Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

My Smoky Bacon Crisp Obsession

Written by

J. A. Buckle

Published by

Curious Fox

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in 2015 by Curious Fox,
an imprint of Capstone Global Library Limited,
7 Pilgrim Street, London, EC4V 6LB
Registered company number: 6695582

www.curious-fox.com

Copyright © J. A. Buckle 2015

The author's moral rights are hereby asserted.

Cover designed by Richard Parker
Cover illustration by Ozerina Anna (Shutterstock)

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

ISBN 978 1 78202 320 3

19 18 17 16 15
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner.

Typeset in Palatino & Weiss

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY

Tuesday 7th September

9.15am: Sixth form college (English block)

"Some very interesting views of life-changing events," says Mr Parry (or "Andy", as he likes to be called), as he walks round the classroom handing back our essays. "Sophie – great account of the Apollo 11 lunar landings! Amy – awesome effort on the suffragette movement!"

Andy paused. "And Josh... Ah, Josh... Well, I'm not quite sure what to say about your essay. I guess for some people getting the latest Metallica album *might* be thought of as life-changing..."

"Umm," I say. I'm not sure whether Andy is impressed or not. Unfortunately my sarcasm detectors have started whirring. So probably not.

"However, I'm guessing you didn't read the second half of the question," continues Andy. "Life-changing events and *how they have inspired society*?"

"Oh," I say.

The class giggles nervously. This is only our second English

lesson at college and everyone is getting to know one another. People are checking out who's cool, who's smart and who's a sad, pathetic loser who can't read questions properly.

4.15pm: Outside college, leant casually against wall

"Yo biatch, wat up?" says Ollie, coming over to give me a fist bump.

For some reason, Ollie now talks like a crystal meth dealer.

"Yo! Yo! Yo! S'all sweet, bro!" I say, but my heart's not really in it.

Ollie tells me about his first Psychology lesson. "Dude," he says. "I found out today dat 'psychology' starts with a P! Thatz some weird shit, ain't it?"

"It's some crazy-ass shit, Ollie," I agree.

Davey comes out of the Art block in jeans and a denim jacket. Very few people can get away with double denim – and Davey isn't one of them.

We start walking home. College is in the town centre and since we are always ravenous, we usually stop off at the supermarket to see what's edible in the Drastically Reduced section. Today I buy some flattened fresh cream éclairs.

"So where's Peter Boy?" mumbles Ollie through mouthfuls of doughnut.

"He's got problems at home," I say. "He texted me to say he was up all night listening to his parents argue."

"Should think himself lucky," says Davey. "I had to listen to mine having rampant..."

"Damn it, Davey!" I say. "You've put me right off my éclair!"

Wednesday 8th September

8.15am: Inner Sanctum, getting ready for college

A problem with college is that you have to wear your own clothes, and I don't have any. At least, I don't have any cool ones. Mum thinks I can wear my school trousers, but if she thinks I'm wearing school uniform to college, she's either very mean or soft in the head. And one thing she isn't is soft in the head. Anyway, I have found some jeans that are only a couple of decades out of fashion, so they'll have to do.

"OK then," I tell Ozzy, lifting him out of his cage. "There's been a slight hiccup with yesterday's embarrassing episode in English, but I think I can still pull it back."

Ozzy does one of his little ferret dances on my lap, showering me with affection and what I hope is only saliva.

"I have managed to get through my first lessons in Chemistry, Maths and Biology without blowing anything up, revealing I'm a complete dickhead, or audibly farting. Yes, there's hope for me yet, Ozzy. It's a brand new start. Who knows, I may even become cool!"

Ozzy gives me a doubtful look.

"Fair enough," I say.

Thursday 9th September

2.30pm: Inner Sanctum

Only two lessons today, so I am home nice and early. Now I'm at college, I've been thinking I could do with some new aims in life, and decide to make a list in my leather-bound notebook.

Yes, I know making lists is incredibly lame but I can't help it – I'm a *making lists* kind of person. Last year, I wrote down five things to achieve and managed to do three of them, which is a 60% success rate, or a grade B. If I can get a B on any of my A levels I'll be well pleased! Anyway, here are my goals for the not too distant future:

1. Make progress with Becky. By which I mean move beyond a one-second kiss on the cheek towards some upper-body-related action. (Lower-body-related action will probably be several years off, unless we're talking foot massage).

2. Make some new college friends and get a band together!

3. Get a Children of Bodom tattoo.

4. Pass at least one of my A levels.

5. Stop making lame lists!!!

Friday 10th September

8.20am: Kitchen, having breakfast

"Where's Mum?" I ask my sister.

"She had to go out," says Maddie.

"What – this early? She doesn't normally start work till ten."

"Well, I don't know!" says Maddie. "I'm not her mother, am I?"

"No," I say. "She's *our* mother."

My sister looks confused for a second. "Right... Er, why

are you eating smoky bacon crisps for breakfast?" she goes on. "That's hardly a balanced diet."

"A balanced diet," I say, "is a bag of crisps in each hand!"

My sister rolls her eyes but doesn't say any more. I allow her a moment to appreciate my excellent comeback before smiling and heading out the door.

9.25am: Chemistry lab

Today, we have to do our first practical. This is worrying because I do not know a single person in my Chemistry set. In some ways this is good (no prior knowledge of my uncoolness!) but then again, I have no idea who I'm going to work with. There's a guy sat beside me who I've nodded at, but he's probably already sussed out a partner; he looks the popular, together type.

"So," says Paula, our teacher, gesturing towards the instructions on the whiteboard. "Today we are going to make ammonia and investigate its solubility. Remember that ammonia is highly pungent and occasionally deadly, so try not to inhale the fumes. Once you have read through all the instructions, please choose a partner and get started."

The guy sat next to me turns my way and smiles.

"You wanna work together?" he says.

Saved!!!

"Hmm, yeah, if you like," I say, shrugging.

The guy turns out to be called Lloyd. He looks a bit like President Obama, only shorter, skinnier and about forty years younger.

"So, how come you're doin' Chemistry?" I say, in an effort to fill the silence.

"I wanna start cooking crack," he says. "I'm gonna be the biggest drug producer this side of Croydon!"

"Really?" I whisper, looking round in case anyone heard.

"No," laughs Lloyd. "I want to be a chemical engineer."

"Oh, right."

"How about you?" he asks. "What d'you wanna do?"

"Well, I'm not sure," I say. "To be honest, I'd like to go into the music business. I play a bit of guitar..."

"Me too," says Lloyd. "Though bass is really my thing."

"Cool," I say. "You into R&B?"

Lloyd shakes his head. "Nope, I'm into metal: deathcore, melodic death and porno-grind mostly."

My eyes mist over and I start to sway a little. Luckily, I can blame it on the fumes of ammonia.

Saturday 11th September

2.00pm: Inner Sanctum

I should really be doing homework but instead I have spent the last four hours working on a design for my tattoo. This is important, though, seeing as it's gonna be on my body for the rest of my life. Not to mention the afterlife, if there is one.

I am not religious but of all religions I think I like reincarnation the best. I'd try and come back as a bonobo ape as they have large brains, muscular bodies and, if David Attenborough is to be believed, a great sex life!

I wonder if people get reincarnated with their tattoos. No, that's silly: you never see animals walking round with tacky

slogans, stars or hearts on their legs.

Then again, who knows what's under all that fur?

6.00pm: Inner Sanctum

Finally, after many hours of blood, sweat and tears (well, sweat anyway) I have the perfect design. It includes my favourite pet (Ozzy), my favourite band (Children of Bodom) and the obligatory skull and scythe.



I drift off into a daydream where I'm at an after-gig party. A few attractive girls are leaning on my arms in an adoring kinda way, when one (jet-black hair, large emerald eyes, huge boobs) notices my tattoo. Somewhere, a crappy romantic song starts playing. The girl tosses back her hair in slow motion, gazes tenderly into my eyes and breathes, "Have you got any washing?"

"Huh?"

Over by the door my mum sighs and shakes her head. "Washing, Josh. I'm putting a load on."

Sunday 12th September

10am: Walking to Ned's

I'm on the way to my dad's (AKA Ned's) when I nearly fall over myself trying not to step on a snail. Honestly, I don't know what is up with snails. Do they have a death wish? Anyway, after checking to see no one's looking, I pick it up and place it in some bushes. I wonder what it's thinking now? It would be like someone lifting a person up from Croydon High Street and dumping them in the Brazilian rainforest. It must be like, WTF just happened?

It's a bit naff rescuing kamikaze snails but at least Becky understands. She once had a pet woodlouse!* I haven't heard from Becky for a while so I text her to say hi before knocking on Ned's door.

Me and Ned meet up about twice a week now. I guess I should call him Dad as he *is* my dad, but somehow it's easier to stick with Ned. You'd think after sixteen years of believing someone else was my father, it would feel really weird hanging out with Ned. But it's actually weird how normal it feels.

"Oh, am I glad to see you," Ned says, manoeuvring his wheelchair aside to let me in. "Minty needs her flea treatment."

"Really?" I say, wearily. Minty is a Yorkshire terrier who

** This was in the days before her mum let her graduate to keeping guinea pigs, of course.*

aspires to be a pitbull. If any dog should be controlled under the Dangerous Dogs Act, it's her.

"We'll be OK," says Ned happily. "I'll just get the reinforced gloves."

Monday 13th September

1.45pm: Biology

Even though Davey is to science what badgers are to ballet, he has decided to take Biology because he wants to be a veterinary nurse.

Our teacher (Lorna, who is not unattractive for an education professional) tells us that today we will be dissecting the heart. A few of the girls look worried but me and Davey just grin.

"Bring it on," says Davey.

Lorna starts handing out the hearts on metal trays. I gotta say, the smell isn't great. A few people have their hands over their noses.

"Lightweights," scoffs Davey.

"Pussies," I agree.

"So how's Chemistry going?" says Davey.

"Oh, OK. I made a new mate," I say. "His name's Lloyd."

"Like the bank!" says Davey. "Cool. I haven't made any new friends yet."

"Well, there's plenty of time," I tell him. "And, anyway, why would you want new friends when you know someone as stupendously awesome as me?"

Davey says, "Yeah, right," in a sarcastic WTF way, which is a

bit hurtful given that I was only half joking.

"Don't be shy with your heart," says Lorna. "Use your fingers to have a jolly good poke about!"

I pick up the heart carefully. It's covered in yellowy fat and as slippery as a hyperactive ferret in body lotion. I prod around a bit and manage to find four rubbery tubes coming out at the top. Unfortunately, I have a pretty active gag reflex and I suddenly sense the chicken nuggets I had for lunch wanting to make an appearance. I bite my lower lip and keep on prodding while Davey puts coloured clips in to mark the veins.

"Once you've located the main blood vessels," says Lorna, "you'll need to take your scalpel and slice the heart in two to expose the chambers. You may want to remove some of the fatty tissue first."

I bite my lip even harder and start to carve away some of the fat. Urgh. This is disgusting. Especially the smell.

"I like to call this the McDonald's Cut," Lorna goes on cheerfully as she wanders round the room. "Once sliced, you'll see that the heart resembles the sort of bun people use for yummy double cheeseburgers!"

"Er, I'm feeling a bit weird, Davey," I say, dropping the scalpel and sitting down hard. "Can you take over for a bit?"

Davey looks at me like an electrocuted owl, before crashing to the ground in a heap.

Tuesday 14th September

7.15pm: Inner Sanctum with Davey, Peter, Ollie and Ozzy

"That's it, then," says Davey. "I have to apply to a new college.

There's a good one in Epsom. It's only twenty miles away. Or I could travel down to Crawley; they've got a railway station."

Davey, Peter and Ollie are slumped on my bed like comatose slugs. It's no wonder my mattress has lost all its puffiness.

"Don't be silly," I tell Davey. "It wasn't that bad."

"You said people were screaming!"

"That's because you pulled the tray down on top of you. There was rancid fat and bits of heart flying everywhere. It was like a scene from a slasher movie."

"Well," says Peter. "What can they expect, taking a horrible subject like Biology? I can assure you, you don't get showered in body parts in Textiles and Graphic Design."

"Exactly," I say. "And that girl who vommed? Well, her face was green well before you fainted."

Davey sighs. "Fine. I guess I'll be OK if we don't have to dissect anything else. There aren't any other dissections, are there?"

"Nah," I say. I decide not to mention the pig's eyeball coming up in the fourth module.

"So you goin' out with anyone yet?" I ask Ollie, in order to change the subject.

"Working on it, bro. Let's just say there's possibilities."

I nod, impressed. Over in his cage, Ozzy does his impersonation of a surprised meerkat, which means he thinks Ollie is lying.

"What about you and Becky?" says Peter.

"Oh, it's OK," I say. "We're OK."

"You seen her boobs?" says Ollie.

"Of course," I say. "But, er, only through clothing."

"Dude, *everyone's* seen 'em through clothing!" laughs Ollie. "You 'ad a feel?"

"I have had a brief fondle, as it happens."

"Wow!" says Davey, his glasses fogging up.

"Actually," I say, "fondle is not really the word but there was... contact."

"Contact?" asks Ollie.

"I had to push past her in the Science corridor. It was busy and there were all these people so we had to squash up..."

"Hmm," says Peter. "*How long* have you been going out?"

"I know," I say, "but Becky is embarrassed about her boobs. She feels they are all people see when they look at her."

"She's right," says Ollie.

"We get on OK, though. I mean... not in a sexual sense but talking – we do a lot of talking. Or at least Becky does. About her boobs. And how much she hates them. But still..."

"You're communicating," agrees Peter. "That's more than my folks are doing."

Everyone is quiet while Peter picks a few stray ferret hairs off his trousers.

"I don't think they get on that well any more," he says finally.

"What makes you say that?" says Davey.

"My mum calls my dad a lazy, self-centred bastard. And my dad calls my mum a cow."

10.00pm: Inner Sanctum

I feel bad for Peter, so I take out my leather-bound notebook and begin to write a song for him, but it feels kinda creepy so I write one for Becky instead.

My body feels so alien

These breasts, they are no fun

I wish I could be 34B

And not bounce when I run.

From the album: *Alien Breasts* by Josh Walker

Hmm, on second thoughts, I don't think I'll give this to Becky. She may take it the wrong way. Girls can be weird like that.

Wednesday 15th September

6.00pm: Kitchen

"It's me making tea tonight," says my sister, waving a saucepan dangerously. "Beans on toast."

"Oh, please, not that!" I say. "Becky's coming over later and I wanna blow her away with my awesomeness, not my farts."

"Yeah, well, good luck with that," says my sister.

"Why can't we wait for Mum to do something when she gets in?" I say.

"I don't want to bother Mum," says my sister. "She'll be tired from doing her cleaning all day. Now hush up and get some plates out."

7.12pm

Becky was supposed to be here at 7. Maybe she isn't coming. Or maybe my clock is fast. I think it is a little fast, maybe...