Lovereading.co.uk

Superstar Babes

Narinder Dhami

Random House

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

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

Chapter One

'You've got *all* my money now, Amber!' Jazz shrieked, hurling a fistful of banknotes at me. 'There are times when I really, *really* hate you!'

I smiled with quiet satisfaction and began gathering up the scattered notes. Meanwhile Jazz vented her frustration by whacking me round the head with a pillow. I yelped with surprise and grabbed a ruler off the desk next to the bed to defend myself.

'I'm only asking you to pay what you owe!' I shouted, poking her hard in the ribs. 'I can't help it if I'm financially brilliant and have a fantastic business brain!'

Jazz picked up a biro and we began to fence, lunging and parrying like Olympic champions.

'Oh, please,' said Geena, picking up the dice. 'This is meant to be a perfectly civilized game of

Monopoly. There's no need to go over the top.'

'It's not fair,' Jazz grumbled, attempting to stick the biro into my arm. 'Amber always buys expensive places like Mayfair and puts hotels on them and then it costs us hundreds of pounds.'

'Really, Jazz!' Geena said in a superior manner. 'It *is* only a game. One, two, three, four . . .' She moved her top hat around the board and her face fell. 'Oh dear.'

'Oh, look,' I pointed out. 'You've landed on my hotel in Park Lane. That's—'

'Whatever it is, I don't have enough,' Geena snapped, fanning out a paltry collection of notes.

'I told you not to buy Liverpool Street Station.' I wagged my finger at her. 'The railway stations never make much money. Well, it looks like I'm the supreme Monopoly champion. *Again.*'

Geena shot me a bitter look.

'Remember, Geena, it's only a game,' I reminded her.

Geena didn't answer. She just launched herself at me and began trying to stuff her feeble collection of banknotes down the back of my T-shirt. Very undignified behaviour for a girl of fifteen, wouldn't you say? Jazz, who's only a twelve-year-old *child*, immediately joined in. This is the problem with having sisters so close in age

to me (a very mature almost-fourteen-year-old). They're *so* competitive.

'You two appear to be rather bad losers,' I spluttered, trying to fend them off.

'Ha!' Geena said savagely, pinning me down on the duvet. 'Where's your *Get out of jail free* card now, Amber?'

'Do not pass GO,' Jazz intoned, bouncing up and down on my legs. *'Do not collect two hundred pounds. Do not annoy your sisters or you'll end up dead.'*

Even though I was face-down on the bed with a mouthful of duvet, my mind was working overtime, as usual. This, at a rough count, was the seventeenth argument we'd had this week. Seventeen arguments about Monopoly and things which had been borrowed without permission and whose turn it was to take out the rubbish – that kind of nonsense. Fifteen of them had ended in mild violence. The other two hadn't, only because Dad had put a stop to them.

Maybe something significant was going on here.

'Stop!' I shouted through the duvet.

'That's strange,' said Geena. 'I thought I heard Amber tell us to *stop*. She said it as if we were actually going to *obey* her.'

'How ridiculous,' Jazz commented, shoving the Community Chest cards down my front, appropriately enough, along with the rest of the banknotes. 'Pass me the Monopoly board, Geena. I have plans for it.'

'No, you don't understand.' I managed to roll over, even with Geena weighing me down. 'I know why we're arguing like this.'

'So do we,' Geena replied. 'You bankrupted us with an extremely annoying and very smug smile on your face, so now we're exacting our revenge.'

'Very well put,' Jazz approved.

'I don't mean *this*.' With an effort I threw them off and jumped to my feet. Cards and notes from the Monopoly game showered down around me, falling out from under the hem of my T-shirt. 'I mean, I know why we're arguing *all* the time.'

'I thought that was normal,' Jazz said.

'Well, kind of,' I agreed. 'But it's been worse since Auntie got married and moved out, wouldn't you say?'

Auntie had moved in with us months ago and had immediately set about interfering in our lives with determination and, quite frankly, a great deal of glee. Before she arrived from India, it was just us three and Dad. Our mum died almost two years ago after she'd been ill for a while. Auntie

had taken charge of everything and still liked to think she had us under her thumb, even though she'd now got married to the gorgeous Mr Arora, a teacher at our school, and moved out. Mind you, she'd only moved next door.

'I know exactly what's going on,' I said thoughtfully. 'We're arguing so much because we're *bored*. We need a new project. Something to get our teeth into.'

Geena sighed loudly. 'Amber, if this is some pathetic attempt to reason with Jazz and me before we beat you to a pulp, I can tell you that it isn't working.'

'No, it isn't.' Jazz brandished the Monopoly board threateningly.

To be perfectly honest, it *was* just a cunning ploy to get them to stop attacking me. But now that I'd had the thought, there *might* just be something in it.

'Look at it like this,' I said quickly. 'We decided that we'd get Auntie married off and now she's married to Mr Arora – I mean, Uncle Jai.'

'What's your point?' asked Geena suspiciously.

'Then there's Molly Mahal,' I went on regardless. 'We helped her too, didn't we? She's a big Bollywood star again now, thanks to us.'

Molly Mahal was another of our projects that had turned out amazingly well. She was a Bollywood actress who'd been down and out and living in Reading, but we'd helped her get her career back on track (I've got a *lot* more to tell you about Molly Mahal later).

'And don't forget Kiran. We helped her through a bad time after her dad died, and now she's a good mate. And then there's Baby and Rocky. We got them together, didn't we?'

'A match made in *me, me, me* heaven, that one,' Geena remarked.

'I'm getting bored,' Jazz said, opening and snapping the Monopoly board shut dangerously close to my nose. 'What, if anything, are you trying to say, Amber?'

'I'm reminding you how many people's lives we've been a very important part of,' I said, quite lyrically. 'How many hearts we've touched. How many futures we've changed.'

'As far as I recall, we got Rocky and our bimbo-brained cousin together to keep him out of the way at Auntie's wedding,' said Geena, 'to make sure he didn't get a chance to perform his gruesome rap music.'

Jazz and I both shuddered at the memory.

'Well, that in itself was a challenge,' I pointed

out. 'And that's what I'm trying to tell you. Maybe we need a *new* challenge.'

Geena and Jazz didn't look at all convinced.

'We need a project that's going to use all our enormous intelligence, skills and creativity to the full,' I went on, getting quite carried away, the more I thought about it. 'Well, mine anyway, as I'm the ideas person around here.'

'Your ideas, Amber, have got us into more trouble than I care to remember,' Geena retorted, rather too forcefully, I felt.

'So you want a new project, Amber?' Jazz repeated thoughtfully.

I nodded.

'A new challenge?'

I nodded again.

'Well, here's one,' Jazz went on gleefully, staring out of the bedroom window. 'George Botley is walking up our garden path right now. And he's wearing a shirt and tie.'

'*What?*' I shrieked.

I bounced across the bed, shedding a few more bits of Monopoly along the way, and peered outside. George Botley was indeed marching towards our front door in a very determined fashion. He was wearing our school tie with a shirt and jeans. Not a good look. I don't want you to get the

wrong idea about George Botley. Not at all. He's in my class at school and he has a thing for me, but I don't encourage him. Not *ever*.

I flung open the window. 'George!' I whispered, hoping Dad hadn't already spotted him from the living room. Or Auntie from the house next door. It was a dark November evening, but there was a streetlight just outside our house, and anyway, Auntie has eyes like a hawk and radar like a bat. 'What are you *doing* here?'

'Oh, hi, Amber.' George beamed up at me. 'I've come to ask your dad if I can take you to the movies.'

'What fun!' Geena chortled, scrambling over to peer out of the window. Jazz followed, sniggering very annoyingly.

'George, I already *told* you,' I said through gritted teeth, 'my dad doesn't allow us to go out with boys.'

'I know,' George replied, 'that's why I thought I'd come and ask him properly. That's why I've put a shirt and tie on.'

'It's your school tie,' I pointed out.

'I know, it's the only one I've got,' George explained. 'I was going to borrow one from my dad, but he's only got the black one he wore to my gran's funeral.'

I rolled my eyes while Geena and Jazz muffled their giggles.

'George, you really ought to keep away from my dad,' I said. 'He's more dangerous than he appears at first glance.'

George raised his eyebrows. 'He was nice to me at your auntie's wedding,' he pointed out.

'George, Dad *seems* very nice,' I said, 'but in reality he's not like that at all. Underneath that mild-mannered exterior, he's a raging tiger.'

Geena and Jazz were in fits on the floor by now.

'I really think you should go home, George,' I went on firmly. 'We'll talk about this at school on Monday.'

George looked disappointed. 'OK.'

I sighed with relief as he wandered off down the street. 'Once again, Amber's lightning-quick brain gets her out of a dodgy situation,' I said with pride.

'Only until Monday,' Geena retorted. 'It *does* seem strange that George is so stuck on you, though. The poor deluded boy obviously needs specialist help.'

'Why don't you just ask Dad if you can go out with George, and get it over with?' Jazz asked.

'Because I don't *want* to go out with him, that's why,' I said. Although I suppose I *was* fond of

George in a way. Kind of like you might be fond of a pet gerbil. 'I don't want to go out with *anyone*. Can you imagine the stress of trying to keep it a secret from Dad and Auntie?'

Jazz nodded agreement. 'Auntie would find out. That woman knows *everything*.'

'Exactly,' I said. 'And we all remember what Dad said about dating. We're not allowed to go out with a boy until we're sixteen, and then Dad or Auntie will be going along with us.'

'Which means we're going to end up living together as three old unmarried women, arguing about Monopoly until we die,' Jazz said glumly.

'You're being extremely quiet.' I turned to Geena. 'Anything you want to share with us?'

I was kind of joking around, but Geena looked me straight in the eye and very slowly turned pink. Always a sure sign of guilt.

'Me?' she said in an over-casual voice. 'Like what?'

'Ooh! What *have* you been up to, Geena?' Jazz demanded, pouncing like a piranha. 'Have *you* got a boyfriend?'

'No, I haven't!' Geena snapped, rather too aggressively. Which instantly made me more suspicious.

Jazz and I glanced at each other and nodded.

Then we both fixed Geena with a glassy, unblinking stare. That always used to freak her out when we were kids.

'I do *not* have a boyfriend!' Geena yelled.

'OK, have you *had* a boyfriend?' I probed.

'I have friends who happen to be boys,' Geena parried.

'Oh, stop messing about,' Jazz said. 'What we want to know is – has any kissing taken place?'

'Stop staring at me like that,' Geena said irritably, stalking over to the door. 'And don't ask ridiculous questions. Of course I've never had a boyfriend, and I've never kissed a boy either.'

She went out of the bedroom and the door banged shut behind her.

'She's definitely had a boyfriend and she's definitely kissed him,' said Jazz, glowing with excitement. 'This is *huge*!'

'Hold on a moment,' I replied, beginning to collect up the Monopoly pieces from the floor. 'We don't have any proof yet. It's obviously our sisterly duty to find out if it's true or not. But we'll take it slowly, all right?'

Jazz rubbed her hands together gleefully. 'Oh, the possibilities for blackmail are endless!' she sighed.

'Why don't you give me a hand?' I suggested, sweeping up a pile of banknotes.

'Are you mad?' Jazz yawned. 'Let Geena clear it up. It's her bedroom. Anyway' – she glanced at the clock – 'it's nearly time for *Who's in the House?* We can't miss *that*.'

'No way. It's just getting interesting.'

So I dropped all the Monopoly pieces on the carpet again and the two of us clattered downstairs. As we reached the hall, Auntie came out of the kitchen, carrying a plate piled with samosas.

'What have you two been saying to Geena?' she asked without preamble. 'She's sitting in front of the TV with a face on her that would stop a clock.'

'Nothing,' Jazz said, slightly overdoing the wide-eyed innocent bit.

'Auntie, don't you *ever* get tired of *noticing* things?' I remarked. 'Don't you ever wonder how much more peaceful your life would be if you just stopped worrying about other people and only thought about yourself?'

Auntie smiled. 'What a lovely idea, Amber. Unfortunately that's never going to happen with you three around.'

Geena was sitting on the sofa in the living room with a sulky look on her face that could have stopped any number of clocks. Uncle Jai – he was

Uncle at home and Mr Arora at school – was arranging bowls of popcorn and bottles of cola on the coffee table. He and Auntie often came round from next door to watch *Who's in the House?* with us.

'AND NOW,' boomed the TV in the corner, making us all jump, *'whatever you do, DO NOT LEAVE THE ROOM! DO NOT CHANGE CHANNELS! Because if you do, you'll miss the programme everyone, but everyone, is talking about! WHO'S IN THE HOUSE? Next, after the break!'*

Who's in the House? was one of those awful reality shows that everyone moans about, but absolutely *everyone* watches. Ten people were locked up in a house together for weeks on end, and they had to do various tests and trials. The people who performed the worst in the tests were kicked out, one by one, by public vote. Remember I said I had more to tell you about Molly Mahal? Well, she was one of the contestants taking part in the celebrity version of the programme.

'Go and fetch your dad, Jazz,' said Auntie, placing the samosas on the table.

Jazz didn't move from the armchair where she was comfortably sprawled.

'DAD!' she roared at the top of her voice.

Auntie sighed.

A moment later Dad wandered in, looking distracted, with his glasses perched on his forehead.

'Dad, did you know that underneath your mild-mannered exterior, you're really a raging tiger?' asked Jazz.

'I always suspected it,' Dad replied, taking a samosa.

'Popcorn?' Uncle Jai passed the bowl to Geena, who shook her head.

'I don't know why we always have to watch this ridiculous programme,' she said tartly. 'I mean, it's not as if any of us *liked* Molly Mahal that much when she stayed with us.'

'Some of us did,' Auntie remarked.

Uncle Jai blushed, but luckily Auntie was smiling.

'Geena's in a teensy-weensy little bad mood at the moment,' I said. 'She's got a lot on her mind.'

Geena glared at me.

'Like school work, I hope,' said Dad.

'Of course,' Geena replied hurriedly.

'I wonder if Molly Mahal's going to win,' said Jazz, which was the same remark she'd made every single night since the programme started.

Auntie tutted disapprovingly as the ad break finished. 'Geena's right though, it really *is* ridiculous. It's about time the TV companies

started making more worthwhile programmes.' Auntie said this every night too, but she still watched, along with the rest of us. 'Do we *really* want to see Z-list celebrities in skimpy outfits crying, fighting and swearing at each other?'

'I'm not complaining,' said Dad and laughed, which is what *he* did every time.

The rap music that always began the programme was now blaring out (*Wh-o-o-o-o-o-'s in da house!*) and then the presenter, Kieron King, loomed out of the screen and began yelling at us:

'Welcome to the Friday night edition of WH-O-O-O-O-O'S IN THE HOUSE?! Tonight's eviction night, folks, and this very night, one of our celebrities will LEAVE the house and WALK THE WALK OF SHAME!'

The crowd of people standing around Kieron King whooped and yelled and jumped up and down, while making sure that they jostled their way in front of the camera so they could wave to their mums back home. Behind them was the gaudy *Who's in the House?* building, which looked like a toy house made of colourful building blocks.

'Why do they always have to talk so loudly?' Uncle Jai asked with a frown. 'We're not deaf.'

'It's because they think the viewers might fall asleep otherwise,' Auntie replied.

The programme had been running for a few weeks now, and there were only six contestants left of the original eight. These were: Molly Mahal, an ex-England and Chelsea footballer called Steve Kelly, the obligatory has-been pop singer Luke Lee, TV presenter Shannon Pickering, and Romy Turner, a model who seemed to be there only because she had a very large chest. The last contestant was Katy Simpson, who wasn't a celebrity at all but had once been married to someone who was famous.

We already knew that Shannon Pickering and Kim Simpson had performed the worst in the week's trials, so they were the two who might be voted out tonight. The Friday night programme was actually quite dull because all that happened was that they showed clips of the previous week's trials before announcing the loser at the end.

'I'm going to vote for Shannon,' Jazz said, whipping out her mobile as the telephone number appeared on the screen. 'She whines all the time. I hate her.'

'You can't hate someone you don't know,' Auntie pointed out quite reasonably.

'And I'm not paying your phone bill this month,' Dad added. 'You'll be paying it yourself out of your pocket money.'

Jazz, who had already voted about fifty times this week, put her mobile away, looking disgruntled.

'Anyway, the programme makers edit what they film to make some of the contestants look worse than others,' Geena said as we watched Molly Mahal trying to knit with spaghetti, which had been part of Tuesday's *Pasta Pranks*. 'I mean, look at Molly. They obviously *love* her.'

Molly was laughing as her spaghetti slipped off the knitting needles, making sure her stunning profile was to camera. She always seemed to get the best camera angles and the best lighting. She never swore or misbehaved or showed too much naked flesh (unlike Romy Turner). Ever since the programme started, the newspapers had been full of stuff about how 'lovely' and how 'natural' Molly was. She was apparently the favourite to win it too.

'You know, I never thought Molly was a good actress,' I remarked, 'but considering what a snooty madam she was when she stayed with us, she's doing a great job here.'

'Maybe she had a personality transplant when she had all that other cosmetic surgery done,' Geena suggested.

We all stared at Molly's wider eyes, slimmer

nose, unwrinkled brow and bigger bosoms.

'Geena's right, you know,' Auntie agreed. 'The programme makers have their own agenda. I mean, I thought Shannon's penne pasta model of the Eiffel Tower was quite good, but she didn't get many votes for it.'

'That's because everyone hates her,' said Jazz.

As the programme moved on to Wednesday's tightrope-walking challenge, I found my mind wandering. Geena and Jazz often remark that it doesn't always come back again, ha ha. *So* not funny.

I hadn't forgotten what I'd said upstairs. I had quickly become convinced that life was a bit too quiet around here since Auntie had got married and moved out.

It was up to me to liven things up, just a little.

Chapter Two

'I *told* you Shannon would lose,' Jazz said with satisfaction as we set off for school early on Monday morning. 'I'm so glad. I really hate her.'

'Yes, I think we get that,' Geena replied. 'It looks like Molly might win, although Romy Turner got a lot of votes for last week's trials.'

'That's not surprising,' Jazz remarked, 'seeing as she did them all in her itsy-bitsy silver bikini.'

'Fascinating as this conversation is,' I butted in, 'I do have something a little more interesting to discuss with you.'

'I doubt it.' Jazz sniffed. 'But go on.'

'About what I was saying on Friday evening,' I began.

Geena and Jazz stared blankly at me.

'You know, about life being a bit dull at the moment,' I reminded them impatiently.

'Oh, that.' Geena shrugged. 'As this is probably going to involve one of your daft ideas, Amber, you can count me out.'

I smiled. 'Well, maybe I'll just have to do something on my own then. Like detective work, for instance. Finding out if anyone's got any secrets they don't want Dad or Auntie to know about . . .'

'What did you have in mind?' Geena asked hastily.

'Well—'

'Hey! Wait for us!'

We turned to see Kim and Kiran scooting along the street towards us. Kim and I have been friends ever since we first went to school and I stopped George Botley painting her blue. We've only known Kiran since the beginning of term, when she moved to our town. We didn't really get off on the right foot (to be completely honest, she actually shoved a newspaper down my school jumper) but since then we've become good friends.

'Did you see *Who's in the House* on Friday night?' Kim panted as they finally caught us up. 'Wasn't Molly great? I think she's going to win, you know.'

'I was so glad Shannon got kicked out,' Kiran added. 'I really hated her.'

'Oh, and me,' Jazz said. 'I hated her too.'

'For God's sake!' I groaned. 'Are we so shallow that some dumb TV programme is all we can talk about?'

Kim raised her eyebrows at me. 'And what's the matter with you today?'

You'd never believe that Kim used to be really sweet and quiet. Now she asserts herself all over the place. I blame Auntie – oh, and Molly Mahal. She gave Kim expert lessons in how to be a diva when she was staying with us.

'Amber thinks our life is too boring,' Jazz explained. 'She thinks everything's settled down too much since Auntie got married.'

'Oh no!' Kim pulled a face. 'This sounds like another of Amber's bird-brained schemes.'

'My schemes are anything but bird-brained,' I replied with dignity. 'All I'm saying is—'

'Ooh, look over there!' Jazz broke in, grabbing my arm. 'It's Baby and Rocky.'

Our cousin and her boyfriend were standing on the corner at the end of the street. Rocky was in Geena's year but Baby went to a private school nearby (her parents, Uncle Davinder and Auntie Rita, were seriously rich). The private school's uniform consisted of a black skirt, white shirt, black and gold striped tie and a gold sweater.

Baby had the skirt pulled up about fifteen centimetres above her knee, the tie was nowhere to be seen and the top three buttons of her shirt were undone. She had the sweater tied round her waist, and she was carrying her coat (designer, naturally) even though it was a chilly autumn morning.

'Oh, what a surprise.' Geena yawned as, frowning furiously, Baby stepped forward and poked Rocky hard in the chest. 'They're arguing as usual.'

'Baby's going to walk away in a minute,' Jazz predicted. 'Five, four, three, two – there she goes!'

Baby had spun round on her impossibly high Vivienne Westwood stilettos and stalked off down the road. Meanwhile Rocky stomped off in the opposite direction.

'What *is* it with those two?' asked Kiran.

'What, apart from the fact that they both have a hugely inflated opinion of themselves, gigantic egos and no brains?' said Geena. 'Not much, really.'

'There you go, Amber.' Jazz nudged me in the ribs. 'You could help Baby and Rocky improve their relationship.'

'I don't think even *my* talents could stretch *that* far,' I said modestly. Geena, Jazz, Kiran and Kim

all sniggered. Highly uncalled for. 'Anyway, Baby and Rocky seem to *enjoy* arguing.'

'What about poor, lovesick George Botley?' Jazz asked with a gleam in her eyes as we joined the throng of kids swarming through the school gates. 'He definitely needs help.' She turned to Kiran and Kim. 'He came round to our house on Friday night to ask Amber on a date, you know.'

Kiran and Kim laughed heartily at this.

'Ooh, tell us more!' Kim said eagerly. 'We want to know all the details! What did your dad do? What did Auntie say?'

'Nothing,' I snapped. 'He didn't get that far. Anyway, I have other plans for George Botley.'

'Really!' Jazz exclaimed. 'And do these plans involve *kissing*?'

The four of them shrieked with laughter and made kissing sounds at me.

'Not at all,' I said haughtily. I had indeed come up with a very good plan for dealing with George Botley, and I was about to tell them all about it when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

'Hey, you!'

I turned to see one of the sixth-formers, a boy called Gareth Parker, glaring at me through thick-lensed, black-framed glasses. He was accompanied by another sixth-former, Soo-Lin

Pang, who looked equally stern. She was carrying a clipboard.

'Yes?' I said coldly. To be honest, I was surprised to see sixth-formers in the main part of the playground. They had their own very posh and spacious building set apart from the rest of the school, so they didn't come and mix with lowly scumbags like us very often. We all hated them because they thought they were so cool, but all the same we were jealous of their luxurious building with its huge common room and kitchen.

'Trainers,' snapped Gareth, pointing his pen at my feet.

'Oh, this is a word-association game, right?' I said. 'You say trainers, and I say – um, laces?'

Gareth flushed. 'Don't try to be funny, Amber,' he snapped. 'Soo-Lin, read the rules about trainers, please.'

'Coppergate pupils are allowed to wear trainers, but these must conform to school rules,' Soo-Lin read from her clipboard in a monotone. *'They must be dark in colour and in good condition. Football boots are not acceptable footwear in school.'*

I glanced down at my flash neon-pink Nike trainers with metallic purple bits. 'Well, they're in good condition and they're not football boots,' I offered. 'Two out of three isn't bad.'

'What's it got to do with you, anyway, Gareth?' Geena put in belligerently.

Gareth fixed her with a stony stare from under his floppy black fringe. 'Mr Grimwade has noticed that school uniform standards are slipping,' he said coldly. Mr Grimwade was the deputy head and was always making a nuisance of himself. 'So he's asked some of the sixth-formers to do uniform checks every morning.'

'I might have known Grimwade would be behind this,' Geena muttered.

'*Mr* Grimwade to you,' Gareth retorted with another piercing glare. 'And while we're on the subject, Geena, your earrings are too big.'

We all stared at Geena's large silver hoops.

'Ha!' Geena said triumphantly. 'That's where you're wrong, actually. I checked the rules, so don't bother asking your tame little sidekick here to read them out.' Soo-Lin looked mortally offended. 'Hoops can be up to three centimetres in diameter, and mine are *exactly* three centimetres. So there.'

'Go, Geena!' said Jazz, and we all applauded.

'I'll be the judge of whether your earrings are acceptable or not,' Gareth said pompously. He held out his hand. 'Soo-Lin, the tape measure, please.'

Muttering under her breath, Geena unhooked one of her hoops and slapped it down in Gareth's outstretched palm. Meanwhile Soo-Lin was looking mutinous.

'Can't I do this one, Gareth?' she pleaded. 'I never get to do any measuring.'

'You can do it next time,' Gareth said impatiently.

'You know, you really need to get out more,' I told Soo-Lin as she reluctantly handed Gareth the tape measure.

'You're right,' she sighed. 'This is the most excitement I've had for weeks. My parents expect me to study all the time and they don't like me going out, even at weekends—'

Gareth tutted loudly. 'When you've *quite* finished . . .' He drew out the tape measure with a flourish and carefully measured Geena's earring. 'Three point two centimetres,' he announced with immense satisfaction.

'What!' Geena shrieked. 'No way.'

'Two millimetres over?' Kiran raised her eyebrows. 'Hardly worth making a fuss about, is it?'

Gareth looked slightly nervous. Kiran's big and square and she has a tongue stud. In fact, she looks quite hard. She could probably flatten a weedy swot like Gareth with one hand.