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Opening extract from

Me and Mr J

Written by

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RACHEL McINTYRE

ME & MR J





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January

JANUARY 1ST

Q. What do you give the fifteen-year-old girl with no social life?

A. *A diary!*

Looks like someone did their Christmas shopping in the Ironic Gifts Department this year, eh, Gran?

Happy New Year!

JANUARY 5TH

First day back at school after the Christmas hols and things were not great.

Actually, that's such a massive understatement, it's probably visible from the moon, like the Great Wall of China. Or Graham Flett's arse.

Bumped into Fat Flett on my way to karate last night, so at least I was expecting combat-themed 'banter' from him and his twatty mates on the bus this morning. And I certainly got it. Yep, a whole twenty-five fun-packed minutes of 'Behold the Ginger Ninja!' and comedy karate chops.

Hilarious.

But, as everyone knows, an MP3 player is a bullied girl's best friend and that's why my iPod is my God. Music–1 Abusive Boys–0.

The bus pulled up and, after one last *chop suuuuuey!* from some random lad, they all swarmed off to their school and I escaped into mine.

Molly and Mikaela were already in registration, verbally stirring the cauldron of bitchiness. *Maybe they'll pick on someone else? Just for once?* No chance. The word 'Lara' floated over and my suspicions were confirmed: today was *definitely* going to be a Bleak Day.

When break came, Mrs Muirhouse turfed me out of the cloakroom where I'd been cosying up to a friendly radiator. So, there I was, shivering to death on my own

in the yard when the witches of form 11G materialised before me.

'Hi, Lara,' said Molly in the warm, friendly manner of a talking shark. Immediately my hackles rose. (Metaphorically that is. Physically, I'm not sure I even have hackles.) 'I wanted to tell you I spoke to your mum yesterday when she came to clean our house. Did you know she's started working for my parents?' Cue sycophantic laughter from Mikaela. 'Weird, isn't it? Next time I'm in my new en suite doing, whatever, I'll be thinking of *your mum*.'

'Lara's mum's a scrubber!' shouted Mikaela and they all fell about laughing.

Mikaela Walker, you are a comic genius. I. Literally Split. My. Sides.

Of course, a *true* Ginger Ninja would have pulled herself up to her full five foot ten at this point and obliterated Molly with a killer windpipe chop. But I couldn't even manage a killer one-liner. *Hopeless*.

Former Best Friend Forever Chloe-the-Turncoat crept over when Molly wasn't looking.

'Hey, Lara.'

'What do you want?'

'Just saying don't let Molly and Mikaela wind you up.

Being a cleaner is nothing to be ashamed of. Honestly. I mean, it's not like she's a *prostitute*.'

???!!

'Anyway, don't take it personally, they're only having a laugh.' And with that she snuck off furtively, like she was being tailed by the FBI.

What a total hypocrite she is. *Prostitute*! She's known my mum since we were in reception.

Oh, Chloe Stubbs. We were like sisters, you and me. Years and years of best friendness at primary then ecstatic when we both passed the girls' school exam. Inseparable at guides / pony club / karate and then, halfway through Year 9, *poof!* you vanished. No more hanging out at school, no more clubs.

No more being best friends.

Looking back, the signs were there, I just didn't read them: ignoring my texts; not picking up when I rang; disappearing every dinner time . . . I bet the whole class was laughing behind my back for weeks.

Never been dumped by a boy (as never had a boyfriend), so I don't know if that's worse, but being chucked by your best friend is preeeetty gutting. Particularly when she ditches you for someone as mind-meltingly inane as Molly Hardy-Jones. No kidding,

I've had *socks* with sparkier personalities.

Even now I find it mystifying that Chloe turned into this gold-digging airhead. Molly clicked her (acrylic gel-tipped) fingers and my best friend gave me the elbow quicker than you can say 'check out my new en suite'.

Anyway, Mrs Murphy took pity on me at dinner, letting me do some shelving in the library which meant I didn't have to brave the yard again. But it was BIG LAUGHS all round at the bus stop later so v. glad I had my iPod to drown their stupid voices out.

Yeah, so my mum's a cleaner. Big effing deal. At least she works for a living, unlike yours, Molly, who despite being a lazy, sorry, *lady* of leisure, can't be bothered to get off her bony backside to pick up a duster once in a while.

These are tough times. It wasn't Mum's life goal to be a cleaner, but after the business went under, it was that or starve. Seriously think she and Dad aged about ten years in six months. And not just because the business flatlined. Selling the house was definitely the lowest of the low points. Standing on the drive in a family hug; Simon not really getting it; Mum trying to act brave; Dad promising it's only temporary.

But two years later it looks pretty permanent to me.

And that's why, far from being ashamed of her job, I am actually *proud* that my mum cleans your house, Molly Hardy-Jones. Because when she picks your skanky knickers up off your bedroom floor, she is doing it to keep me, my dad and my brother going. Meaning she is a star not a scrubber.

So screw you, Molly Hardy-Jones, and your new en suite. My mum is the Queen of Clean and she rocks her rubber gloves like a GODDESS. And if you EVER leave your dirty pants lying about for her to deal with, I swear I will stuff each and every pair in your big fat gob.

PS Molly's got her own en suite. Me and Simon share a flannel. There literally is no justice.

JANUARY 8TH

Simple Simon (aka World's Dumbest Kid Brother) stuck a knife in the toaster and ripped its guts out while I was making the tea tonight. *Then* he tried to stick his tongue in a light fitting, blowing all the fuses in the house (including Dad's), which meant when Mum got in from work, the three of us were a) starving and b) blundering about in pitch-darkness.

Never mind 'ass', Simon is an omni-pain in the brain, body and soul. He surpassed 'ass' at about eighteen months. Hard to believe it now, but when he was first born I *loved* playing Big Sis. Taking him out in his pram, blowing raspberries on his tummy, dressing him up like a doll.

Ha! How times have changed. He has belonged to Satan since the minute he learned to talk. No matter how much I threaten him, his mouth is ALWAYS on full volume while his brain's turned way, way down. And the little freak constantly gets me into grief.

Like tonight: instead of dealing directly with her delinquent spawn, as any normal mother would, Mum had a right go at *me*.

We are currently stuck on a loop, like that film *Groundhog Day*, except ours is called *Everything is Lara's Fault Day*. OK, Mother, totally get you work hard, are sole breadwinner, etc., but STOP TAKING OUT YOUR MOODS ON ME.

Tonight's variation on the theme: beef Hula Hoops.

'What's this all over the carpet?'

'Could be Hula Hoops. Simon had a packet earlier.'

'First the electric's off and now the place is a pigsty,' Mum snapped. 'I am sick to death of coming home to

this every night.' She poked at the crumbs with her foot. 'Look! Right the way up the stairs. It's like sharing the bloody house with Hansel and Gretel.'

'Er, yeah, they're not my crisps. Tell him, not me.'

'It's your responsibility to make sure things are straight; you're the eldest.'

'That is so unfair. I have to do *everything*.'

'Lara, Simon is *six years old*. And anyway, he does his share.'

!!!!

I clattered the hoover out of the kitchen cupboard and naturally I did tut, sigh and roll my eyes while I was doing it, of course I did.

Simon 'does his share' round the house? What a joke. You can count the number of times Simon's 'done his share' on the fingers of an oven glove.

More to the point, why isn't she nagging Dad to 'do his share'? I mean, if we're getting technical here, isn't *he* the eldest?

I am up at five every day delivering newspapers in arctic conditions, while he's still snoring his head off upstairs. (A job I do, let's not forget, so I can pay for karate and other stuff myself, thus sparing them extra expense.)

Then, after school, I've got ten GCSEs to study

for. With the way they go on about the FINANCIAL SACRIFICES they've made for my education, they should see my exams as the Holy Grail. But no. My parents think *clean carpets* are more important.

Meanwhile, Simple Simon gets away with murder and Dad gets to spend his days brooding on the sofa like some TV-obsessed, housework-shy troll.

He's unemployed FFS, what else has he got to do?

JANUARY 10TH

WTF?! Massive shock in English today. Surely Mrs Gill's idea of a good time in bed is the complete Jane Austen and a hobnob?

Well, apparently not. Turns out she's going on maternity leave till September.

Bombshell though that may be, the *real* headline news is the cover teacher they've drafted in. Imagine Edward Cullen and Mr Darcy rolled into one. Well, that does not even come *close* to the glorious gorge-ness of Mr Ben Jagger. And it wasn't just me who noticed either: the poor guy was nearly knocked to the floor by 11G's collective fake-eyelash fluttering. Even treat-'em-mean Molly tossed her hair extensions so hard I thought

she'd dislocate her neck. (Sadly, no.)

Anyway, Mr Jagger kicked off his lesson with, 'Right then . . . OK then . . .' and mucho throat-clearing. But once he'd got past the nerves (understandable given the whole class was eyeing him like a starving dog shown a chop), he was excellent and it was BY MILES the best English lesson I've ever had. He'd prepped this interactive video stuff on medieval Verona that was so absolutely brilliant even Thicky Mikaela was mesmerised.

Plus! Not just English, he's our form tutor too, so pleeenty of opportunities afoot to gaze upon his gorgeness.

Never thought I would write these words, but *I am looking forward to going to school tomorrow*!

JANUARY 11TH

Registration was like being backstage at *Next Top Model* this morning. Obviously, we already had the competitive bulimia and bitching, but Mr Jagger's sudden appearance has sent the class glamour stakes stratospheric. Some hardcore make-up bag raids were in evidence and I admit I am just as guilty: nearly missed the bus I spent that long trying to de-bush my hair.

Honestly, he could be a top model himself. Tall, but not gangly stick-insect-esque like me, more sporty and fit, with floppy boy-band hair doing a cool this-is-just-the-way-it-goes vibe, not a posing-in-front-of-the-mirror style. His eyes are amazing too, light green with brown flecks in (*think* so anyway – I need to confirm via a closer look) and a tan like he spends his summers on a surfboard somewhere exotic.

He belongs on a catwalk or the set of an Australian soap. *Definitely* not in a classroom filled with drooling girls. No exaggeration, the whole school is Jagger-struck.

Mr Jagger, Sir: you are a bucketload of glitter sprinkled on a cowpat and you don't even know it. In fact, today you performed possibly the greatest miracle of the twenty-first century: your presence made a day at Huddersfield Girls' High School pleasant.

Well, *almost* pleasant anyway, because the 'your mum's a scrubber' comments kept coming thick and fast. (But since Mikaela started it, mainly thick. Ha ha.)

What can I do? I've tried cultivating deaf-rhinoceros-in-Teflon skin and I've tried answering back, but neither works. If I show a flicker of response, it's like diving into shark-infested waters . . . while wearing a wetsuit made of ham.

Suicidal feeding frenzy.

Rang Emma tonight. Miss her so much. Her moving miles away is the worst knock-on effect of the business folding. More like losing a sister than a cousin. Can't blame Uncle Andy for going though. Nothing left for them here, was there?

Buuut, can't help selfishly wishing Em was still around, especially as the Mean Girls seem to be ramping things up lately. I could do with some local support.

'Molly's always been a bit of a cow. And a complete snob,' she said. 'Chloe will wake up and smell the bullshit soon, don't worry.'

'Maybe . . .' I said, not that convinced. 'How's college?'

She went straight into a rambly story about this 'kick-ass' night out she'd had with a guy from her psychology class. Then how 'awesome' her new part-time job in Topshop is. And how she's going to Florida with Uncle Andy and Auntie Amanda; the new firm is expanding *again* because apparently solar panels are booming in Essex.

So I listened, and really I'm 100% thrilled life is treating her so brilliantly because I love her and she entirely deserves it.

Then, when we'd said bye, I headed downstairs to watch telly. But Mum and Dad were having another one of their hushed rows about money (i.e. lack of) in the lounge. So I made a piece of toast and went back to my freezing, minuscule bedroom, and sat there on my own, feeling sad.

JANUARY 14TH

Newsflash! It's official: Mr Jagger is ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!

Reason 1

OK, so today we're reading *Romeo and Juliet* when he says, 'Right, we're going to do this next activity in pairs. Can you divide yourselves up, please?'

Pairs. The word strikes fear in my heart. Will someone *die* in the scramble not to work with Lara T, Queen of the Untouchables?

And it's not only me. Pairs are tricky for the Weird Sisters: you know – two's evil company but three's a crowd, etc. The word 'pairs' is a guillotine blade ready to drop. Mikaela and Former Best Friend Forever Chloe are visibly panicking. *Who will Molly pick? Who will she*

choose? Don't pick her, pick me!! Aaarrggghh!

What they should do is work together and leave Miss Molly flying solo, but they're too dim to see that. Plus it's pretty obvious beneath the besties act that they completely despise each other. Anyway, after a few seconds, Mikaela's lonesome brain cell lumbers to life and she pipes up, 'Sir, how many in each group?'

Mr J managed to keep a straight face while he said, 'Two, please,' in a perfectly normal voice. But he saw me watching him and raised his eyebrows a tiny bit as he caught my eye. Then he kind of shrugged *What is she like?* Entirely, solely at ME. Ha!

Next, when the class (as is the custom in 11G) left me *alone, alone, all, all alone*, instead of forcing me into a group like Mrs Gill always does, he went, 'OK, Lara, you can work with me.'

Got to spend five minutes doing character maps with him and he seemed v. impressed that I knew so much about the play already. The stuff he said was properly interesting AND it gave me the perfect opportunity to confirm that his eyes *do* have amber flecks in them. Amber or hazel anyway. Dark honey-coloured.

That aside, he is so fantastically brilliant at explaining stuff that I learned more about Romeo and Juliet & Co

in those five minutes than I have in the last five weeks. (Sorry, Mrs G, but it's true.)

Reason 2

Home-time and I was waiting for the Hellbus, minding my own business, when Molly saw me give my head a totally innocent scratch.

She smirked, shouting out, 'Urgh, Lara, have you got nits *again*?' which was followed by mass shrieks and a stampede as the girls nearest to me fled. At least the boys' school hadn't let out yet, so I was spared that added humiliation.

Of course I don't have nits. For the record, I had them *once* in Year 7 (caught from Simple Simon). But somehow Molly has managed to weave this isolated episode into some tedious non-joke that I'm a walking bug motel.

'I can see them jumping on your head!' she yelled from the 'safety' of further up the road.

'No you can't because I DON'T HAVE THEM,' I called back. But no one was listening; all too busy laughing while I shrank deeper and deeper into my blazer.

Now, if my life was a fairy tale, I'd write here that a handsome knight on a snowy-white steed galloped up, swept me into his arms and rode me off into the

magnificent sunset. But I'm no princess and it was a beat-up silver car with Mr Jagger rolling the window down. Not complaining though: who'd want a horse in this traffic?

'Is everything OK?' he said, instantly drawing Molly straight to the car, a couple of cronies close behind.

'Hiya, Sir,' she said, flashing her teeth, sticking her boobs out and flicking her hair extensions. 'Have you come to pick me up then?'

The others giggled. Not me. I was too stunned she'd managed to do four things simultaneously.

'Nice try, Molly,' he said. 'But no. I wanted to know what's going on. I saw all these people running off and . . . Lara?'

'Oh, it's nothing, Sir. Just waiting for the bus,' I mumbled.

The rest of the girls had drifted back one by one and were watching us. Mr J looked at me for a few seconds longer, then nodded. 'OK, well, if you're sure everything's OK, Lara. See you tomorrow.'

And he sputtered off in his knackered little car, smoke billowing from the exhaust.

Wow! Can't believe he stopped. That is the nicest thing a teacher has ever done for me. None of the others

have bothered to step in before. Or maybe they've just never noticed the way people treat me. Not everyone needs a cloak to be invisible, do they?

Molly looked a bit put out, but at least she shut up and left me alone. Then the boys' school came out and a gang of girls made this faux-squeamish deal of not sitting next to me, but bollocks to them. Least I got a seat. Normally it's standing room only. They keep promising us a bus for each school. Can't wait. The girls are bearable-ish, but the boys are industrial-strength knobs.

Anyway, I stuck my headphones in and starting reading a book Mr J recommended called *I Capture the Castle*. But it was hard to concentrate because all I could think about was him turning up out of nowhere at *exactly* the right moment.

Mum and Dad are stressing over the rent arrears downstairs and, as I can't take another ounce of money's-too-tight-to-mention tension, am taking refuge in my room. Again.

Still can't stop thinking about Mr J. He's kind, clever, good-looking, funny, sporty, loves to read – the guy pretty much full-houses my dream boyfriend wish list.

Depressing really. What are the chances of meeting someone my own age like that?

Slim.

And of him fancying me back?

Ha! *Skeletal*.

JANUARY 17TH

Following on from the *gasp!* shocking revelation that my mum is *gasp!* a cleaner, the Ginger Apartheid Movement has gathered momentum and I appear to have now made the transition from mocked-but-tolerated to actively shunned.

The evidence? Registration this morning and a pink envelope appears on every desk. Every girl pulls out a pink glittery card. The room is buzzing. Every girl is giddy with anticipation. Every girl except me.

Why?

Because I am the ONLY member of Form 11G that hasn't been invited to back-stabbing former BFF Chloe Stubbs's 'Sweet Sixteen Celebration'.

(Pink glitter! Un. Be. Lievable. We had matching *PINK STINKS!* badges on our blazers in Year 8!)

Anyone else's party and I wouldn't even be that arsed, but this is Chloe giving me the *unclean, unclean* social leper treatment. And I don't get why; not really.

Yeah, I realise I was never hanging with the cool kids, but me and Chloe got on great until Molly wormed her way between us. Even the girls we used to knock about with like Kayleigh and Eden have drifted over to Team Molly along with Chloe. They're never mean or bitchy, it's more like I don't exist any more.

I am the Invisible Woman.

And the mystery remains: why has Molly got it in for me on such an epic scale?

As far as I'm aware, it's not an actual crime to be intelligent or ginger or have a stupid surname or a mum who cleans (even though Molly seems to think it is). What is it with her? Does she think being poor is catching? *Caution! Friendship with Lara T may result in fatal outbreaks of Primark, Pot Noodles and pound shops.* Stuck-up cow.

And now today's little stab looks like last-nail-in-the-coffin time. *Everyone* gets an invite to the pink puke fest apart from me and the only hint of a silvery lining was that Mr Jagger had a meeting so he didn't witness my shame.

Later . . . Just had a Facebook message from Chloe aka The Traitor.

Hey Lara! I hope you don't mind about the party but I knew it wouldn't be your sort of thing. I did want you to come,

honestly, but I think it might be better if we do something on our own another time instead? Love Chloe xx

Get this, right. I am in the middle of typing *No worries! I know you were only thinking of me* when a flock of flying pigs pass over the house and knock the 3G out.

What are the chances . . .?!

JANUARY 19TH

Brrrr! Mum and Dad have announced we're on yet another economy drive, so the heating's off tonight. I want to know exactly what there is left to economise on. We live the no-frills life in our house as it is. Are we going to feed Simon to the dog? Start rationing the bathwater? Hmmm, I'd rather not add 'I stink' to The List.

The *Why Lara T is Queen of the Untouchables* List

- I'm ginger
- I'm poor
- I'm a geek
- I have the Surname of Shame
- My mum cleans for a living

And coming soon . . .

- I stink

Seriously worried I am becoming worse than Untouchable. Is there a lower caste, one even the Untouchables look down on?

Joke: *What did one Untouchable say to the other Untouchable?*

'At least we're not Lara T!' Ha ha!

Anyway, the further 'austerity measures' mean I haven't dared ask about getting a new school skirt, despite the fact this one is almost gynaecologically indecent. Short skirts might always be in fashion, but freezing your twinkle to a bus shelter will never catch on.

Oh, PLEASE don't let us be poor for much longer. When will we be able to afford new clothes? Heating? Fruit?

Hmm. Sounding v. ungrateful bitch-esque here, which I so am not. Am I demanding caviar in a gold dish on my private yacht? *Nooo*. And I am fully aware that

Mum's cleaning and the money left over from selling the house isn't stretching as far as they'd hoped AND that it's my school fees sucking the last few quid out of their savings account.

But I can't help pining for how it was before everything went down the toilet. Dying to have the little things again. Satellite telly, weekends away, family trips to the cinema, clothes shopping . . . the stuff I completely took for granted.

Stuff we could probably still have (now and then) if it weren't for the FINANCIAL SACRIFICES they make because we have to keep Genius Lara at her Good Private School (the irony!). Mum, Dad and Simon – we'd *all* have better lives if it wasn't for my stupid school fees which, even with the 50% braniac bursary, are astronomical. Wasn't easy to pay when we actually had money, but now we're on the breadline, well, it explains the economy overdrive.

And that's why I can't tell them how much I hate school, no matter how bad it gets. Throw the massive FINANCIAL SACRIFICES back in their faces, would you? Selfish, ungrateful bitchcow of a daughter.

Could never confess this to anyone, especially Dad, but I was almost relieved when he and Uncle Andy gave

up the fight. Obviously, that was misery on toast, but it meant the tension stopped – that horrible scrabbling on a cliff edge thing with the pair of them constantly up and down to the bank, begging for more time. Once they'd given up and the house had gone to pay the debts, at least the uncertainty was over.

I may actually cry if I think about this much longer. Soooo . . .

Yay! (drum roll) The weekend has arrived at last, full of thrilling possibilities: parties, premieres, paper rounds . . .

Thank God no one has any of the Sunday whoppers round here, I can barely lift the bag as it is. I bet Molly's parents get *The Times;* they probably order five copies and spring-load the letterbox just to taunt their paper girl.

Not that Molly could actually read it of course. She's far too dumb.

JANUARY 22ND

Karate was excellent tonight and I cannot wait for the day when I Jackie Chan the bejesus out of everyone who annoys me at school. *Hiiii yaaaaah! Chop*.

Went round to Gran's after with the shopping and had a cup of tea. She did wake up briefly for the Sky Sports headlines, but mainly I ate choccy digestives and broiled myself on the central heating. Mmmmm, warmth: how I miss you, old friend. Mum and Dad are still point-blank refusing to turn the heating on (fuel costs blah bills blah money blah) so only a pair of thermal socks and dreams of Mr J came between me and hypothermia last night.

On a brighter note (hallelujah and praise the Lord), I'm currently enjoying a respite schoolwise because Molly is so *entirely* obsessed with the lovely Mr J that flirting with/ talking about him consumes all her time.

Typical conversation of the day

Molly: I'm off for a sandwich. You coming?

Mikaela: What do you reckon Mr Jagger's favourite sandwich is – egg and cress?

Chloe: No, that's too gay. Tuna salad?

Molly: Salad? No chance. He's a proper man. It'll be ham and mustard, something like that. Hot. Meaty. Little bit spicy.

Aaaand so on.

Gay sandwiches, eh? Who knew?

Ever since Molly had her hamster-to-human brain

swap, when she's distracted (e.g. by sunflower seeds, hibernating, fancying the hot new English teacher, etc.), there are no spare neurons available to monitor other activity. Which means I can slip under her radar for a bit. Not so much as a single ginger jibe all day. Result!

Now if only a fit teacher could start at the boys' school then maybe the bus lot would leave off for a bit too. Tonight at home-time some lad I've never even laid eyes on before was loudly jabbering on in my direction about 'kick a ginger day'. I plugged my iPod in to ignore him, assuming he was making it up, but a quick Google confirmed it later. A dedicated ginger-bashing day does indeed exist. You can even buy commemorative mugs.

How can that be *legal*, never mind socially acceptable? If we've got laws against abusing people because of the colour of their *skin*, why not hair? Blonde, black, brown, bald, grey, red: one nation, follicly united!

Later . . . Oh dear. Dad has just lost it big-style with Themnextdoor (mutual anonymous loathing – we don't know their names, they don't know ours).

They've just dumped *(boom boom)* the dog poo from their yard over our fence. Most of it landed by the car on the driver's side. Dad nipped out to get some fags and,

well, the upshot is he's had to throw his best trainers in the bin. Not good: wars have started for less.

JANUARY 28TH

Themnextdoor are driving Dad to new – heights? depths? – of grumpiness because their YAP ratty YAP little YAP dog YAP never stops YAPPING.

I guess it's worse for Dad because at least the rest of us are out during the day. He went round after tea to complain about dog/rat and they just laughed in his face. He got straight in the car and he's still not back now and it's half ten. Mum's rung his mobile about twenty times, but it's switched off.

Better news! There are some exciting potential developments on the Hellbus front in that I have had a Eureka moment. (Except not in the bath and I didn't run down the road starkers. Ha ha.)

Humanity's past glitters with such moments. Ideas so simple yet so revolutionary they've changed the world: *How about if I rub these two sticks together? Is it me, or do we all look a bit like monkeys? Chips AND cheese?*

And here's my own modest contribution. If I ask Mr Patel for an evening paper round as well as the morning

shift, beg Mum for a loan (maybe) and use up all my savings, I should be able to buy myself a BIKE.

I know, it's genius. Cycling is cool AND I'll get the papers done loads quicker AND it'll pay for itself in a term as it'll save me forking out for a bus pass AND I'll get fitter AND help the environment, plus (and this is the best bit) I won't need to face the boys' school knobs on the Hellbus ever again.

Go me!

PS 11.35. Still no sign of Dad.