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Opening extract from

Half My Facebook Friends are Ferrets

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Monday 6th January – 6 months till my 16th birthday

10.20am: Lower Dungeon (AKA English Block)

Today I have to do a presentation at school. It counts towards my English GCSE, so I feel I should make an effort. Mrs Barber, our English teacher, refuses to let on just how much it counts, which makes me a bit suspicious. I wouldn't be surprised if it's less than half a percent.

At least my presentation should be interesting. So far, we've had to sit through "Nail art through the ages", "Cheryl Cole – Style Queen" and "Eating for a healthy complexion". I'm still wondering if I've made the right choice though. I had three ideas originally:

Ferrets, their role in modern society

The Major Pentatonic Scale and its use in improvising riffs

The satanic roots of Death Metal

I decided to go with the last one, feeling it had the edge excitement-wise, but now I wonder if it might be a bit too exciting, especially for Mrs Barber who's nearing retirement and rumoured to have heart trouble.

"Who do we have next?" says Mrs Barber, consulting her list. "Ah yes, Joshua. Come on up, dear."

Mrs Barber beckons me to the front and I suddenly notice the St Christopher hanging round her neck. My PowerPoint has pictures of church burnings!

To calm my nerves I take a few deep breaths and remember Ollie's advice of imagining everyone in the room naked. Unfortunately, Charlotte Anderson is in the front row and imagining her naked sets off a stirring below. This would be fine if my trousers weren't so tight but Mum refuses to buy new ones due to our Financial Difficulties.

"Do you have a PowerPoint?" Mrs Barber asks.

"Pardon! Oh yes, um. Yes, I do," I admit.

"Excellent," she says. "Some nice slides for us to look at."

"Right… sort of… not really."

Mrs Barber looks a bit uncertain. "What exactly is your presentation on, dear?"

3.50pm: halfway down some road or other

"Fantastic presentation," says Ollie on the way home. "Especially that bit where you showed the slide of the demon with three willies and Mrs Barber had the panic attack."

"Thank you, Ollie," I say. "Damn! I knew I should've done the one on ferrets."

"I shouldn't worry," Ollie goes on. "Mrs Barber will be OK; a short stay in hospital will probably do her good."

I say goodbye to Ollie at the corner of his road and wander on home. Thankfully, no one is in to ask how the nightmare presentation went. In my bedroom, I say hi to Ozzy, my ferret, and reach under the bed for the giant leather-bound notebook Mum gave me. Yeah, I know – some people get PlayStations for Christmas, I get a notebook.

At the time, Mum tried to "big up" the present by saying, "It's got 200 pages of extra high-quality paper!"

"Amazing," I said.

"So, you can write on both sides without the ink showing through."

"Awesome Mum, really awesome."

"But the important thing," she droned on, "is that this can be your release valve, Josh. When I was young, I wrote down all the bad things that happened to me in a book like this and I felt much better. It got out all the angry, destructive feelings."

Maybe you should write one again then, I thought, but I just nodded and laid the book with my other gifts (a festive white Toblerone and a packet of scented gel pens).

Now, I'm wondering if I should use it for its original purpose. I need a bit of a release valve one way or another. I open the book and make a list of things that are bad in my life. It's not complete – that would take hours – but it's a start:

Things that are bad in my life:

1. I am 15½ and have never been kissed, unless you count my nan, Mum, Mrs Stokes, Aunt Sarah, Ollie's Labrador Bongo and my cousin Anna. And Bongo's kiss was more of a slurp.
2. I look nerdy and I don't even wear glasses
3. We have Financial Difficulties
4. My mother is the strictest parent on the planet
5. Girls think I'm a dick...

Good. Excellent. Do I feel any better?

No.

Tuesday 7th January

1.10pm: astroturf with Peter, Davey and Ollie

"Looking at me," I say, "would you say I come across a bit nerdy?"

"Nah," says Ollie. "You're too stupid to be nerdy."

"Thanks," I say. "But I mean, if you didn't know that?"

"I'd put you down more as a geek," says Davey.

"A geek! Davey, if anyone is a geek it's you."

"Er, I may be a lot of things but I am not a geek."

"You are a bit," I say.

"Just because I wear glasses…"

"What about your periodic table mug?" I remind him.

"That was a gift."

"The University Challenge quiz books?"

"I was going through a phase."

"The Apollo 13 space module poster on your door?"

Davey holds up his hands. "OK, you got me."

"Anyway," says Ollie, "I don't think being nerdy's so bad. I saw a girl once with a sweatshirt that said 'I love nerds' on it. At least, I think that's what it said. It wasn't easy to make out because of her enormous boobs."

"Right," I say.

"The words were kinda stretched."

"Yes Ollie, we get it."

"Well, all I know," says Peter, "is that whatever you are, you should be proud."

"Jesus, Peter," Ollie says, "that is so gay."

"I know," says Peter happily.

Wednesday 8th January

4.45pm: Inner Sanctum (AKA bedroom)

School seemed to go on forever today but when I check my bag, I discover it's still not over because I now have a mountain of maths to finish! Mr Cain, our teacher, obviously thinks none of us have anything better to do than slave over decimals all evening. In my case, he may be right, but he's not to know that.

5.20pm

The phone rings and I rush downstairs. It's Davey. Why he can't text like normal kids is beyond me.

"Have you done your maths?" he says.

"A bit," I say.

"I don't get it."

"What don't you get?"

"Anything!"

Davey sounds desperate but I'm used to this. He knows how to turn on the emotional blackmail and while it works with his mum, it won't work with me.

"Well, maybe you should ask Mr Cain," I say.

"Huh?"

"Mr Cain, our maths teacher."

"But then he'll realise I'm dumb and move me down. And I won't survive ten minutes with the chavs, Josh!"

I can hear Davey's breathing down the phone, short and rapid, like he's just climbed Mount Everest, or in Davey's case, walked down his hallway.

"Calm down, Davey," I say. "Let's go through it slowly. Now what you need to do…"

"Can't you just tell me the answers?"

"What?"

"Hollyoaks is on."

5.30pm: back in Inner Sanctum

I'm a soft touch, that's the trouble. Even Ozzy takes advantage of my wonderful nature. Currently he is rolling around in my school uniform scattering an asthmatic's nightmare of black and white hairs. I'm getting the occasional whiff of ferret food too. Thanks Ozzy. I'm really gonna attract the opposite sex with my trousers smelling of liver!

Thursday 9th January

3.15pm: La Bastille (AKA French)

Madam Zizi, our French teacher, has just told us to write a paragraph on our family but as I don't know the French for "ridiculously bad-tempered psychos", it's gonna be difficult. Madam Zizi says we can finish our paragraph at home.

Does one sentence count as a paragraph?

Absolutely it does, which means I can spend the entire evening chilling out to Megadeth and designing a cool CD sleeve for my album. Yes!!

Looking at me, you would never guess I'm a metal head. I look more into Abba or the Cardiff over-80s male voice choir, than I do into Morbid Angel or Slayer. This is because my mum insists that my hair is kept short and in the least fashionable style known to man. She also believes that wearing black T-shirts is satanic. My mother is the most repressed, nun-like person I know. How she ever had kids is beyond me.

6.00pm: kitchen

Currently Mother Superior is out tending to the needs of the various folks she looks after, so I make myself a delicious tea of cornflakes and smoky bacon crisps.

I have only just finished and am debating whether it's bad to eat four bowls of cornflakes in a row when Mum and my sister come in. My sister kicks off her stilettos and collapses in the chair opposite. She looks like she's had a fight with a hair drier but I don't want to die a virgin, so I decide not to mention this.

"Good day at work, Maddie?" I say.

"F * * * off," she replies.

I have an on/off relationship with my sister.

Mostly off.

Mum is shifting things round in the fridge. "Don't tell me someone's used up all the milk," she mutters.

"Not me," I say, moving my maths folder in front of my cereal bowl.

"Mrs Hughes down the road has a fridge that warns you when the milk is low," says Maddie.

"Does she now," says Mum.

"She got it as part of that ten grand refit she had on her kitchen."

I give Mum a sympathetic look but she has turned to fill up the kettle.

Sadly, it'd take ten grand to bring our house up to squatter's standards. Not that it's dirty or anything; it's just caught in a 70s time warp. We could make money by opening it as a museum. "And here you see genuine 1970s wallpaper. Note the globular pattern in shades of burnt umber. Sick bags can be found to your right."

Also, a lot of things don't work. I've given up eating fish fingers due to the three foot drifts of snow in our freezer, and the last time I tried using the oven, I was almost incinerated.

Mum says this is what happens when you don't have a man about the place. Which is a bit hurtful considering I'm nearly 16 and definitely of the male persuasion, but I know what she means. We don't have Dad is what she means.

Saturday 11th January

10.45am: Inner Sanctum

Today is an Ozzy cleaning day. As I get out his towel and the ferret shampoo, Ozzy eyes me suspiciously through his black bandit mask. He does not like being washed.

11.10am

Hmm, the bathroom looks like it's been hit by a tsunami. My clothes are soaking wet. I have several large scratches on the inside of my arms and a bruise coming where I smacked my head on the sink.

Ozzy is very clean though!

He is also very annoyed.

Sunday 12th January

3.30pm: Mr Pitman's house

I am young, not suffering with any serious health issues and am a "drain on resources", which in Mum's eyes means I should be working. Never mind that I have homework, and must wash Ozzy, and update my Facebook account and spy on other people's accounts to find out what amazing stuff they're up to so that I can feel really jealous. This is not enough for my mum; she'd have me digging turnips in the snow at 5am if she had her way. In fact, she has me doing something worse – entertaining Mr Pitman.

Mr Pitman lives down the road from us and suffers with

arthritis. When it's bad, he can hardly bend to put on his socks. Ever since his wife left last year, Mum has been cleaning and shopping for him. And since Mum is great at guilt-tripping me into doing anything she wants, I walk his dog (a yappy Yorkshire terrier). I also mow his lawn and play chess or, on very depressing days, Ludo. Mr Pitman always wins because, try as I might, I cannot get into a game of Ludo.

Maybe if it was strip Ludo with Megan Fox... Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, moving my little green counter.

Mr Pitman throws the dice with vigour, causing it to spring off the board and land in Minty's basket (Minty is the dog).

"Whoops, sorry," says Mr Pitman as I delve into Minty's hair encrusted blankets.

"Grrr," says Minty.

"She won't hurt you," says Mr Pitman. "She's only a little thing."

Yes, but her teeth are like hypodermic needles I feel like saying, but Minty has remembered that I'm her ticket out of this hell-hole so she resists savaging my face.

"Your go," says Mr Pitman.

It's the weekend and I should be getting up to all sorts of teenage shenanigans. Instead I'm sat here feeling my brain about to implode through lack of use. I roll a two.

"Unlucky," says Mr Pitman.

Monday 13th January

9.35am: Tower of Terror (AKA Maths Block)

Mr Pitman's house is depressing but it has nothing on school. If one more person says to me: "Cheer up lad, these are the best days of your life!" I may have to pin them down, attach electrodes to their private parts and send several thousand volts of electricity coursing through their bodies. These are certainly NOT the best days of my life. At least, I bloody well hope not!

Today in Maths, for example, Mr Cain informs me that he's had to give me an F for my homework because the writing was so bad. "You are 15, Joshua," he says. "You should be able to write."

I say, you are 50, Mr Cain; you should be able to read!

Actually, I just nod and promise to write it out again.

10.45am: Field of Nightmares (AKA school playing fields)

And now in PE, Lydia Smart has just come over and said to me, "There's a party at Hannah Harrigan's on Saturday. Don't bother coming, you're not invited."

What was the point in that? She just walked right round the pitch to tell me that.

There are girls in this school who are downright nasty. They make Simon Cowell look like Ghandi. Not that I'd want to go to Hannah Harrigan's party. Her dad is something big in the Metropolitan Police. He'd probably arrest you for dropping a crisp.

Davey comes and stands beside me and we watch the two teams slog up one end of the field, miss the goal and slog back