

Rae Earl



MY LIFE UPLOADED

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MAKE YOUR MARK

New York





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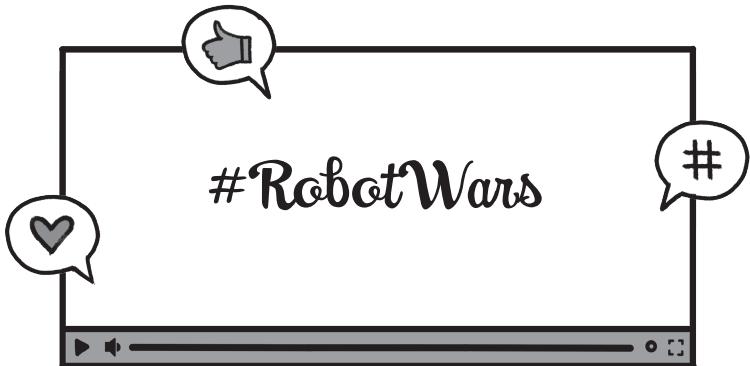
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Even that pic of you in the unicorn outfit. Yes, *that* one. And that baby photo where you hadn't learned to actually eat. All-over spaghetti is SO NOT a good look.

For Jo-Anne Green.
With thanks for all your
help and your amazing
work with peas.





You know you've had a bad weekend when your cat is sulking and trying to eat your shoe at the same time. My pet hates me. My phone hates me. My mum's boyfriend hates me.

Things are looking bad right now. But before YOU start hating on me, too, let me try to explain what really happened this afternoon.

Firstly, I am NOT a murderer. I did not try to kill a machine. It was just a simple misunderstanding between a very angry feline, a desk, and my foot. But it all just got completely out of hand, and Mr. Neat Freak and his zombie pack of dusters are exploiting the situation.

And I don't want to blame anyone for the accident, but it WAS Mum's fault. She wanted me to spend the afternoon doing my homework, so she turned the Wi-Fi off. I KNOW. I was forced to find a desperate way to get service so that I could send a message to Lauren. It was an important message that would cheer the gorgeous Laurenmeister up. She's a best friend who is very fed up and in need of some love.

And it should be a simple thing to message your friends. It's a

human right but not in this house. This is a mobile dead zone. . . . Not this area. Just my house.

To try to get my message to send, I had to hang out of the window with my arm waving in the air. That didn't work. Our neighbor thought I wanted to speak to her. *There is no problem, Mrs. Milner. I am just living with two unreasonable, controlling dictators.* Then I tried to use the shower in the bathroom as a massive antenna thing. This also failed. The shower is for washing. The shower knew it was not a cell tower and would not play along.

So instead I used my cat, Dave, as a mobile hot spot. I learned some valuable lessons here. A phone will not balance on a cat's back, and the cat will then try to eat the phone in anger. Then it will try to eat the contents of your wardrobe.

Once Dave had deserted me for my socks, I had no choice but to stand on top of my desk, flex my leg, point my toes, and hold my phone up in the air as high as I could. Getting a decent signal to text your best friend should NOT involve ballet, but it was worth trying for Lauren. I was pirouetting by my laptop when Dave decided that she wanted to get involved. There was a huge feline leap with full claw extension onto my knee. I lost my balance and fell off the desk. My heel planted itself firmly on my mum's boyfriend's best friend.

His robot vacuum cleaner. It had come into my bedroom to feed on dust.

As I landed on the machine, it beeped in distress. It stopped eating dirt and switched to a random path of confusion. Dave then attempted to kill the robot vacuum cleaner by jumping on top of it. It did sort of look like an out-of-control pigeon.

At that moment, the neat-freak boyfriend rushes into my bedroom and sees MY cat surfing on top of HIS robot vacuum cleaner. The Neat Freak yells at Dave, then yells at me that I've had it in for him and his "superior cleaning methods" for ages!

He then starts nursing his best vacuum cleaner friend like it's a massive, soppy Labrador, reassuring it that all will be okay. He takes it downstairs, muttering about its delicate microbrush technology, and I haven't seen him since.

So Dave and I are now sitting in my bedroom. I still haven't managed to text Lauren, and I think I am in big trouble. This doesn't seem fair, because I've tried to get along with this man. He's my mum's boyfriend and a neat freak, but I've tried. That's me, I suppose. I try to get along with everyone, because things are just easier that way, aren't they? But you cannot live with a man who puts his relationship with a cleaning device before his relationship with living things.

He's even given the robot vacuum cleaner a name: McWhirter.

And McWhirter follows me everywhere. He's like my rotating, sucking-everything-up shadow. When I eat my toast at breakfast, you hear the Neat Freak saying, "There, boy! Get Millie's crumbs!" When I eat dinner, he's at his master's side. Sitting. Waiting. Staring. I know he's just a machine, but his ON/OFF switch looks like eyes. Glowing, red eyes full of tidiness, hungry for a treat of some of my mess. McWhirter the cleaning robot dog has become my bossy, buzzing stepbrother. He is terrorizing me with his automatic settings and full-view sensor.

He? I'm calling McWhirter *he* now! I can't stay here. I'll go mad. I'll start talking to the dishwasher. Neat Freak does that, too. He

hasn't given it a name yet, but it's only a matter of time. He congratulates it when it's finished a cycle.

It's not normal, is it?

All this nonstop trauma over stupid stuff, like fluffy balls on wood floors, makes me think . . .

It makes me think that I need to go live with my dad.

How much twonk can one girl take?! Gary IS a twonk and he gives twonk. Twonks like him do the sort of idiot stuff that HURTS lives. We are not talking *spoon*—meaning the silliness that usually makes you like a person more (LAUREN!). We are talking full-on, drilling-in-your-head, lemon-in-your-eyes-on-a-day-to-day-basis TWONK. It's the WHOLE twonk attitude. They just want to make your life tougher—even when it's tough already. If you're climbing a mountain, they'll come along and say you need a concrete backpack. SERIOUSLY, twonks are WARPED!

I know that sounds a bit “Drama Queen,” but I don’t seem to belong here anymore. Maybe, if I just move out for a while, Mum might miss me and realize that I’m actually nice to have around. And one great thing about having parents who don’t live together is that I actually have somewhere else I could go.

It’s *telling* Mum that’s going to be SO hard.

My mum isn’t evil, but she’s strict and tough beyond the belief of any normal human being or even any parent. Living with her is a bit like being in the army without having to wear camouflage trousers or getting the opportunity to squash people you don’t like with a tank.

And yes, when I say that, I am thinking of rolling over her boyfriend. And McWhirter.

When it was just Mum and me, we fit together more. I could cope with her rules. Obviously, her turning off the Wi-Fi at eight o'clock EVERY night apart from Saturday wasn't great, but we were at least partners in crime—or *grime*, as the Neat Freak called it when he first arrived with his stupid Lycra shorts and power mop. No, Mum didn't clean much and there was an inch of furry-based mess on top of the widescreen—but who cares?

She works at the hospital. She's not a surgeon or anything, but she has to order all the swabs and bandages. So she's basically responsible for stopping people from bleeding to death on a national scale. She saves lives! She doesn't need to DUST. And she doesn't want me cleaning too much, either. She doesn't want me to become tied to an oven, baking my signature-style Black Forest gâteau for some man. She would much rather I come with her to her boxercise class or do my homework or BOTH. At the same time. Mum does multi-tasking like no other woman dares.

I haven't got a signature-style cake, by the way—mainly because Mum and I aren't big on baking. Mum says that if you can get a perfectly decent apple pie from the supermarket, then why bother spending two hours making one? Just watch people do it on TV. I agree. We agree on most things. Or we did until Gary turned up and hoovered all our love away.

Gary. Gary "Neat Freak" Woolton.

Do you know that only twenty-three babies in the WHOLE of this country have been called Gary in the past two years?! This is because Garys CAUSE TROUBLE. And they polish everything at the same time.

Every Friday, Mum and I used to slum it together on the sofa in

our pajamas and watch television till one in the morning. Now Friday night for me is YouTube on my own, and Friday night for her is date night with a man who smells like Pine-Sol. I can't even watch Netflix, because they're always too busy watching something about the Tudors. He's ruined everything.

And since I've been back at school, Mum's insisting that I start following a strict study plan. My final exams aren't until JUNE. And don't even get me started on Gary's cleaning schedule. The oven does not need daily cleaning. Before he came along, we hardly used it.

I have to get out of here. Especially now that Gary thinks I'm a robot vacuum cleaner murderer. It's for Dave's protection as much as mine. Even if it's just for a few months. That's all. Nothing too drastic.

I need to think about how to tell Mum that I want to go live at Dad's, though. But my phone is beeping like mad. Finally, I've got a signal. Oh. It's Lauren. It's . . .

Oh no.

No. No. NO!

It's . . .

This isn't good. Oh prawning HELL.

I need to get over there. Trust me. This is bad. BAD. Everything about me can wait. Lauren is in TROUBLE. THIS could go viral.



#StyleShamed

Lauren's mum lets me straight in. She likes me. She thinks I'm a "good influence." This is because I make Lauren live on Planet Earth for at least some part of the day. The rest of the time, Lauren is on Planet Lauren. It's a fantastic place to be, but lots of adults seem to struggle with it. I love it, though. She's the opposite of me. She does, THEN she thinks.

There's no sign of Lauren's dad, which is probably why her mum is looking so cheerful. Lauren's parents don't get on. They're a soap without the funny bits.

When I get to Lauren's bedroom, she's under her duvet like a very shy and sad quilted tortoise. I can hear her sniffling.

"Go away," she moans until she realizes that it's me.

She pokes her head out. "Oh, Mills—it was just terrible. Unbelievable. Remember those new heels? My first proper pair? You said . . ."

I know what I said. I tried them on, too, and I said they should come with crutches, because breaking your ankle was almost guaranteed.

"Oh no, Lauren. Have you hurt yourself?" I say to her. "They

are hard, Lauren. It's like balancing on really drunk giraffes. The struggle is REAL."

"I know. So I thought I'd practice just by walking to the store. It's only three minutes away in normal shoes. Actually, it was more like twenty in these heels, but . . . I was doing okay until I had to go up the curb, and then . . ." Lauren pops back into her blanket shell. "I heard giggling. I think someone might have been"—Lauren gulps—"following me. What if it's Mr. Style Shame?"

The Mr. Style Shame Instagram account has a massive number of followers. We don't know who runs it, but he's a big name around here. His logo is an outline of a guy wearing dark glasses. He's probably some Batman genius who lives in a bitter den of sass. People WE KNOW have been featured by him. He is constantly on the prowl, like a fashion lion, hunting for people who aren't looking their best. THEN he pounces. And his attacks are FATAL. He blurs your face, but everyone at school still knows who you are, and no—the adults can't stop him. They've got NO idea. They think life begins and ends with Facebook.

If you're unlucky enough to be featured, there's a very good chance that you could be in an online-sensation nightmare in under an hour.

And now he may have a photo of my beautiful best friend falling over in a pair of pink stilettos while carrying a can of Sprite and a Kit Kat. You see what I mean? This isn't good. And Lauren knows it.

"Take a look for me, Mills. See if I'm on there."

I pick up my phone and—yes, of course I follow Mr. Style Shame. Don't hate me. We all do. You need to check to make sure you're not on there. He can strike at any time and . . .

Yes. Sure enough, there is a photo of my beautiful best friend in

midair with a filter to maximize her completely wonky, going-all-over-the-place body. One very pink high heel is in the gutter. The other one is flying beside Lauren's shoulder like a very embarrassed parrot.

If the photo wasn't bad enough, he's written:

Look at this modern-day Cinderella leaving her
glass slippers behind! Remember: If you're going
for #Glam, practice first, girls, or you're very unlikely
to find your own Prince Charming. #Fail #Heels
#Mr.StyleShame

"Is it there?" Lauren whispers.

"Er . . . yes."

"How many likes?"

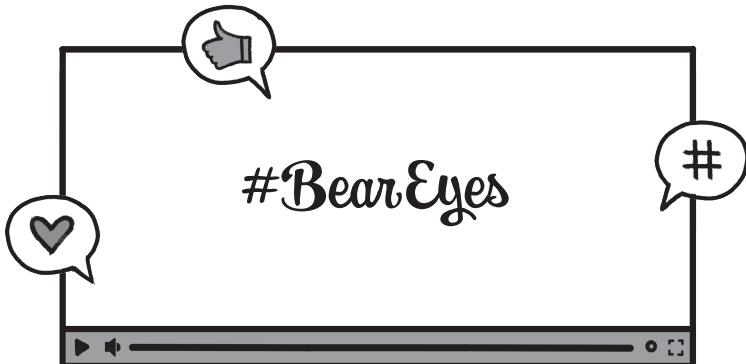
Do I lie?

I take several hundred likes off the actual figure before telling her. Lauren pulls the duvet so far over her head that she looks like she may be planning to hibernate forever. I think she's trying really hard not to cry. Her face collapses when she's upset and doesn't want me to see. When she sobs, I sob. That's how we are.

I hate this. Lauren is my BFF—one of the sweetest, loveliest people you will ever, EVER meet. And Mr. Style Shame makes so many people feel totally, trollingly BLURGH about themselves. He does that CLASSIC evil thing of pretending to be funny so he can get away with it. I'm sick of him.

But right now, I need to work out a way to make my best friend feel better.

And I think I have an idea.



If there are two things my best friend loves, it's makeup and our favorite vloggers. We both love them. Vlogging just cheers you up, doesn't it? And our faves are always THERE—during the daytime or at 2:00 a.m. when you can't sleep because you've got something on your mind.

"Come on, Lozza," I say. I can feel her sobbing under the duvet. "He'll find a new victim in the next five minutes. You'll be forgotten by Monday."

I don't actually believe that, but I just want to make her feel better. People are still talking about Holly Graham's skirt-tucked-in-striped-underpants Mr. Style Shame tragedy, but Lauren doesn't need to hear that right now.

"Let's watch Bella Fruity—the inexpensive beauty—and do some serious eyes."

Bella is one of our favorite vloggers. She does SERIOUSLY low-budget but highly magnificent makeovers. We have nearly worn YouTube out watching her genius with eyes. We have tried her exotic-bird eye makeup, her showgirl brows, her Kardashian contouring, AND her Kate Middleton wedding makeup tutorials. After that, we

could have basically married Prince William. We looked bride-
aliciously fabulous.

Today, though, I think we should keep it simple, so I say to Lauren, “Let’s do Bella’s perfecto winged cateye look.”

Lauren finally comes out of her covers, and we do our makeup. She puts hers on brilliantly, but, just to make her laugh, I get hold of the foundation and liquid eyeliner, pick up my phone, and hit RECORD. . . .

“Okay. So today we are going for the panda look. A lot of you contact me and say, ‘Millie, I want to look like a big furry bear in a zoo.’ So what do you do? It’s EASY. First of all, just get some foundation that’s about five shades lighter than your actual skin tone. SMEAR it all over your face and then get some black liquid eyeliner and draw MASSIVE BLACK CIRCLES ALL OVER YOUR EYES. Now just grab a potted plant or some broccoli from the fridge, stick it in your mouth, and—BINGO!—you’re a panda! NOW, EAT THAT, BELLA FRUITY. I’m the BIG BEAR PANDA BEAUTY! I could go to any party at any zoo in the world.”

Lauren is howling with laughter behind me.

“Who cares what you look like?! Who cares if you trip over? If your BFF is upset because she thinks someone caught her looking stupid, just do something completely spoon like this to remind her that none of us are perfect. Also, there is no shame in trying something new, but there is shame in making people or bears feel bad about themselves. So THANK YOU.”

I’m on an emergency goofball mission here, and it’s worked. Lauren is laughing wildly. Going full silly to cheer up Lauren is totally worth it.

“Now I’m going to upload that. No one will care about your fall if they see THIS!”

Normally, I'd never do anything like this. Most photos or videos I share online are thought about, shot at least thirty times, and put through a really good filter. BUT, as Aunty Teresa says, desperate times call for desperate measures. My BFF needs the love.

And I do it! To be honest, I've got hardly any views on any of my stuff, so I don't think anyone will see it. Also, I'm not sure it's going to stop people talking about Lauren's spectacular fall, but it's worth doing it to show her that I'm WITH her. You'd do the same. I don't mind doing really silly stuff if I'M in actual control of it.

Then Lauren says something really lovely. "You always cheer me up, Mills. You always know what to do."

I sometimes do. I'm good at sorting things out for other people, like Lauren and Aunty Teresa. What I'm not so good at is sorting out my own life, like how to tell Mum I want to go live with my dad because her boyfriend is the most annoying person on this earth.

"Millie," says Lauren. "Thank you. But do you want to take off your panda makeup now? It's quite difficult to take pandas seriously."

She's right. Pandas are not good at discussing who they would like to live with, as they mainly live in zoos with one partner. In fact, pandas are very lucky when you think about it. I bet no one comes in and cleans up their bamboo with a portable dustbuster, GARY.

"You're right, Loz. I need to look professional. Dave tried to kill McWhirter, and I've had enough. I'm going to tell Mum that I want to go and live with Dad for a bit."

Lauren looks taken aback. "Millie! Why do you want to leave

your mum?! You two are like sisters, really, but sisters that get on! I know the Neat Freak is a bit—”

This makes me cross. “Gary is not ‘a bit’ anything. He is a FULL-ON pain. And Mum obviously doesn’t want me there unless I’m doing school stuff. It would only be for a little while. . . .”

Lauren looks at me and then softly says, “Millie, are you sure you’re not just being a little . . . jealous like a spoiled only-child? Your mum deserves to be—”

I lose it slightly. “Lauren, this isn’t about Mum being happy. It’s about her deciding that a man who uses hospital-grade hand sanitizer as shower gel is the ONE.”

Lauren backs down and changes the subject.

“By the way”—she now has her duvet wrapped around herself like some kind of very warm poncho—“have you seen the new boy?”

Have I seen the new boy? Yes, of course I have. New people at school are interesting. We know Reuben Stubbs can still fold himself up into a locker. It used to be impressive, but we’ve seen the same trick a hundred times now. Anyone NEW is a very good thing.

Lauren looks very proud of herself. “I have information on the man!” She attempts a swagger. “He’s called Danny Trudeau, and he is Canadian.”

“Ohhh . . .” I put on our MAJOR GOSSIP ALERT voice. “Is he? How did HE end up HERE?”

Lauren starts to whisper. “Well. The rumor is that he could be related to”—Lauren looks around to check that there aren’t any other people listening—“the president.”

“The president of what?” I ask her. It sounds like a film.

“I don’t know,” Lauren says before realizing she sounds ever so slightly ridiculous and crumpling into a giggly mess on the floor.

“LOZZA!” I throw a hamburger pillow at her.

Lauren gets up and angrily slams the hamburger down on the bed so hard that it loses its bun. “Now, guess who’s already following him on Instagram!”

We both know: Erin Breeler.

How can I explain her?

Erin Breeler is the queen of Instagram at school. She is guaranteed hundreds of likes on everything she posts. She could put a pic up of her avocado salad and get total adoration from every breathing thing on this earth. Even non-breathing things, like the avocados, would probably like her posts.

On her account, she has the most perfect photos of her totally amazing, glowing life. Selfies like you’ve never seen. Her angles are perfect. Her eyebrows are sculpted. HER BUM IS A CELEBRITY ON ITS OWN. She smiles with perfect teeth (even when she had braces, she looked unbelievable) and wears clothes that the rest of us don’t dare to. She does yoga poses in jeans. It looks GREAT. You think I’m exaggerating? Go and look. The girl is phenomenal.

And even though it’s all about what she looks like on the outside, she writes stuff like *Feel the inner glow radiate out* and *I can be more mindful in this mohair cardigan*, so you can’t even call her shallow.

She’s really clever about what she posts. When she had a zit, she made it into a good thing. She put her little finger over it, puckered her lips, and posed with a *No apologies! No one is perfect!* caption. She acts like she doesn’t really know what she’s doing, and everybody falls for it. It’s so FALSE, but everyone seems to love her.

Girls like Erin don't hang around with girls like Lauren and me. She's too cool. Too edgy. And if you get in her space, she will take you down in SUCH a whip-smart way. Yet, a weird part of me still wants her to like me.

I know—pathetic. And, honestly, I'm scared of her. And I hate that in myself. She's superconfident, both at school and in her posts, and it's like—

"Millie! Come back to the room!" Lauren is calling out to me.

"Sorry," I say. "I was just thinking about Erin Breeler. Beautiful people can make you drift off, can't they? Erin and Danny. Lovely Danny with his lovely—"

"Bag!" Lauren interrupts. "Have you seen it, Millie? That boy has serious stationery."

Lauren likes paper and pens more than anything. She has a Pinterest board that is just fluorescent markers.

"I was going to say his eyes, but anyway, Loz, I'd better go."

Lauren gives me a huge hug. She also wishes me luck, which I'm going to need.

The truth is, I could stay here forever.

I feel sick. I don't want to go home.



When I get home, Mum still isn't back from the big weekly Saturday shop. Gary is cleaning the toaster and telling it off for hoarding little bits of bread. This is normal. He has a feud with the toaster. He says it's a bad design. The toaster feels the same way about Gary but cannot talk.

Actually, I don't think Gary is speaking to me after I damaged his robotic true love. He looks up when I come in but then goes back to cleaning. Who spends their weekend doing that? Someone with no friends who likes telling things off. Worryingly, there is no sign of McWhirter.

I go upstairs to my bedroom, and Dave comes and joins me. We are refugees from Gary "Neat Freak" Woolton's Democratic Republic of Clean. I create crumbs. Dave sheds hair. We are the enemy.

I keep thinking about what Mum is going to say when I tell her about Dad's. I can't decide if she'll be relieved or calm or . . .

She's going to be cross. Who am I kidding? I try to take my mind off things. What will my new video thumbnail be? A screenshot of something I've watched? A photo I've taken? Mum's furious, sobbing face?

Finally, I hear her coming through the front door. I take Dave downstairs. Mum is in the kitchen, flustered, and loaded with bags from Sainsbury's. A soggy baguette is poking out of one of them, and wet carbs always put her in a REALLY foul mood.

I know I should probably wait for her to take her coat off and try to have a proper, sensible chat, but ALL the feelings EVER are rushing up from deep inside of me. I end up yelling at her so loudly that Dave the cat leaps into the air—so high that, if I'd been filming it, the video would have been a YouTube sensation: "SuperCat Scales a Building!"

"Mum! I want to go and live with Dad."

Mum just carries on unpacking. She must have heard, but I try again just in case.

"Mum—I want to go and live with Dad! At Granddad's house. It's a REAL place. It has a roof. It's FINE!"

This has been building up all summer, so surely it can't come as a surprise.

Mum wraps the soggy baguette in a tea towel, hands it to Gary, and says, very calmly, "Of course you do, Mills. It's like the Wild West over at your granddad's. Your granddad tries, but you know what your dad is like. And don't get me started on Teresa. You'd be able to do what you like, but you're perfectly okay here. I know you think some of my rules are over the top, but turning the Wi-Fi off at night means your brain gets a rest! I'm looking after you! Protecting you! Now, stop being silly and tell me what's really wrong."

This makes me cross. How could she not have noticed how unhappy Gary has been making me? I try to take a deep breath, but my brain goes on heavy-rain-flood mode and my mouth gushes out all sorts of horror.

“Because, Mum, eating a custard cream in this house has become a five-stage process involving a dustpan and brush. And you DO NOT need a side plate to eat a banana! A banana is a big, solid mass. It has its own neat little container—its actual skin! It’s the most interior design-friendly fruit known to man. It loves being clean. Why are we even discussing how tidy food naturally is? See what Gary’s done to us?! And stop staring at my hand.”

I realize I’ve picked up a banana and am banging it up and down to back up every point I’m making. Fruit torture is not a good look.

Mum says, “You’re going to bruise that, Millie.”

Gary is already brandishing a newspaper just in case I make the banana fully mushy and he has to wrap it up for the bin. He can’t help himself. He then starts pretending this argument is not happening and begins what he would call a “light clean” of the kitchen units.

I don’t care. I am on a serious rant.

“Mum, I didn’t mind your study schedules or your stupid rules. Mostly, I can put up with them! BUT NO ONE CAN LIVE LIKE THIS. We used to have great times together. Now we NEVER do. You’ve changed. And you’ve always said, ‘Don’t change for anyone. Don’t change for a man.’ But that is exactly what you’ve done. You call yourself a feminist? You’re actually a sappy-dappy cheeseball love lady. You’re not my mum anymore. You’re HIS gooey girlfriend!” I point at Gary, who has frozen midpolish. “And you don’t let me decide stuff for myself, like when I do my homework or how late I stay at Lauren’s, even though I never do anything wrong. I don’t ever get to do anything my way. It always has to be your way, and it isn’t fair.”

All this is terrible, but it's how I feel.

Gary "Neat Freak" Woolton, who is NOT my dad, shouts, "Go to your room!"

Mum, who is still my mum, says quietly, "What's happened to my lovely, sensible, clever girl?"

I yell, "She's in a . . . a coma of really fed-up!" Which is a totally rubbish response, but I'm really angry.

When I storm out of the room, I trip over McWhirter, who is probably trying to escape all the noise. It completely ruins my exit, but at least he is still alive. My aunty Teresa would call this karma. I call it further evidence of my life being ruined by cleaning equipment—vacuum sabotage. I bet Gary programmed him that way.



Are you still here? I'm surprised. I'm a bit horrible. I'm sorry you had to witness that.

I curl up on my bed and have a mini cry—a wrong-time-of-the-month sort of sob at a sad film. I can see that Mum loves Gary. The calm part of my brain can see that he makes her laugh, and he rubs her dry heels with cocoa butter. She'd been single for years because she didn't want to settle for second-best. Gary came along with his posh mountain bike and amazingly expensive muesli and—BANG!—it was major relationship time. So believe me—I don't want to ruin my mum's happiness.

But if I'm honest, the whole situation is making *me* really unhappy. This house feels like a ride at a theme park that never stops, and I can't get off. And it's not making me feel good. My chest feels tight. And the thing is, in that argument with Mum, I didn't even sound like me. I'm usually totally chill and . . .

Okay, let's just say it: *sensible*.

It's a CURSE. I've always been that way. I blame Mrs. Woods. She wrote in my school report: *Millie is a girl with plenty of common sense*. How did she know? Well, when Stephen Pearson broke his

arm while running around on the playground, pretending to be an owl, I was the one who suggested that we should probably call an ambulance. Everyone else was trying to find a phone to get a photo. Including, probably, Mrs. Woods.

I was nine.

I know. Sweet. But also a bit tragic.

You can be anything at school—geeky with geek chic, a cosplayer, or a MAJOR member of the Nerdverse—that's basically ALL FINE. No one cares. Bradley Sanderson in the year above has a vlog channel called The King of Elevation, where he films himself in lifts or going up and down escalators. One of his videos has seventy-seven thousand views! That's way more than Erin has ever got for one of her mindful-in-mohair posts. To some people—admittedly not many at school—HE is the BOMB.

But me? Being the sort of person that is quite . . . wise? Well, I'm less cool than Daniel Gyver from tenth grade, who can chew through six entire pens in one geography lesson, including the metal nibs.

My friends love me. Mum says I've got a good ear and a soft shoulder. She doesn't mean I've got a floppy, mushy body (sorry—you probably realized that). She means I usually know what to do in a crisis. Even the sort of crisis that Lauren says makes you hide in your bedroom for days eating crisps and playing *Pet Doctor*.

I can usually cope with my weird family. I can even cope with real men. I've had a REAL BOYFRIEND—Dylan Anthony. Yes! Him! HE was mine. For a month and a half. Until we had a massive row over the suffragettes. He thought they were overreacting. I said not being allowed to vote JUST because you're a girl was a pretty big deal.

I know. I sound like a right doofus. But in that moment, it just felt RIGHT. This is why I feel so panicky now. I'm not normally the one having a meltdown. I'm not the one who makes any silly decisions, and yet, here I am about to. . . .

It is *not* sensible to want to leave your mum and go live with a man who still lives with his own dad at the age of thirty-eight and who once used elastic bands and a copy of *Top Gear* magazine to make you a diaper.

There is not much common sense there, Mrs. Woods. But this is what I want to do.

Perhaps I just need time—some time to stop being a wobbling mess. I'm not a dessert shaking in a desert. I'm Millie. I'm . . .

I need to go.

For once, I'm going to follow my heart, and my head can just . . . shut up, be quiet, and DISAPPEAR. If it possibly can. And if it can't, my heart can go out partying alone and my brain can stay home with a tub of ice cream and watch a film.

I must be nervous. Can't stop thinking of desserts. CLASSIC sign.