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Opening extract from

Lobsters

Written by

Lucy Ivison, Tom Ellen

Published by

Chicken House

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TOM ELLEN & LUCY IVISON
LOBSTERS

From the Chicken House

I was a hopeless teenager – scared of girls, motorcycle gangs and being asked to do anything practical (not necessarily in that order). If only I'd known some of what Lucy and Tom reveal . . . actually, that would have made it worse – so best you read it for yourself. It's funny, true and wise.

Barry Cunningham
Publisher



TOM ELLEN & LUCY IVISON

LOBSTERS

A socially awkward love story

Chicken House

2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
www.doublecluck.com

Text © Tom Ellen and Lucy Ivison 2014

First published in Great Britain in 2014
The Chicken House
2 Palmer Street
Frome, Somerset, BA11 1DS
United Kingdom
www.doublecluck.com

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Cover and interior design by Helen Crawford-White

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Typeset by Dorchester Typesetting Group Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

The paper used in this Chicken House book is made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

ISBN 978-1-909489-33-2
eISBN 978-1-909489-57-8

For Christina, Kate and Alexie . . .
The Original Dream Team – L. I.

For Carolina – T. E.



1

Hannah

Grace burst into my bedroom with such force that she nearly fell over.

'Freddie isn't in France!' she announced triumphantly, as Tilly came crashing in behind her.

I sat up in bed, where I had been watching videos of baby sloths and tutorials on how to do eyeliner flicks all morning.

'Are you *sure*?' I asked.

'Yes!' Tilly yelled, and started doing a little victory dance on the spot.

'But I stalked him this morning,' I said, 'and there's a picture of him actually standing in front of the Eiffel Tower, holding up a baguette and pretending it's a moustache. He literally couldn't be more in France if he tried.'

'Yeah, he *was* there,' Tilly squealed, 'but then the most amazing thing happened: his house got burgled and they had to come home early!'

'Obviously, it's really bad about his house and everything,' Grace cut in dutifully.

'Yeah, yeah,' Tilly nodded. 'Obviously . . . but the point is . . . he's coming to Stella's tonight. Fact.'

'Fact,' Grace repeated. 'And you are totally going to get with him. Tonight is the night . . .' She crinkled her nose and smiled.

I kicked off the duvet and swung my legs out of bed. 'What? No . . . I'm not ready.'

'You *are* ready,' Grace soothed. 'You are totally in the right place. He's so the right person.'

'No, I don't mean *emotionally* ready. Obviously I'm *emotionally* ready. I mean I'm *literally* not ready. I haven't got out of bed for three days. I look an absolute state.'

'You look like you always do,' Tilly said.

'Thanks, Tills.'

'Seriously, Hannah,' said Grace, 'you've always said Freddie was the one you'd lose it to. The only reason it hasn't happened yet is because you've been on revision lockdown for, like, the last four months.'

'Fate was keeping you apart,' said Tilly, grandly.

'And now fate's brought you back together,' said Grace. 'Have you got any food?'

'Excuse me, I thought we were talking about the role of fate in my life?'

'Yeah but I'm hungry – I can't contemplate fate on an empty stomach.'

I slumped back into bed. 'Go downstairs and have a look, then. My mum hides the biscuits above the microwave.'

They clomped down to the kitchen. Grace was right. I'd put losing my virginity on the back burner until after my A levels. Although 'losing' is such a random word for it. It's not like you're gonna find it under your revision timetable, is it?

I used to dream about losing it to someone fragile and kind. Someone who understood me and was really cool, but didn't care what other people thought of him. Someone with dark, curly hair who tanned really well and spoke Italian. Or maybe *was* Italian.

Freddie Clemence is not fragile, kind *or* Italian. He's not the love of my life. At least, I *hope* he's not, otherwise I won't have much of a life to look forward to. But surely, if everybody held on to their virginity until they found the love of their life, there'd be a lot more virgins roaming round.

Half the problem is that I do the same thing with boys that I do with clothes: I imagine an outfit before I go shopping, rather than just waiting to see what's in the shops when I get there. I daydream scenarios that will never happen. I think about boys falling in love with me who in real life wouldn't look at me. And it's not even me in the daydream; it's this sort of celebrity version of me, all glossy and poised and sexy. I imagine being invited to parties where events play out perfectly. How I'll meet the love of my life and he'll be inexplicably drawn to me and say things like, 'I would die for you, Hannah.' And then we'll have sex in a car like in *Titanic*.

In reality I'm either snogging Freddie in a corner or cleaning up someone else's sick, because I feel bad for the person whose party it is.

But maybe Stella's party will be different. Everyone's finished their exams now so it's going to be massive. Ninety people have accepted the invite on Facebook. And now that Freddie is back early from France, maybe it *is* a sign. Maybe now *is* the right

time. It's not love, but I just need to get sex over with so I can get on with living my life.

Tilly and Grace stomped back up the stairs, and flopped on to my bed, clutching two packets of Hobnobs and a jar of peanut butter.

'I hope you never take Zac down,' Tilly said, staring up at my ceiling. 'He's been there as long as I've known you.'

She was looking at the sticker of Zac Efron I'd put there when I was twelve, so he would be the first thing I saw every morning.

'It's *never* coming down,' I said. 'Zac is my first love. I may have moved on—'

'To Freddie,' Grace interrupted.

'—but he will always have a place in my heart.'

'And your wardrobe,' Tilly said. 'Do you still have that T-shirt with his face on? That was mental.'

'Says you in the Aztec harem pants.'

Tilly swung her legs in the air to show them off. 'I have nothing else to wear. My mum isn't doing any washing because she's on strike. She wants me to learn how to do stuff before uni.'

'Well, you'd better learn quickly,' I said. 'You're never going to meet a boy and get out of no-man's-land dressed like Aladdin.'

Tilly is in hymen limbo. She's the walking undead. A sex zombie. Max Lawrence *did* go inside her, but not all the way and only for a few seconds. She said it hurt too much so he stopped. And then he got off with Amber Mason at a party so Tilly dumped him. She couldn't have known at the time that it was her last chance saloon. She might have given it a better go if she had. But

Tilly's a wimp when it comes to that kind of thing – she almost fainted when she had her HPV.

How can we live in a world where they can identify serial killers from their DNA, but we can't figure out if Tilly's a virgin or not? We've googled it a hundred times but the more you try and research it, the more philosophical the whole thing gets.

Like, what *is* losing your virginity, anyway? When your hymen breaks? But that can happen horse riding or doing gymnastics, or even *swimming* apparently. I could have lost my virginity to Acton Municipal Pool, for all I know. If it's just the hymen thing then what about gay people? It must be the act of someone else being inside you; after all, boys lose their virginity even though nothing breaks. So maybe it's a mystical, intangible thing? Like the Holy Spirit.

Out of all of us, Grace is the only one who has lost her virginity. She fell in love with Ollie last year and they have been inseparable ever since. I don't know how they're going to cope when they go to uni. Grace hasn't told us what having sex actually feels like, though. It's like once you've done it you become unable to speak about it. Can anything be *that* amazing? Maybe nothing feels epic when you're actually living it.

We sprawled out across the bed and started rambling on about other things: what we'd wear to the party and what colour we would dye our hair if we had to pick one colour for the rest of our lives (me: chestnut. Tilly: platinum. Grace: stay the same.). And then conversation inevitably turned to the missing member of the group.

'Do you *really* think she's at his house?'

Tilly was sat on my bed with her legs crossed, eating the peanut butter straight out of the jar with a spoon. She had added my Duke of Edinburgh hoodie to her Aztec look and her long red hair was wound into a topknot.

'Well, she's not here, so . . .' Grace shrugged, as if Stella could only be with us or with Charlie. Maybe that was actually true. It did feel weird that Tilly and Grace were here and she wasn't.

'Of course she's with him,' I said. 'He got back from uni last night. I've been with her every day since exams, but I haven't heard from her today.'

'Well, I think it's a toxic relationship,' Grace said.

I laughed. 'A "toxic relationship"? What do you think this is, *Jeremy Kyle*?'

'You know what I mean,' Grace tutted. 'He's really bad for her. Stella, of all people, could do way better.'

'Yeah, I know,' I said. 'Shit, I'd better tell her about Freddie.' I wrote Stella a text:

WHERE ARE YOU? FREDDIE IS BACK FROM FRANCE AND I THINK TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT!

Sam

It all felt wrong. Totally, utterly, terribly wrong. What the hell were we doing? I decided to ask Robin.

'This feels wrong, man,' I said. 'What are we doing?'

He was kneeling on the wet grass beside the big steel bucket, pressing one final textbook into the mangled mass of textbooks

already squashed inside.

'What are you on about?' he muttered, holding the books in place with one hand while he used the other to retrieve a cigarette lighter from his pocket. 'I think it's pretty obvious what we're doing.'

He sparked the lighter twice to check it was working. It was.

'Yeah, what I mean is it feels wrong to be doing this after what happened this morning,' I said.

'We're celebrating, you idiot.'

'That's my point!' I yelled, as Robin stood up, swatting bits of damp soil off the front of his trousers. 'There's nothing *to* celebrate. I already told you how badly I fucked up French. So, if we're celebrating, then we're celebrating defeat. Who celebrates defeat? It's illogical.'

Robin snorted. 'We're not celebrating defeat *or* victory. We're celebrating *the fact that it's all over*. It doesn't matter how we did – it's the fact that we never have to think about those exams ever again.'

He was way off, there. I'd thought more about that French exam since finishing it that morning than I had in the last six months. Which, to be fair, was probably why I screwed it up so badly. Fucking pluperfect tense. Who needs to go that far back into the past anyway?

Robin clicked the lighter again. 'Right. Let's do this then, shall we?'

This had always been the plan. Back at the start of sixth form, we'd agreed that the day we finished our A levels we'd celebrate by incinerating all our textbooks. It was supposed to

be a cleansing thing; a glorious cathartic bonfire that marked the end of childhood and the start of . . . well, not adulthood exactly, but definitely a step in its general direction.

But, in reality, it was just the two of us standing over a mop bucket in Robin's back garden. If this was the road to adulthood, I was considering turning back.

Robin knelt back down and plunged his hand deep into the bucket to pull out my French textbook. He placed it carefully on top of the pile and held the lighter up at me.

'Here, come on, man. Show those French pricks what you're really made of.'

I shook my head. 'No. I don't feel like it.'

He shrugged. 'Suit yourself.'

He sparked the lighter and held the flame against the corner of the book's cover.

'Why isn't it burning?' he demanded. 'Nothing's happening.'

'It's laminated, you dick.'

The flame was just about managing to turn the plastic-coated corner a faint browny-black colour. If we were going to use this method on every book, we'd be here all day.

'Why the fuck do they laminate them?' snapped Robin, extinguishing the lighter.

'Probably to stop people like us burning them in buckets.'

'Those bastards,' he murmured. 'They're always one step ahead. Maybe we could just burn the inside pages. They're not laminated.'

'Then we'll be left with a bucket full of empty book covers. What are we going to do with all those?'