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Double or Quits

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July

Sunday 13

4 p.m.

OMG. Am actually weak at knees. In fact think may need to lie down for a bit. Is unprecedented. Is utter revelation. Am happy! Not just 'thank God it is chocolate sponge instead of povvy yoghurt for pudding' happy, but when Baby does the lift at the end of *Dirty Dancing* happy. Or when James got a laminator for his birthday happy. Oh. Am actually going to have to lie down as think may swoon, Jane Austen-like, in my delirium.

4.30 p.m.

OK. Am temporarily unswooned and can confirm that am in love with Jack Stone. Oh, even writing his name makes me feel breathless and dizzy. Although that could be dog, who has eaten Glade Plug-In and is emitting overpowering scent of hyacinth every three minutes. Or possibly low blood sugar as have used up all joules of energy snogging. Will stop for bit again.

4.50 p.m.

Have had replenishing Marmite on toast. But only one slice. As am in love, cannot eat properly, it is well-documented fact. But is enough to be able to write coherently, if only for brief moment. Am likely to hit wall of pain any minute, i.e. start pining and panicking as have not seen him for more than an hour.

Cannot believe I feel like this. Have been utter fool.

True love has been staring me in face for years but was blinded by shiny but hollow bauble, i.e. Justin Statham and his halo of blond hair, small nipples, and ability to play 'Stairway to Heaven' on guitar. These trappings are meaningless to me now. Jack is my true destiny. He is my Paulie and I am his Juno. Except not pregnant and with better dress sense. We are inseparable. Or at least we would be if he hadn't had to go home for Sunday lunch (at 4 p.m. in Stone household due to various issues involving tantric yoga classes, biorhythms, and scheduling on T4). But I will see him again tomorrow after school. Point is, we are soul mates, i.e. we like all the same things, for example The Doors and Waitrose hummus. Plus I can tell him anything. Like the time I ate sheep poo because I thought it was a Malteser. Or when I got my hand stuck down a drain trying to reach a Sylvanian something.

Except fact that am actually in love with him. Am going to build up to that. As *a*) do not want to appear like overkeen stalker type; *b*) am waiting for him to say it first, and *c*) declaration needs romantic setting, e.g. sunset, or beach, or balcony in unspoilt peasant village, i.e. not John-Lewis-decorated bedroom contaminated with odour of hyacinth-scented dog and within earshot of eleven year old singing 'Nessun Dorma'. Which is obviously why Jack has not told me yet either.

Also have not told him what actually happened on the night of prom, obviously. He did ask me where I went

when I left the party. I said was depressed about wonky portrait mix-up and had gone for refreshing walk. Which is not a total lie. Have not added bit that walk was to meet Justin and that ended up naked in his bed and possibly only narrowly avoided doing 'It' because Justin did snakebite sick and passed out on racing car duvet. Jack does not need to know silly details like that. Justin is a closed chapter, or paragraph even, in the foreword of my life. Oooh. Who would do the foreword? Maybe Julie Burchill. Anyway. Book metaphor is excellent as life is officially a fairy tale and Jack is my knight in shining armour. Or shining skinny jeans. Anyway, he is totally my Darcy.

This is it. This is my happy ever after. I just know it.

Ooh, doorbell. Maybe that is him. He cannot bear to be apart from me and has sacrificed his nut roast in order to gaze once more on my features.

5.30 p.m.

Was not Jack. Was Sad Ed, who has already eaten (two helpings) and is engulfed in gloom, as usual. It is because his mojo has decided to fall in love with our best friend and Jack's sister Scarlet, who is oblivious to Sad Ed's (admittedly not many) charms and is still pining after bat boy Trevor. I said surely my happiness could lift the veil of tears that is strapped permanently to his head but he said, *au contraire*, it is nauseating, and if I want to help I can tell Scarlet asap about me and Jack, and then she

might be inspired to reassess her friends, i.e. Sad Ed, for potential boyfriend material. I said would think about it.

6 p.m.
Have thought about it. Am not going to tell Scarlet yet. She is just too judgemental. And sometimes plain mental.

Mum is also in a bad mood. Do not know why. She should be delighted about me and Jack. He is clean, brainy and has never worn a Kappa tracksuit.

6.30 p.m.
Apparently Mum's misery is not in any way related to Jack, as James has pointed out, as part of his well-practised 'the world does not revolve around you' lecture. It turns out that was in such bubble of bliss that have made grave error in judgement and forgotten that today is Mum's birthday. That is why I only got one roast potato at lunchtime and the soggy Yorkshire pudding.

7 p.m.
Have solved birthday dilemma and given Mum Jack's portrait of me as present. And pointed out that this was yet further evidence of Jack being such excellent boyfriend as he has painted picture that can adorn her walls and remind her of me for ever. Mum said 'hmm'. And Dad said, 'Why would a picture of Princess Margaret remind her of you?' There is no pleasing some people. It is because they have forgotten what it is like to be

consumed with passion. Or possibly never knew in first place. Cannot imagine habitual vest-wearers Janet and Colin in heated clinch. Or rather do not want to imagine it. Gak.

Nothing can dampen my good mood though. Jack's portrait has saved me from domestic abuse. It is like magic talisman. Will text him to tell him that.

7.30 p.m.
And to tell him that had four fishfingers and peas for tea.

11 p.m.
James has just been in to demand an end to texting. He has counted no less than sixty-three beeps in five hours and has calculated that so far today my love has cost £7.56 plus several pence in battery recharging electricity. He is right. I do not need to text Jack. We are so in tune I will send my thought-waves out of window and he will telepathically know what I am saying.

11.45 p.m.
Just got text from Jack checking am still alive as had not replied to previous text. Think thoughts ensnared on Clive and Marjory's leylandii. Have texted back. But is last one of night.

12.05 a.m.
Is new day. So can text again. Have sent him message to say cannot sleep.

1.30 a.m.
No reply. Maybe he is dead. Maybe should ring and check. Yes will do that.

1.45 a.m.
He not dead. He asleep. Or rather was. Will do same. So can meet in our dreams. Plus James has confiscated phone.

Monday 14

8 a.m.
Am still in utter bubble of bliss. Love, as effete Tory Bryan Ferry says, is the drug. Mum did ask if 'crack marijuana' was in fact the drug due to my uncharacteristic perpetual smile and fact that did not get minty with dog when it coughed on my Shreddies. She is still in bad mood about temporarily overlooked birthday yesterday. I said inconsequential matters such as dog spit and birthdays are of no interest to me since I now operate on a higher plain. Which made her suspicious again. So pointed out higher plain was love, and that I do not need artificial stimulants as Jack is more than enough. But mention of stimulation and Jack in one sentence made her eyes perceptibly bulge and lips go thin so left house before either she or James could launch into anti-teenage pregnancy sex lecture. James is very much anti-sex. And love. It is because he is still reeling from the devastating union (in pathetic

eleven-year-old sense) of Mad Harry and Mumtaz. Though am not sure if he is more distressed at Mumtaz's choice, or at the demise of Beastly Boys and untimely end of his boy band dream. He says only the dog understands him. Which is possibly true.

4 p.m.

The saggy sofa is just not the same without Jack. I cannot believe his buttocks have graced Yazoo-stained cushion for the last time (except for annual last day silly string/release the sheep ritual). I miss him. I miss the sweet sound of his voice shouting at Fat Kylie to stop microwaving Wagon Wheels. I miss the thud, click of his boots with the drawing pin in the toe chasing rogue Retards and Criminals along B Corridor. John Major High is an empty shell without him. Yet just a few weeks ago I barely noticed him among the crowd of pasty faces and McFly hairdos. Oh, it is utterly poetic.

Plus his head boy replacement, i.e. Sad Ed, is clearly not up to the job. He is too busy being consumed with lust over his self-appointed Chief of Staff/Director of Communications aka Scarlet to enforce any kind of control. Scarlet, *au contraire*, is consumed only by power. She has already been to see ineffectual headmaster Mr Wilmott three times to demand *a*) a ban on Dolphin-unfriendly tuna in the canteen, *b*) a ban on pupil-unfriendly Mrs Brain in the canteen, and *c*) an overhaul of the fruit and nut dispensing machine as there is a

packet of dried figs in there that is potential chemical weapon. He says they will not be able to implement any changes until September, and possibly never in the case of Mrs Brain. Scarlet is unperturbed and says it will give her time to draw up a manifesto for lasting change. Asked what I got to do in the new regime. She says I can be Peter Mandelson. Normally would be utterly peeved at weird-voiced and potentially evil role but luckily am too busy being in love. Am going round to Jack's house now. Ostensibly to visit Scarlet in her war room (aka the den), but mostly to gaze at Jack.

9 p.m.

Have done several hours of gazing, four minutes, thirty-three seconds of snogging when Scarlet went to the toilet, and some minor under table footsie while she comforted Suzy over birth of Jolie-Pitt twins (Suzy boiling with jealousy at vast and multicultural family when her own ovaries are withering on vine). Jack said maybe we should reveal our new relationship to cheer her up but I said this was further proof why we cannot, as our young and potentially fruitful union might push Suzy even further over the edge. Plus think having secret love is utterly literary. Is like *Romeo and Juliet*. Our families are from opposite sides of the tracks, well, Debden Road anyway, and might fight to keep us apart. Jack pointed out that my mum already knows what is going on and has not forbidden anything except closing of the bedroom door at

any time so that she can see into every crevice to make sure we are not doing 'It'. But I said she is only not declaring war yet because she is gloating in her superior position of knowing something before Suzy. Jack rolled eyes, but luckily at that point Scarlet came in to demand my immediate repatriation to presidential headquarters to take tea orders.

In contrast, Mumtaz and Mad Harry's love is very much not secret. Apparently they were all over each other on the St Regina's junior log (official territory of Years Five and Six) in first break. James says it is disgusting and he is minded to inform Mr Mumtaz who is not a fan of snogging, or Mad Harry. The only reason he is holding his tongue is because he gets his SATs results tomorrow and is confidently expecting them to be so high that he will be instantly admitted to Eton, and thus avoid having to go to substandard John Major High, which not only has a broken locust tank and unhygienic toilet facilities, but is where the Mumtaz and Mad Harry love nest will be ensconced come September. He is heading for certain disappointment.

Tuesday 15

As predicted, James's SAT results have not magically opened the doors of Eton, Rugby, or Hogwart's. In fact, according to official statistics, he is utterly not as boffiny as everyone thought. Mum says it is the influence of

deadly Keanu O'Grady who is ruining not only his own life, with his endless consumption of peperami and Capri-Sun, but the lives of those around him. James says it is not Keanu, it is that no exam can do justice to his unique intellect, and is begging to be sent to private school. Dad says we cannot afford it in these austerity times and we are all going to have to make sacrifices in the harsh months ahead. I asked what his were. He says he has been using the same golf balls now for several months.

I suggested we could move to Hull, i.e. potential new home of Jack and utterly cheap, according to Phil and Kirstie. But Mum says she would rather move to the Whiteshot Estate than north of Watford, i.e. not at all. James says there is nothing else for it then, and is demanding to be home-schooled. He has clearly had some kind of emotional breakdown. I can think of nothing worse than being trapped in the dining room with Mum for seven hours a day while she bangs on about osmosis.

Wednesday 16

10 p.m.

The home schooling dream is over. Mum says if the credit crunch continues, then come September she will not be available for tuition as she will be looking for a job. It is because she is worried we will be forced to shop at Lidl or give up Cillit Bang for own-brand substandard cleaner.

James warned her that we will become latchkey children, and get obese on microwave meals and that the house will go downhill and we will be festering in discarded Pot Noodle cartons and Mars bar wrappers within weeks. Which sounded excellently tragic. But Mum has put paid to any dreams of Dickensian squalor. She says she will only work part-time and we will continue to consume a balanced diet including liver once a week and oily fish on Tuesdays.

Also Granny Clegg has rung. Apparently Grandpa Clegg is up in arms about the curfew in Redruth, i.e. all menacing local youths have to be inside their houses by nine p.m. He says it is anti-Cornish and wants it imposed on anyone who eats olives, wears coloured wellies, or drives a 4X4, regardless of age. Granny says he is showing no signs of giving up his allegiance to the Cornish Liberation Army and that she does not know how much longer she can take it. This morning he claimed his blood ran black like the Cornish flag, and said if he ever needs a tranfusion, it has to be from someone born within the county boundaries. Granny is now sleeping in the spare room with Bruce. Said did that not compromise 'relations'? She said they hadn't had 'relations' since Boris Becker won Wimbledon in 1985 (no idea) so there is no change there. Plus Bruce does not sing mining songs and his breath is less deadly.

It is utterly sad. Jack and I will never end up like that, i.e. locked in political conflict. Or wearing elasticated

trousers. We will be at one for eternity. Even though he is at band practice, I feel utterly connected to him. In fact, can feel him telling me to call.

10.15 p.m.
Think maybe he was just telling me NOT to call him. So just marginal error. He had left mobile at home and Scarlet answered and demanded to know why was ringing him 'out of hours'. Said *a*) needed political advice relating to inbred Cornish relatives, and *b*) did not know Jack had official office hours. She said *a*) to tell Granny Clegg to embrace life and possibly join match.com to find a like-minded pensioner who does not think the Health Secretary is someone who types up prescriptions; and *b*) after ten is reserved for head girl (i.e. smelly Oona) business, band business, or girlfriend business, and I am none of the above. Said will bear that in mind in future. There is no way am telling Granny Clegg about match.com though. She has had a hip replacement. Plus am still holding out hope for a Clegg reunion. She may have forsaken her racist and generally moronic tendencies for newfound left-wing feminism, but she still thinks *Doc Martin* is real so all is not lost.

Thursday 17

There has been another relationship breakdown. Wonky-jawed Welsh Lib Dem Lembit Opik has been dumped by

the Cheeky Girl. It was obviously not true love. He should have stuck to his own kind, i.e. the wide-mouthed weather woman, also from Wales and also habitual shopper in Marks & Spencer's 'sensible' department, instead of being seduced by hot pants and exotic Transylvanian accent. James says it is utterly like his own situation, i.e. Mumtaz has been swayed by Mad Harry's bottom and has ignored James's superior intellect and interest in chess. Although he is visibly less despondent today. It is because Keanu has taken James's side and has banished Mad Harry from the gang. I said it was an empty gesture as in a week neither of them will be in the gang anyway as they are leaving St Regina's and Keanu will have to recruit a whole new set of idiotic minions. James says, *au contraire*, it is replete with symbolism, as it means he will enjoy the protection of the O'Gradys at John Major High. Said O'Gradys are not the mafia, they are just over-large family of helmet-headed mentalists. And that includes the girls. James said exactly.

Friday 18

Scarlet is getting more suspicious of me and Jack. It is because had to offer apologies for non-attendance at saggy sofa summit this lunchtime (to discuss potential ban on kettle on environmental grounds, i.e. it is giving off odd fumes since I tried to heat milk up in it for Ready Brek) because was meeting Jack for romantic walk down

Battleditch Lane (aka snoggers paradise aka dogshit alley). Obviously did not say was going for romantic walk, said was going to help head boy round up escaped lower school snoggees. Luckily Sad Ed came to rescue by saying he had a few things he needed to run by her in private. Do not think he meant strategy though. He is still hoping she will suddenly develop interest in his pants area. Thank God she is out tomorrow (on PA duty for Suzy, attending lubricant convention in Ipswich ('Sliding into the Future')). Which means Jack and I can spend entire day enjoying secret love. It is utter serendipity (new favourite word) that we do not have Saturday jobs any more. We do not need money—we can live on love alone. Think Mr Goldstein (hunchback, Fiat Multipla, proprietor of lentil-smelling wholefood outlet Nuts In May) must have known this when he sacked me.

Saturday 19

10 a.m.

Hurrah. A day of love beckons. Am glad to be alive. Unlike Sad Ed, who has already texted to say he has only been herding trolleys for half an hour and is already suicidal and if he does not unite with Scarlet soon he will have to revive untimely death plans. Asked him how fellow herder Reuben Tull was, i.e. was he not cheered up by his seemingly endless ponderings on whether God is a

dog-headed lizard with lasers for eyes? But apparently Reuben has other withdrawal symptoms (crop failure, and not the wheat kind) and is 'on a total downer, man'. As is Scarlet. Though is not drug- or Sad Ed-related. It is because she is stuck in traffic on the A14 and Suzy is insisting on playing her hypnotic anti-smoking CD, which is not at all conducive to driving. Or giving up smoking, as Suzy has been listening to it for three years and still has a packet of Silk Cut permanently stuck down her bra. Told her to call Sad Ed, as will be busy for rest of day. She said 'doing what?' Said charity work. Is not complete lie. Is utterly kind to Jack to snog him. And anyway, lie is for good cause. Is essential she does not find out. Or secret love will just be normal run-of-mill love. Which is not at all literary or tragic. Will be OK. Convention does not finish until five and traffic clearly awful, so she will not be back until six at earliest. If leave by half five she will be utterly in dark still.

5.45 p.m.

It is all over. Scarlet very much not in dark any more but bathed in 100 watt polar ice-cap melting light, i.e. she knows about me and Jack. She burst in on us in den and said, 'Oh God, it is true. Ugh, ugh, make them stop, Suzy, make them stop.' Which was pointless as *a*) Suzy in favour of all sex and *b*) were not actually engaged in any nakedity, were in seventies loveswing watching *Scrubs*, but was clearly in non-just-good-friends way as one of his

hands was twirling curl of hair and other was hovering dangerously close to left breast. Said I had thought she wouldn't be back and had not intended for her to find out like this and it is fault of unusually favourable traffic conditions rather than my fault per se. But Scarlet said in fact is Sad Ed's fault as he confessed on phone what sordidness was going on in her absence and is why she made Suzy ignore speed limit and traffic impediments in order to stage utter bust. Jack said it is better that it is all out in the open and that Scarlet should be happy for us. But Scarlet not in agreement. She demanded that all non-Stones (i.e. me) depart forthwith so she can lie down in darkened room and meditate in bid to calm mind. Jack said not to worry, and that he will talk her round and all will be fine by tomorrow. I said he had better as do not want to be forced to choose between best friend and lover. Although then realized that, actually, would be good as is utterly Shakespearean. But Jack said, 'I know what you are thinking and you are wrong, it would not be good, or literary, or tragic. Just annoying.' Oh, I love him even more. He is in tune with all my innermost thoughts and feelings.

Unlike Sad Ed who is utter traitor and in tune with nothing, as his misguided mojo only serves to testify. Rang him on way home to demand to know why he had spilt proverbial beans. He said he had hoped it would win him points for being loyal and also that she would collapse into his arms in either *a*) face of our horrifying

forbidden love, or *b*) realization that he is her Jack, only not her brother, and with slightly 'more developed' (aka fat) upper arms. He is utterly disappointed though. Not only did he miss the crucial revelation moment, but he is on overtime untangling a nest of trolleys that Reuben jammed behind the pay and display machine. Which, frankly, is divine justice.

Sunday 20

9 a.m.

Am racked with torture. Every second I do not hear from Scarlet is another potential nail in the coffin of our sixteen-year alliance. Is excellent. Am totally living in episode of *Skins*.

11 a.m.

Still no news from Stone household. James says whatever happens, I am my own person, and do not need the approval of my friends. I said I was glad to see he has forgiven Mad Harry and is moving on in his life. He said on the contrary, Mad Harry is a treacherous villain and he is hoping to wreak revenge by going solo and securing five-album deal thus showing Mad Harry what he is missing by breaking up Beastly Boys. He wandered off singing 'The Promise'. Which was ironic as it did not show any. Plus the glory is never the same after the band has split. Look at Duncan out of Blue.