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Opening extract from

Chips beans and Limousines

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Day One
6:47 p.m. and forty-seven seconds
if I start writing right NOW...

Dear new Diary,

I have a surprise for you. It is a BIG surprise. (Don't worry – it's also a GOOD surprise!!!)

You are going to be so thrilled when I tell you!!!!!!

Are you sitting down???

No, you are lying flat on my desk while I write in you. Obviously. Okay, just breathe deeply, and try to stay calm.

Dear diary, I can just imagine what your life was like on the shelf at Paperflo's. Pretty dull, no?? No one

to talk to except other diaries. Nothing to talk about because no one had written in you yet. Maybe you wondered who would pick you up and take you home. Who would write in you? Would you be hearing the thrilling details of a spy's secret life?? Or the love confessions of a wacky teenager??? Or the rotten poetry of a spotty computer geek????

Well. No. It's FAR more exciting than that!

Because – the hand that picked you up and took you home was MINE. The hand that is writing in you now, belongs to...

(I hope you are remembering to breathe deeply and stay calm)

BATHSHEBA CLARICE DE TROP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Ta Daaaaaaaah!!

Yes!! Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes!!!!!!
THE Bathsheba Clarice de Trop!!!!!!!

You never thought you would belong to a celebrity, did you???

Yes. It is I. Heroine of *Bathsheba's Amazing Party, Bathsheba's Brilliant Best Friends, Bathsheba Saves the Day, Bathsheba Glamour Queen and the Smugglers of Doom* and *Bathsheba Shops (Vols. 1, 2, 3)*. And all those other amazing, astonishing, best-selling a million times over books which my mother – the charming, beautiful and intelligent Mandy de Trop – writes about ME.

Me me me me me me me me me me me me!!!!!!!!

Isn't it exciting???

Aren't you thrilled???

You are SO LUCKY!!!!!

You are going to be hearing ALL ABOUT ME!!!!!!!

And we can be best friends, right??

Because that's what a diary is, isn't it??

A Girl's Best Friend.

No. Don't thank me. I know it's an honour for you, but after all, I'm just like you, really.

Only FAMOUS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(And less papery).

Oo, there is Natasha, the housekeeper, calling me for supper. I do wish she would not call me "Bath", though. I must have a Word with her, like Mummy does.

Mummy isn't home yet.

I keep running out onto the landing because I think I hear the front door opening and it might be her, but it is always just Natasha bashing pans in the kitchen.

She still might be home in time for supper. I do hope so!!!!

She is so extraordinarily busy writing about me that sometimes I don't see her for *ages*. Sigh.

9:08 p.m. and sixteen seconds ish

No Mummy, as usual. And Natasha had lots of work to do so I had supper on my own. I ate my lasagne in front of the television in the small sitting room with lots of cushions round me like a family. But even the small sitting room can feel awfully big and empty when it is just you and *Dr. Who* in it.

I had a Word with Natasha. I said, "Natasha, maybe when you call me for supper, instead of shouting 'Bath, grub's up,' you could shout 'Bathsheba Clarice de Trop, grub's up.'"

Natasha laughed and laughed in a very disrespectful way, and said, "Bath, love, if I did that you'd never get any supper. I'd be too busy working out how to say your crazy name to cook it."

I do not have a crazy name! Although I suppose it is a bit difficult to say. Bath–Shee–Bar. Cla–rees. (It's French!) Der Troe, like toe. (It's Aristocratic!). Maybe you could repeat it after me, dear Diary, or

maybe not, as I have just remembered you do not have a mouth.

Anyway, Bathsheba is a name for a Heroine! It is glamorous and dignified, unlike Bath. I mean, she might as well call me Shower Curtain and be done with it.

I pointed this out to her, but she just said, "Hurry up and eat your dinner, Butterball."

I wish she would not call me Butterball, either.

It makes me sound dumpy, which I am NOT. Very.

Oh, but I am so glad you are here, dear Diary!!!! It will all be better now I have someone to talk to. I mean, write in. Sometimes it does get a little dull being all on my own. This evening, for example, I was so bored I tried to help Nastasha make the lasagne, but she said "No chance, Bath, don't you remember what happened last time? I don't want another visit from the fire brigade!"

I don't think that is fair, anyone could mix up minutes and hours in a recipe, it is not my fault the tinned tomatoes burst into flames.

Anyway, while I was eating my supper, it struck me, Diary, that, being a book, and having lived on a Deprived Shelf all your life, you may not actually have read many other books.

And therefore it is possible – just possible – that you may not know all about me already.

Although probably you will have caught a glimpse of the novelty key-rings, or the bookmarks, or seen other, not-famous girls, with their *Bathsheba – The Best by Far!* T-shirts. (Aren't they great? I've got twelve!!!!!!)

Maybe I had better fill you in on what you've been missing.

(Don't worry!! The books are available, priced £5.99, from all good bookshops. You could ask for a boxed set for Christmas!! There is still time to learn ALL ABOUT ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!)

Where shall I start???

Well, I am just always either
1) saving the day
or
2) having extraordinarily glamorous sleepovers with my amazing best friends, Aurelia Windsor-Battenberg and Fifi LaQuiche-Lorraine.

Aurelia and Fifi and me like to spend our time shopping in Harrods or Saks Fifth Avenue (if we are in America) or Gucci or Pucci or Prada. Aurelia has smooth chestnut hair and is very refined and intelligent. She wears glasses but they are such expensive ones that she looks even better when she's wearing them than when she's not. She is fifteenth in line to the throne. Fifi has curly black hair and is extremely French and also a champion show-jumper. Her mother is a film star and her father is related to the Prince of Monaco.

You are probably wondering why I am complaining about being bored when I could be out shopping or drinking lattes with my super-amazing friends, and, um, that is quite a good question. The thing is, Aurelia and Fifi have both got measles, or possibly something more glamorous, so sadly they cannot be with us today. I know it is a really big coincidence that they have both got it at the same time, but things like that sometimes happen, and it does NOT mean it is not true.

Well, anyway I do not have measles, and I am just more glamorous and intelligent and champion show-jumper than either Fifi or Aurelia, and, also, I have Natural Leadership Skills. Plus, I have blonde hair, which is just the colour of champagne, and is beautifully wavy, NOT frizzy.

Aurelia and Fifi and me go to a very select boarding school called St. Barnaby's. I just love boarding school! I am head of all the school even though I am only in Form 1 (if you want to know

why, read *Bathsheba's Victory*). And I am captain of the hockey team (*Hail Bathsheba*) and of the swimming team and the riding team, and I am also house librarian and form monitor and more or less everything else too, also I always star in all the plays our drama club puts on. I am top of my class in everything, including cookery, where my lasagne is always the best. I am just soooo good at everything that it is actually a bit embarrassing sometimes!!!!!!

But right now I am not at Boarding School. It is the start of the holidays. As it is the holidays, I expect I will have an adventure soon. I have saved the world thirteen times (*Bathsheba Crime-Fighter*, *Bathsheba and MI5*, *Bathsheba Puts It Right*, *Bathsheba Leads The Way*, *Bathsheba Sorts It Out*, *Bathsheba Triumphant*, *Bathsheba the Heroine*, *Bathsheba World Peace Angel*, *Bathsheba the Brilliant* and lots and lots of other books). I have also:

- Foiled a smugglers' plot (*Bathsheba on the Beach*)

- Discovered hidden jewels in an old farmhouse (*Bathsheba at Strawberry Fields Farm*)
- Driven off pirates (*Bathsheba's Caribbean Crisis*)
- Solved the murder of a catwalk model (*Bathsheba's Paris Plot*)
- Prevented a prize pony from being pony-napped (*Bathsheba's Gymkhana*)

At the end of my adventures I always make a joke that everybody laughs at, even the baddies, who I have tied to chairs. And then my boyfriend, Brad, picks me up in his sky-blue Ferrari, and we drive off to the opera, or the beach, or a fashion show, or something else equally brilliant.

Oh yes, dear Diary!!! I have a boyfriend!!!!!!!!!!!

Blush blush blush blush blush blush blush!!!!!!!!!!

He is six feet tall and he has dreamy green eyes and a permanent sun-tan. He is sixteen and he can drive because he is American. He is a champion surfer and also a member of MENSA. He gives me

diamond rings all the time because his father is a zillionaire computer genius and also descended from royalty.

So obviously, it's AMAZING being me!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Really!!!!

Whenever it starts feeling as if Mummy has not been home for a whole week or maybe two, I just think as hard as I can: "I am Bathsheba Clarice de Trop! My life is FANTASTIC!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

And it works. Usually.

I live in a PALATIAL MANSION with my mother. There is a darling old housekeeper called Ma Dovey who adores me and is just always baking me home-made cakes and biscuits.

(Yes, I know I said Natasha was the housekeeper!! Ma Dovey is sort of somewhere else at the moment. Maybe she has measles too.)

I have a massive swimming pool with my logo (I

have a logo – it's a diamond-encrusted B) set into the tiles at the bottom. I only have seven walk-in wardrobes, because there are only seven colours I like to wear. They are

1) Hot Pink
2) Bright Blue
3) Green
4) Gamboge
5) Ecru
6) Vermillion
7) Mauve.

I have two dressing tables with identical box sets of make-up and jewellery, in case a friend wants to come round and play. One of them hasn't even been touched yet!!!! Which is a GOOD thing, and does not make me sad AT ALL.

My bedroom has a carpet that is thick and pink and like walking through a forest, and a four-poster bed with a canopy with silk roses sewn into it, and

a life-size doll's house (I'm a bit old for it now, of course!!).

And I have new skis!!!

And I have two ponies!!!!!

And I have a Jacuzzi!!!!!!!!!!!

So there!!

My life is FANTASTIC.

It's better than yours.

I'm going to bed now.

P.S. Goodnight dear diary, I really hope we can be friends.

It can get a bit lonely in the holidays while one is waiting for an adventure to start.

Day Two
Just after lunch (Caviar and lettuce pie! My favourite!)

Hello Dear Diary!!!

I hope you are settling in well. Do you like your shelf?

You are in select company.

You are sharing the shelf with the ENTIRE BOXED SET COLLECTION (special edition, gilded pages and red binding) of BATHSHEBA BOOKS!!!!!!!

You must be so pleased!!!!

Anyway, today I am going to rehearse my next role.

St Barnaby's Drama Club are putting on a new play. I am the star!!!! Obviously.

I am A Little Princess from the book of the same name, adapted into a play by Moi, Me, Bathsheba Clarice de Trop.

In case you don't know, it is all about this girl who is at a miserable horrible school with a miserable horrible teacher. Blerrgh! Her father dies so she has no money, and they make her live in an attic in the cold on her own. Everyone is horrible to her. But she wins them over by showing she is Angelic and Sweet-natured and A Little Princesscular. (Just like me!). And in the end she discovers she has a guardian, and lots of money. And her guardian (who is like a father) comes and takes her away from the horrible school and they live happily, for ever and ever.

My father is Not On The Scene.

Mummy brought me up alone, struggling against Adversity. (I think adversity means bad publicity. In fact, I am sure of it!!!)

Mummy does not talk about my father, but I expect he is probably very rich and glamorous. Maybe he is a Hollywood actor, who has to keep his love-child (me!) secret. Or perhaps he is a top spy who has to maintain anonymity.

He has not been to see me for six years.

La la la la la la la la.

I don't mind!!!! My life is brilliant!!!!!!!

Did I say I had two ponies?????

Showtime!!!!!!

Now I am going to rehearse. If I prop you up here, dear diary, you can watch. And applaud!!!!

(Well, just rustle your pages then).

First I have to put on my costume. This is a beautiful silk evening gown and high heels. But a bit

dishevelled, as it would be if you lived in an attic.

Hmm.

It might look better with breasts.

These are my lines:

When things are horrible – just horrible – I think as hard as ever I can of being a princess. I say to myself, "I am a princess, and I am a fairy one, and because I am a fairy nothing can hurt me or make me uncomfortable."

Did you like it???

The bit where I swooned on the sofa was particularly good, wasn't it?

I can't wait till Mummy gets home. Maybe she will have time to watch me act. Oh, I do hope so!! Maybe tonight she won't be busy again!!!

I know she has a very important job (writing about me!!) but I really, really wish she had time to

watch me act. At this rate I will be grown-up before she sees me on stage, and I do not think I will make such a convincing Little Princess when I am sixteen or even older.

Later Still

Mummy not home yet. She is probably really busy writing. Or at a glamorous party with Agents.

I so am not dumpy, not with the light off, anyway.

Later, Much Later

Still no Mummy. The high heels are getting a bit uncomfortable.

Later, Later, Later...

At last!!!! I can hear her in the hall!!!!!!!!!

Back soon, dear Diary!!!!! Best friend!!!! Mwah!!!

P.S. I just kissed a diary. Maybe that's a bit weird.

Tea time

WELL.

Cross cross cross cross cross cross cross.

Dear Diary. You will not BELIEVE what happened.

I rushed downstairs.

"Mummy, I am A Little Princess," I told her. "Do you want to see me act?"

"No time, dear, I'm afraid. Busy busy busy. Got to get organising our Hutchford's Book Signing And Bathsheba Bash! Give me a kiss – no, just an air kiss, you'll spoil my make-up."

And she went into her study and shut the door.

I don't ever get sad, because my life is fantastic, but sometimes I feel as if I don't know what to do or

where to go. I hate that feeling!! It's like being hungry, but eating doesn't fill it up. (I tried and it just gave me a stomach-ache.)

I sat on the stairs and recited my lines quietly to myself, but it was not the same.

Then I remembered. Natasha was still here. She would like to see me act!!!

"Natasha! I'm going to perform a show for you! The Little Princess – from the Book of the Same Name. Adapted by—"

"I'm sorry, Bath. I'm in such a hurry. I have to get off on time tonight." She was rushing round the kitchen, with a tin of tomatoes in one hand and a jar of herbs in the other.

"Oh, don't be silly! What are you in a hurry for? I'm going to entertain you!" I pulled out a chair for her.

"I'm going to see my goddaughter. In her school play."

Goddaughter????

Play??????

"But this is FAR better," I said. "Besides, I have Genuine Talent."

She sort of rolled her eyes.

"Butterball, I'm late. Can't your mother watch you?"

"She's busy again."

"Oh." She looked a bit sorry, and then she said. "Maybe tomorrow, okay? I really have to get the cooking done now." And she pushed past me to get to the stove, which is not housekeeperly!!!!

I was really cross.

"You are a rotten housekeeper," I shouted. "I am going to get Mummy to bring Ma Dovey back!"

Diary, do you know what she did????

She looked at me and said: "Bathsheba, Ma Dovey is fic-tion-al."

As if I was stupid!!!!!!!!

I was even more angry. I said: "I suppose next you'll be telling me I'm fictional, too!!"

And do you know what she said???

She sighed and she said: "Well, actually, Bathsheba, yes, mostly you do seem to be."

And then she pushed me out of the kitchen!!!!!

And shut the door in my face!!!!!!!

I don't know what she is talking about.

I am not fictional!!!

I am right here!!!!

I don't believe she even really has a goddaughter. She certainly hasn't mentioned her before.

A Bit Later

What's so brilliant about this stupid goddaughter anyway?

I bet I can act much better than her.

I can Emote. (I am not quite sure what that means, but Mummy says all the best actresses do it, so I suppose I do too.)

I bet this so-called goddaughter never Foiled Smugglers.

A Bit Bit Later

Maybe Emote means "Swoon on the Sofa"?

I can't imagine Natasha having a goddaughter. I wonder if she calls her Butterball too?

I sort of hope not.

A Bit Bit Bit Even Later

Dear Diary, I have had the most *astoundelicious* idea!!!!

Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I am soooooooooo amazing!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I am going to spy on Natasha!!!!

I am going to wait till she leaves and then follow her and see where she goes really. I don't believe she has a goddaughter at all. Certainly not one who can act! I bet she is really smuggling emeralds, maybe in packets of pasta. Or dealing in stolen antiquities.

Ooooo, I will have to get disguised!!!!

It will be just like *Bathsheba in Havana*, when I had to dress up as a vacuum cleaner in order to be smuggled into an evil mastermind's headquarters!

(It was a pretty uncomfortable disguise, let me tell you, Diary. Have you ever tried to breathe through a vacuum cleaner tube? Well, don't. Yuk, yuk, yuk.)

This disguise will be FAR more stylish (not that it would be difficult to get less stylish than being disguised as a hoover. I do not think *Bathsheba in Havana* was one of Mummy's best books.).

This is going to be sooo much fun!!!!!

Day Three

Dear Diary,

Huh, huh and double huh!

I am a little bit scared and worried. There is a secret going on. Mummy is very stressed, and there is a stranger downstairs in her study. I peered over the banisters and whoever it is has a bald head, but I couldn't see anything else.

Mummy told Natasha to take the day off. It feels funny, Natasha not being here and Mummy being here, as it is usually the other way around.

Well, I don't care if Mummy doesn't want to tell me what's going on. I have my Art. I mean my