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My (Not So) Simple Life

Rachel Riley Goes Back to Basics

Joanna Nadin

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Extract

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July

Saturday 14

8 a.m.

Today is utterly the worst day of my life, and I should be jubilant because I have been waiting for tragedy to strike my boring existence for several years but, instead, am racked by torture and loss. It is because Justin Statham, Year Twelve rock god and part-time meat mincer, stood me up on prom night for Sophie Jacobs (dad invented Microwave Muffins, was once in a Fairy Liquid advert, 34C breasts). She finally overcame her obsession with possible pervert-in-school Mr Vaughan and his oversized nipples and has returned to the hairless, small-nippled chest of her first love. It is like in *The OC* when Ryan leaves beautiful and brainy Marissa to go back out with low-rent Theresa from Chino. (Although, unlike Marissa, I am not a drug addict or lesbian. And Justin does not wear wife-beaters or play pool).

Plus Mum would not let me stay in my room all evening in case I tried to self-harm with my ironic fairy wings, so I had to watch *Poirot* with her, Dad, a ten year old in a Ninja Turtle outfit and the dog (also in Ninja Turtle outfit). James did offer to be my date but the shell was off-putting. Not to mention the potential incest issues. Am too distraught to even eat Shreddies. Will possibly pine myself to death. Even Mum feels sorry for me. She has phoned in sick to my Saturday job, i.e. hunchback Mr Goldstein and his lentil-smelling health food outlet Nuts In May, with an alleged dose of unseasonal

winter vomiting bug. Although she is probably secretly celebrating, as Justin was not high on her list of potential suitors due to his *a*) long hair; *b*) decision to pursue career as rock guitarist, and *c*) mum who wears Lycra. Oh God, he is even gorgeous on paper. I miss him even more. Will sob on bed for a bit.

9.15 a.m.
Have just had excellent thought. Maybe Justin did not stand me up, but is, in fact, dead. Hurrah. Will text best friend Scarlet in hope he was killed in tragic road accident on notorious mini roundabout system.

9.20 a.m.
He is not dead but is very much alive and back with Sophie Microwave Muffins. Apparently they were all over each other behind the C Corridor fruit and nut dispensing machine last night. Scarlet says she is coming round immediately for a full report and to offer sisterhood support in my time of crisis. Plus her mum Suzy is having one of her tantric sex classes in the den and she says she cannot bear all the old people groaning. It is like an X-rated version of *Cocoon*. Am still too distressed to eat. Am an accidental anorexic.

1.00 p.m.
Scarlet has just left. I asked if she wanted to stay all day. And preferably night, lest I perish in my solitude. But

apparently the tantric sex finished at twelve so it is safe to enter the den without fear of naked geriatrics. Plus she has E4 at home whereas our Freeview is limited to BBC4, ITV3, and BBC Parliament. It is not the signal. It is Mum's ferocious parental controls. Anyway, am too depressed to watch television due to Scarlet's over-graphic description of Justin and Sophie's love-in last night (Goth Corner Mark II, Mrs Leech's biscuit cupboard, and the upper school toilets). She knows too many technical terms for genitals.

Scarlet says I should look on the plus side, i.e. that I did not actually do 'It' with Justin, now that he is not my ONE after all. But I pointed out that, maybe if I had done 'It', then he would still be my ONE and that now am going to die a virgin like Miss Crawley with the moustache and too many cats. But then Scarlet went into one of her lectures on wearing your virginity with pride.

It is because she is still not back with weedy bat boy Trevor Pledger. Apparently he snogged Daisy Devlin who has a fake Marilyn Manson tattoo behind the wheelie bins. (The snogging I mean. The tattoo is on her buttock.) Prom night was clearly a hotbed of adolescent groping. Thin Kylie and Fat Kylie and their respective boyfriends Mark Lambert and Mr Whippy did some swinging behind the fire curtain. Thank God they will all be leaving school in a few days. John Major High will be almost Eton-like without their idiotic antics tainting the corridors of

intellect. Though there are still several O'Gradys too many on the register. And one Justin Statham. Oh God, please let him fail his resits so he has to go and make sausages full time. I cannot bear to look upon his poetic beauty every day, when it will never again be mine to touch. Or snog. Am going to sob a bit more.

1.15 p.m.
James and dog have been in to announce that there is soup on the table. I said I was too weak to make it downstairs. He is going to bring me some in a non-spill flask.

1.20 p.m.
Oh God. Soup is oxtail. Which reminds me of butchering Justin. Am going to have to sob again.

1.25 p.m.
Sobbing has spilt soup out of non-spill flask on M&S duvet. May well have to write to Thermos to complain. Have texted Dad to send dog up to keep me company in my hour of need. Dog will lick up soup and I will be shout-free from Mum. In my weakened state, one telling off could send me over the edge.

1.30 p.m.
Dog does not like oxtail. Has eaten flask cup instead. Have sent it back down before it tries to hawk it up on already vile polycotton bedlinen.

5 p.m.
Oh God. Must have fallen asleep in post-oxtail grief. Bizarrely, duvet is now soup-free and smelling of Lenor. Maybe God has taken pity on me and performed a modern miracle. Am like that girl in Portugal who found God in an aubergine. Or Granny Clegg when she saw Jesus's face in a slice of Nimble toast (the real one, not my one-year-old uncle).

5.15 p.m.
Am not like Portuguese girl or Granny Clegg. It was James. He washed sheets while Mum was at Marjory's next door admiring her new binoculars (she has been investing heavily in surveillance equipment ever since she caught photographic evidence of me and Justin snogging on her digital camera). He is being extra specially helpful. He says it is his new Ninja way, to protect the weak and stupid. He has brought me stain-free Marmite sandwiches for supper.

6 p.m.
Have just had a phone call from Jack, (brother of Scarlet, newly appointed Head Boy, and former best friend of two-timing Justin). But have no idea what he said because before he opened his mouth, just shouted, 'Do not say, "I told you so". I hate you, Jack Stone.' Which is almost true. I hate him for being right about Justin anyway. Why did I not listen to him? It is because I was

blinded by love. And by good hair. Oh God. Need to sob. And then eat a sandwich as am quite faint now.

7 p.m.
Have eaten several sandwiches and feel slightly less suicidal. May just manage to drag self downstairs to watch some escapist TV and take mind off real-life tragedy (TVs in bedrooms are on par with heroin and murder in Mum's eyes).

9 p.m.
Am back in bed. Entire BBC schedule reminds me of Justin e.g. car crash victim in *Casualty* had Doors poster on bedroom wall, i.e. like Justin. Man from Birmingham on crap lottery show said his favourite one out of Girls Aloud was Nicola i.e. like Justin. Am going to go to sleep instead. Will probably feel better in morning.

Sunday 15

8 a.m.
Do not feel better. Am still in pit of despair. But think smell a bit so will have shower as do not want to end up malodorous as well as single, like Year Twelve bisexual Oona Rickets.

11 a.m.
Or Sad Ed. He has just been round to offer condolences

and reviving mini Mars bars. He is utterly depressed too. Though is also unwashed and quite ripe. It is because his girlfriend Tuesday has been repatriated to America. He says I should be happy I am not him. That is true. He has fat upper arms and his mum is in the Aled Jones Fan Club. No wonder he exists in a perpetual state of gloom. He says I should not be afraid of facing Justin at school, as he and Scarlet will be my henchmen. They do not stand a chance against Sophie Jacobs though. She has Pippa Newbold and Fi Cunningham, who can send Year Sevens into paroxysms with one flick of their highlighted Pantene hair.

1 p.m.

Thin Kylie has just been round to offer condolences and to set me up with Mark Lambert's friend 'Donkey' Dawson who works in Halfords and is renowned for having a weird helmet head and big thing. Have said no. Kylie says I am making a mistake and that I need to get back in the saddle immediately to make Justin jealous. I said I had never been in saddle and do not think that former Criminal and Retard with oversized head and penis will make rock god Justin weep with remorse. She said, 'Whatever. But Donkey is, like, a legend in Bishop's Stortford. It is like a saveloy.' Luckily at that point Mum came in and despatched Kylie before I had to listen to any more sausage/penis comparisons. Am going for lunch now. Still feeling weak with depression but Mum

is paranoid about me becoming anorexic so she wants to monitor every mouthful.

3 p.m.
Have not eaten lunch. It was bangers and mash. Mum is now convinced I have eating disorder. I do not. It is just that the sausages (Duchy Originals Pork and Herb) reminded me of 'Donkey' Dawson. Although I suspect his is of inferior quality and does not come with Prince Charles's seal of approval. On plus side, did not think about Justin for several minutes. Maybe I am in recovery.

3.15 p.m.
Am thinking about Justin again. Maybe I should call him. Maybe it has all been a terrible misunderstanding and there is a rational explanation for him groping Sophie's 34Cs behind the yoghurt-covered raisin display. Will ask James. He is full of Ninja insight and is well versed in conspiracy theories, thanks to his trusty companion Google.

3.30 p.m.
It is not good news, odds-wise. James says, statistically, seventy-five per cent of sexually active eighteen year olds have cheated at least once by the time they leave school. Plus my hair is mental and I have no breasts.

Also, spookily, just got a text from Jack. It says DON'T CALL HIM OR LURK OUTSIDE HOUSE LIKE STALKER X

Which is exactly what I was thinking of doing next. Although not so much like stalker, more lovelorn tragic heroine type. Maybe he has supernatural powers. That would come in useful when he is being Foreign Secretary, which is his ultimate goal, alongside winning the Mercury Music Prize for his band the Jack Stone Five. He could predict what despots and dictators are thinking and outwit them. Have texted back. Y NOT?

4.15 p.m.

Jack has replied. It says U 2 GD 4 VACANT PRETTY BOY (he means Justin).

Have texted back. NOT VACANT. BUT IS PRETTY. It is hard to believe they were ever best friends. They are so different. Justin would never accuse Jack of being vacant. Or pretty. But then Jack would never dump me on prom night for someone who was once in a Fairy Liquid advert.

4.30 p.m.

Jack has texted back. JUST DON'T DO IT RILEY. WILL EAT FONE IF HAVE TO X Which is quite funny. Although James claims Mad Harry has eaten a phone. He is hoping to become a phenomenon like fat Frenchman Monsieur Mangetout. He should take some tips from the dog. It can seemingly consume any household appliance without suffering ill effects. I caught it chewing Mum's Wisdom Spinbrush in the bathroom this morning. (Gave it a quick rinse. Mum will never know.)

4.45 p.m.
Jack has just texted again. It says. SERIOUSLY. DON'T. He is very commanding when he wants to be. Have said OK. He is right. As always. I will only be prolonging my agony. Do not want to speak to or see Justin again.

5.00 p.m.
And could not call even if wanted to now. James has been in to confiscate phone. He said his Ninja powers detected that I was about to make contact with the enemy. He means he heard beeping and got suspicious. He is like Mum when it comes to suspecting the worst. Am going for tea. Which will hopefully not be penis-shaped in any way.

6 p.m.
Was quiche. So genital-free. Ate with gusto to prove Mum wrong about anorexia. But she thinks quiche bingeing could be sign of bulimia and has taken to hovering at toilet door when I go for a wee. Also, James is still refusing to give back phone. He says I should be preparing myself mentally for school tomorrow as it could be traumatic. Oh God, he is right. I cannot go. Justin and Sophie will be all over each other on the saggy sofa and I will be nothing more than an object of pity and derision. It is utterly tragic. Hopefully will die in night from sadness. If not, will have to think of cunning plan to evade Mum's anti-truancy divining skills. She does not

allow days off unless she has forensic evidence of vomit or runny poo.

Monday 16

Am not dead. But have cunning plan. Am going to pretend to walk to school but will actually detour to Grandpa Riley's house. He is bound to be in now that Baby Jesus is banned from Treena's place of work (The Twilight Years Day Centre) in case he is stolen by old ladies again. Plus Grandpa is notoriously lax about attending school. He says he only went when it was raining and that he left at fourteen to join the Navy anyway. This is not strictly true, i.e. Grandpa has never been in the Navy. He left to work in a shuttlecock factory. But that is not the point. Will not be missing anything at school anyway as it is Sixth Form induction, i.e. wearing black, moaning about troops in Iraq, and listening to crap mix CDs.

4 p.m.

Hurrah. Plan has been utterly successful. Have spent day watching Jeremy Kyle and CBeebies with Baby Jesus and Grandpa (am not sure which is more disturbing—enraged women in lilac velour or *The Tweenies*). Plus have eaten proscribed Wagon Wheels, Monster Munch, and Bachelor's Supernoodles (Jesus's lunch of choice), which is excellent depression food. In fact, feel quite happy and energetic. It is all the sugar and Tartrazine. Grandpa says

the whole Justin/Sophie thing was inevitable and that all men are bastards who think with their willies. (Except for Dad. Who seemingly married Mum for her freakish ability to do logarithms in her head and get red wine stains out of cream shagpile.) Asked Grandpa if he had ever cheated on Grandma Riley. He said no. But not through choice. It is because Grandma Riley had arms the size of hams and a hive of killer bees. He does not need to cheat on Treena. Her demands for sex are insatiable. Grandpa says she will wear it out at this rate. At which point had to stop eating proscribed Peperami due to sausage/penis thing again.

Mum is not suspicious at all. She asked how school was and I just shrugged, i.e. not even a lie. She rolled her eyes and started on about teenagers being uncommunicative and that mobile phones and email are to blame and in her day she had to give a full account of the school day to Granny and Grandpa Clegg, including whether or not she had been to the loo and for what purpose. Luckily James stepped in to give his full account of school: fell off top of Keanu and Mad Harry in attempt to recreate pyramid of death, looked at some newts, learned theme from *Pet Rescue* on chime bars, went to loo twice—one poo, one wee. Primary school is a cinch. He will be in for a shock when he gets to John Major High. Although he will probably relish the challenge. Plus it is not at all certain he will go to John Major. He is still angling for boarding school. He says he is concerned state secondary

may not offer him the wide-ranging education he requires. It is because he wants to wear a cape and learn about Death Eaters. Have told him Hogwart's does not exist but he just smiled a knowing smile. He is an idiot.

Although it is possibly true about John Major High not being up to scratch. According to Scarlet, Sixth Form induction consisted of watching *Bowling for Columbine* in the audio-visual suite (i.e. hairy librarian Mr Knox's crap video machine). Mr Wilmott is trying to counteract any possible gun-toting activity. It is wishful thinking. The only gun-toting John Major High has ever witnessed is Mr Vaughan's crap splurge guns in *Bugsy Malone*. Although they did cause irreparable damage to the B Corridor ventilation shaft. Scarlet says I might as well not bother coming in all week as the anti-vice film theme is continuing tomorrow with some anti-drug vintage *Grange Hill*. Asked her if Justin mentioned me at all. She said he only managed to wrest his tongue out of Sophie's mouth long enough to eat a KitKat. It is gross. Public snogging is utterly undignified. Although was quite nice when he used to fling me against the lockers in fit of passion.

Tuesday 17

It is nice at Grandpa's. There is no regime of fear regarding spillage, and the TV is on all day. So is kind of like the common room, but without the snogging, black clothing, and constant demands to sign petitions against whaling

or war. Have got to give up the junk food though. Mum asked me if I had been sniffing glue when I got home. I pointed out that sniffing glue would make me spotty and lethargic, not buzzy and wild-eyed, but this did not seem to allay her fears. So admitted to eating a Wagon Wheel (to avoid menacing phone calls to Mr Wilmott) but cunningly said it was Sad Ed's. He is always eating so she will not suspect anything.

Wednesday 18

Grandpa's is becoming a hotbed of truancy. I was not the only one watching *In The Night Garden* (drug-induced toddler programme involving weird maggot and some talking clothes pegs) and eating crisps on the faux leather sofa today. Unbelievably, Dad was also in attendance. I thought he was there to frogmarch me through the school gates, but it turns out that his boss Mr Wainwright had booked him on an Outward Bound team bonding course and Mum would not let him stay at home either. He says there is no way he is yomping around on the notoriously boggy fens with only Malcolm from IT to protect him. I do not blame him. Also he says CBeebies is possibly more educational than school. He is right. Today I learned how toothpaste is made, from a dog and a woman called Auntie Mabel who flies everywhere in a spotty plane. (Although may well write in to point out the carbon footprint implications.) Anyway, we have

agreed not to grass each other up to Mum. Helped Dad smear some convincing mud on his Hush Puppies. Though he does not need my assistance. He has over twenty years' experience of avoiding Mum's Paxman-like questioning.

Thursday 19

8 a.m.

Dad is going to work today. I could see him struggling internally over his Oatibix between a day of crisps on the sofa or a day of arguing about the price of photocopier fluid, but he knows better than to push his truancy too far.

3 p.m.

Unlike me. The game is up. Mum knows everything. Her face (with menacingly thin lips) loomed at the window this afternoon just as Grandpa and I were settling down to *Diagnosis Murder*. Even Jesus screamed. I said it was utterly unfair and that Dad is a complete traitor as he had promised not to say anything. Which was my first, or possibly third or fourth, mistake, as it wasn't Dad who told her. Nor was it amateur private eye Marjory from next door with her binoculars and digital camera. Devastatingly, it was Sad Ed. (It turns out there was no Sixth Form at all today due to Criminal and Retard-related damage to the 'audio-visual suite' so he had come over to listen to

Morrisey CDs and moan about Tuesday.) Apparently he tried to run away, but his size is an impediment to speed, and Mum blocked him at the hydrangeas. Inevitably, he buckled under her interrogation. Which is crap, because I have taught him the rules several times, i.e. DO NOT look into her eyes. DO NOT admit to anything. If in doubt, have coughing fit or feign idiocy or death.

Mum is using her 'It is not me you are letting down, it is yourself' method of punishment. It is a lie. She thinks I am letting her down and will end up semi-literate like Granny and Grandpa Clegg. Have promised to go to school tomorrow, even though it is last day and will consist of idiotic Year Elevens spraying silly string over the mobile science labs and saying it is the end of an era etc., etc.

It is Dad I feel sorry for. There is no way he will be let off so easily. Mum is lying in wait for his return like the beast of Bodmin Moor. I did try to backtrack and claim that he was never actually at Grandpa's and that he had just rung and I answered the phone, but she said, 'Even you are not that stupid, Rachel.' Plus apparently Marjory has camera footage of him driving in the opposite direction to Wainwright and Hogg yesterday morning. She rang earlier to offer her services to track down the 'other woman'.

7 p.m.

Dad has confessed all. He tried to plead innocence with

the same 'I only rang' trick that I used but Mum said she was not an idiot (true) and showed him Marjory's incriminating footage. James says he is disappointed in both of us and that we have insulted his Ninja ways. He and Mum are watching Channel 4 news together on the sofa with an air of annoying self-satisfaction. Even the dog has a smirk on its hairy face. It is being allowed to sit in Dad's place. Its holier-than-thou attitude will not last. It is bound to have eaten, broken, or vomited up something by tomorrow.

8 p.m.
Or earlier. Dog banished to shed for barking frenzy at Jon Snow (who has replaced Natasha Kaplinsky as its most hated newsreader). Dad is back in his rightful place on sofa.

Friday 20

8 a.m.
Today is the last day of school. Hurrah. Am not filled with nostalgia at all. In fact, like Gordon Brown, am looking firmly to future. From next term, will be actual Sixth Former and will no longer have to wear idiotic kilt and cardigan. Plus school will be free of morons like Mark Lambert, who is bound to let the sheep out, set off the fire alarms, and drink too much Tizer.

On down side, am going to have to face two-timing

rock legend Justin Statham and nipple pervert Sophie Microwave Muffins. Have texted Scarlet for reinforcements. She and Sad Ed are going to call for me on the way. I said Sad Ed has already proved his incompetence in these matters but she says he is reeling with remorse and has promised to shape up for future getaways.

4 p.m.

Am reprieved. Justin was not at school. Nor was Sophie Microwave Muffins. They were at Stansted airport with Mr and Mrs Microwave Muffins, waiting to fly to a villa in the Algarve. They are going for the whole summer. He has even quit his meat mincing for her. I hope they are going on easyJet. It is notoriously unreliable and the toilets are too small to do it in (according to Thin Kylie, who has tried several times). Was nice to have henchmen though. Jack came too to ensure I did not try to detour to Stansted to fling myself at Justin's mercy. I said hardly, as, in the absence of any of us owning a car, it involved getting on a smelly bus driven by Len Viceroy, followed by two separate and overpriced trains. (Although a teary airport reunion is utterly romantic. Will try to engineer one into my life at some point. If ever find love again.)

Last day of school entirely as predicted. C Corridor was strewn with funny (in no sense) foam, and the bodies of inconsolable Sixth Formers who think they will never see each other again. As if. They will all be back in Saffron

Walden in three years, living at home and having tedious conversations about how brilliant school was. Unlike me, Scarlet, and Sad Ed. As soon as we have got our degrees, we are moving to a bohemian squat in Camden and will return only to consume Christmas lunch.

On the plus side, Emily Reeve brought baby Lola Lambert in. She is coming back to school in September after all. Mrs Reeve is going to look after the baby. It is an excellent multi-generational solution. There is no way Mum would look after my baby if I got pregnant. She has enough trouble with Baby Jesus as it is. Mr Wilmott was visibly relieved. Not that he wants a teenage mum in the Lower Sixth, not even one who wears knee-length socks and pinafores. But it means his grade point average is safe again, following the announcement that one of the maths geeks is moving to Ipswich.

Plus Mark Lambert proved again that, contrary to expectations, he would make an excellent father. He selflessly dived across the foamy parquet to protect Lola from an oncoming sheep. Although apparently he was the one who let them all out in the first place. And set off the fire alarms and did Tizer sick in the language lab. I will miss him, despite his shaven head and moronic deeds. And the Kylies too. It will not be the same in registration without their endless supplies of *Heat* magazine, self-tan, and graphic details about Mr Whippy's 99. Oh, it is utterly the end of an era.