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Opening extract from

# Nathalia Buttface and the Most Embarrassing Dad in the World

Written by

**Nigel Smith**

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*Nathalia Buttface and the Most Embarrassing Dad in the World*

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# CHAPTER ONE

THE MOST EMBARRASSING DAD IN THE WORLD WAS embarrassing Nathalia even before she was born.

He went and married Mum, didn't he? So when baby Nat was born, she ended up with Dad's last name instead of Mum's. Mum's last name was De Montfort. A very ladylike name, with just a whiff of the exotic. Nathalia De Montfort was a name to be reckoned with.

*I could be Prime Minister with that name*, she would think, daydreaming, *or a supermodel. I*

*could be a flying vet, or a singing brain surgeon. I could win two Nobel prizes – one for making things go bang and one for stopping things going bang.* Nathalia De Montfort could win three Michelin stars, four Oscars and a grand prix in the same weekend. *She* could be the first eleven-year-old girl on Mars.

Thanks to Dad she wasn't Nathalia De Montfort.

She was Nathalia Bumolé.

"It's pronounced *Bew-mow–lay*," Dad would tell her patiently, time and time again. "If anyone says differently, the joke's on them."

"On *them*? The joke's on THEM? That's not how it works, Dad. The joke will definitely NOT be on them. It will be massively on me. It was massively on me all through my last school, and it will be massively on me in this one too."

But her words were lost over the crunching of gears and the shouty morning DJ, who was called Cabbage.

"It's back to school day," burbled the fathead,

as if the millions of sulky kids now being dragged sleepily out of their beds didn't know. "So step away from your Easter eggs and get ready for the great summer term. Which means rain, exams, sports days and asthma attacks. Ha ha ha."

Then he and his witless companions roared with laughter. *Great, summer term, thanks for reminding me*, thought Nathalia, scratchy in her new school blazer. *And I'm the only kid IN THE WORLD starting at a new school today. I'll have to walk into a class full of people who all know each other. And they'll ALL stare at me.*

"Do you know how embarrassing that is, Dad?" Nat shouted.

But Dad wasn't listening. He was still wittering on about her stupid name.

"…and it's a very old name."

*Well that's all right then*, she thought sourly. *If it's* old. She sighed. Dad thought anything old was good, even though it might plainly be rubbish – old houses, old music, Nathalia's nan.

And especially the mega-rubbish old camper

van she was currently being carted around in. She sank lower into the van's cloth sofa as she glimpsed a couple of kids in the distinctive purple and blue uniform of her new school.

The van had a name. Of course it did. Only The Most Embarrassing Dad In The World would give a noisy, rusty, smoky machine a name. He called it Ned The Atomic Dustbin. Nathalia thought that was stupid. For a start, it ran on petrol not nuclear fusion, so it wasn't atomic at all. She had to admit, however, it WAS a dustbin.

"It's a skip with wheels," said Mum one day, refusing a lift to the train station. "If I was seen in that, my company would lose a hundred points on the stock exchange overnight."

Nathalia wasn't sure what that meant but she liked it when Mum talked business. And she especially liked it when Dad got told off too.

Looking at her watch again, Nat told herself she wasn't nervous about her new school. She had thought hard about it and now she had school sussed. She knew it wasn't about being popular.

She wanted to be NOT UNPOPULAR. At her old school, most of the time she'd have liked to hide in a cardboard box at the back of the class but a girl called Amy Chan had got to the box first. Amy Chan was definitely NOT popular.

Nat had found it hard to make friends and she mostly blamed Dad. He was always embarrassing her.

For example, he always gave her such rubbish advice. At primary school he kept telling her to 'join in a bit more'. One day her classmates were talking about their imaginary friends. Nat hadn't got one but decided to listen to his advice and 'join in'. On the spot she invented an imaginary friend called Jenny Jennifer. Jenny Jennifer, she said, had a white face, long white hair and long white fingernails, and lived on a fairground ride. Noticing everyone had gone quiet, Nat warmed to her story. Jenny Jennifer sang nursery rhymes backwards, could only be seen when the carousel went round too quickly and – here Nat went for the sympathy vote – only appeared to children

who were sad.

Three girls ran off screaming before Nat realised she'd invented less of an imaginary friend and more of an EVIL TERRIFYING GHOST.

Stupid Dad advice.

And now she was starting at her *second* secondary school in a year. They'd had to move so that Mum could have an easier commute to her big new job. Even this was Dad's fault really. If he had a PROPER job like other dads, they could have stayed put. Nat hadn't made any friends at her last school, but to be fair she had only been there a few months, and anyway she was sure she had been just about to. One girl had even said 'hello'. Now she would have to start all over again.

And so far it was a TERRIBLE start. She'd got up late because Dad hadn't forced her to get up earlier like a proper dad would have done. And now she was being driven to school in this *contraption*, surrounded by… surrounded by…

*Hang on*, she thought, *what IS all this junk*

*I'm surrounded by?*

Newspapers, crates, wires, pots, pans, lightbulbs, magazines, half-empty toolboxes, reels of fuse wire, two burst spacehoppers, a bike with only one wheel that was supposed to have two wheels, a bike with no wheels that was supposed to have one wheel, a ukulele, six unwieldy old computer hard drives with less processing power than Mum's new hairdryer, a croquet set, a blackboard, a whiteboard, fifteen full black plastic bags, a garden chair, a garden bench, a garden gnome, shoes, a candle in a wine bottle, a motorbike engine, four boxes of LPs called things like *The Strobing Bogeys, live at Preston Civic Centre*, a broken record player, a huge kicked-in speaker with Mum's footprint still just visible, a box of yellowed paperbacks with either spaceships, dragons, or tanks on, a box of yellowed paperbacks with spaceships, dragons AND tanks on, postcards, rubber masks, and various wooden objects that could only be described as 'objects, wooden, various.'

Nathalia HATED the van. And she hated gobbling her breakfast cereal at the little table in the back of the van due to them being late. As she shoved the Dog's shaggy – and, she noticed, uncomfortably – *milky* head away from her bowl, Nat tried to get comfy between a box of Scalextric parts and a filing cabinet.

She stared at her reflection in the grimy window, suddenly wishing she had a lemony-scented window cloth. This van really was disgusting.

Her large brown eyes stared back at her. Brown eyes. She sighed; who has blonde hair and BROWN eyes? People always made a fuss about it. Grannies in caffs were the worst for fussing. *Urgh, getting kissed by whiskery old women... I'll get a rash from all the bristles*, she thought.

That was Dad's fault too. They were *his* eyes.

"Hold tight," said Dad, just after he braked violently. He'd spotted someone he knew. Even though they'd only moved here five minutes ago, he already knew EVERYONE.

Nathalia sighed as she dragged herself back out from where she was thrown under the table. She sighed as her blazer got tangled in a string of broken Christmas lights. She sighed for the *third* time when she saw the Dog wearing her cereal bowl like a soldier's hat. The Dog licked her face and his breath smelled of doggy victory.

Dad was now hanging out of the van window, chatting to a young man with a silly moustache, super-skinny trousers and a hat shaped like an upside-down bucket. *Typical Dad*, she thought. *He loves talking to young people because he thinks he's still young and cool, even though he's obviously really old. It's just so EMBARRASSING.*

She slid further down out of sight as Dad started telling the young man about how it was her first day at school and how it was a shame that she was really shy. *I'm shy NOW, you idiot*, she thought. Didn't Dad know by now that that was literally the WORST thing he could say? And she just knew he was going to say it to EVERYONE

at the school gates too. She felt sick.

*That's it*, she decided, as he finally drove off. *No one at my new school must EVER meet Dad. At the next set of traffic lights I'm opening the slidy door and jumping out. I'm running to school and if he follows I'm just going to shout: "Help, there's a strange man following me, call the police." Maybe*, she thought, *Dad would be just put in prison long enough for me to get my GCSEs out of the way. And perhaps make just a COUPLE of friends. I'd visit him. Probably at night when no one could see, but I would visit him.*

"Nearly there!" called Dad, oblivious to the evil Nat-sized plot taking shape behind him. "Traffic's a bit bad and for some reason we seem to be late."

*Right*, thought Nathalia, hand poised on the slidy door lever. *There's a set of lights coming up. They're always on red. Mum says the council does it on purpose because they're communists out to stop people going about their business in very fast*

*little cars like hers. Which is what she also says every time she gets a speeding ticket.*

Nathalia felt the van slow. *Sorry, Dad*, she thought, *but prison's quite nice these days. Nan says it's like a holiday camp…*

Nat gripped the door handle, ready to fling it open. But then…

"Brace yourself," Dad shouted, "I'm going to take a back double."

Nathalia's blood froze. There were few more terrifying words in the English language than Dad saying, "I'm going to take a back double."

Previous 'back doubles' over the years had landed them in a park, a shopping centre, an airport runway, a railway line, and, memorably, IN ANOTHER COUNTRY ENTIRELY.

Nat's knuckles were white on the handle. She had to get out. NOW. This school was going to be different. The first day was crucial – it determined the rest of your life…