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opening extract from

Girl, 15, Flirting For England

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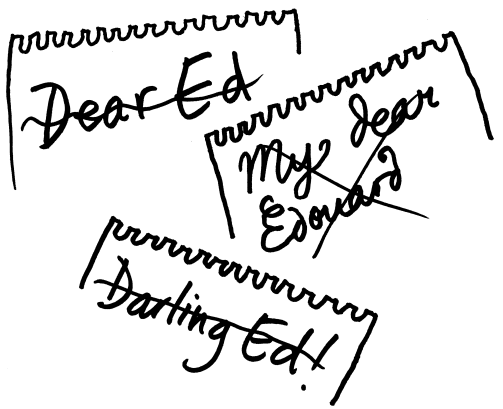

Dear Edouard,

. . . or may I call you Ed? Edouard is so . . . it sounds a bit . . .

Oh, no! Insulting him already! Being rude about his name! Jess screwed up the piece of paper and threw it at the bin. It missed.

Dear Edouard,

You're my French exchange partner . . .

He knows that already, retardo! Jess screwed up the piece of paper and threw it at the bin. It missed.

Dear Edouard,

Hi! My name's Jess Jordan and apparently we're exchange partners . . .

'Apparently'? As if it had all happened by accident and Jess was a bit embarrassed about it? And would, to be honest, have preferred to exchange with a monkey?

Jess screwed up the piece of paper and also screwed up her eyes, her fists and her toes, and uttered a strangled cry of anguish. Why was this so damn difficult? She looked out of the window. It was raining. Mustn't mention that. French people probably thought it rained in England all the time.

If only she hadn't got herself into this mess. A couple of weeks ago, the French teacher Mrs Bailey had said she had 'an announcement to make about the forthcoming French exchange scheme'. She'd looked awkward.

'Things are a bit unusual this year,' she'd said, 'because there are more French boys wanting to take part than English boys. So I'm afraid some of you girls will have to have a French boy as your exchange partner. Put your hand up if you don't mind.'

Jess's arm had shot up so fast, she'd almost dislo-

cated her shoulder. A French boy! What could be more sexy? Jess was dazzled by the thought of all those French footballers with their shiny brown eyes and pouty French lips.

But now, trying to write her first letter to the guy, she was *so* wishing she hadn't. If only Edouard had been a girl, Jess could easily have dashed off a letter introducing herself, no problem. But now she felt self-conscious. She had to come across as attractive, charismatic and mysterious, even if her country *was* saturated with rain.

Dear Edouard,

I'm your French exchange partner. I'm sorry I have to write in English, as my French is totally useless. My name's Jess Jordan and I live in a loft-style apartment overlooking twinkling skyscrapers. My mum is descended from the Royal House of Portugal. Her name is Joanna the Slightly Mad. My dad lives in Hollywood. He's a film producer. I was born on a stormy night in July, when it rained rubies . . .

So much for fiction. Jess screwed up the paper. It missed the bin. OK, there was only one way of doing this. She had to imagine Edouard was a girl – even call him by a girl's name, and then just change the name back to Edouard afterwards.

Dear Josephine,

Hi! I'm your French exchange partner. My name's Jess Jordan. I hope you don't mind if I write in English. It's OK if you write back in French, because my mum understands it. She's a librarian. We live in an old terraced house, not far from the park.

My dad's an artist and he lives miles away, by the sea. My parents split up years ago but Dad and I talk loads on the phone and send each other texts and e-mails. I see him when he comes up to town.

I don't have any brothers and sisters, which is OK, but I don't have any pets either, which is a major tragedy.

I'm about average height and I've got dark hair which is just ordinary, but I have really high-class, Nobel-prize-winning dandruff.

Jess crossed out that last bit about dandruff. It sucked, trying to describe the way you looked. Mrs Bailey had said everyone should introduce themselves by letter, and supply a photo. They had to give their letters in to Mrs Bailey as if they were essays, and she was going to check them all before sending them off.

How totally Stone Age, thought Jess. *Everybody uses e-mail these days*. Mrs Bailey was such a control freak.

But the horrors of trying to write the letter were nothing compared to the agony of selecting a photo.

Should she send him the one where she looked like an overweight stalker? Or the cross-eyed terrorist with a headache? Neither, of course. In fact Jess had had a brilliant idea about the photo – but right now she had to get back to the freaking letter.

I like music, especially rap. I love watching TV comedy, and when I leave school I want to be a stand-up comedian. How about you?

Jess's mind went blank. Her brain stalled. She had stopped thinking of Edouard as a girl and become trapped once again in the knowledge that he was a guy.