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opening extract from

Ruby Rogers Get a Life!

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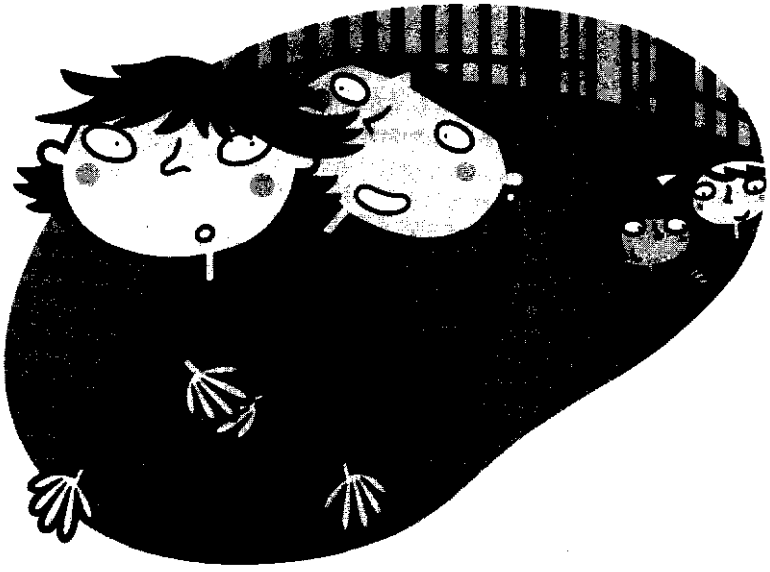


CHAPTER 1

I'll never forgive myself

AS I ARRIVED at the school gate I saw Yasmin waiting for me over by the main door. No way was I going to speak to her *ever again.* I wouldn't even *look* at her. I wouldn't look at her one more time in my *entire life,* even if we lived in the same street. And if she dared to speak to me today, I'd spit in her eye. I'd spit in *both* her eyes.

I pretended not to see her, went through the gate and off across the yard, away from the doorway. Through the crowd I saw Hannah picking her nose in her usual charming dreamy way. Right! I'd

go and talk to her instead. When I was halfway there, I saw something out of the corner of my eye. Yasmin hurtling towards me.

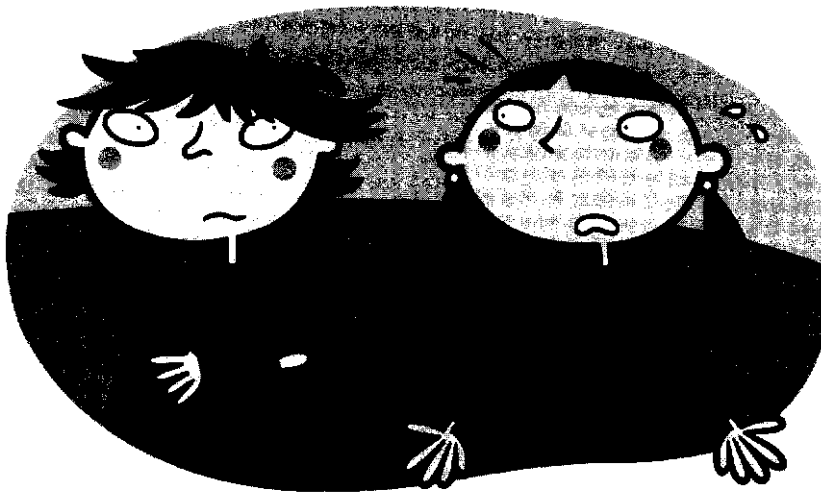
'Ruby!' she shouted. 'Ruuuubeeeee!' I ignored her. 'RUUUUUBBBEEE!' she yelled. My eardrums almost shattered. I carried on walking towards Hannah, who was still picking her nose. If we ever have an Olympic nose-picking team, Hannah will be captain.

At this point somebody grabbed me. Yasmin. She threw her arms around me and hugged me, so, of course, I had to stop walking. I was still ignoring her, though. I just sort of grimly stared ahead. She grabbed my hand.

'Ruby!' pleaded Yasmin. 'Speak to me! Don't blank me like this! I'm soooo sorry! I was *soooo* wrong to say monkeys were stupid! I'll never forgive myself! I've got a present for you! Look! It's all wrapped up in green shiny paper!'

Something flashed and sparkled in the corner of my left eye. I wasn't going to look, though. I just went on staring in the other direction, at Hannah. (She still hadn't seen us, amazingly. She was totally unaware of our life-or-death struggle. She had started on the other nostril.)

'Ruby!' Yasmin's voice dropped to a hoarse whis-



per. 'You've got to be friends with me again. You've *got* to. I've had the weekend from *hell*. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. You turned off your mobile. You told your mum to say you were out when I rang your landline. I've been punished enough!'

I went on staring into the distance. I hoped I was looking pale and grand. No way was I ever going to speak to Yasmin again – *ever*.

'My mum's made some of her grated cheese sandwiches,' Yasmin went on, whispering desperately now. 'You can have some.'

I hesitated. When I said I would never speak to Yasmin again, I had forgotten about the sandwiches. Her mum makes these absolutely incredible,

amazing, heavenly sandwiches. She grates the cheese into tangy little piles and the bread is just wonderfully soft with crusty edges.

'How many?' I asked sternly.

'All! You can have them *all*!' shrieked Yasmin, mad with joy that I'd actually spoken to her. '*Please* say you forgive me. *Please* be friends again. I didn't mean it when I said your monkeys were stupid.'

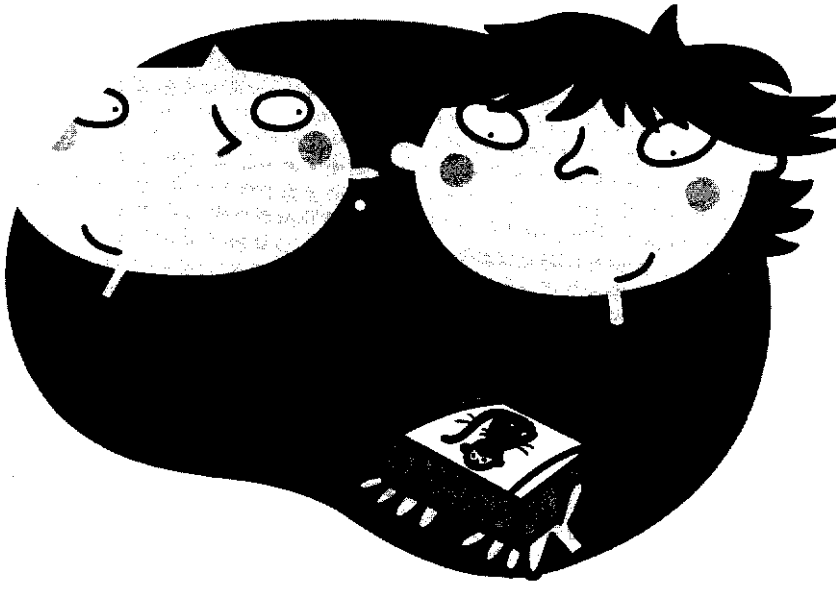
'Why did you say it, then?' I turned to her for the first time and looked into her eyes. I hoped my eyes were glittering and cruel. But it was quite hard to keep up the cruel act when I saw that Yasmin had actually been crying. Her big black curly eyelashes were all wet, and there were wet streaks on her face.

'Why did you say monkeys were stupid?'

'I had a headache,' said Yasmin lamely. 'I felt bad.'

'When you attack monkeys,' I said solemnly, 'you attack me. OK?' I didn't want to drag this out too much, though. I was wondering how many sandwiches her mum had made, and whether we had time for one before the bell went for registration.

'I know, I know – I'll never say anything rude or horrid about monkeys ever again,' said Yasmin. 'Or any animals. Except possibly spiders. Here's your present. Are we friends again?'



She pushed the green shiny little parcel into my hands. I tried not to look interested. I tried to open it looking as if I just didn't care if I had a present or not. Inside was a small white box. I opened the box, and inside was a brooch – a brooch of a monkey! He had red eyes.

'He's got ruby eyes,' said Yasmin. 'Well, not real rubies. I don't think so anyway. But it's to show he's Ruby's. We got him at a car boot sale on Sunday. I used up two weeks' pocket money on him.'

I couldn't help smiling when I looked at him. He

had a cheeky grin and his ruby eyes flashed in the winter sunshine. I unfastened my coat and pinned him on my jumper.

'Thank you,' I said. 'He's very nice.' But I still tried to say it in a sort of grand voice, as if I was somebody important.

'Are we friends again, then?' asked Yasmin.

'OK,' I said, shrugging.

'Best friends?' said Yasmin. I nodded. She grabbed my hand. 'Oh thank *God!*' she whispered with a massive sigh. 'I promise I'll never say anything out of order, ever again.'

Just as I was about to make a polite enquiry about the cheese sandwiches, the bell rang. Typical!

'At break,' whispered Yasmin, as we walked into school, 'we'll go down on the field and have the sandwiches. OK?'

'I thought you said I could have all the sandwiches?'

'Oh, come on, Ruby!' Yasmin giggled. 'If you eat all the sandwiches, you'll get a tummy ache. Maybe even be sick! You can have more than me, though. And I'll tell you all about Holly's new boyfriend.'

'Holly's got a boyfriend?' This was terrible news. Holly's a gorgeous, glamorous teenage Goth and I

was lining her up as girlfriend for my big brother, Joe. Especially now he'd split up from the tiresome Tiffany.

'I'll tell you all about it at break,' said Yasmin.

I was looking forward to break. Mainly the sandwiches, of course. But also the information. If Holly had a boyfriend I had to hatch a plot to split them up without Holly minding at all. Maybe I could make her boyfriend smell completely repulsive somehow. Perhaps I could make a kind of witches' brew of horrid-smelling stuff and squirt a bit on his jacket without him noticing.

I was so much looking forward to break. And I was glad Yasmin and I were friends again, to be honest. She'd cried, she'd apologised, she'd promised never to diss monkeys again, she'd bought me a present, she'd promised me most of her cheese sandwiches and she had all the gossip. As a candidate for best friend, I had to admit, right now she held all the aces.

We sat together at the back of the classroom. It was five-star accommodation. There was a radiator right next to us, and a spare chair for our bags. We settled down cosily and Yasmin reached under the table and during registration she squeezed my hand so hard, she almost broke several bones in

my fingers. I grinned at her. The good old team was back together again. But then something unusual happened.

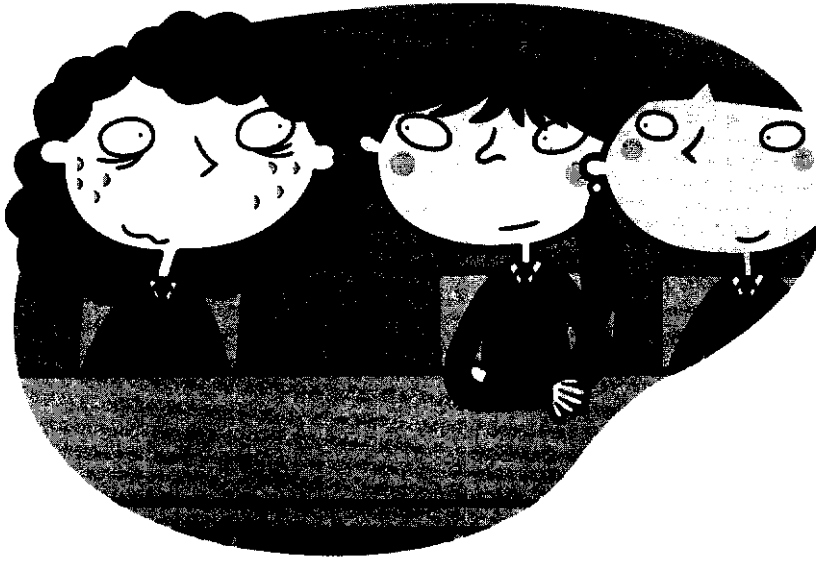
The door opened and the head teacher, Mrs Wakefield, walked in, together with a really weird-looking girl. She was pale and a bit spotty with dark circles under her eyes. She had wild silly hair and a big bottom and she kind of waddled.

'This is Lauren Potter,' said Mrs Wakefield. 'She's new to Ashcroft Primary and I know you're all going to make her very welcome indeed.'

Lauren blushed and looked at the floor. 'What a nerd!' whispered Yasmin. Our class teacher, Mrs Jenkins, shook hands with Lauren. Lauren shook hands kind of badly, as if she couldn't quite remember what hands were for.

'Welcome to Y10 Ashcroft, Lauren!' said Mrs Jenkins, smiling broadly and pretending, for a moment, not to be a werewolf. 'You're going to love it here. We're all mad, of course. Now, where will you sit? Ah yes, there's a chair at the back with Yasmin and Ruby.'

Disaster! Mrs J had dumped the nerd on us! Lauren made her way awkwardly towards us, tripping over people's bags and getting caught up in her own hair.



'Hannah, stop picking your nose!' said Mrs Jenkins. 'Now, Yasmin and Ruby, I know I can count on you to make Lauren feel at home. Yasmin and Ruby will look after you today, Lauren, but if there are any problems they can't sort out for you, you only have to ask me.'

Lauren finally arrived in our corner. Yasmin took our bags off the spare chair. Lauren tried to smile at us both at once and went sort of cross-eyed. She sat down. Close up, she had strange zombie eyes. Her coat smelt new. This was a total nightmare.

Oh no, I thought in despair. *Yasmin's going to have to offer her one of* my *cheese sandwiches!*

CHAPTER 2

You pig!

AT BREAK it was raining, so we all had to stay indoors. Mrs Jenkins went off to the staffroom for her cup of coffee and we sat on our desks. There was a terrific noise, with everybody talking and Froggo singing some stupid song from his latest computer game.

'Kill Kill Kill!' he sang. *'Kill till you feel so ill!'*

'Take no notice of Froggo,' I said, smiling at Lauren. 'He's not really a cold-blooded killer. He's really a pussycat.'

'Pardon?' said Lauren, blushing. 'Did you say something about a cat?' It *was* very noisy.

'That boy!' I shouted. 'He's quite nice really!' I pointed at Froggo. He pulled a face, making his eyes all bulgy. 'We call him Froggo!' I yelled.

'Poddo?' shouted Lauren above the din. This wasn't a great start to our relationship. Total failure to communicate.

I could communicate with Yasmin easily, though. She knew what I was thinking. I knew what she was thinking. We were both wishing Lauren could be beamed off to the Planet Tharg and leave us in peace.

'Is shish Thenkin spice?' asked Lauren.

'Wha?' I yelled.

'Is Mrs Jenkins nice?' shouted Lauren.

'No!' I cried. 'She's a werewolf!'

'What?' shouted Lauren.

'I'm going to the loo!' yelled Yasmin. 'I won't be long!'

And she pushed her way through the crowd. I watched her go with real pain. I knew she had those blinking cheese sandwiches in her bag and if this nerd Lauren hadn't been dumped on us, we could be eating them right now in a cosy corner somewhere.

'Have you got any brothers and sisters?' asked Lauren, moving in close and shouting in my ear.

'Yeah!' I yelled. 'One bro! Joe! He's sixteen and vile!'

'I've got two brothers and a sister!' yelled Lauren. 'They're all younger than me! Alfie and Roly and Alice!'

'Nice names!' I yelled back. I felt annoyed that Lauren had more brothers and sisters than me. It was almost as if she was showing off.

'Got any pets?' shouted Lauren.

'No!' I yelled back. 'Worse luck! My mum's a midwife and my dad's a geography teacher, so it wouldn't be fair to have a dog. We're out all day.'

There was a silence. I wondered what was keeping Yasmin. She's usually very quick on her visits to the loo.

'Have you got any pets?' I asked.

'Well, sort of,' said Lauren. 'Two sheepdogs, a pony and three cats.'

What a show-off, I thought. *I'm going to hate her forever.*

'Plus the farm animals,' Lauren went on.

'You live on a farm?' I asked. Lauren suddenly seemed slightly different. 'What animals have you got?'

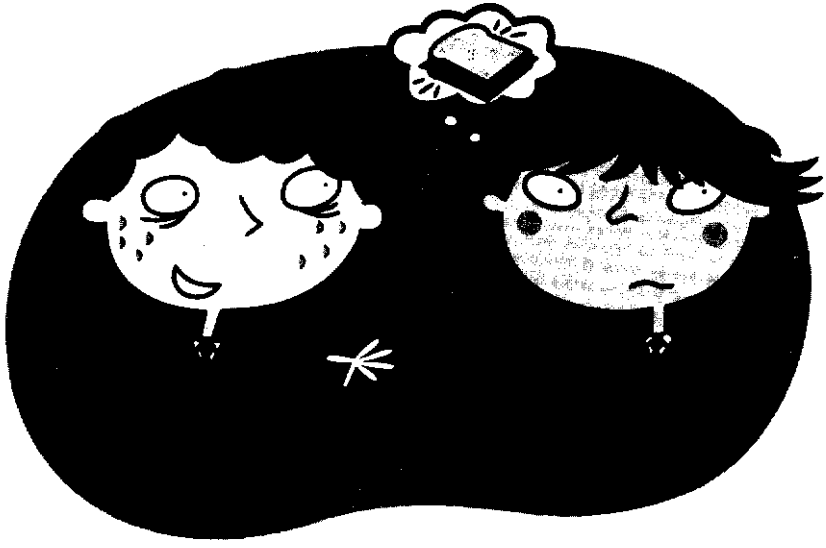
'Oh, about two hundred cattle,' said Lauren. 'About nine hundred sheep. The lambs are just being born now. And free-range hens. And we've just got two pigs and they've both had piglets.'

'Piglets!' I shrieked, possibly in a piglet-like way. 'How many?'

'Fifteen,' said Lauren. 'You can come and see them one day, if you like.'

'Yeah,' I said, trying not to sound too keen. 'Great.'

My mind was wandering, to tell you the truth. I was having hunger pangs. Where was Yasmin with those divine cheese sandwiches? How could she be so mean as to leave me stranded with Lauren like this?



I didn't even mind donating one of my sandwiches to Lauren. Just so long as *I* could have one. My tummy was rumbling now like a thunderstorm in the Rockies. Luckily there was so much noise in the classroom that nobody heard.

'Do you want to go to the loo?' I asked.

'No,' said Lauren. 'I'm all right. I hardly ever go.'

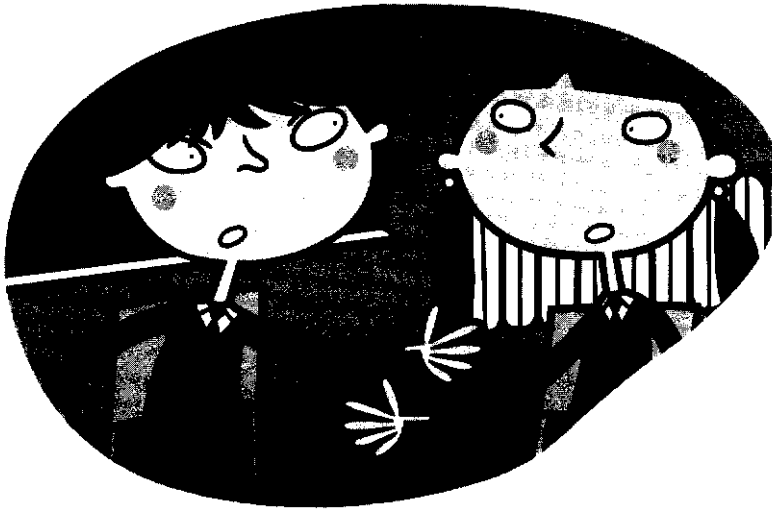
Once again it seemed to me that she was trying to score points. OK, she had more animals than Noah in his ark, and a family the size of a football team, but did she really need to boast about how she never had to use the loo?

'I hardly ever go, either,' I said coolly, even though I was starting to want to go right now, and the more I thought about it, the worse it got.

I was beginning to feel quite bad. I was faint with hunger and dying for the loo. But just then the bell went, and any minute now Mrs Jenkins would come marching back in.

Yasmin appeared and sat down in the chair next to the radiator. I noticed crumbs around her mouth. I slid down into the chair next to her. Lauren also sat down.

'Have you been eating the sandwiches?' I whispered in Yasmin's ear. 'Give me one quick! I'm starving! I've just got time before Jenko gets back!'



'I'm sorry, Ruby!' whispered Yasmin, 'but there aren't any left. I met Hannah in the corridor and I was eating one, so I had to offer her one. And then Emma Goodheart turned up and demanded one too.'

'You pig!' I hissed. 'Those sandwiches were mine. You said so yourself.'

'You can have all of them tomorrow,' said Yasmin, licking her lips and wiping her mouth on her sleeve. 'They weren't very nice anyway. The bread was stale.'

I knew she was lying. Her mum's bread is never stale. I started to hate her again. It had been a mistake, allowing her to get round me with her promises of cheese sandwiches. I nearly hated

Lauren because of her boasting, but I almost hated Yasmin worse.

'Right!' said Mrs Jenkins, marching into the class and banging her bag down on the desk. 'Now I hope nobody's forgotten what a special day it is on Friday?'

'No, miss! St Valentine's!' yelled Sophie Grant. Froggo made the sound of somebody being sick.

'Quiet, Dan!' Mrs Jenkins snapped at him. 'Now don't forget the party. Oh – Lauren – we're having a fancy-dress party after school on Friday. It's to raise enough money to buy some goats for poor families in Africa. The fancy-dress theme is animals. OK?'

Lauren nodded. I was surprised she didn't take the chance of boasting about her huge menagerie.

'Right,' said Mrs Jenkins, 'don't forget to bring your costumes with you on Friday. You can change into them after last lesson. There's a letter here for your parents, to remind them of the details.' She gave out the letters.

'You'll be coming as a monkey, won't you, Ruby?' said Yasmin.

'No need for any special costume, then!' said Froggo. Everybody laughed. I tried to smile as if I didn't mind being the laughing stock of the whole

class. I was really cross with Yasmin and Froggo for teasing me like that. Especially as I was so hungry. Yasmin had given Hannah and Emma Goodheart my cheese sandwiches! OK, I was hungry and humiliated. But I would have my revenge.