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Opening extract from

The Life Of Riley

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January

Sunday 1

New Year's Day

Am in agony. And not due to highly anticipated cider and blackcurrant-induced hangover from best friend Scarlet's New Year's Eve party, but to fact that Dad had moved second best friend Sad Ed's *Dawson's Creek* ladder and I fell off the drainpipe in my attempt to escape my facially disfigured (i.e. acne-ridden) ex-boyfriend Will, god-bothering cousin Boaz, and uber-chav neighbour Thin Kylie. So, instead of spending the evening looking vintage and dancing to seminal music, had to sit in casualty for three hours with Dad, James, and local madman Barry the Blade, who, it turned out, was fine but had nothing better to do. Then the weary doctor (who looked about sixteen but was in fact twenty-six and a half—James checked) said I had only suffered minor bruising and it was lucky my fall had been broken by the mini-trampoline (disused due to injury risk—how ironic).

So am now on sofa with Baby Jesus (aka my uncle) and the dog watching one of Dad's *Lovejoy* videos and sipping Lucozade (me, not Baby Jesus. Or the dog—it is eating leftover green triangle Quality Street instead). Mum has taken James and Boaz to Mole Hall Wildlife Park (total exotic wildlife count now reduced to three otters due to unexplained marmoset death, plus the flamingos are out of bounds in ongoing bird flu crisis); Grandpa and Treena, parents of Baby Jesus, are at the January sales (i.e. Woolworth's); Will never came home

from Thin Kylie's; and Dad is fixing the drainpipe under strict orders from Mum who fears that squirrels will get in and devour the electricals.

4 p.m.

Scarlet and Sad Ed have just left. It is all too depressing. I have clearly missed a potentially life-changing experience. Apparently Scarlet's mum, Suzy, drank too much Merlot and did dirty dancing to Christina Aguilera (proto-feminist singer, according to Suzy). My mum would never do that. She only dances to Rod Stewart and it is excruciating to witness. Also, malodorous Year Ten lesbian Oona Rickets got off with a MAN in the downstairs toilet, then had a panic attack over her sexuality and had to have emergency counselling from Suzy. She has redeclared herself 'bicurious'. What is that meant to mean? It sounds like bivalve. Apparently Scarlet didn't get off with anyone. She is still too traumatized by her illicit liaison with non-goth and possible love of my life Justin Statham. I asked Scarlet if Justin had snogged anyone and she said no he was too busy doing requests on his electric guitar. Sad Ed said why didn't I ask if he had got off with anyone, so I asked him and he said no, so I said point proven.

5 p.m.

Have just got text from Scarlet's brother Jack: Hp u bounce back soon Riley! Ha! X!

Hilarious.

7 p.m.

Will came to say goodbye—his mum Fiona is driving up from Fulham in the morning to collect him. She is too hung-over to come today due to the Tory frivolities at David Cameron's organic beer and Twiglets party in Notting Hill. (Mum says it is more likely down to drugs and weird sex. She thinks all politicians spend their spare time getting drunk and breaking the law, except ginger Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy, whom she is convinced is going to save Britain from moral turpitude and juvenile delinquency.) Will was with Thin Kylie who had four love-bites (I counted them) on her neck and her hand up Will's shirt. Will did not have love-bites. Not even Thin Kylie would dare go near that amount of sebaceous secretion. I said I was glad that love could conquer their social and mental divide. Thin Kylie said, 'I ain't no mentalist. You're the mental one to chuck him. He's like Prince William, innit.' Then they went off to do karaoke with Terry and Cherie. It will not last. He is used to organic caviar while Thin Kylie thinks crisps are a food group.

This is not a good start to the year. I will be fifteen in eight months. I should be at my peak of general brilliantness, i.e. like Peaches Geldof, not sipping glucose drinks in Mum's terry towelling dressing gown and watching Ian McShane with a mullet with my one-week-old uncle.

New Year Resolutions:

1. Attempt to discontinue friendship with Thin Kylie.

We have nothing in common and her Bacardi habit is worsening.

2. Repatriate Suzy's glow-in-the-dark rabbit vibrator asap. James has lent it to Treena to vibrate Jesus to sleep.
3. Concentrate on school—GCSEs now a mere year and a half away and do not want to end up serving doughnuts in Dorrington's like Maria Pearce (aka Pie Shop Pearce) for the rest of my life.
4. Experiment with alcohol or drugs or sex. According to Sad Ed, it is the law to have been sick on Strongbow and have seen several willies (or minkies in his case) by the end of Year Ten. So far have only seen James's (bath-sharing economy drive by Mum), and Grandpa Riley's (horrific bathroom lock failure incident), which do not count, according to Sad Ed.
5. Find THE ONE. Will utterly not snog random Tories with congenital acne but will save myself for long-haired creative type with interest in tragedy and general literariness and with musical potential i.e. Justin. For a minute last year during on-stage *Bugsy Malone* snog thought it might be Jack but he is *a*) Scarlet's brother and *b*) Scarlet's brother.

Monday 2

Bank Holiday

Auntie Joyless is coming from Redruth to collect Boaz at lunchtime. Grandpa and Treena have been sent to DFS

for the day with the baby (warm, plenty of seating, crisp machine). Mum thinks Auntie Joyless may have a nervous breakdown and have to summon emergency Episcopal services if she finds out Grandpa has an illegitimate son called Jesus with someone from Bolton.

4 p.m.
Boaz's return to Cornwall did not go as smoothly as Mum had planned. Dad is driving Auntie Joyless back to Redruth in the Passat now that her new Mini Metro is wedged into Clive and Marjory's Granada saloon in a generally mangled state and Len Viceroy (aka Fat Len) from Viceroy garage can't separate them until next week as he is having surgery on a varicose vein.

Timetable of events:

12.15 p.m. Auntie Joyless arrives in new Mini Metro, as purchased from Denzel's Crazy Car Warehouse in Cambourne, complete with 'I brake for Jesus' sticker on the window and lucky crown of thorns hanging from rear-view mirror.

12.30 p.m. Boaz apologizes for running away and agrees to attend Reverend Ray's 'Bible Bash' camp for delinquent teenagers in February half-term. James asks if he can attend for research purposes. Request denied by Mum on 'because I say so' grounds.

1.00 p.m. Dog eats Delia's vegetarian shepherd's pie (puritanical, but with a Christmas theme, i.e. shepherds) during Auntie Joyless's enforced saying of grace (eyes shut all round).

1.10 p.m. James and Boaz sent to Mr Patel's to buy emergency lunch.

1.30 p.m. James and Boaz return with four chicken korma ready meals, a tin of cling peaches and a semi-melted Viennetta (Mr Patel's freezer on blink). Dad says he is secretly glad dog ate vegetarian pie, Delia or no Delia.

1.45 p.m. Fight breaks out in DFS between Mrs O'Grady and Ying Brewster over last remaining white leatherette corner set. Police and ambulances called and DFS closes until further notice.

2.30 p.m. Grandpa and Treena arrive on doorstep four hours early. Mum sends James (crucial mistake in retrospect) to hide Baby Jesus in his bedroom.

2.45 p.m. James appears in dining room and declares an emergency.

2.50 p.m. Auntie Joyless says, 'Nothing is beyond the power of our good Lord,' and demands to know nature of said emergency.

2.51 p.m. James says Baby Jesus has been sick on his Will Young doll, and it is now not singing 'Evergreen'.

2.52 p.m. Auntie Joyless storms upstairs to find 'second coming' lying on *Lord of the Rings* duvet between sick-covered Will Young and giant glow-in-the-dark rabbit vibrator (on).

2.53 p.m. Auntie Joyless declares the house is inhabited by Satanists and demands Boaz strap himself in the Metro.

2.54 p.m. Auntie Joyless reverses Metro at full speed into Clive and Marjory's driveway whilst trying to cross herself at same time.

3.30 p.m. Auntie Joyless and Boaz depart in Passat with Dad and the dog.

3.31 p.m. Mum demands to know provenance of giant glow-in-the-dark rabbit vibrator. Rachel vows it is more than her life's worth to divulge the

sex secrets of vague acquaintances. Mum says, 'Was it Suzy?' James says, 'Yes.'

3.45 p.m. Rabbit vibrator sealed in Jiffy bag with stern letter from Mum requesting that Suzy keep her menacing sex toys to herself.

3.50 p.m. James and Rachel sent to rooms to reflect on inappropriate use of menacing sex toys in front of evangelistic humourless relations.

Thank God school starts in two days. How am I supposed to be tragic and literary with my ridiculous family? I bet Emily Bronte never had to put up with this sort of hoo-ha.

Update

3.00 a.m. Dad and dog arrive back from Cornwall. Dog wakes up entire house in incident involving leftover chicken korma.

Tuesday 3

Mum is in a panic. She says Jeremy Paxman has informed her that there is a plague of sex register pervert teachers in schools. I said I didn't know she had a hotline to Paxo. She said don't try to be funny, it was on the news, and are there any at John Major High, apart from sex pest Geography

teacher Mr Ingham, who is on permanent sabbatical? Said, 'No.' Did not inform her about Justin's ex girlfriend Sophie Jacobs's ongoing gropings with student French teacher Mr Vaughan. Or lesbian PE teachers Miss Vicar (stick-thin; no breasts; facial hair) and Miss Beadle (overweight; bulgy eyes like Joey in *Friends* or rabbits with myxomatosis).

Went round Scarlet's to discuss sex pervert crisis. Suzy said it was all blown out of proportion and that most of them were not paedophiles but merely fulfilling the Oedipal desires of sexually charged sixteen year olds. She is thinking of writing to Tony (Blair—Suzy thinks they are on first-name terms following their brief encounter at the school dinners visit last year, during which she was arrested for possible terrorist activity). I wish my mother were an enlightened sex therapist instead of a former tax clerk with a Cillit Bang obsession.

Also, school starts tomorrow. And, with it, my quest to find THE ONE (as long as THE ONE is not a teacher or other pervert). I predict it will be Justin and we will be snogging by half term.

Wednesday

First day of school.

Thin Kylie has already chucked a sickie, due to post-traumatic stress disorder (according to poorly spelt note from her mum Cherie, given to me to hand in, through

a cloud of Marlboro fumes and Impulse. Registration was awash with rumours that she had snogged Prince William. (Fat Kylie told trainee Year Eight chavette 'Primark' Donna (little sister of Leanne Jones, free giver of sexual favours), who is easily confused, and who told the entire lower school by first break). Even Ms Hopwood-White was overexcited. I said that he was not Prince William, he was an acne-ridden Tory from Fulham. But Fat Kylie said, 'You're just jealous. Because no one's been near your chuff.' Luckily, attention was diverted by news that we are getting a new girl in class tomorrow. And not one of Mrs Duddy's Retards or Criminals this time either. She comes from London and is called Tuesday Weeks and is the product of a totally broken home! According to Mrs Leech, her dad, who is American, ran off with his psychiatrist. Oh my God. She is my ideal me! I bet she looks like drug-crazed beauty Marissa off *The O.C.* and has a band on Myspace and spends all weekends getting spotted as a model at the giant Topshop. Or, even better, maybe she is black! Fat Kylie is claiming her for chav corner. She is planning to take her to sightsee the drive-through McDonalds in Harlow so that she doesn't feel homesick. The Kylies are going to be disappointed. Tuesday is bound to be on the Zone diet and will only eat Sushi and raw vegetables. Which could be a problem in Saffron Walden, which is sorely lacking in Japanese cuisine.

1 p.m.

Thin Kylie is back in school, following a miraculous recovery, according to Cherie, or success at procuring morning after pill from Dr Braithwaite (huge hands; lazy eye; bottle of whisky in desk drawer), according to Thin Kylie. Although Primark Donna told her she should keep the baby as it would be heir to the throne and she could sell her story to *Chat* for £500. Fat Kylie said she would get more from *Pick Me Up*, and she should know, her mum has sold several stories to them, including: 'I married a murderer' (not true) and 'I'm in love with a ghost' (possibly true, although probably under influence of Smirnoff Ice).

Thursday 5

Tuesday is not black. Nor does she look like Marissa Cooper. She is like a stretched out version of Kelly Osbourne, complete with excessive EMO eyeliner and daring attitude. Sad Ed tried to talk to her in French but Ms Hopwood-White caught him and made him conjugate 'manger' on the new electronic whiteboard. Which he got wrong and broke in the process, due to his oversized fingers. So we are back with chalk and felt pens until the new financial year, according to headmaster Mr Wilmott.

At lunch, Tuesday sat at the end of the Alternative Music Club table (i.e. anyone with a guitar or an Arctic Monkeys CD—main members Jack, Justin, and Stan Barret

from Year Eight who once saw Paul Weller in John Lewis) eating peanut butter and jam sandwiches (compulsory American food) with her iPod on. I tried to warn her this was totally against school rules, but I don't think she could hear me. She is clearly ubercool and wildly dangerous. I absolutely have to get to know her before the end of the week. Especially if she has access to Justin at lunch.

On the plus side, the Kylies have been unsuccessful in luring Tuesday into their fake-Burberry-clad clutches as well. They are clearly concerned that she may be harder than they are because they locked official school midget Dean 'the dwarf' Denley in a locker in last break just to reinforce their position.

Asked Mum if I could have peanut butter and jam on 'rye' for lunch tomorrow. She said I could jolly well have school dinners or take in a cheese and tomato bap. She is in a mood because it turns out she was wrong about Charles Kennedy. According to the six o'clock news, he is a total alcoholic. Granny Clegg rang in triumph—her motto is never trust anyone ginger or with a beard. Plus she voted UKIP.

Friday 6

Epiphany

Ooh. Epiphany would be a good name. Epiphany Riley. I may well ask Mum if I can change my name by deed poll,

like Edward Pratt from four doors down, who is now called Edward Jedi.

Tuesday was sent to see Mr Wilmot in registration due to three breaches of school uniform rules (nose piercing, visible Wonderbra, visible thong) and lack of remorse about said breaches (she held up three fingers to Ms Hopwood-White and told her to 'read between the lines'. Which is brilliant, even if she did steal it off Jack Black, and Ms Hopwood-White didn't get it.) Scarlet is going to organize an anti-uniform rule rally in sympathy. We are all going to wear visible Wonderbras and pants (even the boys) to school next Monday. She is going to get Jack and Justin to spread the word among Year Eleven. So Justin and I will be reunited in political endeavour, following Jack's (failed) election last year. Hurrah.

4 p.m.

Asked Mum if I could get a Wonderbra (size 32A) in Cambridge tomorrow (Saffron Walden does not stock Wonderbras). Mum said what was wrong with my M&S training bra? I said it was for a political feminist cause and everyone had one, even Marjory next door (I saw it on the washing line once, it must only come out for special occasions). Mum said she didn't care if the Queen had one, I was not going round looking like 'Britney Aguilera' and, besides, she didn't have time to go to Cambridge as she had to regrout the bath. Then James pointed out that the Queen does not need a Wonderbra as she has enormous

breasts anyway, so he was sent to his room for thinking about naked royalty.

Will have to find new source for Wonderbra. I do not want to let Tuesday or Justin down. Possible targets are: Oxfam, Treena, and Thin Kylie.

Saturday 7

Offered to take Baby Jesus for a walk into town in his pram, but was overruled by Mum on grounds that one of her Conversational French friends might think I was a 'gymslip mum'. I said that no one knows what a gymslip is, plus I am notoriously sexually inexperienced. But Mum just made her lips go super-thin so I took the dog instead. He is feeling left out now Grandpa is giving all his attention to Jesus. He is still in charge of bottle feeding, nappy changing, and reading all the manuals. Treena is in charge of wardrobe.

No Wonderbras in Oxfam. Mrs Simpson (aka hygienically-compromised lady tramp) must have bought them all. So went to lurk outside Goddard's to watch Justin do something revolting with a bit of a pig. At least that was the plan but the dog very much wanted to be inside and overpowered me, knocking a display of mince all over Justin in his blood frenzy (I blame Mum for banning beef and chicken-based dog food on the grounds that it might contain bird flu or mad cow disease, and the dog is mad enough as it is).

Had to pay for the mince spillage at a cost of £11.97 (most of my Christmas money). Mum is right. The dog is a liability. Justin looked excellent in his butcher's coat, though. Like a blood-spattered Kurt Cobain. I just need to prove that I am his Courtney Love. Without the looks, or clothes, or position as lead singer in a girl band.

Asked Treena if I could borrow a Wonderbra. She said yes, but the proferred item was suspiciously grey and stained and should clearly, under no circumstances, be visible to the human eye, rally or no rally. Options now reduced to Thin Kylie.

Sunday 8

Went round to Thin Kylie's (against New Year resolution to distance myself from chav neighbours, but ruled acceptable due to nature of Wonderbra emergency) but she was round Fat Kylie's helping her pierce baby Whitney's ears (again), according to Cherie. Asked Cherie if she or Kylie had a Wonderbra, size 32A. Cherie said don't be daft, her 'la-las' were 34FF (she has had two breast enlargements and is fast-approaching Jordanesque proportions) and Kylie's were all in the wash now that Mark Lambert is back on the scene. (It turns out he did not get some 'gyppo' from the fair pregnant, after all. It was Candy Floss Ken.)

Am going to have to wear visible white cotton M&S

bra instead, which is totally non-political and probably within school rules.

Monday 9

8 a.m.

The day of the anti-uniform rally dawns, and with it will dawn my friendship with iPod-wearing, rule-breaking, half-American Tuesday Weeks. And possibly my love affair with THE ONE i.e. Justin. Am wearing M&S bra and will pull pants into visible range once I am out of Mum's jurisdiction (i.e. within school grounds). It is a shame the pants are white with a cat motif though, and not black, or a thong, like Tuesday's (thongs are on Mum's banned list on grounds of hygiene).

9.30 a.m.

Anti-uniform rally over due to disappointing turnout of masses and general unsluttish nature of underwear. But, luckily, Scarlet and Jack had gone all out in Suzy's Agent Provocateur tasselled and crotchless numbers, so they were sent straight to Mr Wilmott, along with Tuesday, who was inexplicably wearing a sequinned bowler hat. I said what about me, but Ms Hopwood-White said there was nothing wrong with nice cotton underwear, it let everything breathe. This is typical. But Scarlet has promised to befriend Tuesday for both of us during detention, and mention my general tragicness and literary leanings. I told her to

remember all the stuff about liking Sylvia Plath, and she said she would try, but she also had to get in some stories about her and Axe, the juggler from Brighton that she snogged at Glastonbury last year, so there might not be time (School counsellor Doddy Doddington is doing detention today and he lets everyone off after fifteen minutes so he can get home in time for *Deal or No Deal*.)

6 p.m.

Called Scarlet for update on Project Tuesday, but Suzy answered and said she was in her bedroom listening to Eighties punk music with a 'fascinating American' and why wasn't I there? And, while I was at it, did I think my mother was orgasmically repressed (following repatriation of glow-in-the-dark rabbit vibrator) and would she benefit from some group therapy? Hung up. This is absolutely typical. Scarlet is obviously going to be eating grits or clam chowder with Tuesday and the rest of the Osbournes within a week, while I am stuck at home eating fishfingers with an eight year old in a mermaid outfit (no idea). Texted Sad Ed but he was busy watching *Star Trek* and told me not to disturb him for at least four hours.

Tuesday 10

Tuesday gets more exciting by the minute. Her mum is a drink-addled former Eighties model called Edie and her

dad is now living in Malibu with his BOYFRIEND, which is why Tuesday has moved. Apparently Edie went to school here! So there is hope for us all yet. In twenty years' time, Scarlet and I could be alcoholic former models with gay ex-husbands and tattooed teenage daughters. Brilliant! I asked Scarlet if she had managed to mention my literary leanings and hidden dark side but she said Tuesday kept banging on about some seminal writer called Hunter S Thompson and she couldn't get a word in.

Am immediately going to read something by Hunter S. Thompson to impress Tuesday. Will go and see hairy school librarian Mr Knox during 'reading time' (aka texting and flicking through *Heat* in the lower hall, due to woeful lack of functioning classrooms).

Wednesday 11

Everyone has gone perverts-in-schools mad. Fat Kylie forgot her gym skirt so Miss Vicar made her play hockey in her giant PE knickers. Fat Kylie called her a sex case for wanting to look at her bikini line. So Miss Vicar said she would be amazed if anyone wanted to look at Fat Kylie's bikini line (which is true—it is potentially horrendous, if the rest of her is anything to go by and, anyway, it is school rules). But Fat Kylie is going to report her anyway for 'paedoism'. Scarlet said that wasn't a word. But Fat Kylie threatened to do something painful with her hockey stick so Scarlet shut up.

Tuesday didn't do games. She has a note from her psychiatrist (seriously!) excusing her on the grounds that she is exceptionally sensitive and the competitive nature of school sports might induce instant anorexia. Miss Beadle has asked her for a full medical report by next week proving her condition, otherwise she will be dribbling a hockey ball on the sheep field with the rest of us.

7 p.m.

Amendment to New Year Resolutions:

6. Get psychiatrist. Everyone has one these days. They will uncover my deep and troubled life and blame it all on my mother for banning Ribena and *EastEnders*.

Thursday 12

Went to see Mr Knox to get book by Hunter S Thompson, but he said the only copy of *Fear and Loathing* had been lent out to Sad Ed last year and had had to be scrapped due to an entire mini Mars bar being stuck on page 57. He offered me a *Sweet Valley High* or the new John Grisham instead. I may well write to Tony Blair to complain. What hope is there for the literary future of the country when school libraries are so poorly stocked?

Also, Mum is learning to drive. Apparently it is one of her New Year resolutions, along with unblocking the downstairs loo and growing her own beetroot. She is

going to be taught by Michael Majors (41; highlights; reputation as middle-aged lothario type) in one of his fleet of Ford Fiestas. Dad did not look happy. But he cannot complain as it was his idea on the grounds that he is sick of being the only one having to ferry her 'inbred relatives' up and down the A303. Her first lesson is tomorrow (i.e. Friday the 13th). I said that this did not bode well, date-wise. But James said that statistically there are fewer accidents due to everyone being super-cautious or staying in to watch horror films.

Friday 13

Mum is jubilant. She says Mike (!) says he has never seen anyone stick so rigidly to the ten-to-two position in all his fourteen years as a fully-qualified motoring skills adviser (i.e. driving instructor). Apparently he also heaped praise on her staying at least ten miles under the speed limit and her almost maniacal mirror-signal-manouevre checking. Dad said he bet 'Mike' had never got behind the wheel of a man's car in his life (Dad's greatest regret is not becoming a Formula One driver, due to Grandpa Riley's lack of finances and there being no car tracks in North Essex), but Mum said, on the contrary, he once sat in a Subaru Impreza with Jeremy Clarkson at the Birmingham Motor Show. So Dad humphed off to check the oil on the Passat.

Saturday 14

Went into town with James to get Hunter S. Thompson book from WHSmith but Mrs Noakes (no chin; bad perm; calls trousers 'slacks'; habit of ringing parents to inform them you are buying potentially corrupting literature) was on the till so had to dither for an hour in the magazine section until she was on her tea break. Bought *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. James bought a *Lord of the Rings* calendar, discounted due to March being missing.

8 p.m.

Am reading *Fear and Loathing*. It is a modern masterpiece and is absolutely full of swearing and sex and drugs I have never heard of. Am going to have to hide it from Mum. It will be banned for sure.

Sunday 15

Went round Scarlet's. Bob answered the door in his underpants and said everyone was in the den, before running back upstairs to shrieks from Suzy and another, unidentified female voice. But when I got to the 'den' (i.e. the sitting room in any normal, British house) Tuesday was sprawled provocatively on a Habitat bean-bag and was watching some film with subtitles and ugly people in it with Scarlet, Jack, and Justin. I asked if they were thinking of turning over to E4 but Scarlet said if I wanted to watch children's telly I could go to Sad Ed's and watch *CBeebies*.

Tuesday laughed and stretched her scarily long legs out even more so that her toes (purple nail varnish) touched Justin's leg (blue Levi's). He moved it. So point one to me. Ha! Said I had to get back to babysit Baby Jesus. Scarlet said 'Whatever.' Tuesday said, 'Oh, my God, is she a happy clapper?'

9 p.m.
I cannot believe I have been 'whatevered' by Scarlet. What is going on? Also, why does Tuesday not like me? I am totally literary and would be an excellent listener to all her hilarious stories about getting drunk with Amy Winehouse. Texted Sad Ed and he agrees it is an outrage. We are going to boycott all things Tuesday and be a rival camp of tragedy and tortured youth. Then she will absolutely want to know us. It is reverse psychology. James is trying it on the dog. He is encouraging it to eat random objects in the hope it will stick to dog food. Although early signs are not promising—it ate a pot of Vaseline this morning.

Monday 16

Tried to get Scarlet to sit with me at lunch but Tuesday headed her off at chips and beans and they went to sit with Jack and Justin on the Alternative Music Club table, so had to make do with Sad Ed and the Maths Club geeks instead.

Tuesday is still trying to lure Justin into her clutches. I saw her offer him an iPod earphone and an Alphabite. She cannot have him.

Tuesday 17

Oh my God. Justin thinks he has found THE ONE! He told Jack who told Scarlet who told me. Maybe Justin told Jack to tell Scarlet to tell me. Because it is me! I am totally his type—I like guitars and wear vintage clothing.

7 p.m.
Or possibly Tuesday. Oh, God, please don't let it be Tuesday.

Wednesday 18

Jesus was up eight times last night. Dad has taken to sleeping with Radio 2 being piped down his headphones. He says he would rather listen to The Corrs all night than Jesus screaming. Mum is not happy as she says she now has to put up with Jesus, tinny headphone guitar, and Dad murmuring 'Andrea' in his sleep. She is going to ring Mr Lemon at the council again to press the urgency of Grandpa and Treena's housing needs.

Tuesday did not do gym again. She had brought Miss Vicar a letter from her psychiatrist (Dr Rubenstein). Miss Vicar said psychiatry was about as real as aromatherapy

or ghosts and what was the point of 'finding yourself' if you were so fat by the time you did that you couldn't see your own toes. Then Miss Beadle added that a good dose of netball never did anyone any harm. Tuesday said, 'Whatever,' and went off in the direction of the bike sheds (aka sex corner).

Miss Beadle is wrong anyway. Netball is life-threatening and horrible, especially now that Fat Kylie has been made Wing Defence on account of her gargantuan weight advantage.

4 p.m.

Mr Lemon has agreed, under severe pressure from Mum, to move Grandpa and Treena up the housing list (Mum is good at persuasion (i.e. open threats). George Bush should employ her as an interrogator at Guantanamo Bay.) Only Mr Whippy (aka Dave Tennick, who sleeps in the ice cream van) and several O'Gradys are above them now. Mr Lemon has estimated their moving date as April next year. Mum has vowed to take her fight to the local paper, the reactionary and ineffective Walden Chronicle.

Thursday 19

I fear Mum may have competition in the form of perverts in schools. The front page of today's Walden Chronicle (only two weeks behind the *Guardian*) is headlined 'Who's teaching your kids?—How to spot the school sex pest'

emblazoned above a picture of a possible sex pest (i.e. moustache and staring eyes).

Friday 20

Mum had another driving lesson after school today, but was thirty-seven minutes late coming home (James timed her and told Dad at dinner). Mum said Mike was spot testing her on the Highway Code and they lost track of time (she got an unprecedented 100 per cent), but Dad did not look thrilled at this and has decided he is going to take over and give her some lessons in the Passat instead.

Saturday 21

2 p.m.

Dad is no longer Mum's driving instructor. Mum says she sacked him for excess sucking of air through his teeth every time she tried to change gear. Dad says he sacked her as he needs the car to commute and the transmission will fall out with her hamfisted attempts at reversing around Waitrose car park. Mum said she would be glad to be back in the hands of someone who actually knew what they were talking about (i.e. Mike) and Dad said if that man's hands ever came near her he would personally crash test the Passat against his fleet of Fiestas. Then Mum said violence never solved anything. And James said what

about in *Ninja Turtles*, and at that point everyone stormed out. This is worrying. Mum and Dad never argue. Except over things like whether own brand cornflakes taste the same as Kellogs. Ooh maybe I am going to be the child of a broken home after all. They will battle over who gets custody of me and James (and the dog) in court. I will definitely live with Dad. He is far more lax when it comes to potential spillages and watching ITV.

8 p.m.
Although Dad can only cook boil-in-the-bag Bird's Eye things and doesn't know where the Hoover is.

9 p.m.
What if neither of them want me? I could end up in care like Tracey Beaker. Which, according to CBBC, is kind of like boarding school for poor children and life is full of midnight feasts and hilarious incidents with vacuum cleaners and you get to call everyone by their first names without having *T4* banned for a fortnight.

9.30 p.m.
Although Thin Kylie went into care when her mum's breast implant burst and she says she had to live with a 'fat God-botherer' called Merryl who had no telly. Maybe I will concentrate on staying on Mum's and Dad's good sides for the moment so they both want me.

Sunday 22

Made Mum and Dad tea in bed. Mum sat bolt upright and said, 'What have you done. Are you pregnant?' I said I was merely fulfilling my duties as a loving daughter and that no, I was not with child. So she said, 'Did you squeeze the teabag properly otherwise it drips on the lino on the way to the bin?' I don't know why I bother. Even making tea is fraught with potential stain-making activity.

Texted Scarlet to see if she wanted to come over but got no reply. She is probably becoming American with Tuesday, i.e. drinking root beer and listening to grunge. Texted Jack but he said SORRY CRUCIAL DRUM JAM, LTRS. Tried Sad Ed but he said he was in a shopping precinct in Ipswich waiting for Aled Jones to cut the ribbon to the new Iceland. So broke resolution and went round to Thin Kylie's but Mark Lambert answered the door in a pair of Get It Here boxer shorts so I left rapidly as I do not want to get anything from Mark Lambert. And James was busy making wholegrain low fat muffins with Mumtaz, so ended up watching *Lovejoy* again. Laughed enthusiastically to show Dad how we share a love of Nineties comedy drama i.e. why he will want to keep me, but Dad just said, 'What is wrong with you, Rachel? Now I will never know whether Tinker's codpiece is genuine.' Which is not true—he has seen this episode at least seventeen times. It is fake.

9 p.m.

Am ploughing on with Hunter S Thompson. It is excellent. Apparently it is called 'New' Journalism and involves drinking too much and gambling and driving dangerously whilst writing. It is certainly not like anything I have read in the *Walden Chronicle*. Though the O'Gradys would make excellent subject matter.

Monday 23

Sad Ed has switched to the dark side i.e. the Alternative Music Club lunch table, now officially renamed 'Tuesday's table'. He said Tuesday is a 'breath of fresh air in this God-forsaken backwater' (he is still trying to be poetic in everyday situations) and that he can't understand why I am boycotting her, she is literary and tragic and has nine different pairs of Converse including limited edition Gwen Stefani ones. I said there was more to being tragic than having yellow plimsolls and a psychiatrist and he said, 'Well, you hardly qualify to comment.' This is rich coming from someone whose parents have a shrine to Aled Jones in the spare room and still buy his Christmas presents from Toys 'R' Us.

Although he does have a point. Why, oh why, isn't Edie my real mother? Then I would be guaranteed some tragedy.

8 p.m.

Maybe Edie is my mother and Tuesday and I are actually