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Opening extract from

Buttercup Mash

Written by

Joanna Nadin

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Hi there,

At the age of seven, in the red plush seats of the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, halfway through a performance of *Oliver!*, I informed my father I had had an epiphany, and was going to dedicate my life to becoming an actress. But years of amateur operatics, school shows, and even a degree in drama failed to realise this dream. Instead, I ended up in swotty politics, as a special adviser to the Prime Minister and freelance speechwriter. I now live in Buttercup's home town Bath, with her my daughter Millie, where we spend much time re-enacting *The Sound of Music* and *Hairspray*, and singing rock ballads. I had so much fun writing **Buttercup Mash** and I hope you have lots of fun reading it.

Love

Jo X



Other books by Joanna Nadin

My So-Called Life
The Life of Riley
The Meaning of Life
My (Not So) Simple Life
Back to Life
The Facts of Life

My Double Life
Double Trouble
Double or Quits



Joanna Nadin

Buttercup Mash



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For Georgina and Nicola,
who are both full of glee



SEPTEMBER



Friday 3 September

11 p.m.
~~Dear Diary~~
Dear Dr Sven Magnusson

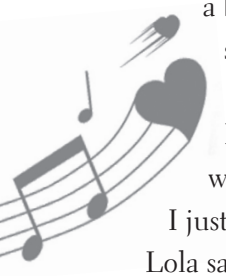
My name is Buttercup Jones. I am fourteen years old. *TODAY*. And I have *ISSUES*.

1. My mother is a 36-year-old failed conceptual artist called Lola who thinks it is *FUNNY* to gatecrash her daughter's party with a homeless man called Fergal O'Shaughnessy.
2. My best friend Imogen spent the whole evening refusing to speak to me because it is '*SO UNFAIR*' that I get a homeless man coming to my birthday party and all she got was Colin the Clown when she was seven, and he wasn't half as drunk.
3. My little brother Harry, who was dressed as the queen, and I am *NOT EVEN JOKING*, made everyone watch the video of his birth in *REVERSE* so we could see him going *BACK* into Lola and the sick going back into my mouth, which made Granny Jones disown us *YET AGAIN*.
4. My big sister Ruby didn't even *SHOW UP* because she 'like, forgot'.
5. Oh, and I would *TOTALLY* go and live with my dad,

only *I DON'T KNOW WHO HE IS*, and neither does Lola. But, given her track record, he is either *a*) broke, *b*) on prescription medication, or *c*) wanted by the police. Or, in the case of Fergal O'Shaughnessy, all three.

6. My home is not just metaphorically but *ACTUALLY* broken i.e: the fridge has alternative life forms growing in it, you cannot turn the kettle on at the same time as the microwave or the TV blows up, and there are chickens where chickens *SHOULDN'T BE*.
7. Oh, and I'm called *BUTTERCUP.* I mean, what kind of a name is that? You can't even shorten it. Try. See? At least Ruby and Harry are vaguely normal. Although to be fair Harry is short for Haroon and Ruby's middle name is Tuesday. But, the point is, Lola could have called us Tom and Kate and Rachel. But, *NO*, she is just determined to be *DIFFERENT*. Which pretty much sums up my life.

Seriously, it's my birthday. And I should be, you know, eating retro cupcakes in a vintage tea-dress. Or drinking Red Bull in a bus shelter, according to Imogen. But instead I am sitting in the dark with a chicken on my lap, writing a diary to an online shrink.



I mean, all I want is a *NORMAL* birthday. You know, with jelly and ice cream and candles.

I just want to be *NORMAL*, end of.

Lola says I don't know what normal is. And Ruby says normal is a media construct designed to sell washing powder. And Imogen says normal is for suburban-minded automatons

like her mum and dad and I should think myself *LUCKY*.

But *SERIOUSLY*, Dr Sven, this is why I need you. Because I don't know how much more of this I can take.

Because, even if Lola is right, and I don't know what 'normal' is, I know that this *SO* isn't it.



Saturday 4 September

Dear Dr Sven,

OK. So I guess I've calmed down since last night. And maybe things aren't quite as bad as they seemed when Granny Jones was out cold on the floor with a chicken trying to peck a sapphire out of her cocktail ring and Harry in his wig trying to find her facelift scars. Because Stan came round and sang 'Build Me Up Buttercup' on his knees in a totally falsetto voice and comedy hat to cheer me up. Which kind of worked. And which also made me realize I had *TOTALLY* forgotten to tell you about Stan. I guess because he isn't an issue at all, he's my second best friend, (but only because Imogen made me sign a contract putting her first when we were in Year Six), and practically next-door neighbour (two doors up on opposite side of road, to be precise), and has known me for ever so is totally immune to Lola's mentalism (and my *ISSUES*).

So I admit, my life isn't a *TOTAL* car crash. But I do have issues. A *LOT* of them. Otherwise why would I be writing this

in the first place? Well, not writing a diary. I mean everyone has done that. Though possibly not on the scale of Imogen. Although she says it's not a diary it's a JOURNAL, and is COMPLETELY like the one Sylvia Plath wrote in when she was having suicidal *Bell Jar* thoughts (which Imo is not, at least not YET, because she does not want to die until she has done enough extraordinary things for someone to make a movie of her life). But usually it's some completely lame school assignment for a supply teacher, like Miss Harbutt-Reed, who we had for history last term when Mr Goldenblatt was off with a cold (not sleeping sickness, which is what Imogen claimed it was). Only Miss Harbutt-Reed accused me of *a*) harbouring an overactive imagination and *b*) missing the point, which was about historical record for future generations blah blah blah, and sent me to see Mr Kwame-Jones, who is our headmaster (and is no relation AT ALL). But, like I told him, it totally WAS a historical document because Lola really DID have to take Harry to a secret location for his custody visit, because Harry's dad, who I can't name for legal reasons, really is some kind of James Bond type spy at MI5, and it's really NOT my fault if Miss Harbutt-Reed is not familiar with my TRYING domestic circumstances. And Imogen was right: Mr Kwame-Jones totally IS progressive and cool, because he said it must be very difficult being from such an underprivileged background, battling against the day-to-day realities of the poverty line etc., etc., and changed the F to a B. I bet the Pennington governors are kicking themselves now, trying to be

modern and attract overseas students by getting a multicultural head, even one who is an African prince and went to school at Eton, which makes Pennington look like Broadmead Comprehensive.



I've kind of gone off the point *AGAIN*. In fact I've forgotten what the point was. Oh, no, I've got it. That it is *WEIRD* to be writing to *YOU*. Because diaries are normally private and everything, so it's a bit freakish writing it for someone else to read, (especially a man who is at least 35, according to Imogen, who has Googled your picture seven times). But, according to your website, GoShrinkYourself.com (which is totally a great name by the way) the more I write down, the more I will be able to see for myself where my mental instability lies, and the more you will be able to help me when I send you the diary (together with my cheque for £500) for personal analysis and a free GoShrinkYourself pen. Though where I'm going to get £500 from is anyone's guess at this point. Because the reason I'm doing virtual therapy, rather than having normal lying-on-a-couch therapy, is that *a*) we have *NO MONEY* until Lola comes up with a new money-making scheme (and one that actually works, *NOT* like the time she tried to breed rare pigs, or become a Hedge Fund manager), and *b*) Lola says all therapists are either perverts or idiots and that your teenage years are supposed to be confusing and traumatic. But that's because she was expelled from Royal Girls for *a*) snogging her boyfriend Denzil on the lacrosse pitch, which indirectly led

to her *b*) getting pregnant with Ruby at the age of seventeen. Imogen says she would cut off her right arm to get expelled from Pennington for doing anything on campus with a dreadlocked barge dweller. But that is because her parents are Welsh Methodists and also in the National Jigsaw Society and so she is totally repressed and covets anyone's home life where they don't spend the whole of Sunday either in church or searching for pieces of Van Gogh prints in the shagpile.

So, anyway, the point. Which is that Stan paid for a year's subscription to your website (£29.99 including VAT). He doesn't have money worries because even though his mum Celia is as flaky as Lola, she actually has a job, i.e. she paints nude pictures of celebrities, whereas Lola hasn't painted anything in years, let alone a B-lister's front bottom.

Stan also says there's no such thing as normal, but that if it makes me feel better, then he's totally behind it.

So I'm going to write it all down. All the *WEIRD*. And the *CRAZY*. Then it's up to you, Dr Sven. You have to make me *NORMAL*.

Or as normal as someone called Buttercup can be.

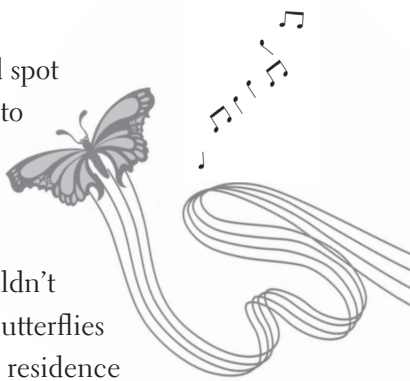


Sunday 5 September

Things That Are Compromising My Mental Stability Today

1. My height: i.e. I have grown *ANOTHER* three centimetres in the last two months, meaning I am now not just tall but *FREAKISHLY* tall (seriously, I can

actually see Mr Goldenblatt's bald spot and the fake hair-in-a-can he uses to fill it).



2. My stomach. Not in an 'Oh my God it sticks out' way. Because it totally doesn't. And anyway, I wouldn't care if it did. But in the way that butterflies seem to have taken up permanent residence in it. Seriously. I seem to feel *SICK* at the slightest issue. And, as I have explained, I have a *LOT* of issues. Hence a lot of butterflies. And vomit. Which I have already had to explain to Imogen is *NOT* bulimia.
3. School. Which starts tomorrow. And which is *TOTALLY* traumatic and butterfly-inducing. I mean, who doesn't get stressed by school? Well, maybe Sunday Henderson-Hicks, who is head of Year Ten, fashion editor of *Penny for Your Thoughts* (which is our *PANTS* school newspaper and is totally run by an evil clique of overprivileged clones and habitual joiners, according to Stan, who has made it his life's ambition to wrest control, change the totally *LAME* name to *Penny Dreadful* and turn it into a subversive webzine) and lead soprano of our Glee Club, i.e. Pennington Musical Society, i.e. PMS (now that Camilla St John Brice is back in the Manna From Heaven Christian Residential Unit for the Undernourished). *PLUS* she is going out with Blake Carrington who is the First XV rugby full back and *OFFICIALLY* the hottest boy in Year Eleven.

But the thing is I am so NOT Sunday Henderson-Hicks. *a*) I do not live in a four-storey Georgian townhouse in Lansdown, *b*) my father, whoever he is, is definitely NOT the owner of a chain of tooth-whitening salons aka Mr Britesmile, and *c*) I do not look like I walked straight out of a Gap advert. I mean, I am a giant, my hair is borderline ginger, and my lips are weirdly big (and not in a cool Angelina Jolie way), so that when I do wear make-up I end up looking kind of like a goldfish in drag. Which Sunday Henderson-Hicks and her sidekicks (or Sidehicks as Stan calls them, ha ha) never fail to point out. (By calling me Nemo. Again: ha ha.) At least they've stopped calling Imogen Puffer Fish, though, since she got breasts. I mean, it's not like she lost a bundle of weight, just that it moved upwards. They were like 34C the last time we measured them and I swear they grew again in the holidays. So Sunday and the Sidehicks are going to be totally spitting with jealousy because she will definitely make the upper boys' Top Totty list this year. And you think Imogen would be totally happy about it, but NO, she hates them. She says it is impossible to be an innocent ingénue type with large breasts. Stan said she could change her ambition to be more of a femme fatale type, but she says she is banking on Blake Lively playing her in her movie life story and that won't work.

Oh, sorry. How have I done this again? I started on school and I've totally ended up

on Imogen's breasts. Note to self (which have also put on Post-it stuck to my computer screen, which is another of your excellent ideas): Concentrate on getting to point. Also, *CHANGE NAMES*, in case Imogen does not want you knowing breast size. Unless you know any screenwriters? Maybe you're like a therapist to the stars. Although I totally get that you can't disclose their names on your website. Oh, sorry, I've gone off the point again. Which is that school is hell.

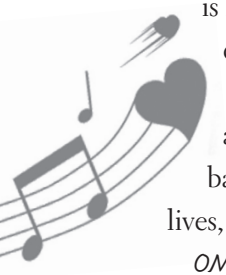


BUT the alternative is worse, i.e. *HOME SCHOOLING*, which is what Harry is going to do, starting tomorrow. Though his father is in no way happy about this and I am kind of on his side. I mean, it's all very well home schooling if you are like some kind of total intellectual. But Lola didn't even show up for two of her GCSEs because she was in a yurt somewhere with Denzil.

Grandma Jones wants Harry to be put down for boarding school immediately where there will be less 'wayward' (i.e. Lola) influence. There is no chance of that. Lola says boarding schools hamper self-expression and creativity. I am lucky I am even at Pennington, which is private, but at least is mixed sex and has no scope for weird dormitory rules. Plus, according to Ruby, they will be totally non-private by the end of the year if her anti-private-school protest works. Although I do not rate her chances against the governors, because,

according to Ruby, they are all fascists anyway. Plus they have got Mr Kwame-Jones now. But Ruby says he is just a multicultural straw doll and it is the governors who are really in charge. Them and Miss Hutchinson, who is Mr Kwame-Jones's secretary, and is like the all-seeing eye, i.e. nothing gets past her (except when she is reading Mills and Boon, which she thinks no one knows about, because she keeps it inside a copy of *Caravanning Today*, only Imogen who *a*) has 20/20 vision and *b*) is always getting sent to see Mr Kwame-Jones, says there is no way *Caravanning Today* has ever contained the phrase 'Charles's breath was heavy in her delicate ear').

Anyway, my point, well one of them, was that I begged to go to school. Because there is only so much of Lola you can take. Even Ruby, who is like a mini version of Lola, only with blonde dreadlocks, went to school in the end. Although she got expelled from Pennington after three months and ended up at Broadmead, which is like this totally tough comp where they have to check you for weapons at the door. Plus she failed all her A levels and is at art college instead now, although mostly she is actually on her dad Denzil's barge, or at her boyfriend Spike's, which is where she lives, unless they have had a row. Which is quite often.



OMG. What is wrong with me? Seriously? So, the point, which is why Harry is being home schooled, which Lola told 007 (i.e. Harry's dad) is that *a*) there

is more to life than exam results, *b*) home schooling is less of a security risk, and *c*) he can hardly come round and do the school run given the whole 'being an undercover agent' thing, so it is tough luck basically.



4. Imogen's love life. This is like a subclause of number 2, because it's to do with school, but it's so big, and mental-instability-inducing, I've given it a number of its own. Because right now Imogen is totally in love with Milo Chirac who is Pennington's resident emo. She says he is definitely her ONE TRUE LOVE and she will not rest until they have signed their names in blood on each other's chests (she has been reading way too much vampire fiction again). But the thing is, three months ago she said the same about the boy who pushes trolleys around the car park at Sainsbury's, who she was convinced was actually the drummer in this band Talking Dolls. And before that it was Mr Rochester from *Jane Eyre* (though she couldn't lurk at his locker what with him NOT BEING REAL).
5. Lola i.e. my mother. Who warrants several subclauses of her own, for example (seriously, these are just the tip of the metaphorical iceberg. If I listed them all I'd be here until Christmas):
   i) Her total failure to set an example. I mean, I don't know anyone who is less like a role model

than Lola, except maybe Granny Jones, but only because she is *OBSESSED* with the seven signs of ageing (although not with eighth, i.e. owning a yappy dog called Geraldo, even though she knows I am totally allergic to dogs). And this is *NOT* because Lola is a single mother, which is completely normal now, whatever Granny Jones says, I mean even Princess Diana was a single mother, but the point is, I bet Princess Diana did not snog an international spy just because he had a mysterious beard, or eat a jar of maraschino cherries for breakfast, or let a man called Fish film her home birth with a camera he won in a bet over whether whales were extinct.

ii) The fact that I have to call her Lola, and that when I have tried to call her anything else, e.g. Mum, which you would think would not be so out there, she sticks her fingers in her ears and sings 'la la la I can't hear you' or screams and leaves the room. Plus Ruby is totally on her side because she says it is because Lola is a person in her own right and should not be identified purely by her relationship to us as her offspring. Which may be true but Lola isn't even her real name. It's Leona. And the thing is, if she hates the idea of being a 'Mum' so much, *WHY* did she have me?

iii) The Stuffed Mongoose. Which is like, a total symbol for *EVERYTHING* that is wrong with this relationship. I mean, normal mothers give their daughters book tokens for Christmas (Imo, although I am pretty sure she was *NOT* supposed to buy *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, although why I do not know because as far as I can tell it is mostly about gardening). Or ponies (Finty Goggins-Smith). Or memberships to Soho House (Sunday Henderson-Hicks). But no, last year I got a badly stuffed mongoose (i.e. it is not in a normal mongoose position, it has two legs stuck out like it's trying to do the splits or something, plus there is an inexplicable bulge in its forehead), which Lola said was to make up for not having a dog, but is frankly just creepy and now it is under my bed because every time I come in the room I can feel its beady glass mongoose eyes watching me. Which is why Stan calls it Hutch, as in Miss Hutchinson, the all-seeing eye. And this sums Lola up. She is just determined to *STAND OUT*.



And that's the point. I mean, what's so *GOOD* about standing out? Seriously, Dr Sven, *WHAT*? From now on, I don't care what Lola, or Imogen, say, I am totally going to concentrate on fitting in and being *NORMAL*. Starting tomorrow.