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Opening extract from **Lobsters**

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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 day-dream 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 brown-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?'

Robin chewed his bottom lip as he considered this. 'We could cut them up into little pieces and bury them? Or put them in a box and throw them in the sea?'

'The sea? We live in London. The sea is at least an hour away.'

'So? I could get my mum to drive us to Brighton when she gets back from work.'

'This is beginning to sound like more hassle than it's worth, to be honest.'

Robin groaned and stood up. 'You need to perk the fuck up, Sam. If you're still like this tonight, then I'm ditching you as soon as we get through the door. End-of-A-levels parties are the best parties ever; that's common knowledge. I'm not having you ruining this one for me by whining on all night. This might come as a surprise to you, given your lack of experience in the area, but girls don't exactly get turned on by blokes constantly complaining about French exams, you know.'

Maybe he was right. Maybe I could look at the French Fuck-up as a positive thing. The beginning of an entirely new and unplanned chapter in my life. No university, no job, no proper conventional future: I could totally reinvent myself, starting this evening.

Robin only heard about the party tonight through his mate Ben, who knew about it via a friend of a friend. So, there was a good chance we wouldn't know *anyone* there. I could become someone else. I could start introducing myself as 'Samuel'. That might make me sound deeper and more intelligent. I could be Samuel the mysterious drifter; Samuel who wears long coats and smokes roll-ups and gazes off into the middle distance

enigmatically during conversations. Rather than plain old Sam, who fails French exams and tries to burn plastic books.

The problem is, you have to have done something with your life before you can start going around calling yourself Samuel. You have to have *achieved* something. Samuel Beckett, Samuel L. Jackson, Dad's mate Samuel who drives a Porsche and used to go out with Nigella Lawson: they've all earned the right to those extra letters. What have I ever done? Won a Year 9 essay contest and fingered Gemma Bailey in a gazebo. I'm hardly in line for a knighthood.

I'd always thought that getting into Cambridge would be my big achievement. But now that I'd screwed up French – and I definitely *had* – I was going to have to find something else instead. I just had no idea what.

You won't find many virgins called Samuel, that's for sure. You remain a Sam until you get past fingering, I reckon. Or at least past gazebos.

Robin picked up the bucket and stomped off towards the house.

'Right, let's just give the fuckers to Oxfam and be done with it,' he muttered.

Hannah

Stella and I were sitting at the bus stop where we had sat hundreds of times before. Except this time I was in extreme pain.

‘I’ve been mutilated. I think I’m in medical shock,’ I said. ‘Have you got any sugar?’

Stella handed me a packet of Starmix. ‘It’s just hair,’ she said. ‘You don’t say you’ve been mutilated when you go to the hairdresser, do you?’

‘Yeah, but what happened to me *in there* was not like what happens at the hairdresser.’

Stella had booked me in to have my bikini line waxed as soon as she had found out Freddie was not only back but coming to her party.

‘Hannah, honestly, it’s just because it’s your first time. Shit, all your first times are happening at once,’ she announced, slightly too loudly.

The lady next to us shot a disapproving glance in our direction, and I winced.

Across from the bus stop is a gigantic H&M poster of a model in a neon pink-and-white string bikini. She looks amazing, all impossibly long and brown and perfect. The poster has been there for ages. Looking at it used to make me feel quietly excited. Because that was going to be me. I was going to go running and do my mum’s Davina DVD and wake up having morphed into an H&M campaign version of myself. But, obviously, none of that had happened, and I looked just the same as always.

‘I’m going to buy that bikini for Kavos,’ Stella said.

We were going away together in a week, and I wasn’t prepared at all.

‘She’s definitely had her bikini line waxed,’ I said, nodding at the poster, ‘and it *definitely* wasn’t her first time.’

Stella shrugged and got out her phone, probably to text Charlie. She wasn't intimidated by the model in the bikini because she is effortlessly cool. She's petite, olive-skinned, naturally sexy and mysterious, and boys always fancy her. She loves video games and blokey films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Scarface*. Her dark brown hair is dyed with random bits of lilac, and last summer she got a snowflake tattooed on her wrist. You can't see it in winter, but it appears when she tans. Out of all of us, she is the closest to H&M girl.

Me, Tilly and Grace don't even come anywhere near. Tilly is tall and willowy with freckles. Her hair is her best feature. It's straight out of a pre-Raphaelite painting, auburn and flowing with curls at the end. Grace used to be plain until sixth form but, like my mum says, she has 'really blossomed', especially since she stopped wearing massive shapeless jumpers as her everyday look.

I think it's really hard to see yourself how other people do. I have naturally blonde hair, pale blue eyes to match my pale skin and a totally average body. On a good day people might call me pretty. On a really good day.

The bus came and Stella strode to the back while I waddled slowly behind her, trying to keep the burning pain around my minge to a minimum.

'You're walking like an old person,' Stella said as we sat down.

'Well, it hurts.'

She rolled her eyes.

I wanted to ask her about Charlie Allen, about *her* virginity and what was going on between them. She is a virgin *by choice*,

which is a distinct category from just being a virgin. She has done everything *but* with Charlie. He is her fuck buddy without the actual fucking part. Or the blowjob part because that totally grosses Stella out. He's fit, but behind her back we all say he's a prick who's using her. We know he deals drugs but we don't talk about it. She says she's happy with the way things are between them, but I don't think that's really true.

I can't ask her though, because the whole her-and-Charlie thing is a no-go area. She'll never admit there's a problem, so we all have to pretend there isn't one. She can ask any of us anything, but we are not allowed to do the same back. Stella is just different like that; she's a closed book.

She is also the kind of person who just has house parties and is relaxed about it. Her parents have gone to France for the whole summer. You would think she would want to go with them, but she never does. This is the second summer they have let her stay home alone. They get her Marks & Spencer food delivered every week and transfer her pocket money by direct debit.

'Are you still getting a bob?' Stella asked.

'I don't know. I don't know if I'm brave enough.'

'You are way too uptight about hair.'

'Yeah, well, I need to do a lot of things before uni.'

Stella got out her phone again. 'Shall we consult the list?'

Last month, deep in revision hell, we had made an action plan of all the things we had to do before uni.

""Hannah", ' Stella read out. ""Fall in love and lose virginity". Well . . . one of those is getting ticked off pretty quickly. . . OK, next we've got, "Get an amazing body. Get good at fake tanning.

Get a new look. Get a bob. Practise having slow mannerisms to appear more enigmatic. Be less giggly and more intellectual.”

I groaned. ‘Oh god, there’s so much to do. Can you add “Cope with failing history” to the list?’

‘OK, you might need to prioritize. What about just getting a bob and sleeping with Freddie?’

I sighed and fished a fried egg out of the Starmix bag. I don’t know when everything got so complicated. Eighteen is supposed to be the age when you become an adult. When you are complete. How can anyone feel finished by now? I don’t even feel started. I haven’t done anything, I haven’t been anywhere. Everyone around me seems so sorted. It feels like suddenly it’s the norm to be in a long-term relationship. To be having sex like it’s no big deal, and have had your bikini line waxed to do it. It’s like so much has changed since Year 10, but then at the same time nothing has. Sometimes I wish I could be fourteen again and just not worry about all this stuff. About what people think of me, and how I come across in social situations. When every weekend we used to sleep over at Stella’s house and eat ice cream and drink cups of tea. I hate it that now people are constantly expecting me to have become something. And like I’m a failure because I just haven’t. Everything seems like it was easier in *Pride and Prejudice*. My nan was married at eighteen. Married. I can’t even operate an iron.

When we finally got to Stella’s house, I went straight up to the bathroom to fully assess the horror beneath my knickers. As if it wasn’t enough having pale red legs with veins showing through and weird albino blonde hair and looking like a hobbit wife, I

was now also deformed.

I didn't tell Mum where I was going because that would have been weird. I know for a fact there are some things she would never do. Like blowjobs and polyester clothing and KFC. I would bet a lot of money she has never had her bikini line waxed.

I can see why people become feminists now. All those years of PSHE telling us about crabs and the UN and mind-maps. Why didn't Miss Smart just get up and say, 'As well as voting and learning to drive and being a good citizen, one day you will have to go into a room and put on a pair of knickers made of tracing paper and let a woman you have never met before pour hot wax on your minge.'

It looked like a raw, bloodied chicken with a Mohican. And I was supposed to be losing my virginity *tonight*.

Sam

Chris bounded up the stairs two by two. We heard him coming about a minute before he opened Robin's bedroom door. He stood on the threshold, beaming at me with his arms outstretched.

'Yes, Sammy! The boy's finally all done and dusted!' He yanked me towards him and gave me a lung-busting bear hug.

He and Robin had both finished their final exams three days ago, so Chris was clearly eager to have another 'last day' to celebrate. He hadn't yet heard about the French fiasco. I almost couldn't face telling him.

It was a few hours after the (attempted) book-burning, and the three of us had agreed to meet at Robin's before heading to the party. I'd gone home to change, but hadn't actually done much more than put on a fresh T-shirt. I was still wearing my busted-up trainers with gaffer tape holding the soles in place. On answering the door to me, Robin had looked me up and down, groaned and told me that girls didn't usually respond well to the 'tramp vibe'.

Chris, on the other hand, looked annoyingly good, despite the fact he'd also clearly made no effort whatsoever. He was wearing a shabby chequered shirt and the same jeans he'd had since Year 10. His bushy, black hair was even wilder than usual and he hadn't even bothered to shave the patches of stubble that were dotted across his cheeks. When you're as good-looking as Chris, you don't have to bother with decent clothes or a hairbrush. You're beyond all that.

'So, what time are we off?' he asked, releasing me from the hug and slapping me hard on the back once more for good measure.

Robin wrinkled his forehead, disdainfully. 'Chill out, mate. It's only half past five.'

'Yeah, but we need to buy booze first.'

'Yes,' said Robin, reaching into his wardrobe and flinging practically every T-shirt he owned on to his bed. 'But before that, I need to decide what to wear.'

Chris exhaled loudly and collapsed into a nearby chair. Robin stood over the mountain of clothing with his hands on his hips, like a football manager about to pick his first eleven.

‘So, how we all doing, then?’ said Chris, as I slumped down into the chair next to him.

‘I’m doing fine,’ Robin replied, selecting a garish green polo shirt from the pile, and sniffing it gingerly before tossing it away. ‘But Sam’s being a mardy-arsed knobhead.’

Chris frowned and put his hand on my shoulder. ‘Oh dear. It’s not Jo again, is it?’

I shook his hand off. ‘No, of course it’s not Jo. I haven’t talked about her in weeks.’

I saw Robin and Chris exchange raised eyebrows. I had talked about Jo almost all of yesterday. And the day before.

‘It’s his fucking French exam,’ said Robin.

Chris clicked his tongue against his teeth and turned to me. ‘Shit, man. What happened?’

‘I just screwed it up, that’s all,’ I shrugged. ‘Like I knew I would.’

‘Come on, man,’ Chris smiled. ‘It can’t have been that bad. And anyway, it’s over now. Tonight, you need to forget about exams and Jo and *everything*, and actually try to enjoy yourself for once.’

‘Thank you,’ said Robin, gesturing at Chris but looking at me. ‘That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you, you grumpy twat. Now . . .’ He held up a purple T-shirt bearing the slogan ‘THE LIVER IS EVIL AND MUST BE PUNISHED’. ‘Shall I stick this one on the “maybe” pile?’

‘If “maybe” is short for “maybe burn immediately”, then yes,’ I muttered.

Robin sighed. ‘Christopher, perhaps you’d like to join me over

here by the wardrobe, and we can leave Sam to sulk in peace while we select an appropriate shirt.'

Chris laughed and slouched over, leaving me sat grumpily in the corner, trying, and failing, to forget about exams and Jo and *everything*.

Jo. I sometimes wonder if I actually liked Jo. I mean, obviously I liked her enough to talk about her a lot (probably too much, in hindsight), and write that poem (also, admittedly, a mistake), but I'm still not sure if I *liked her* liked her, you know?

Sometimes I think I was only obsessing about her because it's just nice to have some to obsess about. Every time I got the slightest suspicion that she might fancy me back, I started to focus on the things that made me question how much I liked her. Like the fact that she's ever so slightly cross-eyed, or that when I first asked what her name was short for, she looked confused and said, 'So I can remember it, I suppose.'

Then, as soon as she lost interest in me and started flirting with Jeremy Marsh again, I was straight back to imagining what it would be like to wake up next to her. It's all a bit of a cliché, really. But then, I suppose clichés wouldn't be clichés if they weren't based on some sort of tediously predictable truth.

This was all academic now anyway, since she'd started going out with Toby McCourt from the year above. *Toby McCourt. Toby.*

Let's not beat around the bush: Toby is a dog's name. I've known at least three dogs called Toby. And not even proper dogs, either; I'm talking rubbish, ratty little Paris-Hilton-handbag ones. I don't think I'm overreacting when I say that kissing some-

one with a dog's name is bordering on bestiality. It's only a short step from dating a boy called Toby to marrying a man called Fido.

Anyway, fuck it. It was only four months of my life wasted. Thank God I never showed her the poem. If Robin's reaction was anything to go by, she would have laughed Magners out of her nostrils and fallen on the floor.

On the other side of the room, the 'maybe' pile was down to just two items: Chris's vote was for a plain white Lacoste polo shirt. Robin was gunning for an unspeakable turquoise T-shirt emblazoned with a picture of an evil clown holding his middle finger aloft. And, since it was Robin who had the final say, the clown shirt won.

'Why did you even ask for my advice if you weren't going to take it?' asked Chris, flopping back into the chair beside mine.

'It's always useful to have a second opinion,' said Robin, hurling the nice, inoffensive Lacoste shirt back into his wardrobe. 'Even if that second opinion happens to be totally wrong.'

Chris shot me a glance through narrowed eyes, which I duly returned as Robin unloaded half a can of Lynx Africa over his horrendous clown shirt. I don't really know why I listen to Robin sometimes. He's my best mate and everything, but he can be a bit of a twat. He applied to Loughborough Uni, but he doesn't seem to care whether he gets in because he's taking a year off to 'focus on his beatboxing'.

I especially don't know why I listen to him about girls. He has some fairly odd theories. He's always banging on about ears, for some reason. He reckons ears are the best bits on a girl. He once

rejected Vicky Parker on the grounds that she had 'shit ears'. His words, not mine. Her ears look all right to me, although I prefer her face and body and tits. Obviously her tits are part of her body, but I feel they deserve special mention. Vicky Parker is ridiculously hot. I told Robin he was talking bollocks about all this ears stuff, but he just laughed smugly, did a sort of faraway look, and told me I wouldn't understand.

When it comes down to it, that's the worst thing about not having done it yet. The fact that everyone who *has* done it suddenly thinks they're Russell fucking Brand. They think they can literally say *anything* about sex, and us wide-eyed virgins have to humour them because we can't even begin to imagine what it's like.

Robin shagged a French girl with a shaved head from the *lycée* round the corner from our school. He only did it once. He got a bit of stick for the shaved head thing, but he dealt with it quite well, I thought. I suppose he liked the confidence she showed in fully displaying her ears, rather than covering them up with hair like most girls. To be fair, she *did* have pretty amazing ears.

Chris has done it three times. With three different girls. But then, he is six weeks older than me. And about ten times better looking. I know for a fact he's known as Fit Chris among most of the girls in the neighbouring schools. Even my mum's friends giggle and go red when they see him. And they're in their forties. It's ridiculous. Before he lost his virginity, Chris was never bothered about it, though. Nothing bothers him really. He's the most laid-back person I know.

‘Right,’ said Robin, pulling his triumphant T-shirt over his head, and checking his reflection in the mirror. ‘That’s that sorted.’

‘Finally,’ said Chris, springing back up. ‘Shall we go and get the booze now?’

‘Are you joking?’ laughed Robin, reaching into his wardrobe and hurling two armfuls of trainers across his bed. ‘I’ve still got to decide on my shoes.’

Chris crumpled back down into the chair, head in his hands.