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Opening extract from

The Private Blog of Joe Cowley

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Sunday 1st January

RIGHT. Here we go.

This thing is set to private isn't it? It'd be just my luck if it went viral.

OK, it's definitely on private.

So here's the thing. I've decided to start writing a blog. A private one. Kind of like a diary but not a diary because diaries are for girls.

The idea is that it'll help me clear my head and sort my life out, because quite frankly, it can't get much worse.

In just the past year this CATALOGUE OF MISERY happened:

- Mum and Dad got divorced.
- Dad shacked up with Svetlana, who is like a million years younger than him and is Russian.
- Mum started seeing Jim the plasterer, and yet the crack in my bedroom ceiling grows bigger with every passing day.
- I nearly got to snog Louise Bentley at the fair, but ended up throwing up all over her after the waltzer made me nauseous.
- I gained the nickname 'Puke Skywalker' at school for the above reason.
- That idiot Gav James ramped up his campaign of torment against me, once even dunking me in a bin upside down and making me stay there for the entire lunch break.

THIS CANNOT GO ON. I have to do something, or I'll end up like Mad Morris down the park who thinks he's Jesus.



By the end of next term, I'm going to be a **COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON**. And I'm going to do the following to make that happen:

- Get Gav back for all the crap he's done to me.
- Become more respected.
- Kiss a girl. A real live girl. A lot of other fourteen-year-old lads have snogged loads of girls, but I haven't managed any. If I do this, then surely I will become more respected, and random people won't slap me around the head in the corridor every day. But it has to be a real girl. The back of my hand does not count.

My other goals include teaching my stupid parrot, Syd to say 'Joe is the man' and saving up enough money so me, Harry, and Ad can finally go to BUZZFEED. Easy.



Lisa Hall Lisa Hall LISA

Wednesday 4th January

I'm thinking when we go back, it wouldn't hurt to try Louise Bentley again. I had already made a bit of headway with her, before the spewing incident behind the waltzer. Perhaps she's ready to forgive and forget?

The problem is, she's not the girl I really like. Not properly. I have been obsessed with one girl since forever. **Lisa Hall.** Just writing her name fills my head with heavenly choirs singing. She is PERFECT.

But she always goes for bad boys and idiots, like now she's with that chimpanzee Gav James. Every time I see them together, it's like being hoofed in the stomach. I know I would be so much better for her.

I doubt she even knows I exist, though. In four years I think we've exchanged maybe ten words. The closest I get to her is in General Studies, where I just stare at the back of her head. I know that sounds creepy, but what else can I do? Whenever she talks to me, it's as if my tongue glues itself to the roof of my mouth. Once, she turned around and asked me the time, and I replied, 'September'. It was April.

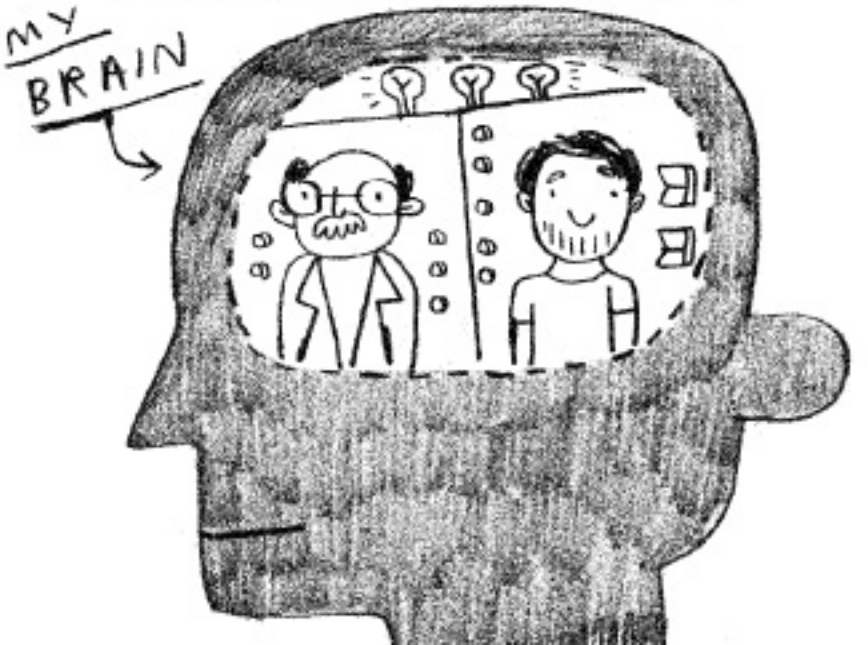
I don't know what's wrong with me. I can think clearly, but somewhere between my brain and my mouth it all gets mixed up and I end up either rambling like an idiot, or saying something offensive.

The only way I've ever been able to express myself properly is through my drawings. I reckon I'll stick some

of them in this blog in case I struggle with words on here as well. In fact, maybe I should give up talking altogether, and just carry my sketchpad around at all times, and communicate like that? No, I'd end up with wrist ache.

Now, this is going to sound stupid, but for some reason, I imagine that there's this control room in my brain, full of computers and dials and blinking lights, a bit like the bridge of the ***USS ENTERPRISE***, and it's operated by these little men in lab coats.

The main man in the control room is this bloke I named Norman. He wears glasses and is going bald, but he's sensible and keeps me from doing anything crazy. But recently, another control room worker started to have more of a say. He's younger than Norman and has shaggy hair, and for some reason, is American. His name is Hank.



I was on holiday in Spain a couple of years ago. Mum and Dad were having a row in the room so I went down to the pool by myself. After a while, this girl came over and started chatting to me. She was dead fit and my heart was beating so fast I could feel it in my nose. IN MY NOSE!

She asked me where I was from. I immediately thought, *Tammerstone* because that's where I am actually from.

But then one of the control room blokes chipped in. *She probably hasn't heard of Tammerstone. You should mention someone famous from around there.*

But Norman disagreed: *I think a better approach would be to say where it's near to give it some context.*

Hank got up from his desk where he'd been napping. *Bullcrap! Tell her you're from somewhere different. Somewhere exciting. You're only going to see her on vacation, so what the hell does it matter?*

So from the initial *Tammerstone*, I somehow ended up saying, 'I'm from New York City! Yeah, New York, New York. That's what they call it. Great town. Never sleeps, apparently. I wouldn't know about that, I mean if I don't get my eight hours I can get a bit cranky! But can't we all, let's face it? We all need our beauty sleep. I'm not saying you do, by the way. You need very little. I bet you're a light sleeper. So, yeah, as I was saying, I'm from the Big Apple.'

'You don't sound like you're from New York,' said the girl.

Norman threw his clipboard down and turned on Hank.

I can't believe you told him to lie! What do you expect him to do now?

Just ride it out, my man, said Hank. *Put on a New York accent and tell her you're in with the mob. Chicks dig dangerous guys. Bada bing!*

Don't listen to him, Joe, said Norman. *He's got you into enough trouble already. Just come clean.*

'Yeah, I'm actually from Tammerstone,' I said. 'Which is sort of near Birmingham. No Mafia there as far as I'm aware. Famous people from this region include William Shakespeare and Ozzy Osbourne. Both mad! "To be or not to be!" "Sharon!" What's all that about?'

She couldn't tell me what all that was about because she was too busy swimming away as fast as she could.

I should point out that this thing doesn't make me one of those schizo-whachamacallits. I'm aware that the control room men aren't real. At least, I think I am.

My mate Harry tells me that the key to stopping my big, fat mouth getting me into trouble is to get more self-confidence. Well, he does walk around with a pipe in his mouth like some kind of Victorian detective, so maybe he has a point. It's all down to how you carry yourself, and your ability to talk to girls without sounding like someone on day release.

I googled **'How to be more confident'**, but all I got were pages and pages about how to make me 'bigger in the trouser department'. I don't need that.

« Older posts

At least I don't think I do.

How can there not be a tape measure in this entire house?

Thursday 5th January

On the way round to Harry's I took a detour past Lisa Hall's house. This doesn't make me a stalker. It was only a mile out of my way.

As I went past I glanced up at her window and saw her. She looked at me and I don't know, but I think she smiled. I smiled back, then slipped on my bum in some ice.

Found an article about how to impress girls on the internet. It was on a website called Men's Domain. It looked useful so I bookmarked it. These are the tips it gave.



1. Be well-groomed

« I'd like to think I'm pretty well-groomed. Having said that, Mum did say I had hair like a bird's nest. My own mother. I sneaked into her bedroom and took a pot of Jim the plasterer's hair gel. I experimented in front of the mirror for a while and I think I've found a style that suits me.

2. Have a good sense of humour

« Check. Obviously.

3. Be a good listener

« I'm an excellent listener. It's talking that's the problem.

4. Respect her ideas and opinions

« I can do that. Unless it's her opinion that I stink. Or that in the battle of the ***Star Trek*** captains, Kirk is better than Picard.

5. Be confident

« Now, this is the biggy. Google is still no help on this subject so I'm going to have to think for myself. Maybe I need to embrace my inner Captain Picard and approach every situation as if I am the master. That's it. As of tomorrow, I am Picard. Only less bald.

Jim is staying over again tonight. He's been around loads lately. He bought me an MP3 player for Christmas and told me to listen to it at night. 'Turn it up nice and loud, son,' he said. What a weirdo. Fell asleep listening to (the best band in the world ever) Pink Floyd, and woke up in terror when it switched to **Motörhead**.

« Older posts

Friday 6th January

Mum asked me to take the Christmas decorations down while she was at work. Harry and Ad came over to help. Ad says he'll do anything for my mum. I don't know what he means by that but I'm sure it's not good.

The three of us have been friends since forever. In Year Seven Harry wanted us to do one of those blood brother things, but I opted out on hygiene grounds and Ad accidentally severed a major vein and had to be airlifted to hospital.

While we were up in the loft, Harry sprung one of his topics on us. **'OK, if you could have any super power, what would it be?'**

'Invisibility,' I said without even thinking about it.

'Invisibility? You old dog.' He chuckled. 'I see what you're thinking. Girls' changing rooms perhaps?'

'Yeah, maybe,' I said. 'But mainly it would mean me being able to walk around school without being given an EPIC WEDGIE by Gav.'

He nodded. 'How about you, Ad?'

'Definitely X-ray vision,' he said, twiddling his glasses.

Harry laughed. 'OK, now I know you must be thinking about the girls' changing rooms, old son.'

'Nah,' he said. 'I'd use it to win *Deal or No Deal*. Then I'd be so minted that I could, like, pay girls to strip for me or something.'

Me and Harry looked at each other.