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Opening extract from

Me Myself Milly

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Chapter One

This week at the counselling session, Mr Jessop – or Ted, as he keeps telling me to call him – suggested I write a journal. He said it in that voice of his which he probably thinks is calming and hypnotic, but which is actually so monotonous I have trouble staying awake during the sessions.

'Milly, I think you should keep a journal; a private record of all your hopes and fears. Pour it all out on the page. Say what you're really feeling.'

Huh, what a joke. He's not saying what he's really feeling; what he actually means is, 'Milly, you come here to talk about what happened last April, only you won't, so I'm hoping you'll write about it instead and let me off the hook.'

Sure enough, he followed on by saying, 'Perhaps you

could write about what happened. You might find that easier than talking about it.'

Is he mad? Why would I write about it if I can't talk about it? I mean, when you talk, the words disappear into thin air; you say them and then they're gone. But when you write them down, they're solid, on the page, there for ever. I couldn't do that.

So when he tried to hand me a thick, spiral-bound, hardback notebook, I sat on my hands. He didn't take the hint and just stood there holding it out towards me.

It was pale turquoise, covered in tiny pink and green flowers and butterflies. It was pretty. And he looked so pathetic, I thought the least I could do was take it.

'I'll think about it,' I lied, shoving it into my bag, and then the timer on his cooker started beeping, which meant it was the end of the session.

I had no intention of writing a journal, but when I got on the bus to go home I started thinking about it. I wasn't even sure what a journal was. Was it like a diary?

Journal. It sounded like 'journey'. An account of some bloke's expedition to the frozen wastes of the Antarctic, maybe, that he wrote with frostbitten fingers, huddled in a tent while the wind whipped at the tent flaps. Or a woman in hopelessly uncomfortable Victorian clothing, fighting her way up the Amazon, clutching her leather-bound journal to her corseted bosom.

Both images, I realised, were from way back in the past when there was still some unknown corner of the globe to

be explored. Not like these days when the whole world is there on Google Earth for everyone to see. I couldn't decide if that was sadly unromantic or wildly exciting. But, whatever, the word 'journal' sounded old-fashioned and a bit dusty, which was so typical of Ted. If I'd gone to the school counsellor, like the social worker suggested, she'd probably be telling me I should keep a blog.

A few weeks ago, the social worker they'd assigned to me after The Incident came round to say that she thought I needed to see a counsellor. Mum said we were fine, or would be if 'the authorities' would just leave us alone and stop sticking their noses in where they weren't wanted. Mum hates 'the authorities'.

No one mentioned Lily, who was sitting in the armchair in the corner with her legs tucked under her. But then, it wasn't Lily who needed a counsellor. It was me who needed one and I realised, at that moment, that this was the first time in fourteen years I would be doing something significant on my own, without Lily. It was such a huge, frightening thought, but I said, 'I want to go.'

Mum looked hurt but she couldn't really forbid me. Lily snorted in that derisive way of hers so I pretended she wasn't there. Things haven't been the same between us since The Incident. That's what I call the thing that happened last April – 'The Incident'.

She hates all the attention I'm getting but she can't do anything about it. It's not like I asked for any of it to happen. If anything it's her fault and she knows that, so

she's keeping quiet. Which is weird for someone so noisy. It's spooking me.

The social worker was droning on about going to the school counsellor because she was good and it was convenient because I wouldn't have to travel. That's when I got to thinking about going back to school and I was seized with panic.

'Can I talk to you alone?' I said to the social worker. Mum took the hint – she's good like that, mad keen on giving us 'our personal space and privacy', and failing to see the irony. As a twin I never get any personal space, and privacy is also in short supply in our basement flat.

'I'll go and make some tea,' she said, leaving the room.

Lily didn't leave, even though I glared at her.

My social worker is called Carmel, which sounds suspiciously like 'camel'. As she has straw-coloured hair and large front teeth, it's an unfortunate name. Still, I'm hardly in a position to criticise first names as I was named after a muddy puddle.

I was still glaring at Lily, and Carmel glanced over at the armchair but she didn't say anything. That's another problem with being a twin. People tend to treat you as one person instead of two. Anyhow, I didn't really care if Lily heard what I was going to say. It was my decision and there was nothing she could do to stop me.

'I want to change schools – I want to go to a different school and I want you to help me sort it out.'

We both knew it was too much for Mum to cope with

at the moment. Lily snorted again but I ignored her. Now I'd had the idea and said it out loud, it had taken hold. I knew I had to do this if I was going to keep my sanity. Carmel didn't look so sure.

'I don't know,' she said. 'It's a big change, and I'm not sure that's such a good idea at the moment. What about your friends? You'll need their support . . .'

'No,' I cut in. 'I need a new start.'

I wasn't about to explain that apart from Lily there were no friends at school. Not really. That's another thing about being a twin: you're a unit and it sort of stops other people getting close. They assume you don't need anyone else. Besides, most other girls are a bit scared of Lily. She's so full on.

I half expected her to make a scene now, about me going to a new school without her. It was a mad idea; one I'd never have had before The Incident. But she must have known that one of her dramatic tantrums would have no effect on Carmel, so she didn't bother.

'Why don't you wait a bit, go back to school, see how you feel and then if you still want a change we'll see . . .'

'No,' I said again, surprised by my own daring. I'm not used to disagreeing with people or standing up for myself. Lily usually does that for both of us. But then a lot has changed recently and I suppose I'd better get used to it.

Carmel's a very forceful woman, though, and I knew that just saying 'No' wasn't going to be enough to convince her it was the right thing for me.

'Please,' I said, going for sympathy instead. So much for the new, assertive me. Carmel had been sent here by the police, as part of their Victim Support Unit, so really it was her job to help me.

'Please,' I said again. 'I can't bear the thought of people staring at me and pointing and whispering. They'll know what's happened, obviously. And I missed the whole of the summer term . . . I couldn't bear it, honestly. I really need a new start; somewhere I can just be me.'

I got the 'new start' idea from Archie's mum. I heard her talking to Jeanie upstairs about moving out. 'I think it's best,' she said, 'after all that's happened, that Archie has a new start and we can put it behind us.' I didn't blame her. It would be nice to walk away from it all, which is something I'll never be able to do.

Carmel stood up and Lily uncurled her legs and launched herself from the chair and from the room. She didn't look at me.

'I'll talk to some people and get back to you,' said Carmel. 'If you're sure it's what you want, I expect we can sort something out.'

'I'm sure,' I told her, though I wasn't. Not really. It was the first major decision I'd ever made on my own. Then Mum came back in and said she knew a really good counsellor who I could go to, so Carmel didn't need to worry about that any more. I could tell Carmel wasn't too happy about it. Perhaps she thought, like I did, that Mum was fobbing her off and there wasn't really any counsellor,

but Mum was using her 'no nonsense' voice so Carmel didn't argue the point. But it turned out Mum was serious, which is how I ended up seeing Ted. And now he's given me a journal to write and although I don't want to do it, at least it's given me something new to think about.

I've spent the last however many weeks trying not to think, which of course is impossible. The more you try not to think about something, the more you end up thinking about it. The Incident has become like a film in my head, on a never-ending reel, that plays itself over and over. Sometimes it plays what actually happened and sometimes it plays what might have happened – what could have happened. I let that one play on, the one where we all come home laughing and happy. The one where nothing has changed us for ever.

My Journal
by myself, Milly Pond

This is my journal.

I don't know what I'm going to write yet, probably just anything – except what happened. I had decided I wasn't going to bother and I'd pretend I was doing it if Ted asked, but then I made the mistake of telling Mum about it.

When I got home from Ted's this afternoon, Mum was withdrawn and I could see she was feeling really down. In an

attempt to distract her, I got the notebook out of my bag and told her about Ted's idea. It didn't cheer her up.

'What?' I said when she tutted loudly.

'I'm sure Ted means well . . . but really . . . he can't know much about fourteen-year-old girls if he thinks they're capable of keeping up a journal.'

I was offended. Why shouldn't I be capable? She might have been right if it was Lily she was talking to. I doubt she'd be able to do it; she's got the concentration span of a butterfly at the best of times.

I'm not going to tell Lily about the journal, she'll probably be even ruder than Mum and tell me to 'get a life' or something. Then she'll read it when I'm not here. I'll have to think of somewhere to hide it where Lily would never look. I can't put it under the mattress because that's too obvious. I think I'll keep it in the doll's house because Lily never goes near it. It sits on the chest of drawers between our beds and Lily wanted to get rid of it last year. She said it was embarrassing, that we were too old to still have a doll's house – but I wouldn't let her.

At first I couldn't think of anything to write. All those blank pages freaked me out so I did a sort of title page, like they have in books. 'The Journal of Milly Pond' sounded too formal so, in the end, I just put 'My Journal' right in the middle. Then, for some reason I added 'by myself'. I don't know why I wrote that and I wanted to cross it out but that would have made a mess so I put my name, Milly Pond, just to make things absolutely clear. Now it looks like something a

six year old would have done. Anyhow, I'd filled a whole page, which felt good until I turned over and there was another blank page.

God! Who'd have thought writing could be so difficult? I don't know how Mum does it.

I must have sat here chewing on my biro for about half an hour before I decided that it doesn't really matter what I write because I don't think Ted wants to read it; I think he just wants me to write it. I'd better check though, next time I see him, just in case.

All that got me wondering about Mum. She writes and illustrates books for a living. I wonder if she panics when she sees a blank page. I doubt it; she probably sees it as an opportunity. I'll try and think like that from now on.