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Opening extract from

Ruby Rogers: Get Me Out of Here

Written by

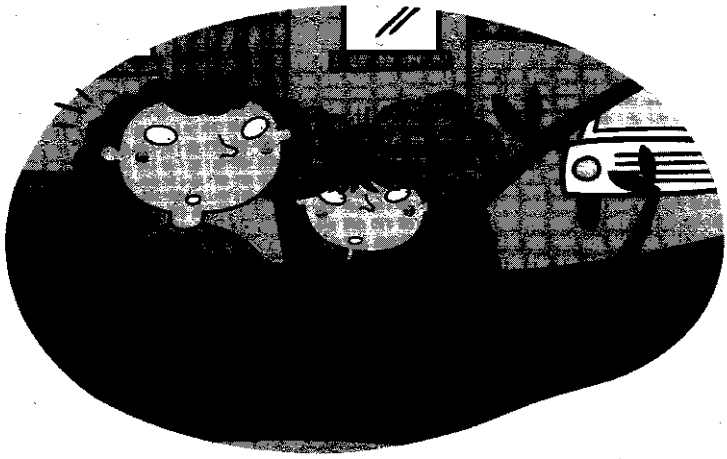
Sue Limb

Published by

Bloomsbury

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CHAPTER 1

I couldn't believe it!

'THERE'S A fallen tree!' Mum and I ran down to the front gate to have a look at the damage. The tree was lying right across our driveway. Some of its roots were torn and twisted and sticking in the air. It looked wrong on the ground – like somebody who's fallen over. I felt as if I was going to cry.

'It looks like a hurricane's been down the street!' said Mum. 'Oh dear! I hate it when trees are uprooted like that!'

All night the wind had been roaring and crash-

ing around the house. I could hear things blowing about in the garden. There was thunder and lightning too. It was terrifying. I'd hid my head under the covers and held on tight to my monkeys.

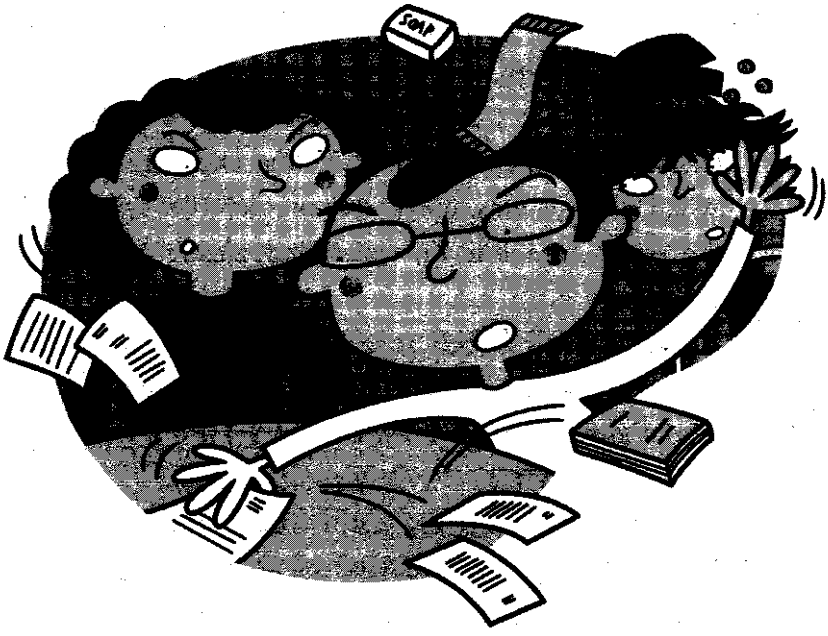
'We won't be able to get the car out,' said Mum. 'I'll have to ring Alison and ask if she can give me a lift to work – and you'll have to walk to school, Ruby.'

We went back indoors to get everything sorted. I had managed not to cry, but I felt kind of sick and wrong. I could always save it up to cry about later. If you don't let a cry out, it can poison you – worse than Dad's lasagne (but that's another story).

It's not very far to school. I nearly always walk home from school anyway. But I usually get a lift in the mornings because we're always in a rush, and, somehow, my sports kit is always in the fruit bowl and my library book's down the loo or something.

'Where's my mobile? Where's my mobile? Where's my mobile?' That was Dad panicking in the kitchen. I take after Dad. We're both untidy. Mum's not always completely on our side.

'How should I know?' she snapped. 'Where's your bag, Ruby? Get a move on, or you'll be late!'



'It's a good excuse, though,' I said, picking up my bag. 'Mrs Jenkins won't be cross if I tell her we were trapped by a tree.'

'Never mind that!' said Mum. 'Get a move on!'

'Ah!' cried Dad. 'Found it! In my pocket. How bizarre.'

I kissed Mum and Dad goodbye and went off down the path. 'Don't accept any lifts from strangers!' called Mum. She gets panic attacks sometimes, after something awful has been on the TV news.

I was really looking forward to the walk to school. Squeezing past the fallen tree was an interesting challenge. I felt as if I was on some kind of wildlife documentary. And it was exciting, in an awful kind of way, to see lots of roof tiles lying in the street, and bits of wood and plastic blowing about.

Joe was still in bed, missing all the drama. Now he's finished his A levels he doesn't have to go to school any more. So he's on 'study leave' – another term for sleeping.

As I turned into the main road I saw my role model, Holly Helvellyn, strolling along. She doesn't lie in bed till midday. She goes to school anyway, even though she's finished her A levels too. I think she likes to use the art room at Ashcroft School, because they've got all the latest arty materials there.

'Hi, Ruby!' she called. 'Amazing storm, wasn't it? I couldn't believe it! The house next to ours was struck by lighting and the chimney pot fell off. Thank goodness nobody was standing in their garden at the time!'

'I heard on the news,' I said, 'that somebody was killed by a falling tree in Birmingham. It's horrible, these storms.'

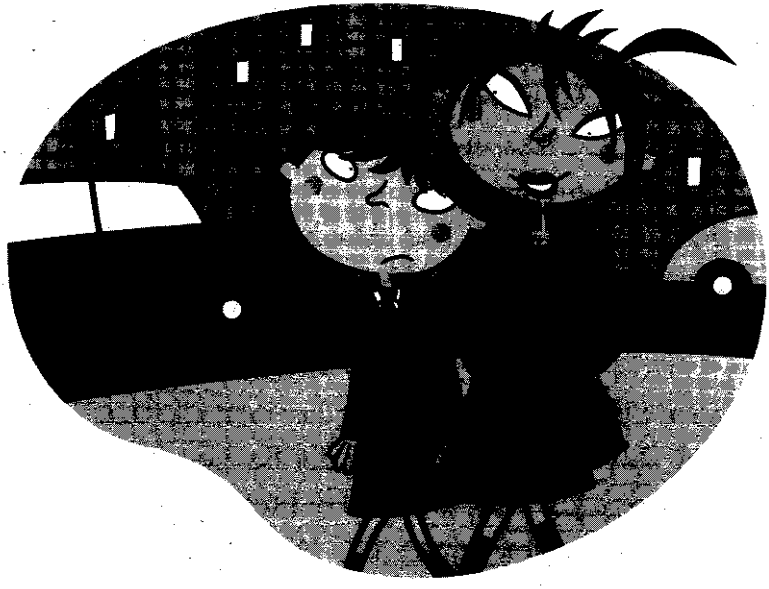
'Climate change,' said Holly grimly. 'Global warming. We've got to get to grips with it.'

I hoped she wouldn't talk about climate change too much, because I was more interested in something else.

'Joe's still asleep!' I said. 'He missed all the action! He doesn't get up till lunchtime these days.'

'Lazy bones,' smiled Holly.

I waited, but she didn't say anything else. Joe and Holly seemed to get on really well at my party recently. We all sat in the garden and wore masks and Holly lit candles. She organises great parties.



But I still wasn't sure if she and Joe were just ordinary friends, or something else.

'Does Dom lie in bed till lunchtime too?' I asked cunningly. 'Is it a boy thing?'

Holly shrugged. She certainly didn't light up at the mention of Dom's name. (He's her ex, at least, I hope he's still her ex – that's what I was trying to find out.) She frowned, as if a little black cloud crossed over her face at the thought of him.

'I haven't seen him for a while,' she said sourly, 'and that suits me fine. That guy was such a poser! I don't even go anywhere near Beaubridge any more.'

'Is that where he lives?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Holly. Then she kind of went off into a thoughtful mood. She seemed to have forgotten about me. I was beginning to regret having mentioned Dom. Maybe she was remembering all the good times they'd had. Maybe she was missing him. Maybe they would get back together again, and it would all be my fault!

'Tiffany never comes anywhere near our house now, either,' I said, reminding her tactfully that Joe and Tiffany had split up too. So now was her chance to grab my smelly, lazy brother. She didn't look very excited at the idea. Who would?

'So, what's cooking this week, then, Ruby?' Holly had kind of shaken herself out of her quiet mood.

'It's Yasmin's birthday party on Saturday,' I told her.

'Oh yes! What are you giving her?' asked Holly.

My heart sank. I'd been trying not to think about this.

'I don't know,' I sighed. 'Hannah's giving her some really amazing clothes, or something, and Lauren's going to offer her some riding lessons on her pony. I can't compete with that! Plus I forgot to save up my pocket money and I'm totally broke.'

'Why don't you make her something?' said Holly thoughtfully. 'Handmade things are so classy and really touching.'

'But what could I make?' I was beginning to feel quite anxious and stressy about Yasmin's birthday. 'I'm useless at making things.'

'Don't be silly, Ruby,' said Holly. 'You're brilliant. You really like painting. What's the problem?'

'Please will you help me, then?' I asked. 'Maybe you could come over one night after school this week?'

Holly pulled a slightly mysterious face and

shook her head doubtfully. I just knew it was something to do with Joe.

'I'm a bit busy this week, Ruby,' she said. 'I've promised my mum I'll help her in her gallery after school. She's got a new exhibition to set up for Friday and her assistant's got flu.'

'Oh no!' I wailed. 'I can't do it on my own! I've got, like, no ideas. My mind is totally blank.'

'Don't be silly, Rube,' she smiled. 'You'll think of something.'