

DAY TWO

PROOF OF MY INSANITY: Lorna and Alice asked me to go to this one-day song-writing workshop with their new friend Hanna and I pretended I had to help Mum and Dad with an imaginary leaf problem in the guttering. I do not even know what guttering is and am hoping they don't either. How is anything going to happen if I just stay in with my books and posters creating a big bunch of crazy in my head?

OK, I hereby vow to get OUT of my brain (*brilliant* though it may be) and INTO the world (dull and vacuous as *that* may be). At least the world has one thing going for it: it's where Nick Collins hangs out.

I will now ask Mum and Dad for summer spending money to fund my adventures.

LATER

Yay! Result!

I got twice as much as I bargained for. The money was a 'yes', but now my parents have a new anxiety: that I am unhappy and dissatisfied. In the last ten minutes of the two-hour conversation (for 'conversation' read 'onslaught of friendly-fire and concerned interrogation') they offered to send me on a yoga retreat in India or on a ski-school vacation. I almost said 'yes' to the India thing before Paul piped up with a timely reminder about the last occasion I ate curry. The world may not have done me many favours yet, but it certainly doesn't deserve a repeat of that particular interesting little incident. The ski-school thing will only work when snow stops being cold, and anyway can you ski anywhere in summer?

I love how, as long as I phrase it as a 'learning experience', I can pretty much get anything from Mum and Dad. The girls still can't believe that my kick-ass wardrobe is thanks to an article I mentioned (several times) about a *fascinating* report

from MIT and Harvard that I found in one of my recent editions of *Scientific American*. It was about the lifelong damage done to teenage girls when their self-esteem suffers due to lack of ability to fit in clothes-wise (or ‘conform sartorially’ as the report put it). The folks instantly knew this would mean future therapy bills if I didn’t get the skirts, tops, jeans, boots and sneakers I wanted. I guess they did the maths and decided that at least buying me new clothes was a controllable expense; therapy can last forever.

Trouble is, now I just look like a geek in great clothes. It doesn’t help that I never know what to do with my hair so it hangs there long and straight, adding to my unkempt-librarian look.

Sadly, the ‘academic evidence’ thing works both ways with my folks, so I am still not allowed to get contact lenses or get my eyes lasered because of the medical write-ups that my darling brother put under their noses about dry-eye syndrome and infections leading to blindness. What super-bites is that the main article came from one of my own copies of *Time* magazine. In all honesty, having eyes like shrivelled raisins or dripping with gungy bits would be heaven compared to wearing old-lady glasses with frames

thick enough to fit french doors into. I chose them last year thinking that if I went for the geekiest, ugliest, frumpiest pair, they'd look ironic, the way rock stars sometimes carry it off, but sadly they just look geeky, ugly and wronger than wrongness itself.

I'm just ranting now.

I should use this journal to plan exact things and carry them out and report back. Righty-ho! Task number one in the Reality Game – go into town and talk to five new teenagers from the regulars who hang out there, but who I don't know properly. These will be five who do *not* either a) say that they *have* to get out of this town or they will go mad or b) look like they might have rickets or scurvy or too much pink stuff in their wardrobe (especially true of males).

Good luck, Lemony, and Godspeed!

STILL LATER

OK, *not* so easy. It gets to that moment where there's someone new and roughly your age looking at you, and you are smiling at them trying not to look like you just had dental work done. But then what do you do next? With one girl I muttered 'nice bag' and she muttered 'thanks', and that was it. I mean, what could I do after that, say, 'nice jacket' or something?

I'd have sounded like a simpleton. And as for guys, if you even hold eye contact for too long you feel like a stalker. And if you say anything nice then they say something sly about you to their friends and suddenly you have become their afternoon's entertainment. And I have heard every comment there is about 'four-eyes', and 'what's the weather like up there?' and I need to protect myself from that.

And then there was Nick hanging out by the fountain, looking like God himself, and all he did was say, 'Where's your twin?' (meaning Ro, of course). I can't believe he hasn't got tired of saying that and *still* hasn't bothered remembering our names. I think he thinks it's hilarious because although we do spend a ridiculous amount of time together, with my height and her lack of it, and my boring, long, brown hair and her stunning, black dreads, we are about as twin-like as a giraffe and a grizzly bear. I am now convinced that the love-test thing with the names is wrong (scientifically as well as morally) because it's feeling like my odds with the Nick-man are sitting *way* below 6 per cent.

I wonder what else they eat in India?

I just love him so much that it hurts. What also hurts is when people presume that because I'm so

cheery and brainy that I simply don't care about stuff like that. Not that I cry much. I wonder why I do that, just stuff it down inside and put a smile on my face and think of something witty to say. I think that if I cried then I would feel worse and somehow they would have made me less.

Why does he only go for the stunningly glamorous girls? Has he got something against personality and brains? Really and truly, does a girl have to be a celebrity or get crowned Miss Northern Hemisphere to get a bit of attention round here?

I think the group from town would be amazed if they knew how often I get dressed to go out to a party or dance and then sit on the edge of my bed, too scared in case I'm all wrong. That's why they think I prefer doing schoolwork and science projects to hanging out. Nothing could be less true (except maybe the 6 per cent thing).

One very cool aspect to this summer is that there is no science camp this year because they blew up one of the labs with an acid/alkali experiment that they'd been planning for the eight-year-olds to do. And seeing as my suggestion of going to a modelling and department seminar was laughed out of the inner atmosphere by my loving family, I need to

make my own fun this summer. They think they know me so well, my family, but how do they know for definite that I'll never need to get out of a sports car without flashing my underwear, or need to know how to apply mascara in seven thin coats? It might just save us all one day! I think Paul should go to it so at least he'll stop snorting milk out of his nose when he laughs at me.

This is the problem with being an imaginative trail-blazer, a self-improver: by the time anyone gets your brilliance you've already moved on to greater greatnesses.

My brilliance? Yeah, right, I guess I must be thinking about those health-shoes I designed and made with the ventilation holes that also let rain in, or the spy-boots with the secret compartment in the right heel that made me walk with a limp, or the time I made my own board game called 'Mess', like chess, but with more pieces and fewer rules. At this point Paul would say it's no wonder I don't have more friends and Ro would hit him.

Face it. I am nothing but a bundle of potential with a large vocabulary and larger glasses.