Gill Sims

WHY MUMMY DRINKS

The diary of an exhausted mum



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SEPTEMBER

Tuesday, 8 September

First day back at school. I am going to 100 per cent nail being a school mummy this year. I can absolutely do this. This year my school runs will go like this:

6 a.m. Wake up, have a shower, put on the stylish and elegant outfit from my minimalist capsule wardrobe that I laid out last night, before applying some light but sophisticated makeup, as suggested by Pinterest, complete with chic, flicky eyeliner. Dry hair, then style into an 'easy' chignon – again according to the diktats of Pinterest – thus creating an overall 'look' that is modern yet classic, with an individual edge. Now looking perfect, I'll tidy up the house so that we have a calm and welcoming environment to return to at the end of the day.

7 a.m. Wake up my precious moppets and offer them a choice of wholesome homemade breakfasts. Happily agree that of course they can help me make the pancakes/waffles/scrambled eggs. Smile with maternal love at the concentration etched on their glowing little faces as they work together to create their delicious concoctions while I pop something yummy into the slow cooker for dinner.

7.45 a.m Send my adorable children to get washed and dressed, which is of course a quick and simple activity because their uniform was laid out the night before.

While they are getting dressed I can quickly pop the breakfast dishes into the dishwasher, then simply remove the bento boxes from the fridge filled with their nutritious packed lunches, complete with sandwiches fashioned into amusing characters and a wide variety of fresh fruit chopped into quirky shapes.

8 a.m. Brush Jane's hair and style it into French plaits or something similar. Run a comb through Peter's hair and then have ten minutes to read them a lovely story before a final, quick five-minute tidy up and the shoes and coats go on.

8.25 a.m. Leave to walk to school, possibly singing rousing songs, with a detour via the park for the dog to have a run on the way. Watch my darling cherubs tumbling amongst the falling leaves and frolicking with each other and my lovely dog. Feel smug at how the fresh air and exercise before school will have stimulated their youthful brains so that they are now ready to absorb information like sponges.

8.50 a.m. Fondly wave my beautiful children off into the playground with many hugs and kisses, before briskly marching home again with the dog. Then, once the dog is settled in his basket to quietly await the dogsitter coming to let him out at lunchtime, I jump into my freshly valeted car and go to work.

3.15 p.m. Pick up the delightful poppets from school. Chat pleasantly with the other mums in the playground about safe and neutral topics.

3.30 p.m. Give children a nutritious snack, possibly involving homemade granola. While they are eating this, go through each child's schoolbag and carefully read each letter and make a note of all events/trips/requests. Possibly have colour-coded files for each child to keep such letters in, so they can be easily located whenever required. Check homework diaries and draw up a balanced timetable so various homework tasks can be accomplished each night.

3.45 p.m. Send children to get changed for obligatory middle-class extra-curricular activities.

4 p.m. Take children to swimming/music/tennis/dance/jiu jitsu, as appropriate. If only one child is at an activity, spend the time bonding with remaining child and discussing their day/hopes/dreams/ambitions. If both children are doing an activity, catch up on work emails like proper twenty-first-century efficient career woman.

5 p.m. Supervise homework tasks chosen from the carefully planned timetable.

5.30 p.m. Serve up mouthwatering yet effortlessly produced homemade dinner from the slow cooker. Have brief smug moment about what an excellent mother I am and feel sorry for those who lack my razor-sharp organisational skills and unparalleled maternal instincts.

6 p.m. Oversee piano practice and run through spellings/times tables.

6.45 p.m. Permit a half hour of screen time.

7.15 p.m. Bathtime.

7.45 p.m. Bedtime. Read another chapter of the educational book the children have chosen.

8 p.m. Reward myself for my productive day with a nice cup of green tea.

This year we will absolutely have no repeats of last year, where the days all too often went more like this:

5 a.m. Wake up to hear a small child thundering down the stairs. Stumble down after them to discover said small child hunched on sofa and glued to iPad. Snarl at beastly brat monster to get back to bloody bed this instant. Crawl back into bed and seethe with rage. Finally fall back asleep just before alarm goes off.

6 a.m. Hit snooze button.

6.10 a.m. Hit snooze button again.

7.10 a.m. Wake up in panic. Jump in shower. Throw on first clothes that come to hand. Have mild meltdown because arse has expanded to full width so can't get knickers past knees. Realise in my haste to get dressed I'd not noticed there was a pair of Jane's knickers in my drawer and am trying to haul them on. Sob in relief that while my arse may not be the tiniest or perkiest, I defy any grown woman to manage to shoehorn her arse into an eight-year-old's pants. Turn head upside down and blast with hairdryer. Survey mad porcupine hair in dismay and tie back with a Hello Kitty bobble. Try to look as though I *want* to be wearing a Hello Kitty hair bobble, as an expression of my unique and quirky individuality. Fail.

7.30 a.m. Go downstairs and shout at precious moppets to disengage themselves from bastarding electronic devices and come and have some breakfast.

7.37 a.m. Snatch bastarding electronic devices from children's hands and howl that they are now confiscated forever and demand once more that they come and have breakfast. Children look up in surprise, having failed to notice my demented banshee-esque presence for the last seven fucking minutes.

7.40 a.m. Hurl Coco Pops at children. Break up fight over the stupid plastic toy in the cereal box. Answer eleventy billion inane questions on subjects such as, 'Who would win in a fight – a vampire squirrel or a weasel cat?' and, 'Can you eat warthogs?' Shout: 'I don't know, I don't know, I will google later, stop playing with your food and just eat it, please, come on, hurry up, it's only a bowl of cereal, how long does it take to eat, no, please don't do that, you will spill it, yes, yes, well done, I *told* you that you would spill it if you did that, no, LEAVE IT, I'll clear it up, come on, HURRY UP!'

8 a.m. Send the children to get washed and dressed. Despite laying out their uniform the night before, now must deal with them insisting they can't find it and claiming it is not there. Stomp upstairs to point out uniform sitting in plain sight on their chairs where it is every sodding morning. At the same time try to make packed lunches and throw something in the slow cooker that the children might actually eat – spag bol. Feed dog. Watch dog inhale food and choke, then vomit. Mop up dog sick.

8.20 a.m. Attempt to untangle the Gordian Knot that is Jane's hair. Explain again that I CAN'T DO FRENCH PLAITS and put

in pigtails instead. Listen to Jane telling me that I am a rubbish mummy because everybody else's mummy can do French plaits and actually even Tilly Barker's *daddy* can do French plaits. Endure a lengthy diatribe from Jane over her ruined life and the utter futility of her entire existence due to her French-plait-less hair while chasing Peter around the house attempting to flatten down the strange tufts that have appeared in his hair overnight, while he squeals and dodges like I am attempting to catch him and stick pins in him.

8.35 a.m. Start bellowing at the children to put on their shoes and coats and get their school bags now, *now*, *now*, NOW! Try not to actually foam at the mouth with rage when met with blank stares and complete denial of any knowledge of the existence of shoes, coats or schoolbags. Child informs me of very important permission slip that *must* be returned today. Search futilely through many piles of paper, eventually find the letter, try to dredge up the £5 the letter is also demanding from down the back of the sofa, as I only have a £20 note.

8.47 a.m. Finally leave the house, hustle the children to school while dragging the dog behind me as he attempts to pee on every lamp-post.

8.57 a.m. Push children into playground, smile weakly at dragon headmistress standing at the gate to judge parents under the pretence of greeting them. Stop dog lifting leg on her American tan tights. Scuttle home as fast as possible, mumbling apologies to the poor dog for his lack of a proper walk.

9.07 a.m. Leave a note for the dogsitter asking if she could take dog out for an extra five minutes if she has time, hurtle into car, wonder vaguely what that smell is and drive to work while

attempting to put on makeup as I try to convince myself that applying lip gloss when driving is neither dangerous nor illegal. Try not to think about pit of hell bombsite of house left behind.

3.15 p.m. Pick up children. Make half-hearted conversation with other parents while trying to avoid the Coven of Bloody Perfect Mummies, led by the Most Perfect of All, Perfect Lucy Atkinson's Perfect Mummy. Attempt to refrain from making any more social faux pas, such as remarking that a certain much-beloved children's TV presenter looks to me like a sexual deviant.

3.30 p.m. Feed children crisps while attempting to tackle the chaos.

3.45 p.m. Send children to get changed for middle-class extra-curricular activities. Argue with them about why they have to go and why swimming/music/tennis/dance/jiu jitsu lessons are not a stupid waste of time. Get told once again that I am a stupid mummy who is ruining their lives. Swear that if I hear the words 'But it's not fair!' one more time I will not be responsible for my actions. Tell Peter that I do not want to come upstairs and smell his fart. Go upstairs and find the clothes they once again claim have vanished. Try to go to the loo, find large turd staring up at me, shout a lot about the Phantom Shitter while the children wander about in only their pants. Scream 'We are leaving in FIVE MINUTES!' for at least ten minutes. Get told again that it is not fair. Snap back that *life* is not fair. Wonder how soon I can have wine.

4.05 p.m. Take children to pointless and ridiculous middle-class activities that they don't even want to go to in futile attempt to turn them into well-rounded members of society. If only one child is in activity, allow the other to play on an electronic device

despite this morning's hollow and empty threats about eternal confiscation while I stalk people on Facebook on my phone. If both children are in activity, open up work emails, stare at them despondently, then stalk people on Facebook.

5 p.m. Give in to the clamour and permit more electronics time.

5.30 p.m. Realise I didn't turn the bloody, bastarding piece-of-shit slow cooker on this morning. Give children cheesy pasta instead. Force them to eat a piece of fruit afterwards in a feeble attempt at nutrition. Google scurvy and show them photos when they object. Get told they don't even care if they get scurvy.

6 p.m. Ask if they have any homework. Receive staunch denials. Agree children can have just five more minutes on their electronics. Open wine. Attempt to tidy up the bombsite that was once my tastefully decorated, elegant home.

6.30 p.m. Tell children to turn off electronics and do piano practice/spellings/times tables while I hoover and throw eleventy billion loads of laundry into the washing machine.

6.45 p.m. Realise the children are suspiciously quiet and there is no sound of piano practice or anything else. Discover children have merely swapped one electronic device for another, claiming that I only said they were to put down their iPods, I did not mention any other things.

7 p.m. Tell children it's bathtime. Children announce they have very important homework to do that must be handed in tomorrow. Mutter every single swear word I know under my breath. Do homework with children while trying to refrain from asking them if they are really that stupid as they claim to have forgotten

what number comes after three and are suggesting that C-A-T spells 'dog'.

8.30 p.m. Finally have children bathed and in bed. Slump on sofa and glug the same glass of wine I poured at 6 p.m. and am only now getting to drink. Mutter 'FML!' repeatedly, as my soul dies a little more.

Yes, this year is definitely going to be much better, I will be far more organised. Unfortunately, I have not actually managed to buy the bento boxes or the tasteful capsule wardrobe yet, and I will have to learn to like green tea, as it is foul, and I also have not yet mastered the flicky eyeliner or French plaits, but I am quietly confident that these are mere details in my grand master plan.

Friday, 11 September

FML. I am thirty-nine today. I don't want to be thirty-nine. How did that happen? *When* did that happen? I wasn't meant to get any older than twenty-eight at the most – and even that seemed impossibly ancient – and now I am staring down the barrel at forty and a future that will probably consist of quirkily patterned skirts from catalogue companies and perhaps a 'statement scarf' if I am feeling really daring.

A future where my social life dwindles to people asking me if I want to come to their advanced yoga classes, or their polite book clubs where they only read earnest and improving books and everyone wears their 'statement scarves' tied over polo-neck jumpers and they are all 'tiddly' after a glass of indifferent Pinot Grigio. Then they say things like, 'Oooh, gosh, are you having another glass? Aren't you brave?' while I fight the urge to reply

that actually I am not brave, I am not brave at all; a brave person would be able to endure their wittering inanities without the aid of anaesthesia, and actually it's not another glass of this cheap wine I need to make them bearable, it's an entire bottle of vodka, and possibly some crack. And, oh, for the love of God, WHY ARE YOU ALL SO BORING?

Perhaps if I refrain from shouting that at the Other Mummies I may have the book club tedium broken up by the occasional invite to jewellery parties, where at least the drink will flow more readily to induce you to buy, buy, buy. But I will then wake up the next day with the sinking realisation that I have spent £150 that I do not have on an array of poorly made tat that I do not need.

I had always assumed that in the unlikely event of me reaching forty I would by then be an elegant and sophisticated woman of the world, fluent in French, pursuing a lucrative, yet humanitarian career, knowledgeable about art and literature and politics – the sort of person that people seek out at highbrow parties to ask their opinion on the situation in the Middle East. Then we would have an informed and illuminating discussion during which it would be obvious that I am much cleverer than them.

Instead, people seek me out at parties because someone told them I had fags, and the reality is that I work part-time in a really boring IT job because it fits in around the children and thus saves on childcare, rendering my lengthy and expensive education redundant. Sometimes, in the more dysfunctional periods of my twenties, I actually wanted to be older and more grown up. Twentysomething me was stupid.

Now, being a grown up sounds like hell. I do not want to go quietly into that good night of women with sensible haircuts who 'live for their children' and stand in the playground trying to trump each other by relating their revolting offspring's many extra-curricular activities and 'achievements', competing about

their husbands' high-powered jobs and boasting about their most recent exotic holidays.

I want to drink too much whisky in smoky jazz clubs wearing an inappropriate skirt while an unsuitable man whispers in my ear.

I want an interesting career that makes use of my wit and intelligence (I'm sure I must still have some somewhere …).

I want excitement and romance and danger again.

I want to run away to Paris and fall in love in a garret (though without the poverty and starvation aspect, obviously).

I suspect Simon and the children might find some flaws in my plan, though, quite apart from the fact that I hate jazz.

Saturday, 12 September

In lieu of smoky jazz clubs, Parisian garrets and unsuitable boys, Simon took me out for birthday tapas last night and I got a bit more drunk than I meant to. I did achieve the inappropriate skirt and the whisky, though. Sadly, the whisky was just part of a cocktail in a very wanky hipster bar. I fear hipster bars are probably the new smoky jazz clubs anyway, now that smoking is banned everywhere.

I also have a vague and unfortunate recollection of shouting 'WANKY HIPSTERS!' somewhat louder than intended before Simon managed to hustle me out of there and into a less-pretentious bar, with proper glasses rather than jam jars. The evidence on my phone suggests we had pretty much run out of conversation by that point and so I just took a load of selfies and photos of my cocktails and put them on Facebook with illegible captions, but it was about 11.30 p.m. by then, so Simon had to go home to bed or he would turn into a pumpkin. Remarkably, though, we had managed to dredge up enough to

talk about that I didn't resort to posting an annoying Instagram photo of my dinner.

I did actually wake up this morning feeling marvellous, and very clever indeed for sticking to spirits instead of mixing my drinks and turning my teeth black with red wine. No, not me. Not this time. I was elegant ladylike refinement, sipping away on my cocktails.

But then I got out of bed, and felt slightly less clever, and the pain has increased ever since. It quickly became apparent that I wasn't actually clever in the slightest, because I had not dodged the hangover bullet after all. Instead, I had an epic slow burner of a hangover – the sort that tricks you into thinking you are all right, so you start going about your day like normal, but then it suddenly smacks you in the head like an evil gorilla and then you just want to die. I think a badger shat in my mouth.

There were also some terrible hangover flashbacks. After the wanky whisky cocktail I had moved on to gin cocktails and there were unfortunate recollections of sobbing with the gin fear in the taxi on the way home and asking the taxi driver if he thought I looked like I was going to be forty in a year. I think he said no, but that was most likely out of terror rather than honesty.

And then, as I prayed only for the pain to end, Hannah rang in floods of tears to say that Dan was leaving her. There is not really anything you can say when your best friend in the whole wide world rings you up to announce her arsehole husband is leaving her, other than, 'Do you want to come round?' and, 'No, no, just bring the kids, not a problem at all.'

Hannah is devastated, of course, and I am very sad for her, but to be perfectly honest, none of us could ever work out what she saw in Dan, who managed to simultaneously be the most boring man in the world and a nasty little control freak. Obviously, one can't yet say these things in case he changes his mind, or she loses hers and takes him back, but to be honest this

is probably going to be a Good Thing for her. I also at no point said, 'Please can you cry slightly less loudly, because I have a very bad headache and I think I might be sick?' I don't know if that makes me a good or a bad friend.

Wednesday, 16 September

Today, as part of my excellent resolution to be a better, kinder, more caring Mummy, instead of panting up to the school gates at 8.59 a.m. while yelling 'Run, RUN! LATE! LATE!', I arrived at school at 8.50 a.m. and walked the children all the way to the playground, chatting delightfully to them about what they thought they might be doing today and the fun things they could look forward to in the new term.

Unfortunately, though, thus it was that as I cheerily waved the little darlings off, Bloody Perfect Lucy Atkinson's Perfect Mummy and her Coven of Bloody Perfect Mummies bore down on me to ask if I had 'had a nice break'. Questions like these are always asked with a sympathetic head tilt and steely glint in the eye. They do not give a rat's arse about whether I had a 'nice break' or not, they just want to make sure I know that they have been to Tuscany or Barbados and to check that I haven't been anywhere better than them so they can humble brag about how they wished they'd had such a 'nice simple holiday' while gloating about their tans.

Obviously I did not have a 'nice break', because a nice break implies lounging around somewhere decadent, reading splendid books by the likes of Jilly Cooper and Penny Vincenzi while a nice man brings you cocktails. Drunkenly shouting at Simon to see what he can make with the Aldi gin and the dodgy bottle of mystery liqueur we got in Malta twelve years ago and have been too scared to open, while scrolling through Netflix to find

something, *anything*, that the children haven't watched, other than *The Inbetweeners* (which, it turns out, is actually highly unsuitable for children, as was evidenced by Peter asking his teacher how she got to school and then telling her that she was a Bus Wanker) is not 'a nice break'. Obviously I was not going to admit this to the Bloody Perfect Coven, though.

So we danced the dance whereby they asked if we were 'just at home' and then they sighed about how exhausted they were from dragging their many perfect children around the world all by themselves because The Nanny had insisted on having a week off to visit her own family. Meanwhile, I smiled and gritted my teeth and swore to myself that the next one to make a patronising remark would get smacked soundly round the head with her own duck-egg-blue Céline bag (obviously, I would not do any such thing. I would wallop them with my own cheap Primarni bag and steal the nice Céline bag for myself while she was still stunned from the blow).

FFS, is it any wonder I drink when I have to endure the Coven? It's a wonder I don't drink more. I was going to be very good tonight, but after the Coven, and then an hour of Peter telling me 'jokes' after school (the very best one was: 'What do you get if you cross a goat with the moon? MOONGOAT.COM!' The others were even worse …), I was a bit broken. So when I noticed there was a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc in the fridge with only a glass-worth left in it, it seemed rude to leave the poor wine to be lonely by itself when it could happily join its companions from last night. It turned out to be quite a big glass, actually.

Friday, 18 September

Wine is my friend. Wine is Hannah's friend, too. She made Dan look after his children then she came round and we glugged pink sunshine wine and shouted 'Dan is a wanker' a lot. Simon hid from Hannah, as he copes badly with emotional women at the best of times, let alone if there is an excellent chance that his wife's best friend might cry in front of him and he might be forced to talk about feelings. Simon's idea of a frank and open exchange about one's emotions is to pat one awkwardly on the arm and mumble, 'There, there', while frantically seeking the nearest escape route.

We did manage to corner him at one point as he tried to slink into the kitchen to get another beer when he thought we were preoccupied with singing Gloria Gaynor songs. We insisted that before he left he must admit that Dan was a massive dickhead. Luckily he has never liked Dan either, in fact, he had often complained that he looked like a goblin (he did rather), so there was no boring awkwardness about him 'not taking sides' because obviously there is no question that he is to be on Hannah's side – she is my best friend, and he is my husband, so he is obliged to take the side I tell him to. Obviously I would do the same for him if one of his friends got divorced and would declare the wife to be a shameless harlot. Unless it was one of his wanker friends, of course.

I fear wine will not be our friend tomorrow.

Monday, 21 September

Muchos excitement in the playground this morning. There was A MAN there! Obviously there have been men in the playground before – this is not some completely Stepford Wives' suburb –

but the men in the playground usually take the form of either Super Busy And Important Daddies In Suits who burst in and out, either throwing the children in at the gate or dragging them out at high speed while talking loudly on their mobile telephones so we are all aware that they are Super Busy And Super Important and only here because The Nanny was so inconsiderate as to get appendicitis; or the House Husband Daddies, who are lovely, but always look in need of a bit of a wash and seem to be a bit lost and teetering on the brink of tears. There are lots of other perfectly nice, normal men who do the school run sometimes, too, but they just sort of blend in, not really standing out or fitting into any of the categories above.

Today, though, today there was A Sexy Man. There had been A Sexy Man once before, it's true, but that 'man' was in fact twenty-three and the French boyfriend of one of the gorgeous au pairs, and we all felt like Harry Enfield's Lovely Wobbly Randy Old Ladies as we peered at him and mumbled 'YOUNG MAN!' to each other while cackling lasciviously. He never came back, oddly enough.

This new man is age-appropriately sexy. He has got that tousled hair, stubble, leather jacket thing going on, but in a really cool way – not a sad, midlife-crisis way. In fact, he looks exactly the sort of man who would sit beside you in a smoky jazz club and whisper indecent proposals in your ear. And he has a really nice arse.

I am very ashamed of myself, as a respectably married thirty-nine-year-old mother of two children, to be looking at another man's arse in the playground, surrounded by the innocent hearts and minds of impressionable children, but fuck my old boots, it was a *really* nice arse. Anyway, Simon might deny checking out the au pairs' arses when he picks up the children, but he's blatantly lying, it is impossible not to notice the au pairs' arses. The mummies in the playground spend much time

discussing if we ever had arses like those of the au pairs. On reflection, we suspect probably not, due to being British and so spending our formative years drinking cider and eating chips, unlike the healthy Continental people who eat salad and go cycling.

Anyway, back to this fine arse. Even Perfect Lucy Atkinson's Perfect Mummy was all of a tizz. (She will get thrush if she keeps getting that overexcited in her lululemons.) The jungle drums had already been beating, of course, so she was able to breathlessly reveal that the name of the object of our attention is Sam. (Of course it is. Naturally a splendid, manly arse like that would have a solid, no-nonsense, manly name like Sam. An arse like that could not be called something like Norman.) He is a single dad because his wife left him for another man and callously abandoned the children as well (BLIMEY, what sort of arse must his rival have had?), he also works in IT (really? He doesn't look like it, but oooh, something in common) and he has two children – a boy in Peter's class and a girl in Jane's (more in common!).

Would I be a terrible person if I tried to encourage my children to befriend his children so I could get a better look at that magnificent backside? Yes, obviously I would be, but you could see every other mother with children in those classes thinking exactly the same thing.

My precious moppets offered up very little by way of information about the new children in their classes; Jane managed to recall that the girl is called Sophie and is 'quite nice'. Peter looked blank when asked about a new boy and eventually said, 'Oh, do you mean Elliott who had the Ultra Rare Golden Moshi Monsters?' Elliott left last term. I despair of my children sometimes.

Obviously, I am only going to start brushing my hair and putting on extra makeup for the school run as part of my new

resolution to make more of an effort and be less of a lazy slattern. It is a complete coincidence that Sam and his arse have happened to arrive in the playground. Nothing more.

Wednesday, 23 September

This morning Jane reminded me at 8.30 a.m. that it was her school trip today. This caused panic stations enough as I tried to remember if I had signed the slip and given the school the enormous sum of money it apparently costs to take the children to visit somewhere free (it appears hiring buses is a very expensive business. Maybe I should go for a career change and buy a bus and hire myself out? Edie McCredie in *Balamory* seemed to enjoy her job. Was she a bus driver? Maybe she was a taxi driver. I refuse on principle to google *Balamory* to find out, as those days are behind me. I have no wish to revisit Miss Hoolie's fixed grin or wonder just why Archie the Inventor had so many yoghurt pots, or ponder whether or not Josie Jump was actually speeding off her tits. Oh bugger, I googled it. She *was* a bus driver. I feel dirty now).

At 8.40 a.m. Jane casually enquired if I was looking forward to coming on the trip too … ARGH! Surely I hadn't ticked the 'I would like to help' box, had I? I had, though why I would have done that was beyond me, unless perhaps I was pissed when I filled in the form? Why would I offer to help on my 'day off' – known to me as my 'Trying To Make The House Less Of A Shit-tip Day' and to bastarding Simon as my 'Having Coffee Day'. Not only had I accidently ticked the box, I had also not bothered to check the children's homework diaries and therefore had missed the nice note from the Lovely Teacher summonsing me to render assistance with supervising the cherubs, which is a task more akin to herding cats.

Ten minutes. That was all I had. Ten short minutes to make myself look presentable and respectable and also just a little bit sexy just in case Sam's Arse was on the trip, too. NO. No. Bad and wrong. I did not need to look sexy, Sam's Arse or no Sam's Arse.

In the end I settled for brushing my teeth, tying back the crazy hair and slapping on a bit of makeup to cover the worst of the horror. When I got into the playground I was quite glad of the lack of time to transform myself into a radiantly glowing Sex Goddess because the tarmac was a moist sea of lip gloss and fluttering eyelashes and *slightly*-too-tight sweaters, with everyone clearly thinking the same impure thoughts about Sam's Arse. However, there was not a sight of the Sacred Bum to be had because his childminder was dropping the kids off (and looking fairly tarted up herself, it had to be said)!

The trip was vile, obviously. I had no idea of the stench that a bus load of children can create. What are their parents feeding them? Thirty children, in a combined space, apparently farting non-stop from the moment we got on the bus until the moment we reached the very large museum containing many priceless artefacts for the children to be educated by, while the adults tried to stop them stealing or smashing anything. My eyes were watering and my lungs were burning by the time we disembarked. I actually thought someone must've soiled themselves, the smell was so bad.

Teachers should be issued with gas masks if they have to spend all day in that fetid fog, though when I remarked on the farting to the Lovely Teacher, she laughed merrily and said, 'Oh, you soon stop noticing it!'

I don't think this is true; Peter came home puffed with pride last year, announcing that he had made his teacher feel sick with a particularly rancid fart he had done. Peter is quite revolting, though. One poor little girl had to be moved away from him as

she found Peter farting and then laughing hysterically each time to be quite distracting. You would think that living with Peter, and my foul dog and his cheesy bum, that I would have become immune to the stink, but I haven't. Maybe the Lovely Teacher is on drugs. That would explain a lot.

Anyway, the trip was horrible. The class ran amok; I saw Freddie Dawkins wiping bogeys on one of the glass display cabinets, but at least since everyone is now suspected of being a paedophile I didn't have to take anyone to the toilet.

Apparently they were there to learn about the Egyptians. I suspect they learnt exactly nothing, except how to squander their money on tat in the gift shop. Jane seemed to be under the impression that I was there to provide her with an endless supply of cash to purchase *all* the said tat and became quite huffy when I declined to spend £35 on an umbrella with a ballerina on it. £35! On an umbrella! FML, I didn't even know it was possible to spend £35 on an umbrella, although in fairness I tend to buy my umbrellas in Poundland and they die or I lose them after three uses, so in the grand scheme of things I have probably spent considerably more than £35 on umbrellas over the years, and maybe what is missing in my life is a statement umbrella. Maybe I *should* have bought Jane the £35 umbrella, and then perhaps she would grow up to be a well-rounded and functioning adult who would not still think 'when I'm a grown up' even in her late thirties? Bollocks, I have failed in my parental duty again.

Being a virtuous and saintly person who helps on school trips and doesn't paint her face like a harpy in order to look alluring to a man with a nice bottom has clearly earned me Wednesday wine, though I have to go to boring work tomorrow because it turns out buses are quite expensive and you have to pass a test to be able to drive one. Since I barely passed my test when driving a very small car – getting the same examiner for so many

attempts that he finally said he had only passed me because people were starting to talk about us – there is no chance I could pass a test driving a bloody enormous bus.

Friday, 25 September

Breathing. Breathing. Breathing. Today I had a half day at work, as I had a dentist's appointment and it wasn't worth going back to work for half an hour before I picked up the children, so I took the dog for a walk round the park before school finished. And who should I have met there but the gorgeous Sam and his Arse as I chased my buggering pig dog round the duck pond, bellowing at him to come back and stop trying to do that to the ducks. Sam was walking his rather lovely Staffie, and although my pig dog made a show of me by behaving very badly as usual, he did decide to run up to Sam and jump all over him, while I shouted ineffectually for the wretched beast to stop it. But on the plus side, it gave me an excellent excuse to actually talk to Sam, without looking like a sad desperate tart (because 'Obstreperous Terrier Owner' is a *much* better look, obviously). So we talked about the dogs, which both turned out to be rescues, and then he said he had seen me at the school (gasp) and weren't our children in the same classes?

Sam Noticed Me! Sam. Noticed *me*. Me!

And *then* he said (which was a bit of a let-down, suggesting that perhaps Sophie had pointed me out as Jane's mum, rather than Sam being struck with wonder across the playground by the way that I totally rocked my laddered tights and frizzy, caught-in-the-rain hair yesterday) that Sophie had said she liked Jane and wanted her to come for a play after school, and what about this afternoon? And to bring Peter as well, because he could play with his son Toby.

I hesitated for a second, wondering if I could wangle myself an invitation too, just so I could nosy at Sam's house and see if he is as perfect and gorgeous as he seems, and also because then I could casually drop it into conversation with the Bloody Perfect Coven who have been twittering around him like hormonally charged starlings, but who, as far as I know, have not yet received an invitation for either themselves or their children. Then Sam said, 'I know it is a bit weird, your children going to a stranger's house, so please come along too, I quite understand.' Ha! So I got to tag along, having again dodged the desperate saddo bullet, even if the flip side was that he thought that I thought he might be a paedophile/child trafficker/criminal overlord. One can't have everything.

Sam's house was not actually what I was expecting at all. I'd assumed he would live in a super-cool, gadget-filled glass box complete with stylish but uncomfortable-looking twentieth-century furniture – basically the *Grand Designs* vision that Simon hankers after, complete with the Mies van der Rohe chairs that he covets and that we cannot afford, not least because the pig dog would chew them and the children would jump on them and break them.

The house was in fact much more like my vision of a home; with squishy sofas and beautiful painted French furniture and tasteful clutter, unlike the clutter-clutter that fills my house. Slightly tactlessly I remarked on this to Sam, but he was very nice about it and said the lack of clutter-clutter was largely due to him just moving in and half the furniture and stuff going to his partner Robyn in the split. Robyn is apparently an interior designer, hence the Very Lovely Things.

I longed desperately to ask more about the errant Robyn, and how and why she would leave a man like Sam, who added to his general perfection by having Mint Clubs, which are the King of Biscuits, but he changed the subject quite firmly so we ended up

talking about the various children's after-school activities in the area – which are good, but not worth the vast sums of money that they cost. It was a dull but safe conversation, and it in no way provided opportunities for me to say anything like, 'Would you mind terribly if I licked you? It's just that you're rather sexy.'

Then Sophie and Jane appeared, screaming, because Toby and Peter had interrupted their game of 'Makeovers' to attack them with Nerf guns, which was perhaps just as well, given how much makeup and glitter the girls were already plastered in, despite apparently only being halfway through the makeovers. Amidst a lot of shouting and scuffling I hastily removed my juvenile stripper look-alike and the tiny Rambo and dragged them home while there was still a semblance of Sam thinking we were a nice, normal family that he and his children would like to befriend.

All this, AND it is Fuck It All Friday. Hurrah and huzzah! So I can give up the unequal battle to save the children from scurvy and abandon the broccoli in favour of frozen pizzas. I can also give up all pretence of limiting their screen time and plug them into the electronic babysitters while I get quietly sozzled on indifferent wine and stalk old boyfriends on Facebook and Simon falls asleep on the sofa in front of *Wheeler* Fucking *Dealers* yet again, and, despite snoring like an angry warthog drowning in a vat of porridge, shouts 'I'm watching that!' if I try to prise the remote out of his clutch. Not that it will do me any good even if I do get custody of the remote, as Simon is such a massive bastarding Gadget Twat that he has rendered using the TV beyond my capabilities with all his various boxes and 'streaming' devices, each with their own remote that needs to be tuned to a different channel. As I can never remember *which* remote is for which box though, I end up jabbing hopelessly at All The Buttons until one of the children takes pity on me and makes it work.

The dog is looking at me most disapprovingly this evening. I fear he has somehow sensed that I am harbouring impure thoughts about Sam and he is judging me as a shameless harlot for using him as a conversation opener.

Saturday, 26 September

Simon spent the afternoon in his shed and I spent the afternoon painting the sideboard in the dining room in an effort to replicate the quirky shabby-chic vibe of Sam's house. While I did this the children attempted to do something creative with what had once been glitter glue, but as the glitter glue had dried out and I had attempted to revive it with some warm water and PVA glue, the substance they were smearing over themselves and the table looked more like unicorn jizz.

Simon was a bit shirty when I revealed the revamped sideboard in its chalk-painted glory, as it had been his grandmother's and is a family heirloom, apparently. Harshly, he insisted it was 'Just shabby, with no chic', which may have been because I got a bit carried away with the 'distressing'.

Due to Simon's lack of vision about my upcycling, the last qualm I had about abandoning him to go out for a drink with Hannah vanished. He actually looked surprised when I appeared in Going Out Clothes, with hair brushed and lipstick *and* mascara on. So much so that he said, 'You look nice. Is that for me?' despite the fact I must have told him at least nine times that he would be looking after the children tonight, including washing the unicorn jizz out of their hair, because I was going out to keep Hannah company so she doesn't have to sit alone in her empty house while Dan has the children for the night.

I may have snapped that at him at bit more brusquely than was necessary, as he actually looked a bit sad and deflated that

the effort was not for him, so I said, 'Do I really look nice?' to which he just responded, 'Yeah, you look okay', which is exactly what every woman wants to hear. Twat.

Poor Hannah has fallen back into the pit of despair having found out that Dan has been shagging some twentysomething slapper he met at the gym and being utterly unapologetic about it when she asked if that was why he had left her. Dan is such a dick. At least Simon won't find any nubile twentysomethings in his shed.

I wonder if I should try to set Hannah up with Sam when she is over Dan a bit? That would be both a kind and altruistic thing to do, to help them both find love again, as well atoning slightly for my shameless crush on him. Maybe if he was taken I would fancy him a bit less? Also, it would piss off Dan no end if he saw Hannah with someone as gorgeous as Sam. What price his twentysomething gym bunny against That Arse?

An evening hearing about The Dickishness of Dan over a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc actually made me feel quite kindly disposed towards Simon, and I even planned to tell him that when I got home, except he was out cold on the sofa with bloody motorbike racing blaring out of the TV. How can he sleep through that? He was snoring and wearing his oldest and nastiest fleece and refused to wake up even when I threw a cushion quite hard at his head. So I left him there and went to bed.

When did Simon get so old? We used to stay up all night, talking and listening to music. Not even talking about anything in particular – we couldn't claim to be setting the world alight with our radical views on art and politics. In fact, I don't know what we talked about, but I know we did. When I met him, he was a something between a Goth and a New Romantic, wearing a big black coat from a charity shop and chain-smoking Marlboro Reds, and I thought he was so cool. Maybe he looks at me and wonders what's happened to me, too? I still remember

what I was wearing the night I met him – a very short black skirt, DM boots, a sort of fisherman's jumper I had stolen off an ex-boyfriend and an over-sized tweed jacket I had nicked off my dad, who phoned me every week demanding its return, except I couldn't return it now because it reeked of cigarette smoke and hash. With hindsight, I must've looked insane, but I was very pleased with myself.

We were at university, in Edinburgh, and I had seen him around in first year but had never spoken to him, as he was older, in the year above me, and part of a cool, arty lot and I, well, I was neither cool nor arty, despite my best attempts to be both. It was towards the end of my second year that he came over to me one night in the Pear Tree pub and asked me for a light, confessing later that it was just an excuse to start talking to me, which was possibly the most absurdly flattering thing that had ever happened to me.

And now here we are, with two children and a mortgage slightly larger than we are comfortable with, and jobs neither of us are terribly happy in, and a ruined sideboard that I have to admit does not look better now the paint has dried, as I had very much hoped it would (actually it looks like it belongs in a skip, so there goes my plan of a career change to interior designer). And the other day Steve Wright played 'Disco 2000' on the Golden Oldies. 'Disco 2000'! 'Disco 2000' is not an 'oldie', it is the best song in the world ever, and it was only out about a year ago, wasn't it? How the fuck can it be an oldie? FML. My youth is dead.

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