Lovereading.co.uk

Life as we knew it

Susan Pfeffer

Scholastic

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.



May 7

Lisa is pregnant.

Dad called around 11 o'clock to let us know. Only Mom had already taken Jonny to his baseball practice and of course Matt isn't home from college yet, so I was alone to get the big news.

"The baby is due in December," Dad crowed, like he was the first guy in the history of the world with a younger second wife about to have a baby. "Isn't that great! You're going to have a little brother or sister. Of course it's too soon to tell what it's going to be, but as soon as we know, we'll tell you. I wouldn't mind another daughter myself. The first one I had turned out so wonderfully. How'd you like a baby sister?"

I had no idea. "When did you find out?" I asked.

"Yesterday afternoon," Dad said. "I would have called you right away but, well, we celebrated. You can understand that, can't you, honey? A little private time for Lisa and me before letting the world know."

"Of course, Daddy," I said. "Has Lisa told her family?"

"First thing this morning," he replied. "Her parents are

thrilled. Their first grandchild. They're coming for a couple of weeks in July, before you and Jonny visit."

"Are you going to call Matt and tell him?" I asked. "Or do you want me to?"

"Oh no, I'll call," Dad said. "He's busy studying for his exams. He'll be glad of the interruption."

"It's great news, Dad," I said, because I knew I was supposed to. "Be sure to tell Lisa how happy I am for her. And you, too. For both of you."

"You tell her yourself," Dad said. "Here she is."

Dad muffled the phone for a second so he could whisper something to Lisa and then she took the phone. "Miranda," she said. "Isn't it exciting!"

"Very," I said. "It's wonderful news. I'm really happy for you and Dad."

"I was thinking," she said. "Well, I know it's way too soon and I haven't even discussed this with your father yet, but would you like to be the baby's godmother? You don't have to answer right away, but do think about it, all right?"

That's the problem I have with Lisa. Whenever I want to get mad at her, or just irritated because she really can be immensely irritating, she goes and does something nice. And then I can understand why Daddy married her.

"Of course I'll think about it," I said. "You and Daddy think about it too."

"We don't have to give it any more thought," she said. "You should see the glow on your father's face. I don't think he could be any happier."

"I couldn't," Dad said, and I could tell from his laughter that he'd grabbed the phone away from Lisa. "Miranda, please say yes. It would mean so much to us for you to be the baby's godmother."

So I said yes. I couldn't exactly say no.

After that we chatted for a while. I told Dad about my last swim meet and how I was doing in school. Mom still hadn't come back by the time I finally got off the phone, so I went online to see what's new with figure skating. The hot topic at Brandon Erlich's fan site is how good his chances are to win Olympic gold. Most people think not very, but a lot of us think he has a real shot at medalling and ice is slippery and you never know.

I think I'd like to take skating lessons again. I've missed it the past couple of years and besides, it'll give me a chance to pick up news about Brandon. He isn't being coached by Mrs Daley anymore, but I bet she still hears stuff. And maybe Brandon's mother would show up at the rink.

When Mom got in, I had to tell her about Lisa. She just said that was nice and that she knew the two of them wanted children. She and Dad have worked really hard on making it a "good divorce". Matt says if they'd worked half as hard on their marriage, they'd still be married. I didn't tell her about how I'm going to be the godmother (assuming Lisa doesn't change her mind, which she's more than capable of doing). I feel kind of bad that I'm going to be the godmother but no one said anything about Matt or Jonny being godfathers. Of course Lisa and Matt don't get along very well, and maybe 13 is too young to be a godfather.

I hope Lisa changes her mind and I won't have to deal with it.

May 8

Not the greatest Mother's Day ever.

I'd told Mom a while ago that I'd make dinner and she decided to invite Mrs Nesbitt. I can't say I was surprised, but I figured if Mom was having Mrs Nesbitt over I could ask Megan

and her mom, too. Only when Jonny found out it was going to be me and Mom and Mrs Nesbitt and Megan and Mrs Wayne, he said that was too many females in one room for him and he was going to have dinner at Tim's instead.

Mom always thinks it's a good idea for Jonny to spend time with Tim and his family because there are three boys and Tim's father is around a lot. She said if it was OK with Tim's folks it was OK with her.

I called Megan and told her to bring her history notes with her and we'd study for the test together, and she agreed.

Which is why I'm so mad at her. If she hadn't said yes, it would be one thing. But she did and I made enough meat loaf for five and salad and then right before I started setting the table, Megan called and said she had decided to stay on at her church and do something with the youth group. She'd gotten the dates mixed up. And her mother didn't feel like coming without her, so it was going to be two less for Sunday dinner and she hoped I didn't mind.

Well, I do mind. I mind because I'd been looking forward to all of us having dinner together and to studying with Megan. I also figured Mrs Nesbitt and Mrs Wayne would be good people for Mom to talk to about Lisa's baby. Mom may not be best friends with Mrs Wayne, but she's funny and she would have gotten Mom laughing.

Megan is spending so much time at her church. She goes to services every Sunday and she never used to and she does stuff with the youth group at least twice a week and sometimes more and for all her talking about how she's found God, I think all she's found is Reverend Marshall. She talks about him like he's a movie star. I even told her that once and she said that's how I talk about Brandon, like it was the same thing, which it isn't at

all. Lots of people think Brandon is the best skater in the US right now and besides it isn't like I talk about him all the time and act like he's my salvation.

Dinner was OK except I overcooked the meat loaf so it was a little dry. But Mrs Nesbitt's never been shy with the ketchup bottle. After a while I left her and Mom alone and I guess they talked about Lisa and the baby.

I wish it was summer already. I can't wait to get my driver's licence.

I also wish I was through studying for my history exam. BORING!

But I'd better get back to it. Bad grades, no licence. The Rules According to Mom.

May 11

Got a 92 on the history test. I should have done better.

Mom took Horton to the vet. He's fine. I worry a little bit about him now that he's ten. How long do cats live?

Sammi told me she's going to the prom with Bob Patterson. I know I shouldn't be jealous but I am, not because I like Bob (actually I think he's kind of creepy), but because nobody asked me. Sometimes I think no one ever will. I'll spend the rest of my life sitting in front of my computer, posting messages about Brandon Erlich and his future in figure skating.

I told Megan about Sammi and how she always gets dates and she said, "Well, the reason is there's always a man in Samantha," and after I got over being shocked I laughed. But then Megan spoiled it by becoming that new preachy Megan and she went on about how sex before marriage is a sin and how you shouldn't date just to go out with guys but because you were serious about making a lifetime commitment.

I'm 16 years old. Let me get my learner's permit first. Then I'll worry about lifetime commitments.

May 12

I went to bed in a bad mood and today everything just went worse.

At lunch today, Megan told Sammi she was going to go to hell if she didn't repent soon and Sammi got real mad (I don't blame her) and yelled at Megan that she was a very spiritual person and didn't need any lessons from Megan about what God wanted because she knew God wanted her to be happy and if God hadn't wanted people to have sex He'd have made everybody amoebas.

I thought that was pretty funny, but Megan didn't and the two of them really went at it.

I can't remember the last time the three of us had lunch together and enjoyed ourselves. When Becky was still healthy the four of us did everything together, and then after Becky got sick, we grew even closer. Megan or Sammi or I visited Becky at home or at the hospital almost every day, and called or emailed the others to say how Becky was doing. I don't think I could have made it through Becky's funeral without them. But ever since then Sammi and Megan both changed. Sammi started dating all kinds of guys and Megan got involved with her church. They've both changed so much over the past year and I seem to be staying who I always was.

Here I am going into my junior year of high school and these are supposed to be the best years of my life and I'm just stuck.

But the real reason why I'm in a bad mood is because I got into a big fight with Mom.

It started after supper. Jonny had gone into his room to finish his homework and Mom and I were loading the dishwasher, and

Mom told me she and Dr Elliott were going out for dinner tomorrow night.

There was this quick moment when I was jealous of Mom because even she has a social life, but it passed pretty fast. I like Dr Elliott and Mom hasn't been involved with anybody in a while. Besides, it's always smart to ask favours of Mom when she's in a good mood. So I did.

"Mom, can I take skating lessons?"

"Just for the summer?" she asked.

"And next year, too," I said. "If I feel like continuing."

"After your ankle healed, you said you didn't want to skate again," Mom said.

"The doctor said I shouldn't even try jumping for three months," I said. "And by then there wasn't any point competing. So I stopped. But now I'd like to skate just for fun. I thought you like it that I do sports."

"I do like it," Mom said, but the way she slammed the dishwasher closed let me know she didn't like it nearly as much as I thought she did. "But you have swimming and you were planning on trying out for the volleyball team in the fall. You can't handle three sports. Two's probably a stretch, especially if you want to work on the school paper."

"So I'll skate instead of volleyball," I said. "Mom, I know my limitations. But I loved skating. I don't understand why you don't want me to."

"If I thought the only reason was because you loved it, then we'd talk about it," Mom said. "But skating lessons are very expensive and I can't help thinking you only want them so you can gossip about Brandon Erlich on the message boards."

"Mom, Brandon doesn't even skate here any more!" I cried. "He trains in California now."

"But his parents still live here," Mom said. "And you'd want to be coached by Mrs Daley."

"I don't know if she'd even take me on," I said. "It's about the money, isn't it? There's money to send Jonny to baseball camp this summer, but not enough money for me to have skating lessons."

Mom turned 15 shades of red and then we really went at it. Mom yelled at me about money and responsibilities and I yelled at her about favourites and not loving me like she loves Matt and Jonny (which I know isn't true, but Mom wasn't right about me not understanding about money and responsibilities) and we got so loud Jonny left his bedroom to see what was going on.

Mom came into my room about an hour later and we both apologized. Mom said she'd think about the skating lessons. She said she thought volleyball would be better on my college applications since I could join a college squad if I was good enough.

She didn't say I'd never be good enough at swimming for a college squad, which was actually kind of nice of her. I'm never going to be good enough for anything the way things are going.

And I don't much like either of my two best friends these days.

All that and a math test tomorrow I can't even pretend I studied enough for.

I wish I was in college already. I don't see how I can make it through the next two weeks, let alone two more years of high school.

May 13

Friday the 13th. Well, things weren't that bad.

The math test wasn't as hard as I thought it would be.

Mom said if I wanted, I could take skating lessons in July.

August I'll be spending with Dad, anyway. Then if I want to continue, we'll talk about it again.

Megan had lunch with her church friends (I don't like any of them) and Sammi had lunch with this week's boyfriend, so I ended up eating with some of the swim team, which was a lot more fun than listening to Megan and Sammi yell about God. Dan, who'll be captain next year, told me I had a really good crawl stroke and that if I worked at it, he could see me anchoring relays as soon as next season.

And I like Peter (he told Jonny and me to call him that; said Dr Elliott was his name at the office). Some of the guys Mom's dated have tried too hard with us, but Peter seemed pretty casual. Not with Mom, though. He actually stammered when he was talking with her and he stumbled and nearly fell. But he laughed at himself and said he wasn't nearly that careless when he was operating on someone.

He asked if any of us had heard about the asteroid and the moon. Mom remembered something about it, because it was big news when the astronomers first announced it was going to happen. Some asteroid is going to hit the moon, and Peter heard on the radio driving over that it's going to be visible in the night sky next week. I asked Mom if we could dig out Matt's telescope and she said we should ask him, but she was sure it'd be OK.

Jonny and I didn't even argue over the computer after Mom left. There was something I wanted to watch on TV from 8 to 9 and there was something he wanted to watch from 9 to 10, so that worked out really well. The fan board is still fighting over whether Brandon'll need two quads to win the Olympics or whether he could win with just one.

It would be so amazing if Brandon won a gold. I bet we'd have a parade and everything.

It's 11 already and Mom still isn't home. I guess she and Peter are out admiring the moon.

May 15

Spent the weekend working on my English paper.

Dad called this morning.

Matt says we can use the telescope. He'll be home in a couple of weeks. He swears he'll teach me how to drive.

Jonny was named middle school player of the week.

May 16

All of a sudden this moon thing is the biggest thing ever. Either that or my teachers are as bored with schoolwork as we are.

I could understand it if I were taking astronomy. But French? Madame O'Brien made us talk about "la lune" the entire class. She's making us write a composition about it due Friday, because Wednesday night we're all going to be outside watching the asteroid hit the moon.

Sammi says every time they make a big fuss like that, for an eclipse or a meteor shower, it rains.

It isn't just Madame O'Brien who's hot for this asteroid. In English today we talked about the origin of the word lunar. Eddie made a joke about mooning, and Mr Clifford was so excited about word origins, he didn't even get mad. He talked about slang instead and metaphors that have to do with astronomy and he gave us a new assignment, too. We can write on any topic that has to do with the moon. Due Friday, of course.

I guess Ms Hammish thinks this moon thing is historical, because in history that's what we talked about. How people throughout history have looked at the moon and comets and

eclipses. Actually, that was kind of interesting. I never really thought about how when I look at the moon it's the same moon Shakespeare and Marie Antoinette and George Washington and Cleopatra looked at. Not to mention all those zillions of people I've never heard of. All those Homo sapiens and Neanderthals looked at the very same moon as me. It waxed and waned in their sky, too.

Of course Ms Hammish wasn't satisfied with inspiring us like that. She gave us an assignment, too. We can write either an essay about astronomy in the past and how it affected someone in history (like if they saw a comet and it scared them or prophesized something) or an article about what's going to happen Wednesday night.

Either way it's due on Friday.

I don't understand teachers. You'd think they'd talk to each other and at least one of them would realize how unfair it is to give us all assignments due on Friday. I wouldn't mind if I could figure out how to double up on them, write my history essay and translate it into French (which I could maybe do if my French was good enough, which it isn't). But I don't see how to do two for the price of one, so I think I'll have to write three separate papers (and one in French) and hand them all in on Friday.

I'll really be sick of the moon by then.

This moon thing is supposed to happen around 9.30 Wednesday night, and Mom was interested enough that we watched the news tonight. They said asteroids hit the moon pretty often, which is how the moon gets its craters, but this one is going to be the biggest asteroid ever to hit it and on a clear night you should be able to see the impact when it happens, maybe even with the naked eye but certainly with binoculars.

They made it sound pretty dramatic, but I still don't think it's worth three homework assignments.

Mom watched the local news, too, which she almost never does because she says it's too depressing, and they're predicting a really nice night. Clear skies and temperatures in the low 60s. They said in New York people are organizing parties for Central Park and on apartment rooftops. I asked Mom if we could have a party, and she said no, but people on our road will probably be out watching and it'll be like having a block party.

I don't know how interesting it's really going to be, but compared to everything else in my life, at least it's something different.

May 17

I got an 82 on my math test. There were at least four questions I should have gotten right but made careless mistakes on.

I know for a fact that Sammi's mother hasn't looked at a test result of hers in years, and Megan's mom has always worried about who Megan hangs out with, but I don't think she cares all that much about her grades. I had to get stuck with the mother who works at home and has plenty of time to check things out and hover and demand to see tests.

We didn't have a big fight over it (I did pass, after all), but Mom gave me one of her famous You Shouldn't Be So Careless lectures, which I get at least once a week and sometimes more than that if the mood strikes her.

Mom said since I'm prone to carelessness, etc., it might be a good idea if I got a head start on all my moon papers, especially since they didn't have to be about whatever is going to happen tomorrow.

She suggested writing about the 1969 moon landing, so I

Googled it, and I found out lots of people didn't really care that there were men walking on the moon. They all watched *Star Trek* (the original, old lousy-special-effects Beam Me Up Scotty *Star Trek*) and they were used to seeing Captain Kirk and Mr Spock hopping around the universe so real people walking on the real moon wasn't as exciting.

I think that's funny. Men were walking on the moon for the very first time in history and people preferred watching Dr McCoy say, "He's dead, Jim," for the thousandth time.

I wasn't exactly sure how to turn that into a paper, so Mom and I talked about it, about how fiction can have more power than reality and how in 1969 there was a lot of cynicism because of Vietnam and the sixties and all that and there were people who didn't think men were really on the moon and thought it was a hoax.

I think I'll do my French paper on what happens tomorrow night, because my French isn't good enough for stuff like hoaxes and cynicism. For English I'm focusing on how fiction can be more exciting than reality and for history I'll focus on how people in the '60s were cynical about what the government told them.

I told Mom that Sammi said it was sure to rain tomorrow night because it always rains when something important is supposed to happen in the sky and she laughed and said she had never known a more pessimistic 15-year-old.

I'll be at Dad's when Sammi turns 16. I have a feeling if she has a party, it'll be all boys, so it probably won't matter.

Around 10, something kind of odd happened. I was working on my paper and Mom was arguing with Jonny about going to bed, when the phone rang. We never get calls that late, so we all jumped. I got to the phone first and it was Matt.

"Are you OK?" I asked him. Matt never calls that late and he pretty much never calls on a weekday night.

"I'm fine," he said. "I just wanted to hear your voices."

I told Mom it was Matt. Jonny took the kitchen phone and she used the one in her bedroom. We told him what was going on (I complained about my three moon papers), and he told us about what he has left to do at school. Then he and Mom talked about the arrangements for him to get home.

This was all perfectly normal stuff, but it didn't feel right. Jonny hung up first and then Mom, and I managed to get Matt to stay on a minute longer.

"Are you sure everything's OK?" I asked him.

He paused for a moment. "I have a funny feeling," he said. "I guess it's this moon business."

Matt's always been the one to explain things to me. Mom had her writing and Jonny, and Dad was at work (for as long as he was here), so Matt was the one I turned to. I don't think he's psychic and maybe it's just because he's three years older than me, but whenever I've had a question he's seemed to know the answer.

"You don't think anything is going to go wrong?" I asked him. "It's not like the meteor is going to hit us. It's just the moon."

"I know," he said. "But things might get a little crazy tomorrow night. Phone lines might get tied up, people calling each other. Sometimes people panic even if there's no reason."

"You really think people are going to panic?" I asked. "Around here, it just seems like an excuse for teachers to give us even more work."

Matt laughed. "Teachers never need an excuse for that," he said. "Anyway, I figured I'd find you all home tonight and it'd be a good chance for me to say hello."

"I miss you," I said. "I'm glad you're coming home."

"Me too," he said. He paused for a moment. "Are you still keeping that journal of yours?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Good," he said. "Be sure to write about tomorrow. You'll probably enjoy reading all the details twenty years from now."

"You just want me to keep a record of all your clever sayings," I replied. "For your many biographers."

"Well, that, too," he said. "See you in a few days."

When we hung up, I couldn't figure out if I felt better because he'd called or worse. If Matt's worried, then I'm worried.

But maybe all Matt is worried about is getting through his papers and exams.