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Opening extract from

Angus Thongs and Full Frontal Snogging

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La marche avec mystery

Sunday August 23rd

My Bedroom

Raining

10:00 a.m.

Dad had Uncle Eddie round so naturally they had to come and nose around and see what I was up to. If Uncle Eddie (who is bald as a coot – too coots, in fact) says to me one more time, "Should bald heads be buttered?" I may kill myself. He doesn't seem to realise that I no longer wear romper-suits. I feel like yelling at him. "I am fourteen years old, Uncle Eddie! I am bursting with womanhood, I wear a bra! OK, it's a bit on the loose side and does ride up round my neck if I run for the bus... but the womanly potential is there, you bald coot!"

Talking of breasts, I'm worried that I may end up like the

rest of the women in my family, with just the one bust, like a sort of shelf affair. Mum can balance things on hers when her hands are full – at parties, and so on, she can have a sandwich and drink and save a snack for later by putting it on her shelf. It's very unattractive. I would like a proper amount of breastiness but not go too far with it, like Melanie Griffiths, for instance. I got the most awful shock in the showers after hockey last term. Her bra looks like two shopping bags. I suspect she is a bit unbalanced hormonally. She certainly is when she tries to run for the ball. I thought she'd run right through the fence with the momentum of her "bosoomers" as Jas so amusingly calls them.

Still in my room
Still raining
Still Sunday
11:30 a.m.

I don't see why I can't have a lock on my bedroom door. I have no privacy: it's like *Noel's House Party* in my room. Every time I suggest anything around this place people start shaking their heads and tutting. It's like living in a house full of chickens dressed in frocks and trousers. Or a house full of

those nodding dogs, or a house full of... anyway... I can't have a lock on my door is the short and short of it.

"Why not?" I asked Mum reasonably (catching her in one of the rare minutes when she's not at Italian evening class or at another party).

"Because you might have an accident and we couldn't get in," she said.

"An accident like what?" I persisted.

"Well... you might faint," she said.

Then Dad joined in, "You might set fire to your bed and be overcome with fumes."

What is the matter with people? I know why they don't want me to have a lock on my door, it's because it would be a first sign of my path to adulthood and they can't bear the idea of that because it would mean they might have to get on with their own lives and leave me alone.

Still Sunday

11:35 a.m.

There are six things very wrong with my life:

1. I have one of those under-the-skin spots that will never come to a head but lurk in a red way for the

next two years.

2. It is on my nose.
3. I have a three-year-old sister who may have peed somewhere in my room.
4. In fourteen days the summer hols will be over and then it will be back to Stalag 14 and Oberführer Frau Simpson and her bunch of sadistic "teachers".
5. I am very ugly and need to go into an ugly home.
6. I went to a party dressed as a stuffed olive.

11:40 a.m.

OK, that's it. I'm turning over a new leaf. I found an article in Mum's *Cosmo* about how to be happy if you are very unhappy (which I am). The article is called "Emotional confidence". What you have to do is *Recall... Experience... and HEAL.* So you think of a painful incident and you remember all the ghastly detail of it... this is the Recall bit, then you experience the emotions and acknowledge them and then you JUST LET IT GO.

2:00 p.m.

Uncle Eddie has gone, thank the Lord. He actually asked me if I'd like to ride in the sidecar on his motorbike. Are all

adults from Planet Xenon? What should I have said? "Yes, certainly, Uncle Eddie, I would like to go in your pre-war sidecar and with a bit of luck all of my friends will see me with some mad, bald bloke and that will be the end of my life. Thank you."

4:00 p.m.

Jas came round. She said it took her ages to get out of her catsuit after the fancy dress party. I wasn't very interested but I asked her why out of politeness.

She said, "Well, the boy behind the counter in the hire shop was really good-looking."

"Yes, so?"

"Well, so I lied about my size – I got a size ten catsuit instead of twelve."

She showed me the marks around her neck and waist: they are quite deep. I said, "Your head looks a bit swollen up."

"No, that's just Sunday."

I told her about the *Cosmo* article and so we spent a few hours recalling the fancy dress party (i.e. the painful incident) and experiencing the emotions in order to heal them.

I blame Jas entirely. It may have been my idea to go as a stuffed olive but she didn't stop me like a pal should do. In fact, she encouraged me. We made the stuffed olive costume out of chicken wire and green crêpe paper – that was for the "olive" bit. It had little shoulder straps to keep it up and I wore a green T-shirt and green tights underneath. It was the "stuffed" bit that Jas helped with mostly. As I recall, it was she that suggested I use Crazy Colour to dye my hair and head and face and neck red... like a sort of pimento. It was, I have to say, quite funny at the time. Well, when we were in my room. The difficulty came when I tried to get out of my room. I had to go down the stairs sideways.

When I did get to the door I had to go back and change my tights because my cat Angus had one of his "Call of the Wilds" episodes.

He really is completely bonkers. We got him when we went on holiday to Loch Lomond. On the last day I found him wandering around the garden of the guest house we were staying in. Tarry-a-Wee-While, it was called. That should give you some idea of what the holiday was like.

I should have guessed all was not entirely well in the cat department when I picked him up and he began savaging

my cardigan. But he was such a lovely looking kitten, all tabby and long-haired, with huge yellow eyes. Even as a kitten he looked like a small dog. I begged and pleaded to take him home.

"He'll die here, he has no mummy or daddy," I said plaintively.

My dad said, "He's probably eaten them." Honestly, he can be callous. I worked on Mum and in the end I brought him home. The Scottish landlady did say she thought he was probably mixed breed, half domestic tabby and half Scottish wildcat. I remember thinking, Oh, that will be exotic. I didn't realise that he would grow to the size of a small Labrador only mad. I used to drag him around on a lead but, as I explained to Mrs Next Door, he ate it.

Anyway, sometimes he hears the call of the Scottish highlands. So, as I was passing by as a stuffed olive he leaped out from his concealed hiding-place behind the curtains (or his lair, as I suppose he imagined it in his cat brain) and attacked my tights or "prey". I couldn't break his hold by banging his head because he was darting from side to side. In the end I managed to reach the outdoor brush by the door and beat him off with it.

Then I couldn't get in Dad's Volvo. Dad said, "Why don't you take off the olive bit and we'll stick it in the boot."

Honestly, what is the point? I said, "Dad, if you think I am sitting next to you in a green T-shirt and tights, you're mad."

He got all shirty like parents do as soon as you point out how stupid and useless they are. "Well, you'll have to walk, then... I'll drive along really slowly with Jas and you walk alongside."

I couldn't believe it. "If I have to walk, why don't Jas and I both walk there and forget about the car?"

He got that stupid, tight-lipped look that dads get when they think they are being reasonable. "Because I want to be sure of where you are going. I don't want you out wandering the streets at night."

Unbelievable! I said, "What would I be doing walking the streets at night as a stuffed olive... gatecrashing cocktail parties?"

Jas smirked but Dad got all outraged parenty. "Don't you speak to me like that, otherwise you won't go out at all."

What is the point?

When we did eventually get to the party (me walking

next to Dad's Volvo driving at five miles an hour), I had a horrible time. Everyone laughed at first but then more or less ignored me. In a mood of defiant stuffed oliveness I did have a dance by myself but things kept crashing to the floor around me. The host asked me if I would sit down. I had a go at that but it was useless. In the end I was at the gate for about an hour before Dad arrived, and I did stick the olive bit in the boot. We didn't speak on the way home.

Jas, on the other hand, had a great time. She said she was surrounded by Tarzans and Robin Hoods and James Bonds. (Boys have very vivid imaginations... not.)

I was feeling a bit moody as we did the "recall" bit. I said bitterly, "Well, I could have been surrounded by boys if I hadn't been dressed as an olive."

Jas said, "Georgia, you thought it was funny and I thought it was funny but you have to remember that boys don't think girls are for funniness."

She looked annoyingly "wise" and "mature". What the hell did she know about boys? God, she had an annoying fringe. Shut up, fringey.

I said, "Oh yeah, so that's what they want, is it? Boys? They want simpering girly-wirlys in catsuits?"

Through my bedroom window I could see next door's poodle leaping up and down at our fence, yapping. It would be trying to scare off our cat Angus... fat chance.

Jas was going on and on wisely. "Yes they do, I think they do like girls who are a bit soft and not so, well... you know."

She was zipping up her rucksack. I looked at her. "Not so what?" I asked.

She said, "I have to go, we have an early supper."

As she left my room I knew I should shut up. But you know when you should shut up because you really should just shut up... but you keep on and on anyway? Well, I had that.

"Go on... not so what?" I insisted.

She mumbled something as she went down the stairs.

I yelled at her as she went through the door, "Not so like me you mean, don't you?!!!"

11:00 p.m.

I can already feel myself getting fed up with boys and I haven't had anything to do with them yet.

Midnight

Oh God, please, please don't make me have to be a lesbian like Hairy Kate or Miss Stamp.

12:10 a.m.

What do lesbians do, anyway?

Monday August 24th

5:00 p.m.

Absolutely no phonecalls from anyone. I may as well be dead. I'm going to have an early night.

5:30 p.m.

Libby came in and squiggled into bed with me, saying, "Hahahahaha!" for so long I had to get up. She's so nice, although a bit smelly. At least she likes me and doesn't mind if I have a sense of humour.

7:00 p.m.

Ellen and Julia rang from a phonebox. They took turns to speak in French accents. We're going for a mystery walk tomorrow. Or *La Marche Avec Mystery.*

10:30 p.m.

Have put on a face mask made from egg yolk just in case we see any *les garçons gorgeous* on our walk.

Tuesday August 25th

9:00 a.m.

Woke up and thought my face was paralysed. It was quite scary – my skin was all tight and stiff and I couldn't open my eyes properly. Then I remembered the egg-yolk mask. I must have fallen asleep reading. I don't think I'll go to bed early again, it makes my eyes go all puffy. I look like there is a touch of the Oriental in my family. Sadly not the case. The nearest we have to any exotic influence is Auntie Kath, who can sing in Chinese, but only after a couple of pints of wine.

11:00 a.m.

Arranged to rendezvous with Ellen and Julia at Whiteleys so we can start our *La Marche Avec Mystery*. We agreed we would dress "sports casual" so I'm wearing ski trousers, ankle boots and a black top with a roll neck, with a PVC jacket. I'm going for the young Brigitte Bardot look which is a shame as, a) I am nothing like her and b) I haven't got

blonde hair, which is, as we all know, her trademark. I would have blonde hair if I was allowed but it honestly is like *Playschool* at my house. My dad has got the mentality of a Teletubby only not so developed. I said to Mum, "I'm going to dye my hair blonde, what product would you recommend?" She pretended not to hear me and went on dressing Libby. But Dad went ballistic.

"You're fourteen years old, you've only had that hair for fourteen years and you want to change it already! How bored are you going to be with it by the time you are thirty? What colour will you be up to by then?"

Honestly, he makes little real sense these days. I said to Mum, "Oh, I thought I could hear a voice squeaking and making peculiar noises, but I was mistaken. TTFN."

As I ran for the door I heard him shouting, "I suppose you think being sarcastic and applying eyeliner in a straight line will get you some O-levels!!!"

O-levels, I ask you. He's a living reminder of the Stone Age.

Noon

La Marche Avec Mystery. We walked up and down the High

Street, only speaking French. I asked passers-by for directions, *"Où est la gare, s'il vous plaît?"* and *"Au secours, j'oublie ma tête, aidez-moi, s'il vous plaît."*

Then... this really dishy bloke came along... Julia and Ellen wouldn't go up to him but I did. I don't know why, but I developed a limp as well as being French. He had really nice eyes... he must have been about nineteen, anyway I hobbled up to him and said, *"Excusez-moi. Je suis Française. Je ne parle pas l'anglais. Parlez-vous Français?"*

Fortunately he looked puzzled, it was quite dreamy. I pouted my mouth a bit. Cindy Crawford said that if you put your tongue behind your back teeth when you smile, it makes your smile really sexy. Impossible to talk, of course, unless you like sounding like a loony.

Anyway, dreamboat said, "Are you lost? I don't speak French."

I looked puzzled (and pouty). *"Au secours, monsieur,"* I breathed.

He took my arm. "Look, don't be frightened, come with me."

Ellen and Jools looked amazed: he was bloody gorgeous and he was taking me somewhere. I hobbled along

attractively by his side. Not for very long, though, just into a French pâtisserie where the lady behind the counter was French.

8:00 p.m.

In bed.

The French woman talked French at me for about forty years. I nodded for as long as humanly possible then just ran out of the shop and into the street. The gorgeous boy looked surprised that my limp had cured itself so quickly.

I really will have to dye my hair now if I ever want to go shopping in this town again.

Wednesday August 26th

11:00 a.m.

I have no friends. Not one single friend. No one has rung, no one has come round. Mum and Dad have gone to work, Libby is at playschool. I may as well be dead.

Perhaps I am dead. I wonder how you would know? If you died in your sleep and woke up dead, who would let you know?

It could be like in that film where you can see everyone but they can't see you because you are dead. Oh, I've really

given myself the creeps now... I'm going to put on a really loud CD and dance about.

Noon

Now I am still freaked out but also tired. If I did die I wonder if anyone would really care. Who would come to my funeral? Mum and Dad, I suppose... they'd have to as it's mostly their fault that I was depressed enough to commit suicide in the first place.

Why couldn't I have a normal family like Julia and Ellen? They've got normal brothers and sisters. Their dads have got beards and sheds. My mum won't let my dad have a shed since he left his fishing maggots in there and it became bluebottle headquarters.

When the electrician came because the fridge had blown up he said to Mum, "What madman wired up this fridge? Is there someone you know who really doesn't like you?" And Dad had done the wiring. Instead of DIY he talks about feelings and stuff. Why can't he be a real dad? It's pathetic in a grown man.

I don't mean I want to be like an old-fashioned woman – you know, all lacy and the man is all tight-lipped and never

says anything even if he has got a brain tumour. I want my boyfriend (provided, God willing, I am not a lesbian) to be emotional... but only about me. I want him to be like Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (although, having said that, I've seen him in other things like *Fever Pitch* and he's not so sexy out of frilly shirts and tights). Anyway, I'll never have a boyfriend because I am too ugly.

2:00 p.m.

Looking through the old family albums... I'm not really surprised I'm ugly, the photos of Dad as a child are terrifying. His nose is huge... it takes up half of his face. In fact, he is literally just a nose with legs and arms attached.

10:00 p.m.

Libby has woken up and insists on sleeping in my bed. It's quite nice, although she does smell a bit on the hamsterish side.

Midnight

The tunnel of love dream I've just had, where this gorgey bloke is carrying me through the warm waters of the

Caribbean, turns out to be Libby's wet pyjamas on my legs.

Change bed. Libby not a bit bothered and in fact slaps my hand and calls me "Bad boy" when I change her pyjamas.

Thursday August 27th

11:00 a.m.

I've started worrying about what to wear for first day back at school. It's only eleven days away now. I wonder how much "natural" make-up I can get away with? Concealer is OK – I wonder about mascara. Maybe I should just dye my eyelashes? I hate my eyebrows. I say eyebrows but in fact it's just the one eyebrow right along my forehead. I may have to do some radical plucking if I can find Mum's tweezers. She hides things from me now because she says that I never replace anything. I'll have to rummage around in her bedroom.

1:00 p.m.

Prepared a light lunch of sandwich spread and milky coffee. There's never anything to eat in this house. No wonder my elbows stick out so much.