised. She really really did.

She was going to see me in the summer. We were going to have this incredible holiday together on a tropical island, lying on golden sands in our bikinis, swimming with dolphins in an azure sea, sipping cocktails in our ten-star hotel . . .



Well, she was going to take me out for the day. It was all arranged. Elaine the Pain set it all up – but my poor mum couldn't make it. Right at the last minute she was needed for some live television interview – I'm sure that was it. Or maybe *Hello!* or *OK!* magazine wanted an exclusive photo shoot. Whatever.

So she never showed up, and instead of being understanding I heard Elaine ranting on to Jenny at the Dumping Ground, telling her all sorts of stupid stuff, like I was crying my eyes out. That was a downright lie. I would never cry. I sometimes get a little attack of hay fever, but I never cry.

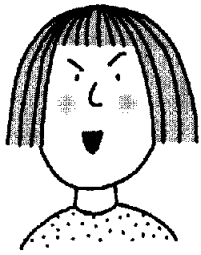
I felt *mortified*. I wanted to cement Elaine's mouth shut. We had words. Quite a few of mine were bad words. I told Elaine that she had no business talking about one of her clients – i.e. me – and I had a good mind to report her.



It was outrageous of her slandering my mum. She was a famous Hollywood movie actress, didn't she *understand*? Elaine should be more *deferential*,

seeing as she's just a poxy social worker.

Elaine said a bad word then. She said she understood why I was so angry. It was easier for me to take my anger out on her when I was *really* angry at my mum for letting me down yet again. *WHAT???* I wasn't the slightest bit angry with my mum. It wasn't her fault she's so popular and famous and in demand.



'Yeah, so why haven't we ever seen her in a single film or telly show, and why are there never any photos of her in any of the magazines?' said Justine Why-Won't-She-Mind-Her-Own-Business Littlewood.

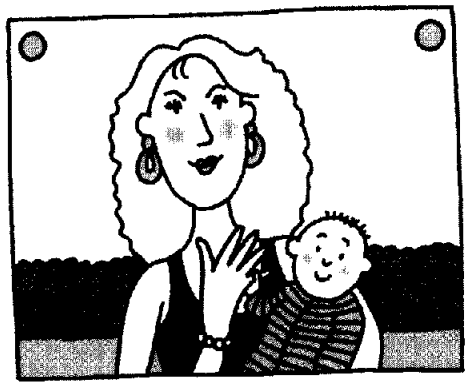
'Wash your ears out, Justine Littlewood. My mum's a famous *Hollywood* actress. Like, Hollywood in America. She isn't in films and mags over *here*, but in America she's incredibly well known. She can't set foot outside the door without the photographers snapping away and all her fans begging for autographs.'

'Yeah, yeah, she signs all these autographs, yet when does she ever bother to write to you?' said Justine Won't-Ever-Quit Littlewood.

But ha ha, sucks to you, J.L., because my mum *did* write, didn't she? She sent me a postcard.

She really did.

I keep it pinned on my wall, beside the photo of Mum and me when I was a baby and still looked sweet. The postcard had a picture of this cutesie-pie teddy with two teardrops falling out of his glass eyes and wetting his fur and the word *Sorry!* in sparkly lettering.



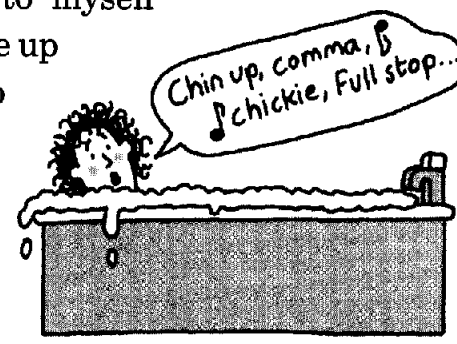


On the back my mum wrote:

So sorry I couldn't make it, Tracy.
Chin up, chickie! See you soon.
Christmas?

Lots of love,
Mum
XXX

I know it off by heart. I've made up a little tune and I sing it to myself every morning when I wake up and every night when I go to bed. I sing it softly in school. I sing it when I'm watching television. I sing it in the bath. I sing it on the toilet. I sing the punctuation and stuff too, like: *'Christ-mas, question mark. Lots of love, comma, Mum, kiss kiss kiss.'* It's a very catchy tune. I might well be a song writer when I grow up as well as a famous novelist.



Of course I'm also going to be an actress just like my mum. I am soon going to be acclaimed as a brilliant child star. I have the ☆STAR☆ part in a major production this Christmas. Truly.

I am in our school's play of *A Christmas Carol*.

I haven't done too well in casting sessions in the past. At my other schools I never seemed to get picked for any really juicy roles. I was a donkey when we did a Nativity play. I was a little miffed that I wasn't Mary or the Angel Gabriel at the very least, but like a true little trooper I decided to make the most of my part.