

Clueless Clarence
5 April 2007

by

Zoe Hunter & Leslie Roberts

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6th Edition

Age 14yrs +

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Clueless Clarence is dedicated to my family and to the memory of Leslie Roberts. His encouragement, support and friendship were instrumental in turning dreams into reality.

He was a true friend and an inspirational collaborator. I will always treasure my memories of him.

With love

Zoe X

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And finally, another big thank you to Peter Layzell, who has helped me in so many ways which includes letting me go on his very popular website.

I am raising money/awareness for *Autism Bedfordshire*:

<https://zoehunter.bandcamp.com/album/rock-on>

Here is two albums *Rock on* and *Swimming Against the Tide*. Also, Leslie Roberts wrote *The Sea is Red* as his personal anthem for *World Autism Awareness Day 2 April*.

Also, I would like to thank Jack Donachie for the following tracks © 2014:

Swimming against the Tide, *Learn to Love Again*, *Love Attack*, *Hey Mister Bus Driver*, *Everybody Gets the Blues Sometimes* and *Just Another Christmas Song*.

It's Christmas Eve © 2014 written by Annette Probert and Zoe Hunter.

We hope you like what you hear! Good listening, everyone!

Foreword

by

Ben McKenzie

I consider myself very fortunate to have known Clarence Upton-Smyth since we were pupils together at Appletown Primary School, near Canterbury, Kent. He is a year younger than I am and yet, from my first year at secondary school, we were always in the same class.

Clarence was born at home at 13 Bagley Road, Appletown on 6 May 1992. At that time, he had a three-year-old sister, Claudia, and six years later his mother presented him with a second sister, Sophia.

Now, I will never forget my first day at Appletown Comprehensive School. We were in the assembly hall and, after my name was called for me to go to my new form teacher, I heard Clarence's name immediately afterwards. I couldn't believe my ears, as he shouldn't really have been there for at least another year.

At the age of five Clarence started learning the piano, and in August 2007 he passed his grade 8 with flying colours. It is now Monday 31st December 2018, and on Monday 30th July this year I found a managerial post with a publishing company called Ace Books Ltd. I then had this idea about asking Clarence whether he had ever considered writing his very own autobiography. He told me he hadn't, and that although he would have loved a book about his life, he was too busy to write it himself. Then he mentioned he had been in his loft recently looking for his squash racket and came across a scrapbook in which he had written seventy-one poems, four songs and a lullaby during 2009/2010, plus his one and only diary; I was intrigued to know why this was a *Cuddles and Friends* diary, of all things.

He explained, “Well, that was supposed to be mum’s Christmas present from my late Great-Auntie Maggie from Scotland, but she didn’t want it, so I ended up writing in it instead. As for the scrapbook, at that time, I had just left school, and I aspired of becoming a famous poet and lyricist. Mum let me do this for a while, but in the end, I was told to find a job or else! And so, both books were put away in my loft box and forgotten about until now. Well, I know I’ve done a poem about Sir David Attenborough, but I’ve never written one about global warming, I wonder why I didn’t do that?”

I suggested, “Well, Clarence, knowing how you feel about our precious Earth and all that, why don’t you just write one? Take your time if you like, no rush.”

He shouted, “Really!”

I said, “No, I’m kidding. Look, just send us an email a.s.a.p. Then, I’ll put it somewhere in your *Scrapbook* chapter.”

He smiled, “Well, I suppose it could go on the end, if you wouldn’t mind, please - thank you.”

I replied, “Of course I wouldn’t mind, it was my idea, wasn’t it?”

He smiled, “Damn it, man, who knows more about me than you do?”

So right there and then, (with permission to use the diary’s sketched characters and monthly poems) we struck a business deal. A few non-family names have been changed to protect the “innocent”.

So, fans from all over the world can just sit back, relax, and enjoy it!

Chapter 1

Secret Diary



January has...

A chance for a brand-new start.

Whatever has happened in the past... good or bad.

You've just got to follow your heart.

Make other people happy and you will be glad.

Tuesday 1 January *New Year's Day. Bank & public holiday
UK and Republic of Ireland
First entry in Samuel Pepys' diary in 1660.*

At 9.12 a.m. I felt dreadful with a terrible pounding head. The house was an absolute tip, and I was carefully dodging around a few half dead looking people who were sprawled out all over the sofa and carpets. Empty and half empty bottles left everywhere, as well as lots of food, party poppers, party hats, balloons, and patches of a pile of dried-up sick in the porch. I hope that we'll never have another New Year's party like last night ever again. It was

nearly as bad as our 2006 Christmas Eve party. On the one hand, last year was great without a single party, but on the other we had family arguments galore.

The worst fight I can recall, in fact, was over this very light pink Cuddles and Friends diary.

Mum moaned, "It is nice of Great-Auntie Maggie to send me this diary, but I don't have the time to write in it. Can't someone else, have it?"

Sophia sighed, "I'm not having that *silly* bear diary."

Claudia shouted, "I can't have it. I'm like mum; I'm far too busy for such things as that."

Dad said, "No way!" and turned away.

As I couldn't bear it going to waste, with much delight and amusement I took it. So, as well as everything else, I now must record each day's events in my new diary. I know, to keep it interesting, what if I'll write down as many numbers as possible into actual figures? Yes! That's it! Right then. So, today mum thanked me when everyone else had gone to bed. According to her, I could end up being famous 1 day. Therefore, I could sell it for a deserving charitable cause or other. Yes, like the www.save-the-edible-insects.com, as they might be the only things left to eat by the time, I kick the bucket.

Anyway, it looks like Samuel Pepys began his first diary in 1660. I suppose now I know he kept a record of his life it can't be all that bad. So, taking in everything I need to record each day, I may as well keep it and make it my new year's resolution. Roll on 2008, and let's just see what it brings.

Wednesday 2 January

Granada was recaptured from the Moors by the Spanish army in 1492.

So happy I wasn't living in Granada in 1492. Apart from anything else, even if I had survived, I'd be dead by now.

Soon I'll be back with my old classmates again at

Appletown Comprehensive School. If I decide to go, then what will I do? I looked up 2 websites. I logged onto the Royal College of London. I could have applied there, but at my age I can only do Saturdays. Then I considered the Purcell School in Hertfordshire. Here I can be a full-time student. I'll need to study 2 instruments: piano, plus I'll have to return to singing lessons as I can't play anything else. I'll need to do 2 auditions, obtain a professional written recommendation, and pay a registration fee of £25. So, I've got to pass a couple of auditions to qualify. Then to be able to stay I'll have to audition again around the middle of the year. What? Let's just think about it a little more and look at the pros and cons:

For:

1. No girlfriend.
2. I hate my 2 sisters.
3. Dad is hardly ever home; he's either working or he's in The Black Pig.
4. I won't be missing Topsy.
5. I only have Si-fi Paul Patterson, Gaming James Robertson, Sporty Ben McKenzie and occasionally Farmer Jason Hanson to hang around with.

Against:

1. Mum's lovely cooking.
2. Mum's handiwork with my dirty clothes.

Hmm! I don't know how to use the washing machine, and I can't cook. I've only just mastered pancakes. So sorry, Purcell School, I'm not quite ready to leave home or to get a full-time job just yet, so it's back to school to study for my A levels.

Thursday 3 January

Britain seized control of the Falkland Islands in 1833.

In 1833 the Falkland Islands must've been in such a sorry state. Good old Britain! 150 years later, Mrs. – um, um – Lady Thatcher sent our sailors and soldiers in to make sure we kept hold of them. That's a very long time.

Whatever possessed me to dedicate a classical composition piano piece called *A Brother's Love* to my beloved sisters? I don't know. I must've been in an exceptionally happy mood on that day last year in spring. I was just about to play it, when suddenly Sophia burst into the lounge and started playing on her *pathetic* violin, practising on her stage 1 piece. She *knows* it doesn't take long to play – she could've waited until I'd finished! I slammed the door and headed straight for the study. But I couldn't go in there either because mum was busy on the computer looking at the most watched clip-on YouTube. I couldn't believe what I was seeing: a little girl about 10 years old playing on her violin just as badly as Sophia does.

I suppose Sophia is the youngest of this family and thinks she can always get away with many things – and usually does. How I'd love to be 9 again. Hmm.

Friday 4 January

Jacob Grimm was born in 1785.

I shan't be reading any of the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* to either of my sisters' children, only to mine, if I'm lucky, that is. I'm not best pleased with my sisters, especially Claudia, at this precise moment. My today's entry will explain all!

Why couldn't Claudia go and cough and sneeze somewhere else? No; she had to do it all over me when she asked if I could take Topsy for a walk around the block. She only has the tiniest snuffle ever. I'm so glad she's going back to Truro to study for that *stupid* Save the Earth

degree tomorrow. A little fresh air would have done her a lot of good as well. Sisters!

When Topsy and I turned into Hillside Drive we bumped into Bonkers Tom Bradshaw who had a pair of silver earphones on which covered the whole of his earlobes. He was listening to modern jazz music. I know this because I heard every note.

I tapped him on his shoulder. "I'm sorry to tell you this, Tom, but your jazz music is way too loud for your ears."

He snapped, "It's none of your business what I do to my ears." Then Topsy started *whimpering*: his Alsatian had jumped on to her and in the process our leads had got all knotted up. Together we tried very hard to disentangle the leads. Then I saw Harmless Barry Monahan coming towards us wearing a button-up, long, dirty-looking, brown coat, a red woolly scarf and trainers with undone shoelaces.

He was asking, "Can I help?" and "*Aaaaaah!* Get your dog away! I don't like dogs jumping up at me, it makes me scared," and started crying.

Tom apologised. "Oh, I'm sorry, mate, get down, Mack!"

Then I saw Mrs. Robinson *wobbling* out of her front garden gate. Her glasses were halfway down her nose; in her right hand she was holding a large Strongbow cider can and wearing a long, light pink dressing gown.

She was saying, "Don't worry, boys, I saw everything, I know how to handle dogs. I've got 2 of my own." What a relief she was home.

I so wish that Claudia or Sophia or, even better, both had been born a boy. Doing that nightmare of a walk made me exactly 20 minutes late for my piano lesson. I was so annoyed with myself. I'm never late for anything, unless of course I'm with mum, Claudia, or Sophia. At 5.09 p.m., I received a text from James.

Hi Clar,

Wii Mario Kart Mushroom Cup races tom at 10 a.m.?

James

At 5.10 p.m., I texted him back.

Hi James,

Sick!

Clar

Saturday 5 January

The inventor of the safety razor, King Camp Gillette, was born in 1855.

Hang on a minute; it won't be long now before I start shaving myself. Good old Gillette!

Nobody else was awake at 9.46 a.m., so, I quickly got changed, gulped down my toast and left a note on the kitchen table.

Gone to James's house on my bike to play Mario.

Clar

I apologised as soon as I saw him at 10.03 a.m. "Hi James. I'm so sorry, but the wind was blowing in the wrong direction making me 3 minutes late."

He laughed. "Ha! Clarence, but what about yesterday then? My auntie heard it from Mrs. Fisher, who heard it from Mrs. Bradshaw, who heard it from Mrs. Carter, who heard it from Mrs. Lovett, who heard it from Mrs. Robinson about your little accident."

I said, "Thanks a lot, Mrs. Robinson, now the whole town must know." Then we started playing all the 4 Mario Mushroom Cup races. James had such an excellent time, smashing me hands down.

When I got back home, Claudia had already left for Truro and mum told me about how my sisters were arguing the toss all morning over Topsy, so mum ended up walking her instead.

I said I was sorry, but there wasn't anything I could do

about it.

Sunday 6 January

Epiphany

Sigmund Freud was exiled to London to escape Nazi persecution in 1938.

He wouldn't have had a hope in hell of a chance a year later.

Only 2 days left to go and for a fortnight all my homework has been left in a drawer. So, I dedicated all my time to completing my maths, music, and geography.

I've never been so brain tired in all my life, so I had to go to bed a little earlier than I had planned.

Monday 7 January

The rock singer David Bowie was born today in 1947.

I looked him up on the internet. I know now he was a very famous pop singer back in the '70s, '80s and '90s, and he's also an actor, record producer and arranger. He's such a versatile character.

If this had been in my parents' time, it would've been the first day back at school.

But no, it isn't. There are 5 precious school days lost every year because of these so-called Inset days. So, if I'm ever lucky enough to have children, I'll make sure they won't miss out and go to some zoo, or to a museum.

Tuesday 8 January

Tony Bullimore, round-the-world yachtsman, survived after spending five days trapped underneath his capsized boat until his emergency beacon was spotted by the Australian Air Force in 1997.

Well, 5 days would've felt like 5 years, the worst part being that he had no idea if he had any hope of being

rescued. I shouldn't think he would want to drink water from now on, much less swim or even paddle.

I woke up at 7.05 a.m. I was absolutely frozen to the bone. I found myself in my bedroom slumped over my chair and desk on top of my *Britain's Got History* book. Then Sophia was taking forever in the bathroom, so I had to contend with the small sink and mirror in the downstairs toilet. It took me ages to get into my white, black, and burgundy school uniform and the weather was terrible. As we were leaving, it started to hail, and we got so battered about. It felt like our bodies, bikes and my glasses had gone through a war zone.

School was awful as well. Head bully boy Moley Markus Thompson and his best mate Creepy Colin Harrison just didn't want to know in our maths lesson, so they decided to block the door against Grumpy Mr. McGann who couldn't get in for about half an hour. So, I had to witness pupils swearing and messing about chucking books and bags around the classroom. But he did manage to persuade Markus to open the door, and he then sent them off to do detention in the cooler.

This was the worst first day back ever!

Wednesday 9 January

Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger introduced income tax at two shillings in the pound to raise funds for the Napoleonic Wars in 1799.

Between 1799 and 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte was a brilliant military leader who led the French armies to a string of victories over every major European power. But in 1805 our British fleet, led by Nelson, defeated a French-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar, thereby beating Napoleon! Good old Nelson!

I got up at 6.54 am, Sophia had to contend with the downstairs toilet. From now on I'll do this every school day.

During lunchbreak, Markus and Colin had flooded out 2 boys' toilets, so now they have both been expelled for the remains of the week! Just typical of them!

Thursday 10 January

Samuel Morse demonstrated his telegraph system for the first time in 1883.

If I'd been alive in the 1880s, where my elder sister is concerned, I wouldn't even have bothered sending a telegram either. My today's comments will soon reveal all.

During PE my indoor cricket skills were dreadful. I was in such a terrible state: I was about to start running when I had the most massive sneeze ever.

Our toughest teacher, Chisel Mr. Brookes, suddenly shouted at me. "Great, Clarence, so I might be ill for my, no, um, my... brother's 40th birthday party, now!"

Thanks, Claudia. I've just upset our best teacher! I think she's the most selfish and bossiest sister ever, who only contacts us when she's upset, wants money or when she wants a lift from the train or bus station.

Friday 11 January

In 1935 Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Pacific.

Amelia Earhart: what a strong woman, well ahead of her time, good on her!

I felt much worse, so I phoned in sick. Mum had to go out to do the shopping, so I asked her for:

Balm tissues
Cough sweets
Vapour rub
Lemsip
Grapes (white & seedless)

It wasn't long before Topsy wanted her morning walk. I couldn't face taking her, so I let her out into our back garden. She managed to find a tiny space close to the right side of our brown mossy fence.

All the junk has been here for months, and all our conifer trees need trimming as well. The sooner they are cut, and the junk is collected the better.

Just as Topsy came back in, so did mum. I thanked her, made my hot lemon drink, and went straight back upstairs to bed.

Saturday 12 January

Jean Lenoir, inventor of the first practical internal combustion engine, was born in 1822.

Ah, ha! A man with a woman's name! I bet he took some stick in the playground. Wow, that was nearly 200 years ago.

Feeling absolutely dead! So, I didn't go to my piano lesson. Mum lent me some money and took it in on my behalf. When she got back, she told me she wasn't feeling well and went to bed holding some herbal stuff. I told Sophia that mum's coming down with my cold, hoping against all hope that she would warn her *pathetic* mates against coming over, but no. What a *racket!* All afternoon downstairs they were playing so-called pop music. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

Thank goodness mum was out to the world. But our back garden is adjacent to our neighbour's, Mr. Leggett, and he did complain. Mr. Leggett, who's built like a brick shit house with the longest jet-black hair, earring, and tattoos galore, came over banging like nobody's business on our front door and I went downstairs to answer it. He complained about the loud music, and if we didn't turn it down, he'd phone the pigs. He then mentioned about our high trees and how it's blocking his precious daylight. So, immediately after he left, I marched straight into the

lounge, switched everything off and said that if they didn't all leave right away, I would quite happily spread my germs all over them. They all took the hint and ran out like the house was on fire! I told dad when he got home from work about Mr. Leggett.

Altogether I found it to be an extremely long and very frustrating day.

Sunday 13 January

Charles Dodgson died in 1898. He used the pen name Lewis Carroll when he wrote his famous books 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Alice through the Looking Glass'.

Ha! Now yesterday's anniversary text mentioned about the internal combustion engine; eventually after a lot of research I found out it was the diesel locomotive. Now here's somebody who would've been able to afford to go on 1 and I don't mean Alice.

On miserable days with the weather like it is and with me feeling rotten, I always dread it because, after our massive roast dinners, everybody else goes to sleep. So, this time I decided to join them.

Mum has caught mine and Claudia's heavy colds.

Monday 14 January

Astronomer Edmond Halley died in 1742. He discovered a comet which was named after him.

I did hear about this some years ago, but back then I thought they were talking about a new comic, *silly* me.

In exactly a months' time it'll be St Valentine's Day. Now, I wonder, will anybody ever fancy somebody like me who has never had a girlfriend before (and it's not through lack of trying either) the answer is... well no, I don't think so.

I felt a lot better, so I decided to go to school. Every spare minute I had was spent going around to all my different

classmates copying their Friday's lesson notes. Sophia has been sneezing everywhere all day, ha!

Tuesday 15 January

Elizabeth I was crowned Queen in 1559.

Fussy old Henry the VIII. Not my greatest of kings ever, I must say.

In our history lesson we had a pleasant surprise. For some reason we had a very nice supply teacher: her name was Miss Hunt, and she was so lovely to look at with her long brunette hair, as well as being an excellent teacher.

She spoke about the Crimean War. Apparently, the British made a few mistakes, but the Russians stupidly made even more, so after 2 years of bloodshed and gore we won! I wish she always taught us, she's so much better than Boring Mr. Collins.

Wednesday 16 January

The 18th amendment to the U.S. constitution banning alcohol came into effect in 1920 – commonly referred to as prohibition.

I always remember dad telling me once that my great-great-granddad bought a couple of crates of whisky from 1 of Al Capone's gang members quite a few times. I can't believe our family had connections with a truly feared gangster! WOW! How exciting!

As I was walking past the assembly hall, I saw the School Secretary, Typo Miss Rutherford, putting up a single flyer in the centre of our notice board. It read:

This year's summer amateur production will be *West Side Story*. Those of you who wish to audition please put your names down on the paper provided below. The audition is to be held on Wednesday 30 January. Thank you.

In my English lesson, the school's head bully girl, Lazy Lisa Carrington, announced that she had put her name down to play Maria; and then I heard that Markus is hoping to play Tony, because he is tall and has short thick black hair. If these 2 most hated school pupils are ever picked for the leading roles, then this show will either be a disaster or the best comedy ever! I hope it's the latter.

Thursday 17 January

Cassius Clay (later known as Muhammad Ali), world heavyweight boxing champion, was born in 1942.

I wouldn't like to have met him in a dark alley way back when he was younger, a lot younger.

During the morning break there were many text messages flying around about class 7B's cookery lesson. Spotless Mrs. Tait had a terrible time. Everybody had to make fruit cakes. There were broken eggshells left in Fatty Phoebe Crossley's flour. For a laugh Spotty Eddie Pritchard had used soap powder instead of flour, and somehow his raisins got scattered all over the floor. Above all, Dippy Molly Gregory had added some lumpy, gone-off milk to her mixture. The whole class was given cleaning duties in the lunchbreak.

At 3.20 p.m., I was just heading towards my bike when, behind me, I heard many people pushing their way in yelling, "Fight! Fight! Fight!!!!!"

Our Headteacher, Shorty Mr. Browning, cried, "Stop it now, or else!"

Everybody stopped except for the 2 girls who were rolling about on the playground tarmac scratching each other's faces and pulling out massive lumps of hair. Mr. Browning managed to force himself in amongst the crowd and pulled them apart. The Deputy Head, Rubberneck Mr. Dingles, had come to help. Finally, they marched Lisa and Molly off towards the school's main doors.

In the evening, I had to go to the chamber orchestra

rehearsal for our Sunday afternoon concerto. I was terrible! So, I'd better do as much piano practice as I can in the next 48 hours before our Sunday's performance.

Friday 18 January

A garage in Boston U.S.A. owned by a security company was relieved of \$3 million in fifteen minutes by a gang dressed in company uniform in 1950.

This reminds me about an item I read in last week's local newspaper, the *Appletown Citizen*. A burglar had unknowingly dropped the money that he was stealing from the house, what a jerk! Don't be a criminal if you lack common sense!

Before going to school, I decided to do some extra piano practice. Not realising the time, at 8.46 a.m. I had to cycle like a madman. In registration Baldy Mr. Spurgeon gave us a newsletter. There's going to be a cross-country fun run to raise money for some local children's charity.

During the morning break, Lisa and her gang were picking on Molly yet again. Stepping in, I said, "You leave her alone; she's only in year 7, pick on somebody your own age."

Skinny Karen Jakes screamed, "Looks like Molly has gone and got herself a 4-eyed, lanky, spotty, ginger nut, geek for a boyfriend."

I reminded them that I've got sisters myself who are just as annoying as they are, then luckily the hand bells went and then we were 'saved by the bell', so to speak. As we were heading back inside, Molly thanked me. I suggested, "You must try to keep away from that mob and go somewhere like the library. You'll never see those idiots, they won't even be seen dead in there," and she laughed.

I must've spent a little longer on the piano than I had originally planned for my Sunday night's performance. At 12.01 a.m. I suddenly heard raised voices from the top of our stairs from mum, dad and Sophia asking me if I could

go to bed. But at least I managed to pay mum back for my missed piano lesson.

Major Roads to Edinburgh

M25 eastern direction, turn right.

M1 going north.

A1

A68

Saturday 19 January

Czech student Jan Polach set himself on fire fatally in protest with the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1969.

So, it's him, he's the person who we need to blame for this latest craze of setting ourselves on fire!

At 6 a.m. the coach took the Appletown Orchestra members halfway there until we had to stop at a motorway station, and we all had to dart out in 1 of the heaviest showers that I've ever been in. In the end, it seemed like forever getting there and we were all shattered. To make matters worse, I was shoved into the back seat and kept on going up and down like a yo-yo.

We all arrived at the *Premier Inn* at 7.45 p.m. I then realised that on my phone I had a voicemail from mum asking me to phone her once we had arrived, which I did.

Sunday 20 January

King George V died at Sandringham in 1936 from influenza having not long celebrated his Silver Jubilee.

Another king I don't much care for, he was such a disciplinarian with his sons.

We played out our Beethoven concerto in the very nice Usher Hall; the audience really liked the performance. When we were finished, Mr. Richards reminded us of all about our next Mozart concerto where we'll be helping to

raise money and awareness for a cancer charity in St David's Hall in Cardiff on 7th March starting at 7.30 p.m. We didn't have an accident on the road coming home either. It was a good job I had a little snooze coming back, because otherwise I wouldn't have been able to write my today's diary entry. It's now 2.04 a.m. and I'm very tired.

Monday 21 January

King Louis XVI, who legalised the use of the guillotine, was later found guilty of treason and mounted the scaffold in 1793 on this day.

Talk about irony; serve him right!

I wished I had thought of booking this day off as well. Anyway, I didn't, so today I got up very late at 8.16 a.m. but then I found myself nodding off during English.

Then during the lunchbreak, Jason said, "Hey, Clarence, I've got some brilliant news for you. This'll cheer you up for definite. Well, Mr. McGann has just caught Markus showing off some porno pictures from his phone. Ha! He's been ordered to do detention in the cooler for the rest of the day!" So now, all mobile phones must go in a box before each lesson. Great idea!

Tuesday 22 January

Queen Victoria's 63-year reign, the longest of any monarch, ended in 1901.

The Queen who wasn't amused! I can't imagine she found much to laugh about if life in the 19th century was as awful as I've been led to believe.

Mum looked very happy to be receiving back the money I owed her. She wasted no time in phoning her friend Annie Young, planning a day's shopping together.

On the BBC1 6 p.m. news I heard that yesterday had been called Black Monday because the world's stock markets plunged by up to 10%. The FTSE 100 suffered its

biggest day's loss ever. To me every Monday is black because I've got to wait another 5 days before the next weekend which I'd like to be stress-free, but knowing my family, it doesn't always seem to be the case.

Wednesday 23 January

Pakistani cricketer Hanif Mohammed occupied the crease for sixteen hours and ten minutes, amassing 337 runs in a test match in Barbados in 1957.

A big yawn is in order here, I think.

Mum showed me what clothes she had bought from Marks and Spencer. I don't know why she showed me, but I was kind about it. "Very nice," I smiled.

This boring day finished with an equally boring English *stupid* essay about a tramp living on a street, which I should've started well before now. At least I was in the right frame of mind to stay up all night to tackle it.

Thursday 24 January

Sir Winston Churchill passed away in 1963, seventy years to the day after his father had died.

An eerie coincidence, that. I've heard some of his famous speeches from the Yesterday channel. I'd have thought his booming voice would be enough to frighten the enemies.

That tramp essay kept me up for hours last night. In registration Mr. Spurgeon wasn't best pleased with me for being 6 minutes late.

On the way to our English lesson, my partner in crime, my mate Paul, asked, "Clarence, would you like to join me at my sleepover? It's going to be at my grandparents' very old house. You see they've won a competition to spend this very weekend at some health spa or other. And they asked me if I wanted to look after their house for them."

"Of course," I said.

Paul replied, "So you'll join me?"

I shouted, “Yes, I will. I’ll walk to yours after my piano lesson. I’ll most probably get to you at 3 o’clock.”

Friday 25 January

The infamous American gangster Al Capone died in 1947.

No great loss to the people.

I’m going to sleep in a very old house tomorrow night. I wished we lived in a house like this.

I went to bed at 8.45 p.m.

Saturday 26 January *Australia Day*

The first convicts extradited to Australia landed there in 1788.

I don’t know what it costs to travel to Oz these days, but they didn’t have to pay anything. They only had to break the law. Funny old world, this is!

By 3.30 p.m. Paul’s dad had already driven us across Appletown to his grandparents’ house. At first, we couldn’t feel anything when we arrived, but it did feel spooky inside the house. As soon as we walked into their massive lounge, we felt this very cold spot in the right corner. We both jumped away from it very quickly. We knew then that ghosts are so here.

Sunday 27 January

One of the famous classical composers, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, died in 1788.

If I’m ever brave enough to decide to go under a past life regression, this is the person I would love to have known and his circle of friends. I could listen to his music forever. Much of it was written before he reached the age I am now, awesome.

Paul and I agreed to share the big double bed and to keep the bedside light on. By 1.20 a.m. he was already asleep,

but I was still very much awake. All was quiet and then, out of the corner of my eye, I had the fright of my life because I saw something small moving along the corridor.

Waking Paul, I whispered, "I've just seen something... out there, it was heading straight towards the bathroom."

So, we just had to go and investigate. Tiptoeing, we crept out of the bedroom. For an hour we searched in every room and of course putting on the lights as we entered, but we couldn't see anything. We even went outside in the garden with our torches for 2 minutes. We were absolutely shattered and thirsty, so we decided to go and get a cup of water. Paul was a little in front of me and as he walked in the kitchen he shouted, "*Arrrrgh!* A grey cat is sitting on the table. I didn't know my grandparents owned a cat!" Just then we heard something going on outside. "*Arrrrgh!!* I'm getting quite nervous here," Paul shrieked.

I whispered, "I think there's somebody outside."

"What, at this time of night?" Paul asked.

When I had unlocked the front door, we saw a very old-looking lady wearing a long grey dress and a black shawl. "Hello, I'm sorry to bother you, but I've lost my grey cat. Her name's Puss, I can't seem to find her. Have you seen her at all?"

Relieved, Paul said, "Oh yes. There's a grey cat sitting on our kitchen table."

We went into the kitchen, but the cat wasn't there. She had completely disappeared.

Then we went back to tell the old lady, but she was nowhere to be seen!

Sitting down on the bottom stair, Paul said, "Right, OK, let's just think about this for a moment. So, when we were outside looking in the garden, that's when the cat must have come in. What you saw was a field mouse or something like that. When we answered the door, obviously the cat must've slipped out then. The old lady saw her cat, so without thinking picked her up and left

without saying a word.”

Agreeing, I said, “Yes, that has to be it.”

Paul shrugged, “So, we can go and get our water now?”

Just as I was about to close the front door, I suddenly saw another grey-haired lady, but much younger-looking, wearing similar clothing. “Oh, hello I didn’t know you were there; I was just about to lock up.”

She said, “I’m so sorry, but the other lady you were talking to just a minute ago is my sister. We live together just down there and I’m afraid she gets a little confused sometimes.”

I said, “Oh, that’s alright and thanks for letting us know.”

I turned to tell Paul, but he was already in the kitchen and by then the old lady was nowhere to be seen either. Paul came out holding a full cup of water. “Who was that?” he asked.

I said, “It’s all right, another lady came to explain. Apparently, they’re sisters and the oldest can get a little confused sometimes.”

“Ah, that explains it then,” said Paul and we went back to bed at 4.32 a.m.

At 5.47 p.m. his grandparents came back from their lovely weekend.

Smiling, his granddad said, “Hi there, thanks, Paul, for looking after our old house.”

Paul said, “That’s all right, but this very strange thing happened last night...”

Interrupting him, his granddad replied, “Ah, so you’ve seen the ghosts then!”

Paul muttered, “Ghosts? No, we didn’t see any ghosts. But at some point, we thought we saw a cat ghost.”

His granddad chuckled, “Ha, ha! I’m only kidding, son. Oh, I’m sorry, you were saying?”

Paul said, “Oh it was nothing, only an old lady had lost her cat. But it all got sorted out in the end.”

His granny pondered. “Hmm, that’s odd because I know everybody who lives around us and not a single

house has a couple of sisters living together. I also know of all the cats, and I can tell you, I've never seen a grey 1. This is all very strange indeed."

His granddad mentioned, "In the winter months, as you know, Paul, we're usually away in Spain. So maybe this could be 1 of those occasions when they only show themselves to us!"

Excitedly, Paul suggested, "In that case, please can Clarence and I come back and do yet another sleepover this time next year?"

His granny smiled, "Well, of course you can, love."

Jumping up and down, Paul shouted, "Yes! Sick, man! This is fantastic news. Clarence, we've got to keep this to ourselves!" I agreed.

Monday 28 January

King Henry VIII (famous for his six wives) who died in 1547 exactly 90 years after his father, Henry VII, was born in 1457.

Another strange coincidence!

Just as we were getting our bikes at the end of the day, Paul decided to break his own little rule and tell a few girls in year 7 about Saturday night. He shouldn't have, but he just couldn't resist it and he made me join in too. We told them exactly what happened.

Paul said, "Oh yes, and we also saw outlines of 2 floating figures just like the *Harry Potter* ghosts, but a lot scarier, with faint strange thingymajiggy objects that they held in their hands which could've been their very own battered heads *who-ooo-ooo-ohh!* Or somebody else's spooky, disgusting head. Yes, they were moving heavy wooden chairs across the kitchen floor, along the lounge carpet, then they just kept making these loud banging noises which went on, on and off throughout the night. We couldn't get any sleep, but that didn't bother us at all as we're so into the paranormal."

It was quite funny to see all the girls running fast out of

the school gates.

Tuesday 29 January

The Victoria Cross was established in 1856, bearing the name of the monarch.

The motto is “For Valour”, I believe. Trouble is, most of them had to die to get the medal.

At 9.15 a.m., straight after registration, Mr. Spurgeon summoned me to Mr. Browning’s office. There I saw Paul, 3 moaning parents and their daughters, Little Tilly Pullman, Showbiz Alison Philpot, and Blondie Gillian Monger. We apologised for our appalling behaviour and were then sent to do detention in the cooler and had to sit with Mr. Collins for 30 minutes! It was dreadful, he just kept droning on and on and on. “If we were back in the good old days, I would’ve made you write ‘I shall not tell *silly* ghostly fiction stories to any pupil in this school again 100 times!’” Well, at least there would’ve been complete silence and oh yes, I think I would’ve preferred it.

All evening, I had the snidest comments from Sophia, who had found out what happened yesterday from Ben’s freckly, tubby and extremely annoying little sister Zoe. “*Oooh!* Clarence got told off by Mr. Browning in his office.” And a few other *pathetic* remarks which aren’t worth commenting on.

All this aggro made me extremely tired, so much so that I decided not to work on my geography homework.

Wednesday 30 January

A significant date for anniversaries: the execution of King Charles I in 1649; the birth of President Franklin D Roosevelt in 1882; and Adolf Hitler was voted into power in Germany in 1933.

So, they forgot to include my mate, Terry Johns, who was born on this day in 1995. He’ll be miffed when I tell him. I think I have this flu bug that everybody seems to be

getting recently. Just before dinner I suddenly felt like nothing on earth. I had a very bad headache, and I was given permission to go home.

I missed the auditions for *West Side Story* and couldn't even be bothered to find out about them either.

Thursday 31 January

Guy Fawkes and three other conspirators were hanged, drawn, and quartered in 1606.

I know they plotted to blow up the Houses of Parliament. It looks like politicians are the most unpopular people on this planet, along with estate agents and lawyers.

I'm not ill! It must've been something else yesterday. Apparently, at the *West Side Story* auditions, Lisa wasn't allowed to take part because she was caught smoking behind the school bike sheds. Her excuses were that she gets very nervous at auditions, so she tried to calm her nerves; and she's currently having personal 'women problems'. She was grounded for the rest of the week, so Karen is now Maria, which is a good job because she's a much better actress. I have been told from James that she's been in a couple of choruses of very good shows such as *Carmen* and *Grease*. I haven't a clue how he knows that, but there you go. Markus is Tony.

Well, Ben mentioned Markus was deliriously ecstatic about it all and, since he got to hear the news, he was shouting things like, "Ha, awesome! I've got the main part, Tony. I'm happy. Sick, man! Yeah! I'm very happy right now; I'll have to go out with Colin tonight to celebrate! So, where to go then? Hmm, I know, we'll go to McDonald's; then we'll walk over the road to the Dreamland Cinema. There must be something worth seeing on there. Yes, that's what we'll do. Oh, I just can't wait!"

Maybe this show might not be as bad now; we've just got to hope for the best!



*F*ebruary has...

At last (hurrah!) slightly shorter darkness hours.

And for all hopeful lovers everywhere,
it is time for Valentine's Day cards and flowers.

For those whose lives the senders would love to share.

Friday 1 February

Charles I was crowned King of England in 1626.

If I'm right, our next king will be Charles III. It will take a few centuries for them to catch up with the Henrys.

No rain! We only had a little cloud, perfect weather for our local charity fun run. From what I can remember, there were: 1 Spider-Man, 1 Batman, 1 Robin, 1 Cat Woman, 1 Lady Gaga, 1 Dracula, 1 Elton John, 2 ghosts and 1 angel. The rest are a blur. The route we had to take was first left out of the main gates and then we headed straight for the Orchard Estate. From there we went down Russet Avenue and past Pink Lady Avenue and Cox Street. After that we had to turn right towards the High Street, across Woodsfield Park Bridge, onto the canal path and into Woodsfield Park and then it was back to the school gates. I

was 1 of the ghosts, for which I quickly had to make up just before I left for school. Out of the whole school I finished 25th; I did it in exactly 1.13.08. Markus won it finishing in 58.11.01. The 2 fattest twins ever, Roly Russell and Poly Pippa Samuels, came in 3rd and 4th positions at the fast times of 1hr.35mins.02secs and 1hr.37mins.05secs respectively. I couldn't believe it, they must've cheated. The only place where this could have happened was the shortcut behind Barclays Bank on the High Street.

Saturday 2 February

The National Exhibition Centre was opened in Birmingham in 1976.

I always wondered when that was built. They designed it with all those triangles on the roof. Apparently, it puts everybody in a good mood, brilliant place. I wish our house was made like that.

My legs really hurt. Thank goodness my piano lesson was cancelled too. Mr. Willis has this flu. Never have I been so happy about not having my piano lesson.

Sunday 3 February

West and East Germany were re-united in 1990.

I would've loved to have been a German just for that day, knocking down the wall that haunted both sides for all those years. It looked like they had a ball on the telly.

Today at 10.03 a.m. I hobbled downstairs and straight into the lounge.

Sophia laughed, "Ha! Oh dear, poor old Clarence, so your legs are still hurting, hey? You're very unfit, you know, you shouldn't be like this at your tender age, it's a disgrace, you're not a pensioner just yet! I was really pleased with my time, it was exactly 1 hour and 59 minutes and guess what? My legs aren't hurting me! Look what I

can do, I can do fantastic cartwheels, just like this, I'll show you, *ahhhhhhhhhhh!* No! Ouch! Bloody hell! Now I've gone and cut myself and I'm bleeding! What a *pathetic* place to put a chair! I need to go to the bathroom unless you'd like to go and get a plaster for me?"

I said, "Um, no I don't think so, I haven't even had my breakfast yet and I'm absolutely starving, see ya!"

She said, "That's right, you always think of your *stupid* stomach before anything else, don't you?" and she went off limping upstairs. Serves her right!

Monday 4 February

British, American and Soviet leaders met in Yalta in the Ukraine in 1945 to reach agreements for post-war Europe.

That happened before the war in Europe was over. They agreed then, but did it happen? Nobody I've spoken to today could remember, so perhaps it didn't.

I got into school at 8.54 a.m. Shy Linda Hobson kept looking at me during history this afternoon. In the canteen there was this very scary food throwing and slanging match with Lisa and Karen. So now there are 2 rival girl gangs in our school!

Tuesday 5 February

Shrove Tuesday

The first edition of the Reader's Digest was published in 1922 by a husband-and-wife team. It contained one article for each day in the month.

Just like my diary! The only times I've seen copies of this magazine were in the dentist's waiting room or when I was taken to see Doctor Dickson. I wonder if there are any magazines for boys like me to read. I must look in our local Co-op.

I got into school a little earlier than yesterday at 8.53 a.m.

My legs are still a little bit achy.

When I got back home, I did finally find the energy to make pancakes for everybody without repeating last year's disaster.

Wednesday 6 February

Ash Wednesday, Waitangi Day, New Zealand.

When King Charles II died in 1685, he allegedly apologised to his courtiers for being "an unconscionable time a-dying" and he expressed the hope that they would forgive him.

Jolly decent of him, wasn't it? When it's my time to go, I'll come up with some brilliant last words. I certainly can't remember my very first words. But mum tells me it was the word 'no'. She may have been joking.

The pain in my legs has gone. I've got PE tomorrow.

Thursday 7 February

Eight Manchester United players, all but one under 25, were killed when their plane crashed in Munich in 1958. They were members of the famous Busby Babes, named after their manager, Matt Busby.

Mum and dad weren't very old when that happened. So, this is a fiftieth anniversary, but I hardly imagine there will be any celebrations at Old Trafford.

During games, Mr. Brookes put me down to play against the most hopeless badminton player ever, Markus. What on earth was he thinking of? Obviously, I won, but I tried my very hardest not to. In the canteen Markus and Colin were waiting for me. I was with James, and they pushed past us and snatched my dinner plate and tray, which consisted of a cottage pie, baked beans and salad, an apple pie and custard and a carton of orange. Colin first started to chuck my lettuce, then it was my big tomato, and last of all the 6 slices of cucumber right down my school uniform.

He shouted, "Don't you beat Markus at badminton ever

again, Clueless! He's only getting back what you owe him, punk."

James snapped, "We'll get you back next time, Markus," and they all laughed, "Hmm, it is St Valentine's Day next Thursday, isn't it," he mumbled to himself.

Friday 8 February

Queen Elizabeth II made her accession declaration to her Privy Council in 1952.

And she's still Queen 56 years later. Maybe she'll beat Queen Victoria's record for the longest reigning monarch.

At 11.15 a.m. we had a little snow and guess what? Yes, it settled! So, during lunchbreak Markus, Colin and the rest of the gang were busy chucking quite a few snowballs in the school entrance and putting them down my back like they have done many times before.

Saturday 9 February

In 1567 Mary, Queen of Scots conspired in the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley, who died after an explosion.

Mary was so devious. Nothing like that seems to happen in the royal family these days. Hooray for them!

Today at 8.30 a.m. Sophia came into my bedroom. She said, "Hey, Clarence, wake up, have you seen all this wonderful snow? It's everywhere, you need to come and see it! It's so magical, it's just like 1 of those lovely scenery Christmas cards. It's unfortunate, because the weatherman said it'll be gone by tomorrow, so we should all be making the most of it."

I asked, "Really? Oh no. I've got my piano lesson to go to, how deep is it?"

She replied, "Oh, it's quite deep, but your old piano teacher has just phoned: he's got to cancel everybody's lessons today because his mother fell over yesterday in the snow and broke her arm."

I said, “Really? And she’s still alive? Blimey, she must be ancient! So, now you’re asking me if I can get up and get dressed and go outside in that horrible cold snow?”

She smiled. “Look, the sun’s shining, I want to build a snowman with you, it’ll be great!”

I sighed, “Well, no, I’d rather stay in bed. Thank you.”

She asked, “Really?”

I said, “Yes, really, and now can you get out of my bedroom?”

She moaned, “My God, you’re just so boring these days. Right, I’m going over to Zoe’s house.”

I replied, “Good! And don’t come back until at least... well... by... dinner time!”

“Yes, with pleasure!” she yelled.

Right, I’ve just decided not to mention about my piano lessons again, unless of course it gets cancelled (like today) or if anything interesting happens.

Sunday 10 February

A proposed tunnel linking England and France was approved by the Channel Tunnel Committee in 1930.

Obviously, they were allergic to urgency in those days. Half a century or so later they started digging.

Just as we were leaving Annie’s driveway at 2.14 p.m., Dad suddenly turned around from the driving seat and gave us all a lecture about being on our best behaviour at Great-Granny Upton Symth’s 100th birthday party, or else! I wish I could say the same about his reckless driving! He needn’t have bothered.

About half an hour into the party, I was on my own by the big lounge window. I looked out and I spotted Uncle Anton’s people carrier pulling up. He had with him Auntie Christine, cousin Isabella, Auntie Phyl, cousin Emma and Jack, his golden retriever. When great-granny let them in, she just went berserk.

She shouted, “You do know when Jack sees any cat,

automatically he'll chase it. I need to go and find Tom."

Auntie Christine said, "Sorry, Eliza, but my dog sitter's very ill, so I couldn't just let him stay at home on his own."

Then Jack saw Tom, and both ended up running through the kitchen and the dining room and straight upstairs. Dad, Auntie Christine, and cousin Isabella ended up on the floor along with the food, drinks, and the Queen's 100th birthday card, but at least mum managed to save the cake, good old MUM! She should've been in the circus instead of being a self-employed cook.

I couldn't resist recording the incident on my phone.

Mum suggested, "Well, why don't we put all this on YouTube tonight?" but not everybody agreed, including me. So instead, she had to settle for downloading some nice photos on Twitter and Facebook.

Monday 11 February

Thomas Edison was born this day in 1847. He registered nearly 11,000 patents, the last one at the age of 83. He famously said: "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration."

I think that's an odd thing to say. I'm inspired more often than I sweat. If Edison were still around, I would ask him to explain. There must be a lot of money in this invention business. I'll have to put my thinking cap on to decide what needs inventing.

At 3.55 p.m., I was in the kitchen getting myself a cheese and pickle sandwich when Sophia came in.

She asked, "Clarence, why were you so late coming home from school today?"

I shrugged. "Why do you want to know that?"

She smiled, "I've just been speaking to Zoe on the phone, and she said she'd seen you coming out of the Co-op."

I said, "Oh, OK, so, if I tell you, you mustn't mention anything about this to Zoe or to anyone else – promise?"

She replied, "I won't, I promise."

I suggested, “Well if you must know, it’s a Valentine’s Day card and a box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates, just in case I get anything on Thursday.”

She laughed, “Ha! In your dreams!”

Tuesday 12 February

All Broadway theatres in New York City were closed to save coal for the American war effort in 1918. Four years later to the day, George Gershwin’s famous Rhapsody in Blue was premiered to rapturous applause in the same city.

I didn’t know this, but I do know that they closed them down in World War 2. They soon opened again. Perhaps it was a case of a lesson learnt, forgotten, and then remembered again. I wouldn’t have liked to live there during those 4 years, no way!

I saw Topsy chewing the right corner of my bed just as I was leaving for school. I told her off. Puppies! I’m so longing for her to grow up.

Wednesday 13 February

The beautiful German city of Dresden was bombed by RAF planes in 1945.

My Great-Auntie Grace has some China which she says is Dresden. She raves about it. I hate to think how much got broken in the 1945 raid. What a waste.

Just in case I forget about tomorrow, I made sure I put my Valentine’s Day card and my wrapped-up chocolates in my rucksack.

Thursday 14 February St Valentine’s Day

Valentine’s Day is a very romantic occasion, but there was no love lost between rival gangsters in 1929 when many of them were massacred in bitter fighting in Chicago.

Perhaps they didn’t know it was St Valentine’s Day.

Otherwise, there might've been a dangerous outbreak of cuddling and kissing.

During the morning break, and for the rest of the day, Markus was going around each attractive girl trying to find out who sent this mysterious Valentine's Day card he had found in his inside coat pocket. The hand bells had just gone, and James was heading towards his history lesson.

I asked him, "So, how many cards did you get, then?"

Pointing to himself, he laughed. "Ha! I didn't get any, but it looks like Markus has a secret admirer! I must go now, or I'll be late for my next lesson, bye."

I was right a month ago today. No cards for me, they were all for Sophia.

Now I know why Thorntons chocolates are very popular. They're just so yummy!

Friday 15 February

Britain adopted decimal currency in 1971; although the new system was simpler to operate, it took many elderly people time to adjust.

I'm glad I didn't have to cope with pounds, shillings, and pence. Granddad used to be able to add up LSD in his head. That would have done my head in.

After school I was in the lounge busy minding my own business, watching the History Channel, when Sophia started putting out all her 6 Valentine's Day cards on the window ledge.

She laughed. "Ha! So, I was right on Monday, nobody fancies you! But look at me! I've got all these cards, and you didn't get any! Ha! You're going to die all alone, with no wife to look after you. I bet you'll still be living here until you're most probably in your late 40s. And I'll be long gone, happily married with a couple of kids; we'll have a nice small cottage in the countryside, somewhere far away from here!"

I said, "At least I wouldn't have all the stress of

moving. And what about all those expensive household bills you'll have to pay?"

Just then Jason phoned. "Clarence, would you like to come over to my house for a few days? Say from tomorrow until the 20th?"

Immediately I replied, "OK, then, great!"

Saturday 16 February

Independence Day, Lithuania

In 1940 the British destroyer HMS Cossack pursued the German supply ship Altmark into a Norwegian fjord; a boarding party seized the cargo and rescued 300 British sailors – the crews of several ships sunk by the Graf Spee.

Interesting statistic, that. And it is a fact, not based on an unreliable survey statistic.

I didn't go to bed until very late last night, due to all my packing, and mum made sure I didn't forget to bring my diary. At 12.01 p.m. Jason arrived with his dad in their big silver Mercedes. After my goodbyes, 15 minutes later we arrived at his parents' massive house and garden. I was given my own room. Looking out of the window I saw 8 chickens, 4 white ducks, 2 black and 1 brown rabbits, 3 brown cows and 6 white sheep and a very friendly house pet, a fat white billy goat.

Jason pointed and said, "He's Dustin, but we call him Dusty for short as he's always chewing everything in sight. But really, he's such a very friendly house pet, we all love him to bits here and I bet you will too once you get to know him."

Sunday 17 February

Historian Edward Gibbon published "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" in 1776.

Not the kind of book if you're looking for a laugh. If Gibbon was still alive today, he could write a sequel replacing 'Roman' with 'British'! Only joking.

At 9.34 a.m., Jason told us more about their goat Dusty.

He laughed, “Ha! When Dusty was only about a year old, he used to follow my dad in all weathers for a short walk to our local pub, The White Horse Inn. Well, this inn has a posh restaurant inside and for obvious reasons Fred the landlord wouldn’t let them go in. So then on each visit, whatever the weather, they’d be outside, and when my dad had almost emptied his glass Dusty would lift his left hoof and touch dad’s right leg. Then he’d keep saying, ‘Maa, maa’ until dad poured the rest into a glass ashtray, put it down on the ground, and Dusty would finish off the remains. He’s now 4 years old and hardly anything has changed, except he’s on a lead and a lot fatter than he ought to be.”

At 11.30 a.m., all 6 of us, Jason, his sister Jane, his parents, me and Dusty, went out walking in this cloudy miserable weather to The White Horse Inn. Not wanting to leave Jason’s dad and Dusty alone, the rest of us opted to keep them company outside. Due to the appalling weather, we didn’t stay long, but it was a good laugh.

I know I don’t normally like animals, but Dusty now he definitely takes the biscuit.

Monday 18 February

John Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” was published in 1678.

I believe he wrote this in prison. So, he must’ve envied the pilgrims being able to travel anywhere.

At 6.30 a.m., Jason was knocking on my bedroom door. “Morning, Clarence.” Then he continued, “Sorry, did I wake you up? It’s only that we really need to get on with feeding the animals.”

Yawning, I replied, “Oh Jason, I didn’t realise you’d be expecting me to help you with that too.”

He replied, “Oh look, don’t worry about it now, why don’t you just go back to sleep, and we can start from scratch from tomorrow morning instead, yes?”

“Oh, OK then. Cheers,” I replied.

Nobody will ever see me marry a farmer’s daughter, because there’s a good chance, she might inherit the same genes.

Tuesday 19 February

William Kellogg invented cornflakes in 1946.

I’m thanking you, Mr. Kellogg, for such an important development in the world of breakfasts. I decided to eat a big bowl of cornflakes to celebrate!

Today at 11. 20 a.m., 1 of the chickens escaped from the pen. We all searched everywhere for her, in the pouring rain. At 3. 10 p.m., Jason called out, “Hey Clarence, she’s over there in our neighbour’s front garden. Oh no, not again, Mr. Jackson isn’t going to like this. I can’t do it, if he sees me, he’ll tell me off, so you’ll have to go and make her come across the road. Hang on a minute, I’ve got some corn in my jacket pocket, let’s see if we can entice her across with this.”

We did get her back, but it took me absolutely ages to persuade her to go over the road. She made me go through all his neighbour’s dirty rubbish and muddy grass. By 3.45 p.m. we were finally locking up the pen. I was shattered and both of us were totally drenched.

I have just decided that I do quite like my sisters after all and I can’t wait to see them again.

Wednesday 20 February

The Metropolitan Museum of Art opened in New York in 1872.

To me, museums are either quite exciting or a total bore. Depends on what interests you. I gather the ‘Met’ has an excellent reputation, but I won’t be crossing the Atlantic just yet to confirm it.

After mucking out, I quickly packed my clothes into my

case and thanked my hosts for a nice time.

Dusty said, “Maa, maa, maa,” and saw me out of the garden gate.

Turning around, I replied, “Maa, maa, maa,” back to him and gave him a final stroke too.

Jason said, “I don’t know about you, but I think we had a great time.”

I replied, “I’ll never forget about it, that’s for sure.”

As I was leaving, I was hoping against hope that he wasn’t going to invite me over again for Easter, or for any other time of the year for that matter – and he didn’t, which was a relief. However, it turns out Jason was right... I will miss Dusty.

Thursday 21 February

Edwin Land was inspired to invent the Polaroid camera in 1947, after his young daughter had been impatient to see a photograph, he’d taken of her because she had to wait for it to be developed.

Girls always seem to be impatient, but little Miss Land did us all a favour.

Did I say I quite like my sisters? Well, I must’ve been desperate. Sophia’s 8 mates were all here, playing this loud horrible so-called Rap music. It was just like being back in amongst Jason’s chickens again.

Friday 22 February

The first helicopter to cross the English Channel took off in 1959.

Only 10 years later we were strolling on the moon. Talk about progress. Even better than those pilgrims!

Today I filled in an application form asking the school’s permission for a day’s holiday on 7th March. Also, everybody had to hand in their fun run money. I was just about to go in the classroom when Karen shouted, “Hey,

Clueless! How much did you raise then?"

Showing her my hand, I said, "I've got a £5 note to give in."

Grabbing hold of my money, she laughed. "Ha! Look, everyone. I have £45 to give in. Thanks, Clueless, I'm now handing in the most amount of cash. That's brilliant, you've just made my day."

"Hey! What are you doing? That belongs to me. Give it back!" I yelled.

Running into the classroom, she grinned, "Ha! Come and get it then!"

Just then Mr. Spurgeon arrived, "Clarence, Stop. Why are you running into the classroom? This isn't like you."

Turning around, I replied, "Oh, I'm sorry, sir, I didn't mean to, I won't do it again."

Looking down, he asked, "Is that your crumpled £5 note on the floor?"

From a distance I could see Karen looking daggers at me. I said, "Oh yes, that's right, sir."

He frowned. "Clarence, I know Karen took it. So, first she'll have to apologise to you, then during the morning break she'll be doing detention in the cooler with Mr. Dingle. Clarence, be bold, stand up to these horrible bullies, I believe you can do it and so should you."

Puzzled, I said, "Oh, but I did ask for it back, sir."

He said, "OK, but don't let this happen to you again; you must look after yourself, your property and be brave."

I said, "Oh, I see what you mean, sir."

Karen didn't look very happy. Ha! Serves her right.

Saturday 23 February

Diarist Samuel Pepys was born in 1633.

Now this answer's my very first question. He was 27.

At 11 a.m., mum and Sophia went swimming at our local indoor pool. I volunteered to look after Topsy and started practising for my next concert.

At 12.09 p.m., somebody had come over banging on our front door. Topsy barked away in the lounge. I was in the upstairs toilet having a poo, and when I had finally finished it was too late as the person had gone. Although it did sound rather like a type of knock that Mr. Leggett would do. I hope our trees will be dealt with soon. It was a little scary there for a moment, and, at 2.30 p.m., dad came home from work, so I told him what had happened.

He replied, "Oh, I'm sorry, son. Yes, you must be right, it's got to be about them. I'll get on to it someday, I promise."

So, 3 weeks yesterday I'll be at the St David's Hall in Cardiff. Yep! Another, long unfamiliar trip to look forward to.

Sunday 24 February

Independence Day, Estonia

King Louis Philippe fled from France in 1848, thus ending the reign of the French monarchy.

Ah! This must've been the French Revolution.

At 3.57 p.m., I decided to email my good old primary school friend Tony Hutt, who just happens to live in Cardiff.

Hi Tony,

The Appletown Orchestra is having 2 Mozart concerto concerts to raise money for a cancer charity on 7th/8th March at the St David's Hall starting at 7.30 p.m. This Friday, our M.D., Mr. Richards, is going to be booking the Sandringham Hotel for his orchestra. My parents were coming along too, but unfortunately dad has recently been taken ill. So, I've 2 tickets going spare for the Friday night performance. Hope we could meet up in town in 3 weeks' time.

Bye for now,

Clarence

Monday 25 February

Cassius Clay (later known as Muhammad Ali) became world heavyweight boxing champion in 1964, only four years after winning the light-middleweight gold medal at the Olympic Games.

That man again. He put on a lot of weight, didn't he!

When Sophia and I arrived home from school at 3.35 p.m., we found Topsy locked in the kitchen barking away and a small piece of paper on the kitchen table. The note read:

Dear Clarence and Sophia,

Dad's ill, his boss found him being sick and now he's at the general hospital. The doctors there diagnosed appendicitis. I've phoned Claudia. Pizza is in freezer. Topsy needs her walk and to be fed.

See you tonight at around 8 p.m.

Mum

X

At least I received some good news today, Mr. Browning had given me permission to have 7 March off, so I won't need to pack my bag until that day now.

Quite concerned for dad, I suddenly started tinkering on the piano and thought of him being such a fan of jazz and coming home quite drunk, so I came up with a short piece called *Tipsy Jazz*.

Tuesday 26 February

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published 'The Communist Manifesto' in 1848.

This doesn't sound like a suitable 'Book at Bedtime'. So, I think I'll pass.

Mum, Sophia and I went to the general hospital at visiting time, and it wasn't a nice experience. Dad now seems a little better since he's had the operation.

Mum said, "I really hope he doesn't catch this dreadful M.R.S.A. bug," and Sophia and I agreed.

Wednesday 27 February

Scientists announced that they had cloned a lamb called Dolly from the tissues of an adult ewe in 1977.

I hope they don't start cloning people. There wouldn't be enough food to go around, and it would mean the end of identity parades. I can think of a lot more headaches.

At school everybody was looking at me. Finally, I found out from Ben that Zoe had texted him. Sophia must've told her. Sisters!

At 9.57 a.m., I received Tony's e-mail reply.

Hi Clarence,

Thank you for your letter.

Long time no see, matey. What a surprise to hear from you after all this time. My sister Candida now lives in London, and we do have a spare room available for guests. So, if it's all right with you I've asked my parents if you could stay with us instead and they agreed. But on 1 condition – that they could have those 2 spare Friday night tickets! They are both Mozart fanatics. When you're finished, they will wait for you at the front of house.

Looking forward to seeing you again.

Tony Hill

Long time no see? That's a funny thing to say. Oh no, what a total idiot. I've gone and written to the wrong Tony. He's Tony Hill and not Tony Hutt who moved to Norfolk! What must he think about my opening words? And not even a *How are you?* I went straight in there. Whoops! Perhaps it's dad, yes, that's right, I'm blaming dad's illness, that must be it! Ah! But at least I'll be saving some money, as I can now stay over at Tony's place for the night.

I phoned Mr. Richards and told him about my new sleeping arrangements.

Thursday 28 February

The Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait in 1991.

Apparently, a girl from class 10A was expelled for a month last week, but she wasn't in Kuwait – wherever that is. I couldn't find it in dad's AA handbook or my map of Europe.

Today, during lunchbreak I decided to go into the library to do my music homework, big mistake! For some strange reason Markus and Colin were in there too.

Markus whispered, "Clueless, come and join us."

I said, "I've got homework, it's got to be handed in by tomorrow."

Colin said, "Come on, we've got some gossip on Lisa."

I asked, "Really? What's this all about then?"

Markus said, "Just come over and we can tell you."

I said, "Oh, OK then." As I sat down everybody heard this very loud *blighghghgh!* noise.

Colin laughed. "Ha! Clueless, you're a bit windy today, don't you need to say excuse me?"

Markus said, "You must suffer from that irritable bowel syndrome. Now, I need to have my coat back, you're sitting on it." Then something fell out and landed on the carpet.

The fat bossy librarian said, "I'm taking this whoopee cushion, Markus, and Colin. You'll need to come with me to Mr. Dingle's office, right now!" Both weren't anywhere to be seen for the rest of the day, and I never did get to hear all the gossip they had on Lisa either.

Anyway, when I got home, dad was upstairs asleep. Mum informed me that he has a sick note for a month.

Friday 29 February

Leap Year was first celebrated in 45 BC.

If I had been born on this day back in 1992, I wouldn't even be 4 years old yet, barely out of nappies.

Today everybody was talking about my yesterday's library incident, I am now officially the laughingstock of the whole school.

When I got home, I had to take Topsy out for her walk, and just as we were passing the Co-op we got caught right in the middle of this terrible hailstorm. Topsy, me and 3 other people: a very old, kind-looking gentleman with his walking stick and a love couple all had to dash under this shabbiest bus shelter ever! Except for the very fast, heavy pitter-patter sounds on the roof, we all stayed there completely silent for the whole 8 minutes.

All throughout, Topsy was lying down looking at me with a very sad expression on her face. At this point I was really wishing I was at home watching it through our lounge window. I've never liked being outside in any type of weather which involves getting wet. I always much prefer nice, warm sunshine. I'm sure Topsy would agree with me. It was 4.53 p.m. when we finally got home, and dad was in the lounge just dropping off to sleep; unfortunately, I woke him up.

He asked, "So did you and Topsy get wet in the rain?"

I said, "We did, but right now I need to take a bath."

He yawned, "OK, good lad."

After my long, warm, and luxurious bubble bath, I had a chance to catch up on my music, and history homework.

I finally went to bed at 11.10 p.m.



March has....

Mother's Day and the first day of spring,
So, give your mum a present with all your love.
Once again, all the birds start to sing,
A wonderful concert way up above.

Saturday 1 March *St David*
Fredrick Chopin was born in 1810.

Another 1 of my favourite composers!

I told dad that I'm glad he's at home for the next month because I can get to know him now. And maybe, when he's better, he could sort out all the household junk and the trees in the garden. He seemed very surprised with my first comment. Perhaps he thought I knew him quite well already.

We sat talking in the lounge and he was telling me how and where he met mum. He was 26 and she was 22. It was May 1986 when they bumped into each other on a train going from London Euston to Blackpool. The train ride I now know in such detail, as if it happened yesterday. Any comments dad made about Blackpool itself were however somewhat vague.

Afterwards he mentioned that this morning he came across sheet music of mine that he hadn't ever seen before on top of the piano.

I told him that when I heard about his illness I started tinkling on the piano keys and thinking about which type of music he liked to listen to, coming up with this little number which I called *Tipsy Jazz*. I played it and when I'd finished, for 1 minute we hugged and with a sad-looking face he left.

Sunday 2 March *Mothering Sunday*

The Anglo-French Concorde took off for the first time in Toulouse in France in 1969.

Concorde, the 1 plane I would've loved to have flown in.

Well, I now know that dad has travelled all around Great Britain on many excursions. He named all the numbers belonging to each locomotive and the precise weather on each occasion.

Somehow, I managed to get in some extra piano playing, but only for about an hour. And its Mother's Day today: poor mum, she didn't get any rest either, but she did like my Thorntons Classic Collection and my funny card I bought from the Co-op yesterday morning.

Monday 3 March

The Star-Spangled Banner was adopted as the United States' National Anthem in 1951.

I used to think it was called Stars and Stripes. I've been told that a lot of people make the same mistake.

Just before lunchbreak, we were all told to go home because the heating had broken down. So, for the rest of the afternoon I was in the lounge talking with dad: he told me how many seminars he'd attended where the speaker was giving talks about trains, when he was free and single.

I finally finished my music homework at 11.09 p.m.

Tuesday 4 March

Christopher Columbus sailed into Lisbon in 1493, after discovering the New World.

I keep getting my wires mixed up. He wasn't Spanish, he was Portuguese.

Today I still couldn't go to school, so dad took me to the study and there were all his old steam trains and diesels laid out on his just as old track. We both sat there looking at the model trains going around and around.

Dad said, "I don't know about you, son, but I do find model railways very relaxing."

I replied, "I suppose it is, but to be honest with you, I couldn't keep watching them for days and days on end."

He mumbled, "Oh, I could, if only."

I must do my maths soon or I shall be in such terrible trouble.

Wednesday 5 March

The Spitfire fighter plane flew for the first time in 1936.

Good job too. If they hadn't been ready when war broke out 3 years later, I wonder what we would have done when the bombing raids started. This makes me shudder.

Yes! Today I went back to school! But as soon as I got home, dad started showing me all his train DVDs, which he's has been watching for the best part of the day.

Tomorrow before I leave for school, I shall have to make a few sandwiches, so I can eat them sneakily in the library while I finish my geometry, so I can give it to Mr. McGann.

Thursday 6 March

In the U.S.A., Chevrolet introduced the pick-up truck in 1931 with a drop-back for easy loading and unloading.

I'm surprised they hadn't invented it earlier than that. We take them for granted nowadays.

Today Mr. McGann was very pleased with me.

The fat bossy librarian wasn't. "You well know you can't do that in here. Please leave and don't let me catch you eating in here again, or else, young man." Blimey, you'd think I'd committed the crime of the century the way she went on.

At 8.57 p.m., I came across dad slouching in his armchair with his head leaning forward over to his right side. He grunted, "I've been home on my own for most of the day and I started to get a little depressed. Now back in the 1860s to the 1880s, there were so many deaths caused by steam trains. And, what about that Richard Beeching axing thousands of miles of railway lines and stations in the 1960s! Oh, I'm really missing my job, and I wonder how old Vince is coping without me at the ticket office."

I replied, "I'm sorry," and gave him a soft pat on his back and left him alone to console himself.

I think I know dad quite well now and it only took me a week. In exactly 3 hours and 23 minutes I had finally managed to pack some clothes away in my very big suitcase.

Major Roads to Cardiff

A28 south to Ashford

M20 travel westward.

M25

Junction 3 head north

Junction 14

M4 cross over Severn Bridge

Continue M4

Friday 7 March

Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone in 1831. (Once connected with an answer, he wanted people to use the word ahoy!)

Ahoy! Mr. Alexander Graham Bell! Well, he must've made a fortune. I'd like 10p for every time a receiver is picked up in the world in this year alone.

The coach arrived 36 minutes late, so we didn't leave until 12.31 p.m.

When we crossed the Severn Bridge, there was an unwelcome message on the electronic noticeboard warning us that an accident had closed the road ahead and we were diverted on to busy local roads and got caught up in the rush-hour traffic. All this would have made us extremely late for our performance, so Mr. Richards decided to head straight for the hall. We had only 15 minutes left for our dress rehearsal.

Just before the show was due to start, I saw that I had a voicemail from mum asking me to text her back, which I did while the *Clarinet Concerto in A minor* was being played.

Hi Mum,

Got here ok! My turn to play in 10 mins.

Clar

By 10.06 p.m., we had finished our concert and everybody in the audience all stood up and started applauding. Then I went off to meet Tony's parents in the lobby. Big mistake, why didn't I ask them to meet me backstage? Crowds of people everywhere kept bumping into me, then realising that I'm the pianist and all of them started taking photos and wanting to have my autograph.

They said, "You're going to be famous 1 day, my lad."

Then in the far distance I saw them. They were all over me as if I was their long-lost son, they had just this minute found. At 1 point I found it extremely difficult to breathe.

Anyway, after what seemed forever, they took me back to their place, which I must say is very impressive. A lot bigger than Jason's house, and no animals.

Saturday 8 March

The first English parliament was established in 1265.

They needn't have bothered. Waste of time, if you ask me.

At 7.45 a.m., Tony came knocking on my bedroom door. I felt dead to the world. He just kept rambling on about the good old days and asking questions about his last girlfriend, Talented Georgina White. Is she still living in the same old house? Has that lazy 29-year-old brother of hers, Mick, left home yet? Is their dog Buddy still alive? Is she still having singing, piano, violin, and tennis lessons? Is she seeing anybody else now or not?

I told him, "Sorry, Tony, right now I'm needing some beauty sleep, but I'll try and answer your questions later."

He replied, "Oh sorry, Clarence, I wasn't thinking just then. Yes of course I'll go, and I'll see you when you get up, bye."

When I finally got up, I made sure his day was very busy, so he would forget about his *silly* questions, and he did. I was so glad when it was approaching 5 p.m., because this was the time, we had to be at the St David's Hall. Tony's mum very kindly took me back there.

Thank goodness I left today; so glad to be away from this clinging family.

I thanked them for their kindness and gave them a box of Thorntons Classic Collection.

Once our performance ended and when things had quietened down, Mr. Richards thanked us all for such a brilliant evening. He then reminded us of all that our next concerto will be at the Milton Keynes Theatre on Wednesday 27th October at 7.30 p.m. and will be raising money for the same cancer charity.

I finally got away at 10.45 p.m.

Sunday 9 March

Joseph Stalin's daughter defected to the West in 1967.

Stalin, powerful leader of the Soviet Union, couldn't control his own daughter.

We finally got home around 4.33 a.m. The rest of the day was spent in bed, but unfortunately, I couldn't get as much sleep as I needed. Sophia had passed her violin grade 1 yesterday. She was playing her *pathetic* violin in the lounge nearly all day. She was driving me absolutely crazy, so I decided to put my tatty old headphones on so I could listen to my best Mozart CD instead.

Monday 10 March

The French Foreign Legion was formed in 1831.

I've no idea who they were, but it can't be very good if we haven't got 1. We do have the British Legion, but I have a feeling that's completely different.

During registration James asked, "Hey Clarence, would you like to come over to mine on Sunday morning, say at 10 o'clock, and play the Mario Flower Cup races?"

I replied, "Yes, if you'd like."

We were also given a letter telling us our next Inset day is on Monday 31st March.

Tuesday 11 March

Glasgow City Council put a stop to playing darts in pubs because they considered it to be dangerous in 1939.

So, boxing, rugby and not forgetting fencing are apparently all safe, but you could break your neck going for double top. Go on, pull the other 1!

I was cycling home from school, and I very nearly bumped into Mr. Leggett, but this time he was with his eldest, scariest-looking daughter, Donna. I was quite certain they

hadn't seen me, so I cycled quite fast down the High Street and hid behind the post office building next to The Black Pig. I waited to see if they were still in my view and there they were heading straight for the pub, strutting along as if they personally owned the street. I had to hide here, of all places. So, I ended up going back home a lot later than I'd planned; at least I didn't have to confront them.

Wednesday 12 March

Mahatma Gandhi began a march in 1930 as part of his campaign of non-violent disobedience, in the hope that British rule in India could be ended.

Well, he got his way in the end, so I suppose it was worthwhile suffering from sore feet.

I've noticed that Sophia has started to be very attentive lately concerning answering the telephone.

I told mum, "So, for quite a few days now, each time the phone rings Sophia runs towards it, pushing me aside. It's not like her at all and I don't like it, she's changed somehow, I wonder what it is?"

Mum smiled, "She hasn't mentioned anything to me, so I really haven't a clue why she's being like this either, but I'm not worried about it."

I replied, "Well, if she was my daughter, I'd definitely be worried."

She said, "Well, anyway, it's nice to see her being very happy at last. Surely, you've got to agree with me, or don't you?"

"Hmm... I don't know, it's all very strange indeed. But you could be right," I replied.

She suggested, "Look, I've got an idea, why don't you just keep an eye on her for a while if you're really that concerned about it?"

"OK, I will then," I said.

Thursday 13 March

Adolf Hitler was defeated in the German presidential election by Field-Marshal Paul von Hindenburg in 1932.

It only took him a year to achieve his objective. Somebody must've tipped him off about the old saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try and try again."

Mum told Sophia and me that she has received a text from Claudia to say she won't be home for her birthday but instead will be coming home on 22nd March on the 11.05 morning train.

On the BBC1 10 p.m. news I heard that gold prices on the New York Mercantile Exchange hit \$1,000 an ounce for the first time. I don't think any girl would want to marry me, but if there is such a person in the far distant future, I'm afraid she may have to be willing to settle for lightweight fake engagement and wedding rings.

Friday 14 March

In 1992, 150 countries signed a document on climate change aimed at reducing the emission of gases believed to damage the ozone layer and cause global warming.

You never could rely on those people trying to predict the weather tomorrow – never mind years and decades ahead. On the other hand, Claudia will know exactly what's going to happen, so when she finishes her 2-year Foundation Environmental Science Degree Course in Truro, she'll be more than qualified to tell me.

We've now finished school for the Easter holidays already. Not long now and I'll be revising all my 5 AS Level exams; but not until after Easter Day when I've eaten both of my delicious Thorntons Easter Eggs in peace!

Just after the BBC1 6 p.m. news, mum turned around to ask, "So, Clarence, what are you going to do in June? Are you going to leave school and get a job then? What are you thinking about?"

I replied, "Oh, I'm sorry: 3 months ago, I made up my mind to stay on and study for my A levels. Didn't I mention it to you?"

She said, "Um, no, you didn't. So, you're staying on for another year then?"

"That's right," I said.

She replied, "It's OK with me, but with your dad it might be a totally different story. Now, you'll have to choose your moment to tell him very carefully, and I really mean that."

Whose life is it anyway? Surely it must be mine, it's not his!

Saturday 15 March

Finland became the first European country to grant women's voting rights in 1907.

Can only assume the Finnish girls were more ambitious. Anyway, other countries soon followed suit, but the men didn't make it easy for them.

Sophia seemed to be in a very happy mood, singing out of tune all over the place. I asked her why she wasn't in her usual mood. "Is it because you're glad that I'm not leaving now, and I'll be staying here for at least another year?"

"Ha! Ha! You think that everything must revolve around you. No, you're wrong and you wouldn't be able to guess it, not in 1,000,000 years," she laughed and went humming straight upstairs to her bedroom.

Sunday 16 March

Palm Sunday

Harold Wilson unexpectedly resigned as British Prime Minister and was succeeded by James Callaghan in 1976.

There must be easier ways of making a living. Whoever they are, whatever they do or don't do, everybody picks holes and blames them when anything goes wrong.

Went to James's house, played the Mario Flower Cup races, and as we were playing, I told him about Sophia's peculiar behaviour, and he just burst out laughing. I didn't think it was very funny, but in the end, I beat him! His mood soon changed, although he did ask me to arrange a rematch.

I said, "I'll email you sometime during the holiday."

Monday 17 March

*St Patrick Bank & public holiday, Republic & Northern Ireland
The kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861, and Victor Emmanuel became the first king.*

There hasn't been a royal family in Italy for a long while.

My Great-Uncle Paddy Roberts will be very busy today, busy getting drunk, that is! Poor Great-Auntie Mary, when she was alive, she always used to put her foot down every weekend, on his birthday and every occasion to celebrate you can think of. I do miss her lots.

Tuesday 18 March

Soviet astronaut Alexei Leonov became the first man to walk in space (for ten minutes) in 1965.

Wow! 10 minutes! He must've had another urgent appointment. If so to where, I wonder.

Today at 5.12 p.m., I heard Sophia sobbing very loudly in her bedroom. She was starting to annoy me, so much so that I decided to go and knock on her door. I said, "Sophia, can you cry a little bit quieter, please. I'm trying to tidy up my bedroom and you're distracting me!"

She sobbed, "Clarence! Why do you keep being so horrible to me? I haven't said or done anything bad to you today – have I?"

I said, "No, but it hasn't quite finished yet, has it?"

She screamed, "Oh just... GO AWAY! I can do what I damn well please!"

At last, back to normality.

Wednesday 19 March

In 1944 RAF Sergeant Nickels leapt from a plane without a parachute at 18,000 feet and survived after landing in a fir tree.

Good job it wasn't stinging nettles he landed on.

I emailed James today at 7.43 p.m.

Hi James,

Can we arrange a rematch for next Wednesday at 10 a.m.? Also, would you like to have a game of chess sometime in the future? I can teach you if you don't know how to play. You mustn't worry, for I'm no budding grandmaster! I just like the game so much and nobody else in my family will play against me.

Please let us know soon.

Clar

Thursday 20 March

Scientists issued warnings in 1966 that a deadly form of brain disease might be linked to eating beef from cattle infected with so-called mad cow disease.

I'd better stick to lamb and pork and hope there are no mad sheep or pigs.

At 8.57 p.m., I received a text from James which read:

Hi Clar,

Can make Wed at 10 a.m. Yes, I do know chess, but I only play computerized.

James

Friday 21 March

Good Friday Bank & public holiday, UK and Republic of Ireland

French scientists claimed that smoking was good for you in 1923, as nicotine kills bacteria.

Granddad Roberts always used that *silly* excuse and he died at 59 years old. If only he had stopped.

Today I ate all my lovely MUM's home-made hot cross buns. Just before I finished them, Claudia phoned up telling us that she won't be home now until tomorrow, so I ate all of hers as well.

Mum wasn't happy. "How dare you eat at Claudia's hot cross buns? They could've had been kept in a tin for her. I'll have to bake some more now; you know how Claudia loves her hot cross buns."

I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't think of that."

"Hmm... yes, Clarence, that's your problem: you never think sometimes," She replied.

Saturday 22 March

Easter Eve

The first rugby international match took place in Paris in 1906 when England defeated France by 35-8.

We don't win so easily these days. It seems we invent most sports in Britain and then go around teaching other countries how to beat us at them. Bonkers, that is.

Claudia eventually came home with mum in the car at 12.02 p.m. She was picked up from the train station again. I can't work her out when the bus stop is just opposite. In 2 years', time I bet she'll want her 21st birthday party to be booked at some posh place paid by whomever.

In the evening everybody else had MUM's lovely home-made warm hot cross buns, so then I decided to eat 1 of my Thorntons Easter eggs. Yummy!

Sunday 23 March

Easter Day

Benito Mussolini founded the Italian Fascist Party in 1919. On the same day in 1933 Adolf Hitler became the German dictator under the new Enabling Act.

If those are the kind of people who are born on this day of the year, perhaps we ought to amend the calendar and go straight from the 22nd to the 24th.

Last year's Easter Day was great; we had a few days away at Uncle Bob's house in Scotland. Well, this was the exact opposite. I'm now feeling a little bit fatter than I did yesterday. Today we had to contend with Claudia's non-stop chatter, with her showing off her silly latest boyfriend photos of Brad Wilcox. Sophia shouted, "Wow! He's so gorgeous, just look at all those bulging muscles and those lovely, big, brown eyes. Where on earth did you bump into him then? Were you at your local shopping centre?"

Claudia smiled, "No, it wasn't there. So, where I'm living right now there's this great fantastic gymnasium. A month ago, I decided to join it and it was a good job I did because there he was, getting all puffed out on this rowing machine."

"So, where have you been with him?" Sophia asked.

Claudia replied, "I've been to a few pubs, bowling, cinema, theatre, and we've even been to an art gallery. But, get this, last week we went to this very swanky club, and he said he was popping out to the loo, but that wasn't it. So, it turned out that he sings there too, and he has the most amazing voice!"

I said, "Oh, he's so good-looking!"

Dad sighed, "Now, Clarence, behave."

I replied, "Oh, this is all very interesting, but I've got to take Topsy out for a very long walk."

Mum remarked, "But it's pouring down, you know how she hates the rain."

"Wish me luck then, bye!" I shouted.

Monday 24 March

Easter Monday, Bank & public holiday, UK, and Republic of Ireland

When Elizabeth I died in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded her as James I of England and the crowns of the two countries became united.

It's strange that it has taken the Scots nearly 400 years to decide they now want a divorce. If my parents should ever split up, then my stomach will choose MUM, for definite.

Sorry, dad! So, let's just hope it'll never happen. I haven't a clue why I made up my mind to tell dad about my decision to stay on at school today, but I did.

All he said was, "Did mum know about this?"

I answered, "Well... yes, I told her 2 weeks ago, but it wasn't really her place to tell you, it was mine – sorry."

He just got up and went straight to the kitchen and got himself a beer from the fridge. The atmosphere wasn't nice. So, I decided to go to my bedroom and put on my *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* DVD.

Tuesday 25 March

National Day, Greece

The European Economic Community (popularly known as the Common Market) was founded in 1957 under the Treaty of Rome. Signatories were France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg.

They wouldn't even let us in at first!

Dad has now got the OK from the doctor to start back at work tomorrow. It looks like he's very relieved to be going back, I even heard him in the trying to sing at the top of his voice *Born Free* in the bath. This might even make him forget everything about yesterday.

Claudia hardly ever asks dad for anything, but in the afternoon, I saw her doing just that. She got her lift back to the train. We'll most probably see her again around the

first May bank holiday.

Wednesday 26 March

Ludwig van Beethoven died in 1827, by which time he was completely deaf.

Poor old Beethoven! I would hate to go deaf myself. I don't think I could cope at all!

Got to James's house cold and drenched at 10.00 a.m.

He wasn't happy. "I got low marks with my maths homework from Mr. McGann, but it's all right for you because you're good at maths."

I felt sorry and said, "If you wanted to, I could help you do them, or instead we could go outside and play your favourite game, football."

This seemed to cheer him up. "What, in this heavy rain? I don't know, Clarence, sometimes I think when we leave school next year you should take up a career as a comedian."

In the end I beat him again at all 4 Mario Flower Cup races and with the chess. He asked for a rematch with both games. We arranged for me to go to his house on 3rd Jun at 10 a.m.

Thursday 27 March

Robert the Bruce was crowned King of Scotland in 1306. He went on to beat the English at the Battle of Bannockburn eight years later.

Funny, that. I always thought he spent his time watching spiders for some reason. Not my idea of fun, terrifying hairy spiders, even the word itself makes me shudder.

Mum called for an urgent family meeting and announced that since the Town Hall is double-booked and she's been elected to record the minutes of this year's A.G.M., it will be at our house this evening. She'll have to record her TV soaps instead. She wants to make a good impression, so

we all need to be on our very best behaviour, or else make ourselves scarce.

Sophia chose to go down our street to visit Zoe; I opted to go on the computer to do my Crimean War project. I wrote about a British-Jamaican nurse called Mary Seacole.

All evening it sounded like there was a gaggle of geese in our lounge. And not a thing left to eat. If this should happen again, then I'll do a Sophia and go out!

Friday 28 March

In the worst air disaster in history 574 passengers and crew perished when two Boeing 747 aircraft collided on the ground at Tenerife in the Canary Islands in 1977.

It's hard to believe that the biggest air disaster wasn't in the air. And even harder to try and imagine the horror of it all.

At 4.45 p.m., mum started telling me all about last night's meeting. Apparently 2 groups want to book Friday nights: a local rock band for their rehearsals and an outside body wanting to start up their own children's choir.

I said, "Don't worry, I'm sure it'll be sorted out soon."

Saturday 29 March

7,655 runners took part in the first London Marathon in 1981.

A lot of sore feet, and this is something I won't ever try to do myself, no way!

I told Mr. Willis about the Town Hall's double-booking dilemma on Friday evenings and asked him what he would do. He didn't give me an answer, but I could see he was thinking about it throughout my piano lesson.

Sunday 30 March

Russia sold Alaska to the United States of America for \$7.2 million in 1867.

Such a cold miserable place; it wouldn't be my first choice

for a holiday, never mind a home!

Everybody else forgot about putting their clocks and watches forward last night. Dad was late for work. Topsy was bursting to go out and Zoe was knocking at our front door. It took ages for Sophia to get dressed, so I asked Zoe if she wouldn't mind waiting in the lounge.

I've absolutely no idea why, but her eyes kept on following me round, just the way Topsy does. Perhaps she wishes she was like me.

Monday 31 March *British Summer Time begins*

Both the Oxford and Cambridge boats sank in the annual University Boat Race in 1912; Oxford won the re-race a few days later.

No way will you find me dipping my toes in the river Thames, not today, not ever.

At 8 p.m., I was in my bedroom on my computer and mum knocked on my door.

She asked, "Clarence, can I speak to you please?"

I shouted, "Yes, of course, come in."

She smiled, "So, that was Mr. Willis on the phone. He's told me that the Friday dilemma has just been resolved. Apparently, he's going to start up a local children's singing group starting at 7.30 p.m. Here you are, my love, I made it this morning, enjoy!" It was the best slice of chocolate cake ever. Yummy!

At 8.25 p.m. I phoned Mr. Willis, he asked, "Hello, Clarence. Have you left something?"

I replied, "No, it's about your singing group."

He said, "Oh yes, what's that then?"

I asked, "So, who will be playing the piano while you're conducting?"

He laughed, "Ha! I'll be doing both at the same time."

I suggested, "Oh, OK, but if you change your mind, then I could play the piano instead if you'd like?"

He said, "OK, I'll keep it in mind for the future, bye."



April has.....

A day for all to take care,

Yes, you had better beware.

For on the first of this month at home or at school,

If you let someone trick you, they'll call you a fool.

Also, there's a good chance of a shower,

It could be any day and any hour.

Tuesday 1 April

Red Rum became the first steeplechaser to win the Grand National for a third time at Aintree in 1977.

If you reverse this amazing animal's name, it spells 'murder'. For the life of me I can't read any significance into that.

No way is this an April fool's joke, although I would like it to be. Mum told us that Granny Roberts and her new boyfriend, Gary Price, are coming down from Scarborough to stay with us on Saturday for a whole week. Let's just hope for nice warm weather so I can take Topsy out for plenty of walks.

Wednesday 2 April

Beethoven's first symphony was given its first performance in 1800.

Today's serious musical compositions might still figure in concerts in 2200, you never know.

This also reminds me of my very first performance. I was around 8 years old, and I was the cat in *Dick Whittington* at Appletown Primary School. I remember getting a little carried away and very nearly fell off the stage.

Thursday 3 April

Test bores were dug for a channel tunnel in 1959.

Babies born in that year would have been ruefully looking for signs of middle-age spread by the time the first people travelled to France other than by sea or air.

Dad told me that he has at last booked 2 firms, 1 to take the household junk and the other to trim down the trees, and they're both due to come tomorrow. Maybe Granny Roberts should come over more often.

Friday 4 April

Opponents of Irish Home Rule protested about the threatened use of troops in Ulster in 1914.

The only thing I know about the goings on in Ireland is that they always seem to have been going on and they are still ongoing.

Today the trees were all trimmed. Better still, there was no junk, just a mess of flattened dead grass for somebody to sort out later. Mr. Leggett shouldn't be bothering us again at least for another year.

I found mum busy cleaning the already tidy study.

She said, "I had to put off doing the cooking, because we all know how fussy your granny is about being clean

and tidy. I didn't know how I was going to cope with the 2 firms arriving at the same time. Ha, it was like a scene from a *Laurel and Hardy* episode, tree bits flying off everywhere and people bumping into each other, a day I'll never forget."

Pity I missed it all, I wish I could've seen it.

Saturday 5 April

Aged 80, Winston Churchill resigned as Prime Minister because of ill health in 1955.

He had the satisfaction of knowing that, when he felt better, he could rekindle his interest in painting and bricklaying. I can't remember where or when I heard that.

Granny Roberts and her new boyfriend, Gary, arrived in their old red mini at 12.02 p.m. I could see Gary is a very fat man indeed. So, Granny has landed herself this bald-headed toy boy with only a few strands of hair, which could be dyed light brown. He also had gold-rimmed glasses, black trousers and a white shirt which was hanging over his belt and looked very tight around his beer gut. On his feet he wore what looked like the cheapest black trainers ever! Inside the car and on the roof rack it was chock-a-block with stuff. Mum very kindly offered my services to help. Just then once again it started chucking it down, and as I was unloading my first heavy suitcase, Topsy dived out right in front of me. I've absolutely no idea why she wanted to get wet. But anyway, I couldn't just let her get lost, so without thinking I flung down the load on the path and chased after her. She took me everywhere.

Eventually at 12.30 p.m. I caught her being very interested in a black and white mongrel on the Woodfield Park Bridge. I apologised to the dog's tall, slender, young-looking owner, who asked my dog's name.

She laughed, "Ha! My dog's name is Patch," and then whispered, "I'm sorry, but your glasses resting down on

the end of your nose look really funny.”

I smiled. “Not to worry.”

I couldn’t tell what her hair looked like, because she had a tight white hood on her head, but she did have big, sparkly, deep blue eyes and sounded like she could be a nice friendly girl.

When I finally got home, mum looked worried and shouted something about Topsy and the suitcase not being waterproof. I was totally soaked to the skin and was in no mood to argue either, so I ended up apologising and went straight upstairs to the bathroom. Once I was in the bath in the warm water, all I could think of was Topsy running off and watching the great big droplets coming down from the sky.

Sunday 6 April

Robert Peary, the American explorer, reached the North Pole in 1909.

Anyone so keen to go to the pole (north or south) has to be barmy! I shiver if I see Arctic scenery on TV from the comfort of a warm lounge. Anyway, it should’ve been cold enough for Peary in April in his own country.

At 10.30 a.m. Topsy and I could’ve been anywhere, but by chance we were in Harpers Lane walking past house number 3. I had seen the very same girl who we bumped into on the bridge exactly 22 hours ago with a very excitable Patch.

She smiled. “Hello, fancy bumping into you 2 again.”

Gobsmacked, I replied, “Ah, you have shoulder-length, wavy, blonde hair! I couldn’t see it yesterday because you had your white hood on.”

But now I know her name, address; how old she is and the school she goes to. So, her name is Lexie McFadden, she lives at number 23, Pink Lady Avenue, just last week she celebrated her 16th birthday and she’s at the mixed private Appletown Independent School.

Then she started moaning about her 2 brothers: Steven 7 and Phil 21. And finally, it turns out that she would've loved a sister at least, so she could have good sisterly conversations and borrow each other's clothes and such things. Wow! 2 brothers, she's very lucky – I'm so jealous.

30 minutes later, I said, "I've got to go now, because I have some jobs around the house that desperately need my attention."

She said, "Wow! A teenager who likes housework, that is something," and then we went our separate ways.

Monday 7 April

William Wordsworth, the Lake District poet, was born in 1770.

Ah yes, William Wordsworth, 1 of my favourite poets. Curiously though, the poem of his I remember best was his tribute to Westminster Bridge in London, where you don't see many daffodils!

Topsy and I didn't see anyone today.

Tuesday 8 April

Britain and France signed an historic treaty to end all conflict between the two countries in 1904; this was known as the Entente Cordiale.

A century later we still fight on the same side when hostilities break out. Mind you, we continue to enjoy disagreeing about a lot of things.

At 3.34 p.m. I caught fat Gary being even lazier than normal, as he was having a crafty fag in our lounge and not outside like he usually does. Mum and Granny Roberts were out shopping. I had to remind him about our no smoking house rule and how he'll need to go outside and as far away from the door as possible.

Facing downwards he mumbled, "Sorry." Then he left the room and headed straight towards the back door. Fortunately, I found some air freshener in the kitchen

cupboard. I quickly sprayed it around the whole house and opened all the windows for 30 minutes. Just as I closed them, I saw the red mini coming up the driveway.

Wednesday 9 April

The first double-decker buses appeared on the streets of London in 1903.

This could still be in the days of horse-drawn vehicles. 1 thing I do know is how difficult it is to climb those steep steps.

Granny Roberts and I had an interesting long chat about her life in World War 2. She worked in the maintenance corps in the WAAF. She served for 3 and 6 months and, believe it or not, it was the best job she ever had. She even showed me her old black and white photograph of herself and the rest of the regiment all sitting around a Hurricane plane, just 1 of the many planes she'd worked on. It was a shame I had to cut our conversation short as I needed to take Topsy out for a walk and to finish my English essay.

Thursday 10 April

Quinine was discovered by Robert Woodward and William von Eggers Doering in 1944; this became the recognised treatment for malaria.

An interesting observation: the discovery was the result of research obviously not allowed to be delayed by the war.

Today I bumped into Lexie in Woodsfield Park.

She asked me, "Hey Clarence, a couple of mates of mine and I want to go out and see a film at the Dreamland Cinema next Thursday, would you like to join us?"

I asked, "Who are they, then?"

She replied, "Well, they both go to my school and they're brother and sister, called Kate and Jeremy Sikes."

I said, "I would like to go, but I don't know them, so I wouldn't feel very comfortable if they were with us too."

She frowned, “Come on, they’re not into drugs or anything like that, you might even get to like them. Look, in a minute we can exchange phone numbers and if you can’t go then just text me, or I’ll see you at my house, 7 o’clock!”

Friday 11 April

Louis XVIII became king of France on the abdication of Napoleon in 1814.

I looked him up on the Wikipedia website. Apparently, he didn’t have any children. So, on the day of his death at the age of 68 on 16th September 1824 the crown passed to his brother Charles, Count of Artois. He was also the last French monarch to die while reigning.

I haven’t a clue as to why, but today I let Sophia borrow my expensive black leather jacket to go out to a party. Weird!

Saturday 12 April

The first performance of George Bernard’s Shaw’s ‘Pygmalion’ was staged at His Majesty’s Theatre in London in 1914.

According to mum this was the play that gave birth to an even more popular musical show called *My Fair Lady*. Something to look out for on TV, but if I do get to see it I won’t brag about it at school.

Granny Roberts suddenly stopped eating her spaghetti Bolognese dinner and made an announcement that she and Gary are getting married this year.

Mum shouted, “I knew it! I could feel it in my bones there was something afoot with you 2.”

With that she stormed out of the room crying, leaving the rest of us to congratulate them. Gary then told us all about it. “So, it’s going to kick off from midday on Saturday 6th of September at a Registry Office in Scarborough.”

Granny decided to go and talk to mum, and dad and I helped Gary pack their car.

I couldn't stand the shouting any longer. I just had to take Topsy out around the block. When we got back the mini had already gone and dad filled me in. "Your mum has sent granny to Coventry."

Do I really belong to this family? I'm beginning to have my doubts!

Sunday 13 April

Jack Nicklaus won the master's golf tournament at Atlanta in 1986; at aged 46, he was the oldest player to win one of the four Grand Slam titles.

This should encourage dad not to give up hope of winning the local pub cribbage trophy. You're never too old – unless, of course, you are.

Sophia has been looking at me all day. Maybe she's up to something, but right now I can't quite put a finger on it.

Monday 14 April

On this day in 1933, the first recorded sighting of the famous (or fictitious?) Loch Ness Monster hit the headlines. Since that time the creature has been 'witnessed' many times, but the truth remains a mystery.

I asked dad about this. His answer was that he'd not heard of any recent sightings. Maybe he, she or it will come back in 2033 to celebrate the centenary.

I went to the Co-op hole in the wall to get £30 out, which I will not be touching until 3 days' time.

During *Coronation Street* I mentioned to mum about my meeting with Jeremy and Kate Sikes and their friend Lexie McFadden at the Dreamland Cinema.

Mum asked, "Oh! Jeremy and Kate Sikes! I didn't know you were matey with them as well."

I replied, "Well, actually they're not my mates, they're

Lexie's, so how do you know them?"

She said, "Oh, I know their mum. Anyway, that's good news, now you'll be making new mates. Look, Clarence, I'm sorry and I don't mean to be rude, but this little bit of conversation just here between Betty and Deirdre is quite an important scene. So please, if you don't mind, love. Thank you."

Tuesday 15 April

The liner Titanic sank on its maiden voyage in 1912 with heavy loss of life.

There have been plenty of disasters at sea, but the *Titanic* is the 1 everybody remembers – according to mum most probably because it had been described as unsinkable.

I saw in our weekly local free *Appletown Citizen* newspaper that a clearance firm – www.tidy-up.com – has been caught dumping unwanted household items illegally. I showed mum, dad and Sophia the article:

Local Police Caught Clean up Cowboy Firm in Action!

I asked, "Now what on earth would they end up getting, I wonder?"

Sophia suggested, "If I were the judge, I'd make them really pay for it. So first, they would have to do at least a year's outdoor community service; then they'd have to pay a £2,000 fine; and finally, there'd be a complete ban on them doing this type of work ever again."

Mum said, "Yes, I agree with you. I mean how can they do such a thing?"

I replied, "Scum of the earth, that's what I think."

Dad went ballistic. "Well, I'm very angry about this! You know, that cost me no end of money, and they just went and dumped all our rubbish in our pleasant Appletown or somewhere else close by like on a roadside or something. And it's a good job that there wasn't

anything with our address on it!” Then he stormed out of the house and headed straight for The Black Pig to drink his sorrows away.

Wednesday 16 April

The first parking meters appeared in London in 1957.

I wish my weekly pocket money equalled the sum of the fines which the council levy on offenders.

Because I made Topsy run all the way around the block, she wasn't a happy puppy. Afterwards, I ate all my cheese omelette and smash potato and went upstairs to look through my wardrobe to dig out my old favourite comfortable white linen shirt, black cotton trousers and black leather shoes to wear tomorrow evening.

Thursday 17 April

In 1965 U.S. students protested at the bombing of North Vietnam.

All these students must read their morning papers column by column to make up their minds what to protest about each day. It must be a fascinating hobby!

This morning, I was running a bit late for school, so Topsy had to do an even shorter run than yesterday. She must think that I'm preparing to enter her in a doggy Olympics, of some kind.

After my dinner of fish and chips, I put on the clothes I'd decided on and made sure I didn't forget my 'Sure for Men' underarm. I hid my spotty forehead as much as I could with my fringe combed down. By 6.31 p.m. I was ready to go and called out, "I'm going to the Dreamland Cinema, see you later, bye," and left for Lexie's house.

A tall, rough-looking guy answered the door. He had a gold stud ring through the left side of his nose and very short brown hair and was wearing designer torn jeans and a black T-shirt. He had a blue tattoo on the right side of his

neck saying 'Love'.

He said, "Come back after the film ends or else, matey, or else!"

I replied, "Yes, I will."

Turning, he shouted, "Ha, Lexie, your ginger nut boyfriend is here," and went back inside the house.

As soon as she came out, she said, "That's my big brother Phill don't mind him, he's always been like this ever since I started dating; he's a pussy cat really. But I've just had a text from Kate and they both can't make it now, so I'm afraid it's just you and me. The film I've picked is called *Young @ Heart*; it's supposed to be very good."

The bus was exactly 5 minutes late, so we were running to the Dreamland Cinema, both exhausted, and of course the film had already started. Just as the film was about to end, Lexie said, "I know we'll miss the last few minutes of the film, but I don't particularly want to get a taxi or walk that long path back, so would you mind if we left now?"

A touch disappointed, I said, "Hmm, OK then."

Once on the bus, Lexie was very excitable, telling me how funny the film was. But deep down I was really annoyed, because we didn't get to see the first or the last scenes, so it was not a good night for me at all.

By 10.30 p.m. I finally dropped her off at her house.

She suggested, "Would you like to go on another date?"

I said, "Yes, why not. Where shall we go?"

She smiled, "We could go to the Pizza House. Say next Friday at 7 o'clock? Oh, and before I forget I'd like to invite Kate and Jeremy also I'm thinking about asking Sam Wilkes too, if you wouldn't mind?"

I asked, "Who's Sam? Is it she or he?"

She replied, "Sam's a girl, she's very nice and an old friend, somebody I can trust."

I nodded, "Well, mum said only last Monday that it's good news now that I'm making new mates. So, seeing that you can trust this Sam mate of yours, then maybe I could do the same. So, I think my answer's going to be..."

yes.”

Hugging me, she said, “Oh, that’s wonderful. So, I’ll see you next Friday at the Pizza House, can’t wait. And you’ll love Sam; I just know it.”

Friday 18 April

15,000 lives were lost, and 28,000 buildings destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Wow, that’s a lot of people. If ever I decide to emigrate, I will keep clear of countries with a history of earthquakes, typhoons, flooding, or civil wars. Come to think of it, that seriously restricts my options. I may as well stay put.

Mum has been talking on the phone to Granny Roberts, soon to be Granny Price, a lot today. I think it looks as if mum is coming around to the idea of those 2 marrying. Lexie is my girlfriend so I’m going to marry her.

Saturday 19 April

The first Miss World contest was held at the Lyceum Theatre in London in 1951; it was won by Miss Sweden.

Mum says she couldn’t even win the knobbly knees contest at Butlin’s.

Today at 9.11 a.m. Sophia came into my bedroom.

She said, “Hey, Clarence, did you hear that terrible thunderstorm we had last night? It started around midnight, and it went on for absolutely ages. It must’ve lasted till at least 3 in the morning.”

Shrugging, I said, “No, I didn’t hear anything. I slept like a log, anyway, I was dreaming just then, how dare you!”

Sophia asked, “So, can you remember it?”

I replied, “Yes.”

She asked, “So, what was it all about then?”

I replied, “Oh, OK, well, Ben, Jason and I were in a massive river, it was made from this gorgeous milk

chocolate, just like in that brilliant Roald Dahl story, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Anyway, we decided to eat it all up, it was delicious. Then Jason's goat, Dusty, appeared, in a big beard and a Santa's outfit. He had a high-pitched Mr. Willis voice, and said, "Well, all of you have been very naughty, none of you will be getting any presents this year. That chocolate you've just had was originally set aside for the reindeer, so what are they going to eat now?"

Jason said, "I know, we could all poo it out for them, that'll sort it."

Ben moaned, "Don't be *silly*, that'll take far too long, they need to be fed right now. How about if I touch this button on my digital watch, we'll then go back in time and tell ourselves not to eat it, because it's needed for the reindeer, simple."

Sophia laughed, "Ha! That's hilarious, Clarence, I wish I had dreams like that. So, what happened next?"

I replied, "But, then you woke me up, Sophia, so I don't know."

She said, "Oh, sorry. Anyway, coming back to last night's thunderstorm. Mr. Leggett has already been over and he's not very happy."

I smiled. "When is he ever happy? So, why is he being angry with us?"

She sighed, "Well, our fence has fallen into his back garden, it's a total mess out there. Dad's fuming, because he's now got to find the money to get it all mended." Great!

Sunday 20 April

Britain mourned the passing of the young poet Rupert Brooke, who died on active service in 1915.

I looked him up and read *The Soldier*. He wrote, "If I should die, think only this of me: that there is some corner of a foreign field that is forever England." I read this poem somewhere and I nearly broke the unwritten law: men

don't cry. Then I remembered I wasn't a man yet, so I did dab my hanky. I can't imagine any circumstances that would inspire a writer's imagination more than the horror of war.

At 10 a.m. I told mum that I couldn't take Topsy out as I was way behind with my music homework. Luckily, she offered to take her for me.

She nodded, "Oh, OK, well I do need to get some fresh air anyway, because just lately your dad has been doing my head in with this fence problem. And if you promise to eat my delicious home-made tomato soup and bread rolls?"

As I was feeling a little bit hungry, I said, "OK." That was the strangest deal that I've ever had to make with somebody. Perhaps she thinks that I'm no longer interested in her cooking for some strange reason.

At 3.41 p.m. I received a text from Lexie:

Clar,

Can't wait 2 c u at 7 p.m. on Fri, at the Pizza House.

Lex

x

I finished my music homework at 11.34 p.m.

Monday 21 April

The Duchess of York gave birth to her first daughter in 1926; named Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, she and the Royal Family never suspected that she would succeed to the throne 26 years later.

Now this is something I know about, thanks to my history lessons, but I'm still going to write it down just in case I forget it. Strangely enough, if a king marries, his wife becomes his queen, but if the daughter of a king succeeds him on his death and she then marries, her husband does not become king. He is referred to as her consort and given a title – for example the Duke of Edinburgh. Life can be

very complicated!

Today Topsy fancied doing 1 of her slowest walks she'd ever had in her life. First, she's running for Britain, and next she's an old dog getting ready for the knacker's yard.

Tuesday 22 April

Manfred Von Richthofen was shot down and killed during the second Battle of the Somme in 1918; a legendary German fighter pilot, he shot down about 80 planes during the war.

He could never have known who he had killed or how many. It was all so impersonal. In war you don't hate individuals, only what they stand for. It makes no sense to me.

At 7 p.m. Sophia and I were in the lounge: she was watching some soap TV programme, and I was busy checking my phone to see if I had received any messages; I hadn't.

Sophia laughed, "Ha! Every week I get loads of messages on my phone and they're all brilliant. You on the other hand get hardly any, I wonder why? Is it because you're not liked by many people? Or maybe you've given your number to a girl you've just met recently?"

I said, "No, anyway you ought to be careful who you give your number to, you never know these days."

She shouted, "Don't you think that everybody knows that? Well, I can't have you nosing into my business, so I'm going upstairs to my bedroom to talk to Kylie in private."

Then I replied, "Good and afterwards you can stay in there and play a few of your games that you've just downloaded onto it as well."

She shrugged. "That's a great idea, because then I won't be looking at your ugly mug for the rest of the evening."

Wednesday 23 April

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died on his 52nd birthday in 1616.

Pity shaky Bill didn't live another 50 years. He could've written so many more historical plays in a language to utterly bewilder especially me and thousands more.

I wonder what good old Shakespeare would think of my very first attempt at a love-sick poem.

OH, MY 'LUXURIOUS LIPS' LEXIE

Oh my 'Luxurious Lips' Lexie
To me you're just so, so sexy.
You're perfect in every way.
Glad we met on that rainy day,
I can't bear it now when you leave.
Always wear my heart on my sleeve.
I want to be more than your friend.
Never let us come to an end.

Thursday 24 April

Barbra Streisand, the American singer/actress, was born in 1942.

Great powerful voice, mum tells me. She also told me that Barbra had 2 daughters who achieved success in the world of music and acting.

At 6.35 p.m. I texted Lexie:

Lex,
C u tom at the Pizza House at 7.p.m.
Clar

Friday 25 April

Cambridge scientists explained the structure of the most important molecule in biology, popularly known as DNA, in 1955; this has subsequently enabled the police to positively identify people who have committed crimes.

Years, even decades, after the dirty deeds were committed, the guilty can no longer be sure they are safe from prosecution. Hooray for DNA, I say.

At 6.37 p.m. I told mum, “I’m now going out to meet Kate and Jeremy Sikes, Lexie McFadden, and her friend Sam Wilks at the Pizza House. Lexie says Sam’s not into drugs or anything like that, so there’s no need to worry; and I’ll be back by 10 o’clock.”

She replied, “I can see you’re making even more new mates now, that’s excellent. See you, son. If you’re going to be later than 10 o’clock, then please don’t forget to give 3 rings.”

By 7.00 p.m. there were 4 of us in the Pizza House sitting around a square, light-brown, wooden table. Jeremy and Lexie were discussing old-fashioned cars and Kate was telling me all about her latest boyfriend Carl Donahue. No more than 6 minutes later Sam arrived. She had short black hair with a ring through the left side of her nose. She was wearing dark blue jeans, skimpy white sequin blouse and black leather jacket. After our orders were taken, they soon wanted to know everything about my life.

I said, “When I was 3 years old, I was diagnosed as having mild autism and delayed speech and from the foundation year I was given some extra help. However, when I reached my 4th year the Headteacher wanted me to go to the comprehensive school a year early. During the last year at my primary school, they held a children’s talent competition on the evening of 5th of April, which was the day before Good Friday. To my surprise they chose me to be the winner. I performed the Mozart *Piano Concerto number 20 in C major*. I was given a trophy and a £500 cheque. On that day my musical director, Mr.

Richards, was in the audience and he invited me to perform a few piano concertos at venues around the UK with his Appletown Orchestra.”

They didn't say anything, so I carried on, “Before then, to live with me must've been a total nightmare for my family, but for some strange reason that competition turned my life around. But I still feel I must write down all the road routes to faraway places where I've never been. Big places are just about OK, but small crowded rooms or corridors especially in unfamiliar places and with loud playing music are still a no-no. It's the same when it comes to family arguments at home: I now just leave the room. When we're in the car I always put the radio on, so I can change the subject.

“I live with my parents, my younger sister Sophia and Topsy the dog. My older sister Claudia, well, right now she's at college studying for an environmental degree of some sorts in Truro and only visits us during the holidays and so forth. My mum works from home with her very own cookery business and my dad works at Appletown railway station. I've only got a few close school mates – my best mate is Paul Patterson, after him it's James Robertson, then Ben McKenzie and finally Jason Hanson, and that's about it. Oh no, yes, I'm sorry but I forgot to mention this: in February this year I got to know a friendly fat goat called Dusty at Jason's farm; and that is definitely it.”

Sam mentioned, “Wow! That was very interesting. Well, our family has just moved into a brand-new house at number 6 Cox's Street and my parents are going away for the night, so would you 2 like to come over to my house-warming party next Saturday at 7 o'clock?”

Lexie smiled, “Sick!”

I asked, “Well, that really depends on how big your rooms are and how many people you've invited and what kind of music it will be?”

Sam said, “Clarence, they are massive rooms, I've got 10 people coming and I promise you I'll have the music

down. I like artists like The Pussycat Dolls, Take That, Queen, Lionel Richey, Kylie Minogue, Taylor Swift, Paloma Faith, Sugababes, Enrique, The Saturdays, Cher, Girls Aloud, Spice Girls, Alesha Dixon, Peter Andre, Will Young, Jamiroquai, Lemar, Leona Lewis, All Saints, Gwen Stefani, Katy Perry, Britney Spears, Travis... I suppose it's that kind of stuff really."

I replied, "And you'll keep the volume down?"

Lexie sighed, "I promise you it'll be totally fine; and if you don't like it, then we can always leave early."

I said, "Oh right. I didn't think of that. OK I'll come then," and Sam left.

We finished our delicious pizzas finally at 9.25 p.m.

It was 30 minutes later when I told mum and dad all about Lexie being my girlfriend and about us both going to Sam's house-warming party. It didn't go down at all well.

Saturday 26 April

The biggest clinical trial in the history of medicine was launched by the National Foundation for Infant Paralysis in 1954; the polio vaccine was named after its discoverer, Jonas Edward Salk.

I wonder if they'll ever be able to find a cure for a sick joke.

Mum told me that they had discussed us last night and decided if Lexie is available then they would like to ask her over next Friday evening.

I phoned her up and luckily, she answered. We arranged for this coming Wednesday 30 April at 7 p.m.

Sunday 27 April

The undefeated world heavyweight boxer Rocky Marciano quit the sport in 1956.

As the saying goes, "Quit while you're winning". That is particularly good advice for boxers, I reckon.

Today at 10.30 a.m. I walked into the lounge and found Sophia with Zoe busy messing around with Sophia's make-up and a hand mirror.

Sophia said, "Wow, Zoe! I think I've done quite a good job, what do you think?"

Zoe smiled. "Yes, brilliant, it's good. You've really brought out the colour of my eyes and my cheek bones look fantastic. Now what about my hair, what can you do with this, anything?"

Sophia suggested, "Well, I think it could do with a cut, it's got loads of split ends."

Zoe shrugged, "Oh, do you think so?"

Sophia replied, "Yes, you do, you really need to go to the hairdressers."

Zoe sighed, "OK, I'll ask my mum if she wouldn't mind taking me to the hairdresser's."

Sophia mentioned, "Well, anyway, Jack Harding must like it, because he really fancies you. He keeps bumping into you during nearly every break time."

Zoe said, "What, him? I don't think so. Anyway, I've got my eye on somebody else."

Sophia asked, "Who's that then?"

Zoe smiled. "That's for me to know and you to find out."

I said, "Well, this is all very interesting, but I must really get on that computer to do my history and geography homework, so if you don't mind."

Sophia suggested, "Why can't you go on your own computer in your bedroom?"

I said, "I know where it is, but I can't be bothered to go upstairs, that's why."

Sophia moaned, "Clarence! You can be such a real pain sometimes, you know! Come on, Zoe, we'll go and finish this off in my bedroom instead."

I shouted, "Good! So, I can now have some peace and quiet ... at last!"

Monday 28 April

Fletcher Christian mutinied on the Bounty, forcing Captain Bligh into an open boat in 1789.

That must've been the most famous mutiny ever. It was thoughtful of Christian to provide the boat. It'll have saved Bligh from getting his feet wet.

Don't you just hate it when nothing goes right? Like today for instance, when I was playing the piano and I just kept on getting it wrong. I tried to make amends by practising for a couple of hours, but in the end, I had to give up!

Sophia said, "Good, I'm glad you've stopped playing on that *stupid* piano at last! What a terrible racket, I've never heard you play so badly! You were really doing my head in. Right, I'm going to do some violin practice, so excuse me."

I replied, "You go right ahead, I'm going upstairs."

She smirked, "Wow, so you're letting me do my violin practice and you're not putting up a fight about your terrible piano playing either. Are you feeling all right?"

Tuesday 29 April

British Aerospace was founded in 1977.

If nothing more memorable has been recorded on this day in the past 2,000 or so years, I suggest we delete 29 April from the 2009 calendar and have a shorter year from 2009 onwards.

Today Ancient Mr. Saunders gave us all a letter about a field trip to Dorset. For 5 days we geography students will be away travelling by coach, starting 19 May, going to a few well-known seaside places before staying overnight on each of the 4 nights in some hostel.

What a busy month May is going to be – and we've got our production of *West Side Story*.

At 6.30 p.m., when we were eating our spaghetti Bolognese dinner, I decided to tell everybody about the

geography field trip. They immediately started putting in their orders.

Sophia mentioned, “Oh now, could you buy me a thick pink stick of rock and a *Kiss-me-quick* hat, or something very similar.”

Mum smiled, “Ah yes, I would like the same as Sophia, please. Thank you.”

Dad mumbled, “Well, I too would like a thick pink stick of rock, and if you can find a nice big mug with some sort of picturesque scene on it, then that’ll be great too, please. Thank you.”

Mum suggested, “Well, now, that only leaves Claudia, hmm, so why don’t you get her the same as me and Sophia? Yes, I’m sure she’ll be quite happy with that, please. Thank you.”

Ha, Sophia! 1 day I’m going to teach you all about good manners. I don’t know when, but you mark my words, young lady, and I’ll do it before this year is out. I can promise you that!

Wednesday 30 April *St George*

Charles Dickens’ novel, ‘The Tale of Two Cities’, was first published in 1859.

Funnily enough I was given this as a present on my 15th birthday, but I haven’t had a chance to read it yet. All I know is that the title refers to London and Paris... I think.

Surprisingly the whole evening went extremely well. Mum and dad told Lexie that they trusted me to be left on my own and I can have a small party with about 4 mates over. They invited her before I could get a chance to do it myself.

I also mentioned my 5-day school geography field trip to Dorset, and she immediately gave me her order for a pink stick of rock and a hat as well. So, all in all there’s 5 plus 1 for me making 6 sticks of pink rock and 3 pink hats to buy!

By 9.15 p.m. Topsy and I were dropping Lexie off at her posh house.

She smiled, "You must've wondered ever since we met why I'd be interested in you."

Shrugging, I said, "Um, no, not really."

She replied, "It was because you made me laugh, and I thought, he looks quite cute, I thought to myself, why don't I give him a try? Especially as I was single at the time."

I moaned, "What about the ugly spots on my forehead?"

She laughed, "Ha, Clarence! Why don't you just go out and buy a tube of spot cream from a chemist?"

I told her, "Yes, that's a good idea, I didn't think of that."

She said, "You worry way too much about your spots."

I asked, "Do I?"

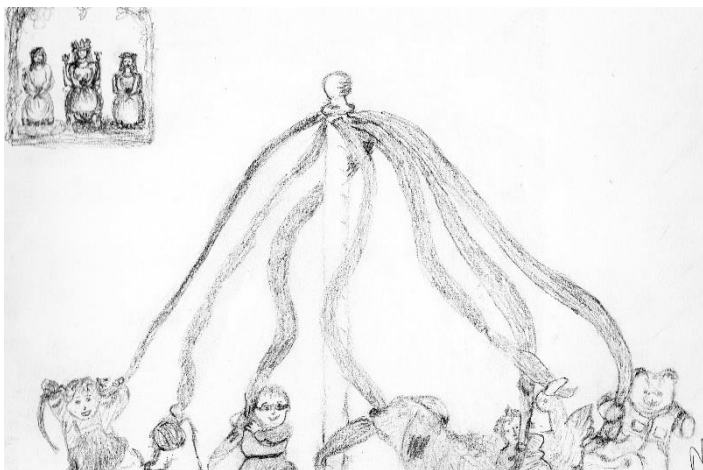
She suggested, "Nearly all of us teenagers have to go through the humiliation of getting teenage spots."

I replied, "But you don't have any."

She whispered, "Well, I might get some in the future."

I said, "Yes, you're right, I'll go to Boots and buy something as soon as I can. Thank you for that."

So, for the first time in my life I've got a nice girlfriend, and my parents seem to like her as well. Great!



May has...

A tradition that gives girls and boys the chance
To celebrate, as round the Maypole they dance.
While one lucky girl will be crowned May Queen
And be happier than she has ever been.

Thursday 1 May *Ascension Day*

The Great Exhibition opened at Crystal Palace in London in 1851.

Pretty basic, I should've thought, without all the knowledge we have nowadays. No recorded music, films or clever gadgets. They must have used a horse and cart to get all the bulky exhibits to their destination. Amazing! Yet from all accounts it was a huge success.

By now I should've started doing some of my revision, but Topsy has recently fancied more fresh air, therefore I'm now taking her for much longer walks as it has stopped raining.

Friday 2 May

The Authorised Version of the Bible was published in 1611.

This sounds to me that nobody was expected to believe in the Old and New Testaments before the 17th century after Christ was born. Who was important enough to give this edition the OK? How odd.

Claudia has cancelled coming up this time for the bank holiday weekend as she has too much exam revision work to do.

Saturday 3 May National Day, Poland

The Chinese government banned polygamy and the sale of women in 1950.

It's astonishing they had to wait until Granny Upton-Smyth was alive before this could happen.

The whole day seemed to go very slowly until I left for Lexie's house at 6.32 p.m. When I arrived, I was confronted by a big stocky man with arm muscles as big as the top of 1 of my thighs. He was wearing a very expensive-looking office black suit and a white shirt with his top button undone and a very loose tie. It must have been her dad. He looked me up and down.

Other than that, the evening went very well until some gate crashers burst in all drugged and drunk up to their eyeballs. We had a few complaints from the neighbours. A boy was selling drugs, a small glass got completely smashed and there was heavy fighting outside and stones of different sizes were thrown at the front door and windows. Then a girl started playing this very loud rap CD. It was driving me crazy, so I had to go outside. Lexie followed me and 5 minutes later the police arrived and put a stop to everything. As I was dropping her off, Phil had just come home from somewhere. He was in such a good mood, waving his arms about, singing all over the place, I don't think I've ever seen him so happy. And to top it all

he had somehow managed to get himself invited to my party, which I don't think Lexie liked.

Sunday 4 May

The famous but fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, was presumed dead after vanishing on a walking trip in Switzerland in 1891 according to his creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, in his book 'The Final Problem' published in December 1893.

I was reading the other day that fans of Sherlock were so upset that the author had to reincarnate the old boy in another book several years later. Pity it's not as easy to do that in real life. I don't know though – the population is already increasing too fast.

Sophia had Zoe over again. They were playing Wii Tennis in the lounge. I couldn't bear them arguing over who won this and who lost that point.

Interrupting their concentration, I said, "You cannot be serious, the ball was in, it's chalk dust, the ball was in."

"Clarence!" Sophia shouted, "what on earth are you doing, and who are you pretending to be this time with that *silly* American accent? And you just made me lose that point."

I said, "I'm being the fantastic, very famous sports personality, John McEnroe. I think he's just the best! Oh, how I would love to get his autograph someday. His very first Wimbledon was in 1977; he had just turned 18; he was from Queens; New York and he had stunned the tennis world by reaching the semi-finals. He has won 7 Grand Slams."

Interrupting, Zoe moaned, "Clarence, will you pl..."

"Excuse me, I haven't finished speaking! And 76 single titles. I've watched him play many times, from the old archive clips the BBC always show when it rains at Wimbledon. But next year it's going to be different when that centre court roof is completed. Oh, I can't stand these horrible atmospheres."

Sophia asked, "And whose fault is that then, hey? Why

can't you go and do your jumping, arm waving and face pulling somewhere else? Or you could take Topsy out and go to the Co-op to buy some nibbles and stuff for your *stupid* party instead."

I shouted, "OK, I'll do that then!"

"Good, and you have my permission to take as long as you like!" yelled Sophia.

Monday 5 May *Bank and Public holiday, UK and Republic of Ireland*

Napoleon Bonaparte died in 1821 on the island of St Helena, where he had spent the last five years of his life.

I know he died of lead poisoning from the paint on his walls, but I would like to think that he died of boredom after all those exciting battles.

James phoned to ask if I was doing anything for my birthday. I told him I've got 2 people coming so far and that I would a few more like guys him and Ben to come over at 7 p.m.

Tuesday 6 May

Athlete Roger Bannister became the first runner to break the four-minute mile barrier in 1954.

His time has been beaten many times since. I wonder whether we refused to change from miles to kilometres for road distances to save the costs involved, or we just wanted to be cussed. Europe got their own back. How many 1-mile races do you hear about these days outside the UK?

At 7.35 p.m. I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and write my diary entry! It's because I'm only 16 and I hope to have many years still left to live. I can't do a Shakespeare and die on my very own birthday! So, here it is.

James, Ben, Lexie, and Phil all turned up at 7.03 p.m.

Things seemed to be going fine, but then at 7.32 p.m. Markus and Colin arrived with 2 more people who I didn't know.

Wednesday 7 May

A significant day in the year for the birth of famous people: English poet Robert Browning in 1812; German composer Johannes Brahms in 1833; and Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky in 1840.

What a shame I wasn't born on 7 May to add to all those other geniuses.

Well, I'm alive, but only just. I can't remember much of what happened, but I did wake up with a terrible headache and I can't really remember drinking all that much. Anyway, the house wasn't bad at all. Somebody must've tidied up just before my family came back. Apparently, Lexie went down extremely well and luckily Phil at some point threw Markus and Colin out.

I struggled through school today and it could've been a lot worse if I hadn't taken 2 aspirins.

James also told me that Topsy was given plenty of nibbles and beer, which turned out to be the reason why she wasn't her usual happy self this morning. I got 6 presents; and my very best surprise was a £1,000 cheque which came from Great-Auntie Grace.

Thursday 8 May

In 1955 Hiroshima victims arrived in the USA for plastic surgery.

Ironically almost 10 years to the day after most of their fellow citizens were eliminated by the atom bomb dropped by an American plane.

At 3.25 p.m. I cycled to the bank to put my cheque into my savings account.

When I got back home, Sophia asked, "So, Clarence,

how much will you have when your cheque has cleared?"

I replied, "I will have £1,152.33p. Why?"

She shrugged, "Oh, that's only 33p more than me, I shall have to borrow a £1 off dad."

I said, "I wish you luck there."

Friday 9 May Europe Day

The Dionne girl quintuplets were born in a tiny hamlet in Northern Ontario in Canada in 1934. Their parents already had a family of two daughters and three sons.

I'd never heard of them before. It served greedy Mr. and Mrs. D right. Just think about all those nappies. On second thoughts, I'd prefer not to.

Markus wasn't at school for some reason.

When I was on my way home, Lexie phoned, and we arranged to meet up with each other's dog tomorrow in Woodsfield Park by the duck pond at 11 a.m.

Saturday 10 May

Michelangelo Buonarroti started work on his masterpiece on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in 1508. It took him more than four years to complete.

That's nearly as long as it took mum to persuade dad to redecorate the lounge last year.

I got up very late at 8.27 a.m. I gulped down my Kellogg's cornflakes and a very cold cup of tea. Fetched Topsy and her lead and ran all the way to Woodsfield Park to get there 10 minutes beforehand. After an hour of talking about our parties, Lexie just started kissing me on the lips.

Afterwards, I said, "I'm sorry, but that kiss has just made me feel really uncomfortable."

She suggested, "Oh Clarence, don't worry, you'll most probably be feeling embarrassed or something. Maybe it's because of that woman standing over there by the pond. Her back is turned, look; she's not noticing us, she's

feeding the ducks. I'm now going to change the subject: what about next Saturday evening then?"

I replied, "Well, my parents will be away in the Cotswolds for that weekend for their 20th wedding anniversary. So, would you like to come over to ours?"

She smiled, "That'll be really sick, man!"

We started walking home; then suddenly Patch and Topsy were nowhere to be seen. We finally found them an hour later in amongst the trees sniffing at each other's arses.

Sunday 11 May Pentecost

Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated in 1945.

I can't begin to imagine what it would've been like to see the conditions in those camps for the first time.

No Markus again, so perhaps he's ill.

Monday 12 May

The General Strike was called off after nine days in 1926. More than a million workers were involved, and Britain had been brought to a virtual standstill.

We learned all about the Tolpuddle Martyrs in last year's history lessons. I bet they never dreamt their efforts would lead to these often worldwide strikes centuries later.

No Markus yet again. I've changed my mind: perhaps he's not ill after all and has gone on strike instead.

Dad said, "In the late 1970s when Labour was in power, we all lived through many strikes that went on for a few years just before Maggie got into number 10. There were lots of demonstrations against the poll tax along with high unemployment.

Tuesday 13 May

Sydney Poitier was the first black actor to be awarded a Hollywood Oscar in 1964.

If there weren't any black actors in the early days of film production, they must've used black paint and a brush on the person who played the role of an African character.

Markus is back at school, and I finally found out from a text from Jason that he was banned from school for beating up my ex-admirer, Gaylord Toby Adams. At 12.56 p.m. I had just finished my lunch and was collecting my coat to go outside.

Markus shouted, "Clueless! I've been looking for you everywhere! I didn't know you had it in you to date that gorgeous Lexie. Where did you meet her then?"

Once I told him, he and his gang stuck to me like glue in the canteen and kept telling me rude jokes. I never felt wanted by so many people.

When I got home today, at 3.35 p.m., I started working on my music; then I stopped as I heard on Radio 2 about the terrible news that over 60,000 people had died today in an earthquake in China. It's only 10 days since more than twice that number perished in that awful cyclone; not to mention on my birthday of all days, the volcano which erupted in Chile. Are all these disasters a sign of divine retribution?

Just then Lexie phoned to see if I was all right because she hadn't heard from me for 3 days. We agreed for me to go around to hers tomorrow after school.

Wednesday 14 May

English doctor Edward Jenner administered the smallpox vaccination in 1796.

It seems as if every time some scientist or other discovers a cure for 1 illness, another one rears its ugly head.

Before registration, James and Ben came straight over to

warn me about my new-found friend, Markus.

I told them, "I know what I'm doing. Keep your friends close but keep your enemies closer, and all that."

James said, "If you ask me, I think he's got an eye on your Lexie. Anyway, Clarence I are going to my friend Joey's after school, and she lives at your end of town. So would it be OK if I wait for you by the bike sheds?"

I nodded, "Yes, that's fine, and thank you very much for the warning, about Markus." Nothing else was said about it, so I concluded that they were right.

When we were leaving school, James said, "Hey Clarence, I think I've got a strange feeling that we are both being followed, so what do you think about us making a little diversion?"

I replied, "Yes, that's a good idea," and we ended up parking our bikes outside the Co-op, going in and positioning ourselves to see if we could spot anyone through the shop window.

James said, "I can't see anyone hanging around. I know, in my rucksack I've got just enough money for a Curly Whirly. I'll go and take my time buying it and you can keep watch." We were in the shop for 5 minutes and there wasn't anyone there. Afterwards, we then went our separate ways, and I finally arrived at Lexie's house by 3.55 p.m. A small young-looking boy with short, curly mousy hair wearing thick glasses answered.

He asked, "Hi, I'm Steven, are you Clarence?"

I said, "Yes."

He mentioned, "Oh, Lexie has gone over to yours now."

I dashed back home and found her sitting on the shabby old sofa listening to Sophia playing her *silly* violin grade 2 piece in the lounge.

Unfortunately, the whole evening ended quite badly, as we had our very first argument about my being a few minutes late.

She announced, "Dad has been telling us about applying for a better paid sales job in Devon. If he gets it

then we'll have to move there."

I asked, "What do you think he'll do if he applies and does get the job?"

She replied, "I wish he does go for it and gets it because it's a really good job and he will have a big posh company car to drive around in. Also, Devon is such a lovely place and most of our relations live there, although I will miss all my mates here too."

Thursday 15 May

The Titanic cruise ship, widely believed to be unsinkable, sank on its maiden voyage after colliding with an iceberg in 1912.

This disaster has been in the news quite recently. I believe 1 passenger is still surviving 96 years later, so she must've been a new-born baby at the time.

At 9.16 p.m. Lexie rang. She mentioned about our Saturday date at my house. I then reminded her about my school trip to Dorset.

She said, "Oh, yes, that's right, and you mustn't forget my stick of pink rock and I wouldn't mind a very nice surprise present as well, dear! Can't wait to see you tomorrow. Bye! Kiss! Kiss!"

Friday 16 May

The first Academy Awards ceremony took place in 1928.

I've only seen 2 of these events. The films and actors may have been brilliant, but I can't say the same for the 'thank you' speeches of the winners. 1 of these days somebody will thank the director's mother for giving birth to him.

The orchestra had to meet up for our first band rehearsal for *West Side Story* at 3.30 p.m.

At 7.54 p.m. I was in my bedroom busy looking for my road map, so that in a few days' time I'll be able to write down all the major roads to Dorset. I decided to go and ask Sophia, in the lounge.

I asked, “Sophia, have you seen my road map? I always keep it in the bottom drawer of my wardrobe.”

Sophia snapped, “No! Why can’t you just go and Google it instead, like normal people do?” She slammed the door behind her and stomped up the stairs.

By 8.34 p.m. I eventually found it, all sprawled out underneath my bed. Very strange!

Saturday 17 May *Constitution Day, Norway*

Rebecca Stephens became the first woman to climb Mount Everest in 1993.

It seems to me that women can do almost everything men can these days. I don’t remember it very well. I was only 11 days old.

At 7.53 a.m. I heard mum crying on the phone. Eventually she told us that it was the police saying that her uncle (my Great-Uncle) Paddy and his dog Trixie had been found dead together in the lounge this morning by his neighbour and friend Angus McDougall, who notified the police. He had suffered a massive heart attack and had been dead for at least 5 hours, and his dog most probably died from a broken heart. The funeral is next Saturday. The vicar couldn’t fit my Great-Uncle Paddy in during the morning, but he said as they were such good friends, he could do the ceremony for us at 3 p.m. instead. That means another family trip to Scotland, so we won’t be back until very late, great!

I do believe it’s the *Eurovision Song Contest* that night as well, the 1 programme we all agree to watch. So now we’ll have to listen to Terry on the radio while we’re coming home. I know busy Claudia wouldn’t go, so I asked mum if Lexie could come in her place.

Dad said, “I don’t think Great-Auntie Maggie will come, being on her own in her middle 90s and living in Applecross, which is virtually the other side of Scotland.”

Mum announced, “Your dad and I have just decided

that we're not going to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary at Jenny's in the Cotswolds, although we can go there next year instead."

I phoned Lexie to apologise for cancelling our date tonight and asking if she wouldn't mind coming with us next Saturday as early as 7 a.m. to go to a funeral in Scotland.

She nodded, "Of course, I'd love to come."

At least mum now won't have a possible conversation about a certain diary!

Sunday 18 May *Trinity Sunday*

The seven-month siege of British troops in the Southern African railway town of Mafeking ended on this day in 1900. It was a significant stage in the fighting against the Boers.

How many months? 7! Now I know what Granddad Roberts meant when he complained that the checkout girls at the local supermarket take longer than the siege of Mafeking to serve him.

The atmosphere in the house wasn't good because there were a few disagreements. To keep out of their way, I decided to go to my room to concentrate on my history homework. For history I had to write all about World War 1: more conflicts and destruction.

In the evening, I was in my bedroom busy packing up my very big suitcase and rucksack ready for my Dorset trip when I heard a knock on the door.

Mum shouted, "It'd be better if you don't take your pink diary, just in case. We all know what teenagers can be like; you wouldn't want to get laughed at, would you?"

I shouted, "Ah! I didn't think of that! Brilliant idea!"

Major Roads to Dorset

A28 South to Ashford

M20 Westward

M26
M25 South to
Junction 12
M3 Southwards
M27
A31

Monday 19 May

T. E. Laurence (of Arabia) died in a motorcycle accident in 1935.

The way the lives of some famous and often fearless people end is such an anti-climax.

With my suitcase and rucksack containing my lunch box and drink, I walked to school. The coach left just after registration. I sat listening to the coach driver's radio all the way. It was a hot day.

Before we arrived at the youth hostel, I had the usual voicemail message from mum to phone her once we arrived, which I did when we got to Lulworth Cove. We all had to walk up a very steep hill where we ate our lunches. The sea was lovely, and we watched the waves bashing against the stones and high white cliffs. We then went on to Corfe Castle and ended up chasing each other, pretending to be ghosts.

Mr. Saunders told us all off for not paying attention when he was trying to relate the local history, so we all had to shut up for a while. The castle was built nearly 900 years ago just after the Norman Conquest. Cromwell and his soldiers were responsible for destroying it, and it was the Victorians who turned it into a tourist attraction.

When we finally reached the youth hostel, we all unpacked our suitcases and chose which bunk beds to sleep in. I left the choice to James. He said, "Right, in that case I will grab the best bed, which for me is the top bunk."

The girls had a different room, opposite us.

Tuesday 20 May

Captain James Cook discovered Australia in 1720.

You would think it was big enough to find long before that! I suppose it depends on how you interpret the word 'discover'.

Today was a good day. We went to Poole and on the ferry to Sandbanks to study sand erosion. Later we walked from there to Weymouth to complete a long hot and tiring but interesting day.

Wednesday 21 May

In 1927 Charles Lindbergh was the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic.

He couldn't have had any friends to keep him company.

Today we all stayed in Southampton. On the boat I managed to lean over and touch the QE2 as we passed it, but it started to rain so it was a good job I had my raincoat on. Luckily, by the time we had eaten our lunch it had stopped raining, so we all sat on the wall in the centre of town.

Apparently, we boys heard rumours that during the evening in the youth hostel girls' toilets, a couple of girls, Fussy Fiona Boswell, and Scary Stacy Wilkinson, had this terrible shouting match about a pair of curling tongs, of all things. Strict Mrs. Brady had no problem whatsoever in dealing with the problem and she soon sorted it out.

Thursday 22 May

The Wars of the Roses began with the Battle of St Albans in 1455.

If they had waited for a few centuries, they could've settled all their differences on the cricket pitch at Old Trafford or Headingley.

We all visited Chesil Beach to learn about the stones, their history concerning the World War 1 and about the D-Day landings. It was like participating in the secret mission with the million American soldiers who were stationed there and the dangers of so many ships getting grounded and that is why a lighthouse got built.

It wasn't long afterwards when we all started skimming stones into the sea, to see which would go the furthest. I came last.

Then we went to the New Forest. It was a nice cool day.

Friday 23 May

Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, U.S. criminals known as Bonnie and Clyde, were killed in a police trap in Louisiana in 1934.

If these 2 were merely searching for fame, they won the game hands down. On the other hand, if everlasting wealth was the objective, I'm afraid it was thumbs down.

We had to load the coach with our suitcases and rucksacks; before leaving for home, we visited a local farm.

By 4.11 p.m. we all got back to the school safely, just as the caretaker was locking the big gates. I then started walking home carrying my heavy suitcase. Inside the rucksack on my back, I had 6 thick pink sticks of rock, 4 light pink gangster-style, straw beach hats, 1 very large, ceramic, white and black Corfe Castle mug and 1 medium-size fairy figurine. But then a car pulled up beside me.

James asked, "Clarence, would you like a lift home?"

I replied, "Oh well, I was just thinking about phoning home, but as you're offering, that's very kind – thank you."

When I walked into the house at 4.33 p.m., mum and Sophia were in the kitchen singing along to some *terrible* pop song on the radio. I asked, "Ah yes, can I smell my favourite dinner cooking, spaghetti Bolognese?"

Turning around, mum smiled, “Clarence! Hello, love, this is a nice surprise. We didn’t hear you come in, and yes, it is spaghetti Bolognese. So why didn’t I get a text or a phone message from you earlier?”

I told her, “Well actually, I was just about to, but then James very kindly offered me a lift, so I took it.”

Sophia asked, “Did you get my stick of pink rock?”

Mum snapped, “Sophia! Even if Clarence did get you some, you wouldn’t be allowed to eat it just before your dinner in any case, honestly!”

Sophia sighed, “Sorry, Clarence.”

Hugging me, mum said, “Clarence, I’ll want to know absolutely everything, but as you can see, I’m a little bit busy right now. So why don’t you just go upstairs and unpack etc., and we’ll see you when dinner is ready, which will be in about 10 minutes? Oh, and before I forget to tell you both, dad can’t come to the funeral now because he has to cover for some other person’s late shift for them.”

Sophia announced, “Yes, that’s brilliant news, because now we shouldn’t be getting into any road rages. Sick!”

Saturday 24 May

In 1903, the Paris–Madrid Road Race was abandoned after six drivers were killed on the first day.

I presume this was a car race. What surprises me is the number of casualties. But then it was not long since a man had to walk in front of any vehicle. Not at 70 mph, I fancy.

First, I must say it was great seeing Lexie again and she absolutely loved all her presents.

She smiled, “These are just fantastic, and you’ve given me a nice fairy figurine as well, thank you ever so much.”

Well! What a day at Great-Uncle Paddy’s funeral. Just as the vicar started speaking, I saw on the front pew 3 white-haired, miserable-looking ladies, all of whom received occasional fleeting puzzled glares. Then when he was a few sentences into his speech, suddenly 1 of them

stood up.

She started confessing, “Oh I’m so, so sorry. I must be at the wrong funeral.” She left very quickly and everybody except for the 2 other crying mourners started *sniggering*. Then Sophia turned to me and whispered, “That was 1 of the funniest moments ever! I bet we’ll never forget it.”

Then Uncle Bob began. “What can we say about my dad, Paddy? Well, he enjoyed a long happy married life with my mum, Mary, until she died suddenly from a stroke 10 years ago. Since her funeral my family and I have visited him as much as we could and, of course, not forgetting his allotment. We all know he liked his liquor and, believe it or not, once he was teetotal.

During World War 2, after visiting a friend, he found it was pitch black and he had missed the last bus home. Not having enough money for a taxi, he decided to walk the extra 3 miles. There was a black-out and vehicles only used sidelights. Dad decided to walk facing any approaching traffic, and he kept his eyes closed reckoning that if he wandered off the road onto the grass verge, he only had to take a short step sideways. Unfortunately, when his boot did contact the grass, he was not aware he had crossed the road, and he disappeared into a muddy ditch. I mention this to illustrate that he was a prominent member of the accident-waiting-to-happen club. He didn’t lack a sense of humour.”

As Uncle Bob ended his tribute, even the 2 worried ladies were having a slight chuckle to themselves.

At the funeral party at cousin Julie’s house, not surprisingly, the 2 women didn’t turn up, so guess who everybody’s lips were on the most! Anyway, we were very much relieved when it was time for us to leave. On the way home, we were all listening to Sir Terry Wogan on Radio 2.

Sophia grinned, “I really love good old Terry, he’s just so funny with his hilarious comments. He makes me laugh.”

We finally made it safely to Appletown, just as the

Eurovision Song Contest was finishing with the winning song from Russia.

When we finally dropped Lexie off at her house, she turned around and said, "I've had such a good time getting to know all your family today. But just lately I've been thinking about giving ourselves a little break. I can reassure you it's absolutely nothing to do with you. It's me, I need to have a little time on my own to concentrate on a few private things. You do understand, don't you? I'm so sorry, Clarence, but I can assure you I'll be in touch again soon."

I mentioned, "Yes, OK I can wait, whenever you're ready."

Sunday 25 May

U.S. athlete Jesse Owens broke five world records in one day in 1935.

I hope by summer 2011, fingers crossed, when they sell the tickets for the London 2012 Olympic Games, I'll be able to afford to buy a few of them; if not, we'll have to watch it on the TV.

Very tired all day today, did a lot of slouching around in my pyjamas around the house doing absolutely nothing. But at 8. p.m. I remembered I had to write up my missing 6 days diary entries. Even though I felt dead to the world, I had no choice, so fetching my school bag and finding all my geography notes, I got down to writing them.

At 9.23 p.m. I finally went to bed, absolutely shattered.

Monday 26 May *Bank and public holiday UK and Republic of Ireland*

Michael Barrett was the last man to die by public hanging in Britain in 1868.

Intrigued to find out all about this man, I decided to look him up on the Wikipedia website. Apparently, he was born in Drumnagresial in the Ederney area of County

Fermanagh. In adult life he joined the Fenians. When he was 27 years old, he was hanged on 26 May for killing 12 bystanders and injuring many others. He put a bomb in a wheelbarrow outside the external wall of Coldbath Fields prison, in the belief that it would bring down the prison wall and allow the Fenian prisoners to escape.

All of us had a good laugh in geography. Mr. Saunders didn't like the way we kept on laughing about our Dorset trip, so he made the whole class do detention in the cooler for the rest of his lesson, which wasn't funny. Also, we had another band rehearsal; I didn't get home until 5.30 p.m. I was absolutely starving! For our dinner we all enjoyed beans on toast and an almond slice for afters. Yummy!

Tuesday 27 May

In 1916 it was proposed that a peacekeeping League of Nations should be created after the end of hostilities.

And they did, but it didn't stop the whole big bang starting again 20 years later.

Yesterday I was so hungry when I got home that I decided to buy 2 double Mars Bars at the Co-op and left them in my bag, so I could eat 1 just before tomorrow's band rehearsal and the other before the dress rehearsal on Thursday.

Wednesday 28 May

British yachtsman Francis Chichester completed his 28,000 miles round-the-world voyage when he arrived in Sydney Harbour in 1953.

This is something I could never even contemplate!

Today's band rehearsal didn't go very well at all, with bum notes everywhere. At least I wasn't hungry this time.

Thursday 29 May

New Zealander Edmund Hillary, together with Sherpa Tensing, became the first climbers to reach the summit of Mount Everest in 1953.

I sometimes get tired climbing the stairs. Seriously though, it must be more dangerous trying to get back to ground level safely. I'd be too scared to look down.

Before registration, a group of us were looking at a print-out column on the noticeboard which read:

'Wanted! 10 pupils (7 volunteers and 3 reserves) are needed to help with Years 12 and 13 sports day on Friday 13th June.'

Right away everybody started putting their names down, leaving 1 space in the top page and the 2 reserve places. When they had finished, they all looked at me, holding a pen. I chose a reserve box hoping against all hope that I wouldn't get picked.

I told them, "Well, I might be busy that day, and in any case it's Friday the 13th and you never know what could happen," and they all laughed.

Surprisingly, the dress rehearsal went extremely well, which sometimes can be bad news.

Friday 30 May

In 1908 Ernest Archdeacon was the first passenger in an aeroplane.

If it had been me, I wouldn't have looked out of the window till I landed. But I was always a coward. Wait a minute though; I wasn't really scared on that trip to Spain. Hmm, yes... a few (million) people had been up there by then.

The main hall was absolutely packed with family members for our afternoon performance of *West Side Story*,

including mum and her mate Annie in amongst a very excitable audience. It was a shame because at the very beginning of the second part, during Maria's song *I Feel Pretty*, the glass fire alarm went off. So, we all had to leave the building.

By the time everybody had been accounted for, it was far too late to finish the show. Finally, Mr. Browning found out that someone had smashed the fire alarm button.

He announced, "I'll find out the person who did this, I promise you all!"

After all the commotion, mum and Annie waited for me to get my bike and I saw James getting on his bike. He reminded me, "Clarence, you haven't forgotten about our Mario Flower Cup races and chess rematch on Tuesday at my house at the usual time of 10 o'clock, have you?"

I mentioned, "No, I haven't forgotten, so I'll see you then."

Saturday 31 May

Peace of Vereeniging ended the Boer War in 1902.

I always thought it was Bore War. I'm certainly bored by all wars.

Today the athletics were on TV, and we all watched it.

Dad shouted, "Wow, this is brilliant! Look, at Usain Bolt go! Incredible stuff! Come on, come on, come on, come on, you can do it! And yes! He's won it! Ha! And yes, now it looks as if he's beaten his very own world 100 metres record of 9.72 seconds. Well now, that race was truly remarkable and unbelievable too, wasn't it?"

Mum said, "Oh, how I wish I could've been that fast when I was just a young girl at my old school, all those years ago. I always used to love those short relays and the 100 metres; my team nearly always came first. In those horrible long-drawn-out cross-country races, we were forever getting mud all over our trainers, and me and my mate Liz Cooper were forever coming in last. We also

hated playing hockey, that went on for ages. Yes, I can remember, once a group of us even tried to get out of doing it by hiding in the 6 changing room toilets; now let's see if I can remember the 5 names. So, now they were Linda Carson, Lorna Butler, Theresa Mitchell and, who were the other 2? Hmm, oh yes, that's right, Mary Thomas and oh yes, it was little Hope Mathews, and we did get away with it for quite a while. However, the teacher finally clocked on, then just started waiting for somebody to come out; and a few times she ended up picking me!"

I said, "I don't particular like doing the 100 metres myself, but that race was quite exciting."

Dad moaned, "Well, in the winter all us boys had to go out and play that horrible, egg-chasing game, rugby. Once Dylan Manning broke his right shoulder in a scrum, so he had to go to the general hospital. Then the following summer we were all playing cricket, it was Dylan's turn to bat, and when Richard Mason threw the ball, it landed in the exact same place – poor bloke."

Mum smiled, "Oh, yes! As we're talking about balls that reminds me once we were having a tennis lesson, and the ball came flying over the net and hit poor Theresa right in between the eyes. She lost concentration, tripped over her trainers, and ended up twisting her left ankle."

Sophia asked, "Did she have to go to the hospital too?"

Mum sighed, "Yes, and she was off school for the next fortnight, or was it for 3 weeks? Um.... hmm, maybe I was right the first-time round. Oh, I don't know, it was such a long time ago."

Then I said, "I've always assumed there must be a limit to breaking athletic records, especially in sprinting."

Sophia remarked, "I wonder if he or somebody else could get it right down to 9 or even 8 seconds? It could even happen at Beijing in this summer's Olympics. Wouldn't that be just amazing?"

Dad nodded, "I agree with you Sophia."

Mum said, "We'll just have to wait and see, I guess."



June has...

The longest day of the year
Also, there's Father's Day.
So, give him a great big cheer.
There isn't much to say,
Just show him you love him by being good.
Even better than you normally would.

Sunday 1 June

A conference in New York City marked the birth of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1909.

It strikes me we are all coloured people. I'm not sure what colour I am, but it certainly isn't white, between pink and beige perhaps. Mum likes so-called white wine, which looks pale yellow to me.

At 10.56 a.m., mum was speaking to Claudia on the phone. "Is he? Well, you would never guess that. I promise you'll find somebody else. Why don't you come over and stay with us? So, when can you come tomorrow? No, hang on a minute. Dad has his lunch at that time, so he can bring you home. Great, see you tomorrow then and don't worry, bye love, bye, bye."

Soon afterwards mum went straight into the lounge to play her Abba CD and shouted, "Yes! He's come out at last, he's gay, I just knew it!"

Claudia is now going to be with us for a whole week, great!

Monday 2 June *Bank Holiday UK and Republic of Ireland, National Day Italy*

Pygmies were discovered in the mountains of Dutch New Guinea by British explorers in 1910.

Were discovered! They're making it sound as if they were hiding from somebody. They couldn't help being small. As far as I know they weren't different in any other way. Another to add to all the other mysteries I can't fathom.

Got down to practising with my Mario and Chess on the computer and took Topsy out, so I wouldn't be around when miserable Claudia and mum will be having, 1 one of *those* deep, meaningful, 'I really hate this world!' and 'What's wrong with me?' conversations. When we got back home at 3.23 p.m., there was Claudia sobbing her heart out and hugging mum on the sofa.

I heard, "Well, the thing is, I know I've got the brains, but I don't think I'm much of a looker."

I said, "Well, you could try growing your hair and putting a little make-up on, that'd make you look pretty."

Mum shouted, "Clarence!"

Claudia shrugged. "No, it's OK, I think he's right, that's exactly what I need to do. Thanks, Clarence, for being so honest."

I smiled. "You're welcome. I'm now going up to my

bedroom because I really need to concentrate on my history and maths revision. But if you'd like any more good advice, then that's where I'll be for the next couple of hours or so."

Tuesday 3 June

In Italy 8,000 prisoners including suspected terrorists were released to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the republic in 1986.

I suppose those inmates who didn't feel like popping back to their cells would've looked forward to celebrating the long-awaited Golden Jubilee with 10 years of unexpected freedom.

James and I had a go at the Mario Flower Cup again. As usual from the start he was already beating me, but on the 4th race I was very close to winning. Then my left foot just started itching like mad, so I had to scratch it.

Suddenly James shouted, "I beat you! Ha!" I just let him have his little moment of glory.

Afterwards he suggested, "Why don't we try the Mario Special Cup and have another go at chess in the October holiday?"

I replied, "Yes, why not, I suppose we could do that, good idea!"

Wednesday 4 June

340,000 British troops were evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940.

This was such a momentous event that I'm lost for words.

I was so annoyed with myself yesterday for getting distracted by our chess game. So today I got up early and worked very hard, until my head hurt, to catch up with all my subjects. I felt a lot better for working on them.

Except for Claudia, the rest of us had to go for our 6-monthly dental appointments. We all have healthy teeth, but deep down I don't really brush them for as long as I

should. Our next family appointment isn't until 12th January next year at 5 p.m. We'll be most probably in freezing cold weather with the possibility of the people carrier getting bogged down with thick snow in the dark.

Thursday 5 June *Constitution Day, Denmark*

Britain said "yes" to EEC membership in a referendum in 1975.

All the politicians seem to talk about these days is whether we should leave the EU (as it is now known). I've heard a lot of the pros and cons and I'm still none the wiser – so this is another issue I'll pass on.

Claudia was in the lounge listening to some weirdo pop music with Sophia. They were sitting on the sofa talking about Brad.

I asked, "So how did you find out about him being gay then?"

Sophia shouted, "You can be so *pathetic* and *insensitive* at times, Clarence!"

I replied, "May the force be wi...."

Claudia interrupted, "And you are not a famous actor in *Star Wars*."

Pointing with my right arm out I said, "Exterminate the Doctor, exterminate, exterminate, exterminate, exterminate, exterminaaatttee!!!!"

Getting up, Sophia grabbed hold of me and shouted, "Wonderful! So now you're being a Dalek in *Doctor Who*. Why don't you go to your bedroom and exterminate a few of your Lego toys instead? That particular task shouldn't be too difficult and just leave us alone! And if you don't, then I'll tell my mates all about your *silly* little polar bear and how you cuddle up to him in bed every night!" Then she marched me out, slamming the door behind me.

I shouted, "Sophia! You're such a naughty person, I'm now putting my hands over my ears so I can't listen to you. You're being very rude to me! And you'd better not tell all your mates about Polo either, he's very precious to

me! I've had him ever since I was a baby! You know that!"

She screamed, "Ahhh! Oh, why don't you just GO AWAY! And if you don't go, you know what'll happen!"

Taking my hands away, I replied, "Anyway, when I'm acting out my TV films and programmes, it always makes me feel good!" I then went upstairs to my bedroom to play with a few of my Lego toys.

Friday 6 June *National Day, Sweden*

This was D-Day in 1944 when the Allies landed in Normandy after a meticulously planned cross-channel invasion.

Almost 4 years to the day since Dunkirk. This time we were making the first moves towards winning the war instead of trying to avoid losing it. What a difference 1,463 days make (no, I didn't miscalculate – it included a 29 February).

Today at 6.57 p.m. I was busy tidying my bedroom when Claudia knocked on the door.

She shouted, "Clarence! Can, I come in?"

Puzzled, I asked, "Why?"

She replied, "I really need to speak to you, it's quite important."

Shrugging, I said, "OK, then, I suppose you can. So, what is it?"

She smiled, "I've just come back from the Co-op, and I've bought you a nice box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates, as a thank you. This is how it happened: so last Friday, I was coming home late after going to the gym, and I caught him in bed with another guy. That's how I found out he was gay. Oh, I'm so glad we had our little conversation on Monday, because it has in some way, kind of helped me get over him. Anyway, once again thank you, and I love you."

Saturday 7 June

The Panama Canal, linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was opened in 1914 after 32 years of intermittent construction.

Until then the land was uninterrupted by water from the Arctic to the Cape of Good Hope. I wonder how the tip of South America came to be given that name. Answers on a postcard please.

Today dad drove Claudia back to the train station. I bet the odds of her landing another layabout of a new boyfriend must be quite high before her next visit in the August holidays.

Sunday 8 June

In 1949, George Orwell's novel 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' was published.

The book will be way over my head until I'm versed in the complicated world of politics.

Dad had a day off today, which is like gold dust. Why can't he spend it with us? He always goes to The Black Pig with his best workmate Vince and doesn't come home until he's finished singing their songs until closing time.

Mum received a photo of Uncle Alan from New Zealand; Auntie Diana had just given birth to a beautiful baby girl called Andrea, weighing 7lbs 6oz. She said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could send something very special for them?" I should really be concentrating on my revision, but I really enjoyed writing that *silly* love-sick poem back in April, so I took myself off to the study, put on Classic FM and started typing. I thought about a new-born talking to her mother. When I'd finished writing it late in the evening, I took my poem to mum just as she was going to bed.

She said, "Wow! This is brilliant; you know you should write a lot more of them," then she emailed my words back to Alan.

I thought about it and decided that I will write some more. And I've chosen to call them *Mother & Baby* poems. *Mother & Baby* poem 1, *The New Arrival*.

THE NEW ARRIVAL

BABY

This is new, where I'm going.
I can see a light showing.
I'm hearing voices – it's quite loud
And it sounds as if there's a crowd.

MOTHER

So tiny, but you're my delight
A perfect vision in my sight,
So beautiful, so sweet, so fine
I can't believe that you are mine.

Monday 9 June

The notorious Roman Emperor Nero committed suicide as rebellious soldiers closed in for the kill in AD 68.

Can we put it down to all that fiddling which is supposed to have distracted him from the fire in Rome? Odd word, 'fiddle'. It could mean that he was a keen musician, didn't fill in his tax form correctly or he was slow to get on with his job. I'd plump for number 3, but I'm only guessing.

Today, Sophia went back to school.

Tuesday 10 June *National Day, Portugal*

Benito Mussolini of Italy declared war on Britain and France in 1940.

On principle I refuse to be dragged back to the war again, so there.

Sophia wanted to know if any of us would like to come to school tomorrow to see her doing sports day. I had to let

her down because I need to study for my exams.

I said, "I'll come to cheer you on if nobody else is available."

Mum replied, "Oh, OK, as I've got nothing planned, I'll come and watch you."

Sophia smiled. "That's brilliant and don't forget to bring the camera because the school are allowing everybody to take photos."

After our fish and chips dinner, mum apologised to me; she said, "Clarence, I'm so sorry, but I forgot to tell you this earlier. Uncle Alan emailed me back yesterday; he said to thank you very much, he and Diana loved reading your lovely poem. He was so impressed that he also suggested you should write some more of them."

At 7.47 p.m. I started thinking about what else I can do, so I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 2, *Recognition*.

RECOGNITION

MOTHER

You heard mummy's voice before you could see.
And now you rejoice when you know it's me.
Wide open – your eyes and you'll gaze with glee,
For you recognise your mum instantly.

BABY

I've been a part of you.
For nearly 40 weeks,
My head and body too
My eyes, my ears, my cheeks.
My time on earth has come.
But how could I not know?
You are my lovely Mum.
Because you love me so.

Wednesday 11 June

The Rotherhithe Tunnel under the River Thames in London was opened in 1908.

I get the impression from the map of London that it is really 2 cities, north and south of the river, but nearly all the famous buildings are in the north. London was not always the capital, and it would be interesting to find out how it developed the way it did.

In the lounge I heard mum comforting a very unhappy Sophia: “Don’t worry about it. So, what, you didn’t win any of your 4 races. It’s the taking part that matters. Hey, look, Clarence is here now, perhaps he can have a go at cheering you up!”

I replied, “Oh yes, so who did win then?”

Sophia shouted, “How dare you ask such a thing!” and stormed upstairs to her bedroom to cry her eyes out.

Mum moaned, “That wasn’t very comforting. Well done, Clarence, for putting your foot in it yet again.”

Thursday 12 June

More than half a million people protested against using nuclear weapons in New York City in 1982.

Logically there should’ve been demonstrations against even the most primitive weapons. For all I know there may have been riots demanding the destruction of all bows and arrows. While weapons exist, they will be used. I wouldn’t mind marching in protest against war. Win that argument, and all the other protests would be silenced. If only life was that simple.

For some reason Sophia seemed a lot happier. “That cow Colette Smith didn’t win any of her races either; she came last in nearly all of them. Ha!”

Mum said, “That’s more like it,” and off she went humming on her bike to school.

Friday 13 June

The first buzz bomb landed in London in 1944. It became known as the V1.

See Tuesday's comment. I rest my case.

This morning, I had a phone call from the school. Apparently, somebody from the sports day volunteers' group had reported in sick. So, after MUM's freshly tasty, cooked bread rolls and home-made strawberry jam, I packed my rucksack and my rain gear, just in case! I wished I'd set off a little earlier, because I hadn't realised that my front tyre had a puncture. I didn't have time to mend it, so I literally had to run all the way.

When I entered the school gates, I was already 15 minutes late. Then for the rest of the afternoon I was hopeless, getting in the way of the competitors and forever tripping over my laces. All in all, I wished I hadn't put my name down. The school was most probably feeling the same way.

At least Colin and Markus made my day. Colin twisted his right foot in the 200 metres, then Markus crashed heavily with Lisa, and both ended up on the grass in the relay race.

Saturday 14 June

A bill was introduced into the House of Commons seeking to ban women from all dangerous sports in 1906 after the death of a woman parachutist.

If the male politicians were so worried about women taking risks, they should have banned them from giving birth!

By 9.16 a.m. I was in the Co-op by the card section looking for a funny card for Father's Day when I bumped into Ben.

He said, "Hey, Clarence, would you like to come over to my place for a couple of hours?"

I replied, “No, I’m sorry, Ben, I can’t come because I’ve got to be at Mr. Willis’s house in a few minutes, then I’ve got to take Topsy out for a walk.”

We finally arranged for me to go round to his house this coming Tuesday at 10 a.m.

Sunday 15 June *Father’s Day, UK*
King John signed the Magna Carta in 1215.

Just about the first date we are taught to remember. Mr. boring Collins called this charter ‘The beginning of history’.

I gave dad his Father’s Day card and a book which were both about trains. He was happy with this as he is every year, to my relief, because I really wouldn’t know what else to get him. Dad didn’t want any fuss and off he went to The Black Pig.

Sometimes I wish I was in Ben’s family: they always go out together on Mother’s and Father’s Days. What’s wrong with my parents? If I ever find out that I was adopted, then everything will make total sense. Yes, that’s it! I must’ve been adopted when I was very small, maybe when I was only a few weeks old or something like that.

At 8.45 p.m. I was in my bedroom and started writing my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 3, *A Present for Father’s Day*.

A PRESENT FOR FATHER’S DAY

BABY

Mummy, you’re not wrapping up yet another gift.
I want to help. But to do so I’ll need a lift.
Also, we’ve got 2 funny looking cards to write in,
I’ve got 1 father so this needs to go in the bin.

MOTHER

Oh, no! That can’t go there, I think you’d rather,

Put your name on it because it's for your grandfather.
It's going to be a special day for him too you see,
Next, it's my birthday, so a little something for me?

Monday 16 June

The leading member of the famous Kirov Ballet, Rudolf Nureyev, defected to the West in 1961.

Russia has always been renowned for ballet. It must've been a hard decision for him to make. I could imagine the reaction of my classmates if I ever decided to turn up in a tutu! Now that would be so funny!

I could hear Sophia moaning away because I was still in bed when she had to go to school. Then at 11.56 a.m. Lexie phoned. She sounded a little down; her dad didn't get the Devon job, so they'll now be staying in Appletown.

Tuesday 17 June *National Day, Ireland*

6,000 supporters of the campaign to win votes for women walked through London to a rally at the Albert Hall in 1911.

I notice that they didn't march, merely walked, apparently showing their less militant attitude. Although some of the suffragettes did end up in prison. Well, they did win the argument in the end.

I didn't get much sleep last night as I couldn't stop thinking about playing on Ben's dad's grand piano. At 9.59 a.m. I arrived on my bike at his house. As soon as Ben opened the front door he went straight outside to their shed and brought his bike back with 2 tennis, 2 badminton and 2 squash rackets.

He explained, "I'm afraid that right now my mum is waiting for the piano tuner to arrive. I'm sorry, matey."

Peeved, I smiled. "That's all right" and off we went to the Appletown Campus. We played all 3 sports, ending with squash, before I cycled back home even more shattered.

By 4.45 p.m. I had eaten my pizza and chips and drunk a good strong coffee and got on with my revision notes for next week's exams.

Finally, I got into bed at 11.46 p.m.

Wednesday 18 June

In West Germany the old currency, the Reichsmark, was replaced by the Deutschmark in 1948.

I'd like to change all my sterling for Monopoly money. I could buy an inexpensive house in Mayfair and sell it again for a huge profit. Well, you've got to dream.

Today I worked very hard revising 4 subjects: history, maths, English and geography.

Thursday 19 June

The House of Commons passed Robert Peel's law to establish a national police force in 1829.

Today I came across my very own dictionary of slang. I was intrigued to see how many different words and expressions have been used to describe the police. Not surprisingly, the first nickname was 'peelers'. Since then, we've had flatfoot, copper, bluecoat, busy, the fuzz, the pigs, and the law.

Because of my deep sleep last night, I was buzzing all day and had an idea about asking mum if I could help her tidy up the house. But then I found her slumped over the kitchen table with her head down in tears.

She cried, "Oh, I'm sorry, Clarence, I never wanted you to see me like this. I'm going to have to come up with a few ideas to save my business or I'll have to do something else. I haven't told anyone else yet, because I'm hoping things may get better in about a months' time. I just hope this horrible recession doesn't get any worse than it is already. You know when you were younger, we all went to Alton Towers, well last month Sophia asked me if she

could go back there for her birthday and invite Kylie Pankhurst and Zoe McKenzie too and I told her that she could. We are still going to the caravan site in Anderby Creek for our annual August holiday, so we'll have to be very careful with our money."

I told her, "I'm sorry, I'd always thought things were OK."

Obviously, I was wrong, and after 20 seconds of hugging her, she dried her tears and together we loaded up all the business cards into our pockets and cycled to the High Street.

Friday 20 June

More than 140 British subjects were imprisoned in the Black Hole of Calcutta in India in 1756.

Wherever and whatever that was, I wouldn't include it in my list of famous places to visit.

Last night I was too worried to sleep at all, so this morning I decided to design and print off 300 A5 leaflets. Topsy, Mum and I spent all day going around the richer end of our Orchard Estate putting a leaflet through each door.

I wished I hadn't known about mum's financial worries just before my AS exams.

Saturday 21 June

Sir Christopher Wren began the reconstruction of St Paul's Cathedral in 1675 after it had been destroyed in the Great Fire of London nine years earlier.

It was a miracle the cathedral was not destroyed again in 1940, when all the surrounding streets suffered widespread damage in 1 of the worst air raids on London. When Granddad Upton-Smyth was alive, he told us so many times that his father was working for a publishing company in that area and witnessed the horrific scenes the following morning.

Just before leaving Mr. Willis's piano lesson, I asked him how his Friday evening Appletown's Young Singers Group was coming on and if he would consider changing his mind about letting me play the piano for him.

He mentioned, "I'm afraid not just yet. But you are very welcome to join in my singing group. I've only got 4 boys so far."

I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't because I've just found out that we are currently having money problems. So soon I may have to put my lessons on hold for a while."

He replied, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, Clarence. But you know, I'm sure it'll all be sorted out soon and I bet you you'll be back here before you know it."

This is the longest day of the year; the daylight will now start to draw in and it'll be wintertime again soon. Great!

Sunday 22 June

King George V was crowned at Westminster Abbey in 1911. At that time, he had been married to the former Princess Mary of Teck for eighteen years and had four sons and a daughter.

He succeeded to the throne 3 years before World War 1 then he died 3 years before World War 2. Another odd coincidence.

Today I told mum that I had asked Mr. Willis if I could earn a little money and play the piano for his Appletown's Young Singers Group on Friday evenings. I was quite surprised with her reaction.

She shouted, "No! You shouldn't have done that!"

I replied, "I'm sorry, Mum, I didn't mean to upset you."

She sighed, "No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to jump down your throat either. In any case, it was a very kind thing for you to do. Thank you, love. But please, you mustn't worry your little head about things like this; we aren't that destitute, not just yet anyway. I think you'll need to keep going to your piano lessons, so you can still pay for those."

I said, “Really? Thanks, you know you’re just the best!”

At 6.54 p.m. I started thinking about people going to piano lessons, so after my fish and chips dinner I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and started writing the words for my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 4, *Ah! Music*.

AH! MUSIC

MOTHER

I day when you were still inside,
We took you with us for a ride.
And on the way I sang to you,
I felt your move, as if you knew.
That music would give you the chance,
To sing at first and then to dance.
So, I will play a lullaby,
And you can join in if you try.

BABY

I’ll sit on mummy’s lap at the piano stool,
Oh, way up here I feel proud and very cool,
I can lean forward to bang on black and white keys,
I’m very clever; yes – I’m the bee’s knees.

Monday 23 June *National Day, Luxembourg*

Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland, defeated the English army at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, a victory which was instrumental in establishing Scotland’s independence although the fighting lasted for another quarter of a century.

And 7 centuries later there is a Scottish Nationalist Party trying to achieve a similar objective without having to use any weapons – not even bows and arrows.

I sat through 2 exams: maths and geography. They weren’t as bad as I anticipated.

When I got home, I immediately tackled my English.

Tuesday 24 June

Pablo Picasso, at the age of 19, took inspiration from cabaret night life to produce his first exhibition of pictures in Paris in 1901.

I'm curious to know how this artist managed to find models with ears halfway down their arms and other grotesque features.

Did my English exam – enough said about that! Came home and sorted out all my history books.

Wednesday 25 June *National Day, Slovenia*

The United Nations was formed in 1945.

It seems more and more obvious that it should have been called the Disunited Nations. Their task would have been made easier if the population of so many countries had not made the basic mistake of allowing power-crazed dictators to rule over them in the first place. Then we could all RIP.

I felt a lot better coming out of the exam room than I did yesterday. Came home and spent an hour longer at my piano practice, then I went over my music theory for Friday.

Thursday 26 June

Fifty motorists founded the Automobile Association in 1905.

I used to laugh when Granddad Roberts told me how he remembered when a member of the AA used to stick a badge on the bonnet of his car and a motor mechanic on a motorbike and sidecar always saluted the driver when he recognised it. To my amazement, he said he wasn't joking.

At 10.11 a.m. I was busy revising for my music theory paper when James phoned.

He told me, "Hey Clarence, guess what I've found out? It's very funny."

I replied, "What did you find out then?"

He said, "Well, Mr. Browning has found out that it was Colin who smashed the fire alarm during the middle of *West Side Story*. Apparently, he'd fallen out with Markus over something and wanted to destroy his moment of glory, meaning his death scene."

I said, "Oh, you're right, that is very funny."

Then he replied, "And quite a few of us have already finished our exams, so to celebrate we're going out to Ben's house. Do you want to come along too?"

I said, "No, I'm sorry I can't, because I've got my music exams tomorrow."

He responded, "Oh, OK, that's a shame, never mind hey, I'm sure we'll be touch again soon, bye."

Friday 27 June

A proposal to legalise divorce in Ireland was rejected following a referendum in 1986.

I suppose they'll have to emigrate to get rid of 1 another!

Yes! I've taken my final exams! The practical went well, and the theory paper didn't go too badly either, although I did make 1 mistake for which I'm now kicking myself.

When I was eating my dinner of sausage and chips, James phoned to say that he's in love with Knockout Katrina Green. Apparently, he met her at Ben's house last night. I wonder how long this relationship will last; time will tell.

I had my school report today. It didn't make bad reading overall. My worst grade was history, where I got a D and a comment saying, "Clarence could try a little harder to concentrate in my lessons."

Yes, I could if I were able to understand Mr. Collins's constant mumbling. The next worst grade was a C in geography. Mr. Saunders complained, "I found Clarence's behaviour on the Dorset trip a little tiresome at times and in the classroom his level of concentration could also be

much improved.”

I know we had to work, but what was wrong with having a little laugh with my mates, hey? What did he expect? In our lessons we’re told the answers and that is it. In my experience we don’t have the opportunity to express our own thoughts and opinions, which is diabolical.

Mr. Saunders is retiring, so I’ve decided it is goodbye to history. Right, Mr. Collins, you are no longer on my school timetable! I told mum and dad about it and luckily, they agreed with me.

No school now until September! And Sophia won’t be finishing hers until 17th July! Awesome!

Saturday 28 June

Queen Victoria was crowned in 1838.

She lived for 36 of the most astonishing years in history. The industrial revolution, exciting medical and scientific progress, social and political advancement, revolution in modes of transport etc.!

Watched quite a bit of the *Tennis: Wimbledon 2008*, then I had to break off to go to my piano lesson. Mr. Willis cancelled my next week’s lesson, because he’s going to be taking part in the carnival on a float in the parade.

On my way home Ben saw me and opened his bedroom window.

He shouted out and was waving 2 tickets. “Hey Clarence, I’m very happy, do you want to know why?”

I shouted, “Not particularly, but I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”

Grinning, he said, “I sure am! I’m going to Wimbledon next Sunday to see the men’s final with my mum and dad. Now, look, I won’t phone you because I know you’ll be watching the very same match. Why don’t you try and have a look out for us? And if you do find you get lucky, then you can text or voicemail me saying so. That’ll be sick, man!”

I said, “Wicked! Yes, I can do that. That’s a brilliant idea!”

He shouted, “Great! Good on ya!”

Lexie phoned at 4.32 p.m. We made plans to meet each other tomorrow with the dogs on Woodsfield Park Bridge at 10 a.m.

Sunday 29 June

The Globe Theatre in London, where most of Shakespeare’s plays were first performed, was burned down in 1613. It had a thatched roof, and a lesson was learned. The theatre was rebuilt with a tiled roof eighteen months later.

I think Shakespeare’s greatest achievement was to become the most admired and respected author to many people throughout the world. Sad to say I’m not 1 of them.

Met Lexie and Patch, but it wasn’t good because as Topsy and I were walking up towards them, I saw Markus and the rest of his gang including Colin talking to her and she was laughing with them. I felt very uncomfortable that they were with us until they left us at 1.30 p.m. just as we were approaching the High Street.

2 minutes later we went home too. But Lexie just kept going on about my rough and ready mates. For our next date we’re catching the bus to Canterbury on Wednesday.

Monday 30 June

In 1908 a huge fireball hurtled across the Siberian sky producing the greatest cosmic explosion ever witnessed. Although it left no crater, half a million acres of forest were flattened, and the seismic wave was picked up 4,000 miles away in the Meteorological Office in London.

Talking about strange happenings, Thomas Beatie gave birth to a daughter today! And what about my today’s entry!

Well, at 2.03 a.m. for some reason I had terrible trouble in

getting to sleep and I had this sudden urge to look outside my open window. Right in front of me I saw this strange saucer-shaped object high in the sky with bright-coloured flashing lights. I couldn't wait any longer, I just had to phone Paul. Luckily his phone was on voicemail. I whispered, "Hi Paul, Clarence. I'm sorry for phoning you so late, but right now I'm looking at this fantastic brilliantly lit UFO. I'm seeing loads of red, green, purple, blue and oh no! It's gone! Hello! I'm, over here! Good, it's come back, phew! It's moving very fast to my right side, which means it's now heading in your direction; it's stopped, it's so still, but there's no sound, I can't hear anything! Why can't I hear anything? This is so bizarre. Wait! Sick, man! What! Now it's gone and *tripled* in size... it's *huge*... how on earth did it do that? Yes, I see, so, this must be the Mothership. Oh, this is amazing, man, just so amazing *Wahooooo!* And *yes!* Here's another UFO coming! And it has the exact same colours, but it's a lot smaller, it's approaching the Mothership, what? It's disappeared! Where is it now? Oh, I see... it must've gone inside. Hey! What! No way! The Mothership has just shrunk back to its original size again and it's coming towards me! This is so exciting; I really hope you'll phone me back in a minute. No! It's stopped! It's dead still again, and what's it doing now? Oh! Wow! This is just so *cool*. It's done a big loop and has *shot* straight up; it's gone! No! It's come back down again! I'm so lucky to be seeing all of this; oh, why doesn't this *stupid* phone have a camera on it? So, it's now approaching my left side! Sick! Wow, that was extremely fast! This is excellent, man, and I still can't hear anything, there's no sound whatsoever, unbelievable! It's just stopped again; right, hang on a minute, so where on earth has it gone this time? It's not hovering over there, not over here either, no it's... gone. Wow! So much better than that boring, small, metallic-looking UFO we saw in Woodfield Park at 9 o'clock in the evening on Saturday 28th of July, last year. Bye!"

1 minute later my phone rang, it was Paul, sounding very

excited. "Sick! I've just seen them too. Weren't they just so cool, man! No, and I never got the chance to take any pictures either. Yes, you're right, so much better than last year! So, what are you doing all day tomorrow, anything?"

I said, "No, why?"

He replied, "Right, in that case we're so going out to look for some crop circles."

I said, "Sick man! So, what time shall I come over?"

He replied, "I'll see you at mine at 10 o'clock in the morning. And why don't you bring a packed lunch, drink and raingear just in case, you never know?"

After that frilling experience I couldn't go back to sleep, so I decided to write my next Mother & Baby poem. *Mother & Baby poem 5, Moons, or UFOs? What do we know?*

MOONS, OR UFOS? WHAT DO WE KNOW?

BABY

Mummy, what's that big white round thing in the sky?
It isn't moving at all, why can't I see it fly?

MOTHER

Hmm, yes, I wonder what it can be.
Sometimes during the daytime, you can see the Moon.
And it's definitely not the dwarf planet - Pluto.
Oh no, & now there're clouds I can see!
And they're getting closer to it, so maybe soon,
We won't be sure if it was the moon or a UFO.

Topsy and I arrived at Paul's house dead on time. All day we searched for something unusual. At midday we were so excited because right in the middle of a wheat field was a perfect circular crop circle! It wasn't as vast as we expected, and there was this very strange cobwebby-looking substance on the ground, and the wheat was all bent over going in an anti-clockwise direction.

Paul asked, "I wonder what it is? Look, why don't we

take a few photos of all of us inside it?"

I shouted, "Great!" So, there on the edge of the circle we put Paul's tripod and on top of that his brand-new black Minolta camera. After our photo sessions we decided to have our lunches right in the middle of the circle.

Paul mentioned, "Well, I suppose this universe is big, massive - in fact, and yet many people still think we're the only planet with life on it. How can people believe that?"

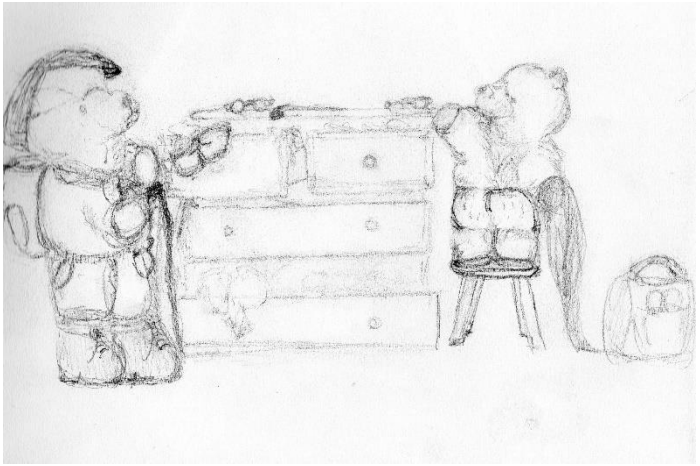
I said, "I do struggle with that idea. I bet they come through wormholes and use some anti-gravity fuel."

He replied, "Yep! And it wouldn't surprise me if they are already living here, like in the sea, mountains, volcanos, and even could be on the dark side of our Moon! Ah! I've just remembered something! It's about my mum."

I asked, "What's that then?"

He said, "She's seen a few UFOs, but the most memorable happened on Thursday 25th of May 2006: at around 6 15 p.m. So, my mum and her mate were driving on the B4506 heading towards Berkhamsted. Then her mate thought she'd seen something shining high up in the distance. So, they pulled up near to the Ashridge Business School, got out of the car and watched in awe at this strange, enormous, object slowly moving across the sky! Apparently, it looked like the Mothership in that brilliant Steven Spielberg's film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; but it was totally silent! Then, about an hour later as they were walking from the car park to the town centre, it turned up again! But it was extremely low down and motionless. And for a moment both were standing right underneath it! But then it just vanished into thin air! *Magic!* I wonder if anybody else had seen it. Anyway, I've got a few UFO books, and some of them write about how our governments are communicating with aliens, all fascinating stuff. However, best not mention this to people unless someone else does first. So, we'll need to watch out for the local TV and radio news for the next few days and to read the Thursday's *Appletown Citizen*."

"Excellent idea!" I shouted.



July has...

More festivals than at any other time,

Most days it is very sunny and hot.

Enjoy the fresh air; swim, walk, run, cycle, climb.

With all the energy that you have got.

Tuesday 1 July *Canada Day*

Hong Kong became a special administrative region of China when it was handed back by Britain in 1997 in accordance with the terms of the 99-year lease agreed between the two countries in 1898.

I don't think there's much more territory left to give away or back. Commonwealth countries used to be shown in red on all the atlases I've ever seen. This idea seems to have been abandoned. Just as well – the world would be looking anaemic by now.

At 9.56 a.m. Markus knocked at our front door. He wanted me to go with him to the shops. I had nothing better to do, so I agreed, but only to see if he would let slip any information he had in mind regarding Lexie. He didn't even tell me he had made plans to meet with his mates outside the Co-op either.

I paid for everything at McDonald's and bought all the sweets.

Wednesday 2 July

The first Arctic crossing by automobile was made by American Oscar Tamm in 1910.

There wouldn't have been many cars on the roads of London in those days, so he wasn't looking for a break from traffic jams. Perhaps he wanted to give an airing to a new overcoat.

Lexie and I only just made the early bus to Canterbury. Lexie had a nice day: with me paying for everything, she went away with a very expensive dress, 3 pairs of shoes and a McDonald's lunch.

Before I left her house, she thanked me for this lovely day and kissed me like I've never had before. It was so powerful I was literally pressed up against her house wall.

Afterwards, I said, "I'm so sorry, Lexie, but just then you were really squashing me; it felt like I couldn't breathe."

She shouted, "Clarence! Not this again! You're supposed to be my boyfriend! I don't know! What, are you like! Blimey! OK, if you don't want me to kiss you like that again, then I won't do it anymore. I'll just give you a quick peck on your cheek if you'd prefer."

I smiled, "Yes! That'll be better."

Then she said, "I really enjoyed shopping with you today. Can we go back to Canterbury again someday?"

I said, "Yes, we can, but only when I can afford it."

Then she said, "Oh, I forgot to mention about this earlier, but my younger brother Steven would love to learn how to play the piano. We've got 1 in the lounge, just sitting there. Would it be possible for you to show him a few things say next Monday, at around 10 o'clock in the morning?"

I replied, "Yes, of course, if you would like me to."

Thursday 3 July

Ration books were finally ready to be thrown away in 1954, nine years after the Second World War ended.

It might be a good idea to bring them back again when half of the population is too fat for their own good.

I've never been so eager to read the *Appletown Citizen* when it came through our door. Absolutely nothing on aliens! I then phoned Paul to tell him, and he wasn't in the best of moods about it. "Oh well, we'll have to wait for our next alien visitation, won't we."

Just before I went to bed, I decided to have a nice time relaxing in a bubble bath.

At 8.45 p.m. I decided to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 6, *Fun in the Bath*.

FUN IN THE BATH

BABY

Oh, how I love to splash around,
In this new playground I've just found.
It's full of water and, what luck,
I've even got a plastic duck.
My mummy smothers me with soap,
She'll keep it from my eyes, I hope.
So, I can see my duck at play,
I'd love to do this every day.

MOTHER

You obviously find it nice.
To wallow in the water, though -
You very nearly drowned me twice!
So, I'm afraid it's time to go.
Now you are looking fresh and clean.
Tomorrow we'll be back for more.
And every day you'll look pristine.
For you and 'Quack' there's fun galore.

Friday 4 July *Independence Day, USA*

13-year-old prodigy Ruth Lawrence was awarded a first-class mathematics degree in 1985.

Oh, no. Fancy trying to match that. I thought I was a genius when I could recite my 7 times table in my 3rd year at primary school.

At 4.30 p.m., mum asked, “Are you and Lexie coming along with me to see Sophia on her carnival float tomorrow?”

I panicked. “No, I’m sorry! So, you’re asking me... moi...to miss the women’s singles final? Are you insane? How dare you suggest such a thing to me! It’s very naughty of you! You’re being unbelievably very, very STUPID! No chance! I’m not doing it!”

She pleaded, “Please, please, Clarence. The carnival only happens once a year. You must know she’s been looking forward to it for such a long time now. Look, why don’t you record it instead? You can watch it over again if needs be.”

I shouted, “I didn’t think of that! But it wouldn’t be the same though, and I might get to *hear* the result accidentally from somebody!”

She smiled. “Well, what if I buy you some sweets tomorrow. Now will that make you change your mind?”

I sighed, “But it’s Wimbledon ... Oh...hmmm...well... OK... I’ll have a box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates, please!”

She shouted, “*Thorntons!*”

I shrugged. “Yes, that’s the deal. Take it or leave it!”

Relenting, she shouted, “OK! You win! Thorntons it is.”

Just then Lexie phoned: she wanted to know the exact same question.

Smiling, I said, “Yes, of course, I couldn’t miss Sophia *enjoying* herself at the carnival, now, could I?”

She replied, “That’s really kind of you because I’ll know you’ll be missing the tennis. That’s wonderful! I’ll

meet you outside the Co-op at midday; see ya, bye, bye, kiss, kiss!”

Every year it's the same! Why can't the Appletown carnival organisers plan this *stupid* show to be on the following weekend, hey? The only thing I can think of is that they just can't be tennis lovers! If I'm right, then they're all extremely sad people...indeed!

Saturday 5 July

More than 400,000 poor Londoners enjoyed free dinners to mark the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902.

The early risers must've had all-day breakfasts, with the tailenders munching on what Granny Roberts calls old-fashioned suppers.

The carnival parade started dead on time at 12.30 p.m. in the High Street. Mum, Lexie and I finally saw Sophia on her school's very loud and colourful *Wizard of Oz* float. It wouldn't have been my choice of character, but she was given the job of being the good witch of the north. She wore a bright long curly ginger wig, a long pink dress and tall pretty crown and held a wand. It didn't quite match her dark brown bushy eyebrows; anyway, we ended up chucking most of our coppers into their bucket. Mr. Willis's float had all characters from *Robin Hood*; he was a great Friar Tuck.

We went on the big wheel and the dodgem cars, and we all had big double chocolate ice creams. During the whole afternoon there were lots of people, and quite a few babies in buggies wanting to be picked up so as not to miss all the action.

At 7.30 p.m. we bumped into Sam by the chip van. Lexie started speaking to her, then mum suggested, "This isn't good, Clarence, look at that terrible sky. I do believe the heavens are just about to open and it's nearly closing anyway. So maybe this'll be a good time to leave." Immediately after she had mentioned this idea, I saw

Markus chatting to Colin as they walked down in our direction.

I said, “Yes, and I’d like to go right now.”

Lexie winked. “Thanks for coming, and don’t forget I’m seeing you on Monday morning.” I told her I hadn’t forgotten, and then we said our goodbyes.

At 9.03 p.m., with my big box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates and a massive glass of lemonade, and luckily without knowing the results, I finally got to see my Venus vs Serena final. It wasn’t as if I’d hoped it only went to 2 sets, 7-5 and 6-4; 3 sets would’ve been a lot more enjoyable to watch.

At 6.54 p.m. I started thinking about people picking things up, so I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother and Baby* poem 7, *Pick Me Up!*

PICK ME UP!

BABY

I’m lying here in my grey bouncer chair,
My mummy’s near, but I’m not in despair.
Though she can see I’m holding my hands up high,
She isn’t picking me up, so I’ll just cry.

MOTHER

I know that you want me to hold you.
And for us to play a game maybe,
But right now, I’ve got some things to do.
Oh, go on then – you’re my priority.

Sunday 6 July

Piper Alpha oil rig blew up in the North Sea killing 170 people in 1988.

Every other day we seem to recall another disaster.
Perhaps we shouldn’t complain so much about the price of oil.

Mum had a phone call today at 11.34 a.m., and when she had finished her conversation, she was kissing me all over.

She smiled. “Thank you, I love you to bits. I’ve got a 75th birthday party to cater for. It has to be perfect: no room for any mistakes, as this could lead us all to a better future.”

I said, “You can rely on me.”

Later in the afternoon I watched Nadal beat Federer in exactly 4hrs 48mins. The final score was 6-4, 6-4, 6-7, 9-7. A very long match indeed. I even remembered to look out for Ben and his mum. No luck there, so I didn’t get to leave that phone message after all.

Monday 7 July

Michael Fagan broke into Buckingham Palace in 1982, stole a bottle of wine and sat on the Queen’s bed asking her for a cigarette.

That doesn’t say much for the security arrangements. I haven’t heard of anything like this again, so they must’ve finally done something about it.

I arrived at Lexie’s house at 9.59 a.m. By 10.10 a.m. I finally managed to get down to showing Steven a few scales and arpeggios on their piano, but it was a total nightmare because not once could he give me any attention. It’s just possible that he could have ADHD. Mum thinks that her very favourite actor of all time, Jim Carrey, may have it. I haven’t a clue about him, but what I do know is that there are plenty of other well-known people with this condition who are just as talented as Jim; so, there’s still hope for Steven yet.

After that unpleasant experience, I gave them all a little burst of Elvis, because according to Lexie, he’s her mum’s favourite pop singer of all time.

During our fish and chips lunch, Lexie asked me if I could show Steven some more piano tips this Saturday.

I said, “I’m sorry, but I found that hard to do. I have

piano lessons myself with Mr. Willis. He's an old guy, a widower in fact and such a scatterbrain! But his house is always spotlessly clean and tidy, which is a little bit odd."

She suggested, "Perhaps he's got a cleaner?"

I replied, "Oh right, yes, that might explain it. But in any case, he's an excellent teacher and it would be worthwhile asking him if he could teach Steven the basics; once he knows the keys, then maybe I could have another go. Although mum might want me around to help her on that day, because she's catering for a 75th birthday party. If she doesn't, then I'll phone you sometime, either Friday or later in the week, so we could do something else."

She nodded, "Yes, I'd like that and thank you," and gave me a quick peck on my right cheek.

Tuesday 8 July

English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned off Leghorn in Italy.

They say that a drowning man relives his whole life.

Today mum asked me, "Clarence, it would be lovely if you could help me serve up the food for this 75th birthday party on Saturday? I really do need somebody to help me, I can't do everything all on my own, and soon I shall have to ask Sophia if she can help too. What do you think?"

I replied, "OK."

She smiled. "Oh, my darling, you're such a wonderful son and I love you."

Wednesday 9 July

Lady Jane Grey was pronounced Queen in 1553.

Such a shame. A very short reign. She didn't have time to make her mark on history. Come to think of it though, I would enjoy being king for 24 hours (but no more).

At 3.34 p.m. I was with Topsy going into Woodsfield Park when I saw in the far distance looking towards the duck

pond Markus and Colin laughing with some girl about the same height as Lexie. I couldn't recognise who the girl was; she was wearing a red coat; I couldn't even see what the colour of her hair was as she had her hood up. Just at that moment it started to drizzle. Straight away I looked down at Topsy and she looked up at me, so right there and then we turned around and went back home.

Thursday 10 July

Rock and roll star Chuck Berry were jailed for three months for tax evasion in 1979.

He must have taken lessons from Al Capone! In return for singing lessons, of course.

I spent all day food shopping in Canterbury with mum, carrying heavy bags ready for her big day on Saturday.

At 8. 46 p.m. I started thinking about people going shopping, so I went to my bedroom to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem 8, *Shopping*.

SHOPPING

MOTHER

Come on now, in the buggy we get,
We've got to do some shopping.
It's a nice day, so we won't get wet,
I'll have your eyes a-popping.
When I wheel your buggy through the door,
You'll see all the marvellous things in store.

BABY

I want to see what you will buy.
From all those shelves piled up so high,
I hope there're toys and games to play.
And lovely food to eat.
If so, I don't mind if we stay.
Till you're rushed off your feet.

Friday 11 July

Louis Réard astonished the world of fashion in 1946 when he launched a skimpy new-style swimsuit which he called the bikini, named after the South Pacific atoll, where atomic tests had recently been carried out.

I bet it cost a bomb (sorry about that).

Mum was working hard in the kitchen making all kinds of grub; she was so in her element; it was nice to see her enjoying life again. I hope this isn't just going to be a little blip for her business and that all her efforts will win her some more customers.

Saturday 12 July

The first Model T Ford motorcar, affectionately known as 'Tin Lizzy', came off the production line at the factory in Detroit in 1908.

Henry Ford informed potential buyers that they could have any colour so long as it was black. He ought to have been called Hobson.

Mum asked me if I could wear a white shirt with black jacket and trousers. When I came downstairs and was just about to go in the kitchen, I noticed Sophia was sitting down in the lounge wearing a black skirt and a white blouse.

Mum mentioned, "Clarence, yesterday I asked Sophia if she could help us, but she refused, so I had to tell her about our current financial situation. So, for her to agree to this, I had to promise to buy her the latest Westlife CD."

When we arrived at the Town Hall, I came across this tatty, old upright piano in the left corner of the dining room. I couldn't resist it, so I went up to the DJ to ask him if he wouldn't mind if I did a few wartimes tunes while they were all munching away on their food. He very kindly let me do it. When I had finished, I could see a lot of very excited people speaking to mum and occasionally turning

their heads and looking in my direction. I could also see the DJ looking daggers at me!

Later mum told me they had asked her if I could play for them at a party and for a wedding. Apparently, she took a gamble and told them that we come together as a package; and it worked! Mum's business looks a little more promising now, so it could be saved.

We ended the day celebrating by sitting outside in the warm evening sun at The Black Pig with Topsy in tow.

Sunday 13 July

The star-studded Live Aid concert was staged at Wembley Stadium for the benefit of Ethiopia's famine victims in 1985. It ran for 16 hours and was broadcast to almost 2 billion viewers in 152 countries.

I reckon this event merited more than a few entries in the Guinness Book of Records.

At 7.34 p.m. Lexie phoned. "Clarence, we haven't spoken to each other for nearly a week. Is everything all right with you?"

I said, "Yes, I'm fine. Oh yes, on Wednesday last week I took Topsy to Woodsfield Park and just by the duck pond I saw Markus and his gang talking to some girl in a red-hooded coat. As you and I haven't been there for quite a while now, I thought it would be nice to go back again soon, say sometime next week?"

She stuttered, "Ah, hmm, w-well you're quite right, I-I, oh sorry, no...we...haven't been there for quite a long time...you see...I can't, as I've got other pl-plans next week. Hmm.... well...I can't do tomorrow, as I'm going out to Canterbury with S-Sam, so why don't you phone me on Tuesday, as I should know what I'll be doing by then." well...I can't do tomorrow, as I'm going out to Canterbury with S-Sam, so why don't you phone me on Tuesday, as I should know what I'll be doing by then."

I replied, "Oh, OK, I'll look forward to phoning you up on Tuesday then, bye."

I finally got to bed at 11 p.m.

Monday 14 July *Bank & public holiday, Northern Ireland
National Day, France*

The Mont Blanc tunnel linking France and Italy was opened in 1965.

If they build many more tunnels, the time may come when we hardly ever see the light of day.

At 9.13 a.m. mum grumbled, "I'm not very happy today! Our ancient, made-in-England fridge freezer has finally died. It's a good job it didn't break down last week, isn't it? Now I've got to go out today and buy us a new fridge freezer. Wonderful!"

Everybody kept out of her way, including Topsy. So, we now have a brand-new fridge freezer, from China. I'll give it a couple of years, tops.

Last year it was the toilet, and then it was the garage door, and just before Christmas it was mum's car! I wish our country could just go back to producing things like we used to. If I ever win the Lottery, I'd start up my very own production company in Appletown and I'd be an excellent boss to all my hard-working employees.

Tuesday 15 July

Selfridge's department store opened in London's Oxford Street in 1909. Harry Selfridge started his career as a messenger boy in Wisconsin, USA and moved to London in 1906.

If I were him, I'd sit up in my grave to celebrate the centenary next year!

This morning, I just remembered I had to phone Lexie.

I asked her, "How did it go with Sam in Canterbury?"

She stuttered, "O-oh that, yes, it was g-good, v-very good in f-fact, we had such a fantastic time."

Then I said, "I know what it is, you must be coming down with some bug, you poor thing."

She replied, "Why would you say that?"

I replied, "I can hear you; your voice is kind of stuttering. I even noticed it when we spoke last time on Sunday as well."

She said, "Yes, that's right. Oh Clarence, you're so clever, I must have a slight cold. Now, going through my diary, I'm quite busy all this week, although I don't have anything written down for Monday just yet."

I replied, "That's all right, you just take it easy. I hope we'll be able to go out on Monday, but only if your cold has gone by then, as I wouldn't want to catch anything. You do understand?" And we left it for her to phone me over this weekend.

Wednesday 16 July

Benito Mussolini banned gambling in Italy in 1923.

Yet he gambled recklessly in 1940, not practising what he preached. He lived long enough to regret it.

Lexie's cold must have developed by now and will most probably be on its way out.

Thursday 17 July

Walt Disney opened his \$17 million theme park at Anaheim, California in 1955.

The king of animation, no less! When mum took us 3 children to see the film *Fantasia*, I'm sure she enjoyed it as much as we did.

Looking through this week's issue of the *Appletown Citizen*, I saw that the local Amateur Appletown Operatic Society are performing *The Merry Widow* at the Appletown Theatre from Monday to Friday next week.

Mum saw the article as well and she suggested, "Hey Clarence, why don't you take a gamble and buy a couple of tickets as a surprise for next Monday evening."

I replied, "But she's poorly right now and she may not

even be better by then.”

She said, “Look, Clarence, sometimes you just have to take the plunge and hope she’ll be feeling fine. If she isn’t, then you can take me in her place instead.”

I said, “I’ll get 2 tickets for the Monday’s performance.”

Smiling, she said, “Well done, and I’m so proud of you. And don’t forget to keep it as a nice surprise for her.” Then she kissed me on both cheeks.

Friday 18 July

The BCG tuberculosis vaccine developed by French scientists Calmette and Guérin was given to children in France in 1921.

TB or not TB, as Shaky Bill nearly wrote in the 17th century. 2 brilliant French scientists supplied the answer much later.

At 9.15 a.m. I was sitting in the lounge watching some programme about antiques when Sophia came in.

She said, “Hey, Clarence, I’m going to Zoe’s. She’s 10 today. Would you like to sign your name on this very funny birthday card that I got for her yesterday?”

I replied, “Why would I want to sign that? She’s your friend, not mine!”

She sniffed, “Oh yes, of course, I forgot, you don’t usually get to do this sort of thing, do you? Well, what you do is this, you have to write your name just under the words Happy Birthday! Then you could add something else, maybe a few kisses, or you could put a smiley face next to your name!”

I said, “Sophia, there’s no need to lay it on. Why don’t you just go away?”

She huffed, “With pleasure – and I won’t be bringing back any of the cake.”

I shouted, “Good! Because I wouldn’t want to eat it anyway!”

I wonder if I’ll be taking Lexie out this Monday for our next date. I do hope so.

Saturday 19 July

French cyclist Maurice Garin won the first Tour de France in 1903. He finished almost three hours ahead of the rest!

Cycling races are not for me. When the riders take a corner, they almost defy the law of gravity. Chess or snakes and ladders are less likely to land me in hospital.

At 9.30 p.m. Lexie phoned.

I asked her, "So how are you feeling, Lexie? How's that cold of yours? Has it gone away yet?"

She told me, "Oh yes! Yesterday, I dosed up on Lemsips and spent the day in bed, so I'm feeling much better now, Clarence, and thanks for asking."

I said, "Oh, that went away very quickly, good. So can we still go out on Monday evening then?"

She mentioned, "Yes, of course, so what do you have in mind?"

I said, "That's good news, because I have a little surprise for you. Will it be all right if I pick you up at 6.30 in the evening?"

She answered, "Yes, of course you can. Well, this sounds all very exciting; oh, I do love surprises. I just can't wait to find out exactly what this wonderful surprise could be, how exciting. I'm really looking forward to it! So, I'll see you on Monday at 6.30 in the evening then. Bye! Kiss! Bye! Kiss! Kiss!"

Sunday 20 July

In 1969 Neil Armstrong was the first man to set foot on the moon. He said, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind".

I couldn't have put it better myself. At least the sun's safe; nobody will ever attempt to land there. Mr. Bean might have a go, though.

Today mum said, "When you take Topsy out today, why don't you surprise Lexie once more by buying her a nice

bunch of flowers and a box of chocolates from the Co-op? I'm sure she'd like that as well."

I replied, "OK then," and I bought 12 dark red roses and a box of Thorntons Classic Collection.

Monday 21 July *Independence Day, Belgium*

A high school biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee was convicted of the crime of teaching Darwin's theories of evolution to pupils in 1925. He was fined \$100.

This was the man who did not believe the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible. I've seen a book about him somewhere. I haven't got time to figure out how the world began. There is enough to worry about already – like how I'm going to survive living in London.

I got dressed in my black suit and combed my hair and by 6.29 p.m. I was at Lexie's house with my bunch of 12 roses and a box of Thorntons Classic Collection.

She started crying. "Oh-oh, these p-presents are really lovely, thank y-you e-ever so much."

I said, "There's no need to cry, let me wipe away your tears. Here's my white handkerchief: I always use it to clean my glasses with. Your black dress is very sparkly; your black tights are of a very thin denier and your shoes are jet-black and you have plenty of thick make-up on."

She laughed, "Ha! Oh, thank you, Clarence, that's very observant of you; and you look so cute in your nice suit as well. But it's a little unfortunate that my high heels make the top of your head finish where it shouldn't really be... finishing. I'd better make sure that I'm not standing too close to you, if you get my meaning. And I'm still not going to ask you where you're taking me."

I replied, "Good. Come on, let's go, we wouldn't want to be late."

The Appletown Theatre was jam-packed, and in our opinion, we had the best seats in the house. When the show had finished, she told me, "Oh Clarence, this was the best night out I've had for such a long time. Thank you."

I dropped her off at hers at 10.30 p.m. She kissed me on my right cheek, and we arranged for our next date at my house on Friday at 10 a.m.

Tuesday 22 July

US bank robber and Public Enemy No. 1 John Dillinger was shot dead by the FBI in Chicago in 1934.

And I thought crime was a new invention. Ignorant me.

At 10 a.m. I had to go down to the Appletown Library to hand in 3 Agatha Christie books for mum. As I was crossing the zebra crossing next to Barclays Bank, I thought I saw Lexie walking down the High Street heading towards the bus stop at the bottom of the hill. I also saw Markus going past The Pet Shop on the same path, but in the opposite direction.

As I was just about to go back home, I came across a jeweller's shop, and they were having a summer sale. Looking through the window I saw only a few customers, so I decided to go inside. As I walked straight ahead, I noticed a very large countertop glass cabinet with so many decorative jewellery pieces inside it. Then suddenly I spotted this beautiful, dainty 9-carat half-price gold necklace; so, I went and bought it for Lexie, I really hope she likes it.

At 7 p.m. I started thinking about people going to the library, so I went upstairs to my bedroom to write the words for my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 9, *Trip to the Library*.

TRIP TO THE LIBRARY

MOTHER

Oh look, this book is way overdue.
We need to go back downtown to the library.
And to take some money, so that you
Can pay the fine which was due in February.

BABY

Whoops! Silly mummy for being late.

With my nice big *Humphrey's Corner* library book,

But you do have a lot on your plate.

Which book will I choose next, first I'll have to look.

Wednesday 23 July

Ford Motor Company sold its first car (Model A) for \$850 with a maximum speed of 20 mph in 1903.

Funny, my first reaction was to laugh at the pace of life a century ago. Then I remembered that they have just introduced a new 20 mph speed limit in the town centre. Static progress.

I was quite surprised to get a phone call from James; this is so unlike him when he's got a girlfriend. He was telling me all about Katrina.

He said, "Oh Clarence, she's gorgeous, her hair always has this lovely coconut smell about it, and guess what? She wants to meet Lexie! So maybe we could all get together sometime and go out somewhere just before we go back to school?"

I said, "Yes, that's all right with me, but I'll have to speak to Lexie first. I'll get back to you soon, bye."

Thursday 24 July

Actor/comedian Peter Sellers died in 1980.

This name meant nothing to me, but mum and dad recalled him from TV comedy shows.

Lexie phoned to say she can't be over on Friday as she'd forgotten she had a prior engagement, but she could make Saturday to meet at The Coffee Shop in town at 10 a.m.

I asked, "Would you like to meet James and his new girlfriend during the first week in September, say the 3rd?"

She said, "That'll be nice." I phoned James and told him.

Friday 25 July

Louis Bleriot was greeted by cheering crowds when he landed at Dover after becoming the first person to fly across the English Channel in 1909.

Another centenary for 2009. If Bleriot had waited a few decades, he could've travelled by tunnel.

Lexie and I could've had a really nice time today. The weather was perfect for doing something outside, but it just didn't happen. I wondered how long exactly we've been going out with each other, so I looked it up in my diary entries. I discovered it has been nearly 4 months since we first met. I know she has turned me down on 2 pre-arranged dates, which isn't bad.

Saturday 26 July

Clement Attlee was elected Prime Minister after a landslide Labour Party victory in 1945.

After 6 years of war, the new government had plenty to do. Recently there has been talk of lowering the age when people can vote to 16. I do hope they don't. I'm useless when it comes to politics. I might be a little wiser in 2 years' time; but I very much doubt it.

Well, I met Lexie at The Coffee Shop at 10 a.m. like we arranged. As soon as we saw each other, we both wanted to say something.

I suggested, "Ladies first."

Sighing, she said, "No, Clarence, you go first."

I replied, "OK then, Lexie, we've been seeing each other for nearly 4 months now," and from out of my pocket I presented Lexie with her brand-new gold necklace.

Looking down, she shrugged. "Oh, this is so lovely, but I can't accept it. I just can't. It must've cost you an absolute bomb."

Shaking my head, I said, "No, it didn't actually, you

see, I bought it in a sale.”

She said, “Um, well...”

I suggested, “Look, just allow me to put it round your neck, then see how you feel after that.”

She mumbled, “Oh, oh, go on, then ... thank you.”

As I was putting the necklace round her neck, I asked, “What’s your news then?”

She said, “Oh, um, oh um, OK, oh, so... when are you going on your family caravan holiday? I need to know, because I’m going to Barcelona with my family for a week too and we’re leaving very early in the morning.”

I replied, “Oh, we’re going in 10 days’ time.”

I’ve absolutely no idea why, but all throughout our date Lexie didn’t stop fidgeting; she hardly ever looked at me, and what about her cheeks! I’ve never seen them so red! Ah, I know, it was most probably ‘women’s problems’, yes, that must be it, what else could it be?

Sunday 27 July

The world’s first jet airliner, the De Havilland Comet, took to the sky for its inaugural flight at Hatfield airfield in 1949.

Yet another of the ‘flighty’ firsts. I hope this is the last.

Today I didn’t do much other than take Topsy out. Lexie was right: her house was completely empty. How I hate Sundays, they’re just so boring!

I went to bed a little earlier than yesterday at 9.25 p.m.

Monday 28 July

Johann Sebastian Bach died in 1750.

I can’t go Bach that far. Who was it who said that puns are the lowest form of wit? He (or she) may have had a point.

On the BBC1 6 p.m. news we were told that England’s longest pier at Weston-Super-Mare has burned down for the second time in 80 years. I can’t remember if they told us of any casualties, but it must’ve been panic stations for

anyone at the sea end at the time. If ever I go on a pier, I'll take the precaution of carrying a kite and water wings!

Tuesday 29 July

The Boy Scout movement was launched by Robert Baden Powell in 1907.

My Granddad Upton-Smyth was a boy scout in the days when the Duke of York used to attend their big camping jamborees and joined in singing *Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree* with gestures to suit the lyrics.

Today at 7.30 p.m. the Town Hall was holding their usual yearly talent contest. I didn't enter, but Sophia did: she came 3rd after choosing 2 of her modern pieces from her violin stage 2 book. Her friend Zoe McKenzie entered as well: she came 2nd with her song *Unbreak My Heart*. But the winner was this little boy called Robbie Hillman, who could've been no more than 8 years old, telling a joke called 'The Wide-Mouthed Frog'. Then he started doing impressions: first he concentrated on the *Harry Potter* films, Professor Snape, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Hagrid, and Mad-Eye Moody. Then he did *Only Fools and Horses*, which I think is the best TV comedy programme ever written, Del Boy, Rodney, and Granddad Trotter. He then did cartoon characters: Homer and Bart Simpson, Mr. Burns, Fred Flintstone, Barney Rubble, Dino, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Roadrunner Shaggy, Fred, Scooby-Doo, Muttley, Donkey and Shrek. Then finally he went on and did a load of very famous people too: David Walliams, Simon Cowell, Amanda Holden, Alan Carr, Michael McIntyre, Sir David Attenborough, Andy Murray, and HRH Prince Charles – that was just absolutely... brilliant!

When the competition had finished, I told Sophia and Zoe, "If I were a judge, I would've chosen him to win as well, because with his voices and actions he was right there on the button, he was quite remarkable really. Oh, and you both know you did make a quite a few blatantly

obvious mistakes.”

Sophia sniffed. “Clarence! Obvious mistakes! How dare you! OK, then, our so-called Mr. Perfect! Right, from now on until the rest of the day we’re sending you to Coventry! Come on, Zoe!”

I was only telling them the truth.

Wednesday 30 July

Italian athlete Durando Pietri was denied a gold medal after finishing first in the marathon in the 1908 Olympic Games in London. He was disqualified when, suffering from dehydration and cramp, he collapsed and was assisted over the finishing line by track officials.

He was unlucky! I like to think that if I had been the runner following him home, I would be sporting enough to stop and push him over the line ahead of me.

Claudia phoned up to say she should be arriving at the train station this Sunday at 3.45 p.m. and asked if she could bring her new boyfriend Charlie too on our caravan holiday in Anderby Creek. Mum said yes, then she reminded her that the no smoking house rule still applies when we’re in in the caravan.

Yet another boyfriend of Claudia’s to get to know.

Thursday 31 July

In the first instance of a criminal being brought to justice by wireless, Dr Hawley Harvey Crippen was arrested on board a ship, the Montrose, in 1910. He was subsequently convicted of murdering his wife.

I bet he wouldn’t have been caught 20 years earlier!

Today, at 9.55 a.m. I was in the kitchen eating my breakfast of cornflakes and mum was busy making a chocolate fudge cake.

I asked, “Mum, can I ask you about something?”

She smiled, “What’s that then? I know! And as you’re

so clever, you've just thought of this brilliant idea. Now let's see, could it be that you've just invented something that'll sort out all of Britain's current financial problems and it can make us all very rich and live happily ever after in this lovely mansion, with a massive garden with plenty of trees, and to finish it off there'll be 2 nice expensive cars parked in a double garage?"

I replied, "Well, no."

She said, "Oh, that's a shame, I suppose we can all dream, can't we? So, what is it then? Oh, no! You haven't gone and got yourself involved with the wrong people, have you? Please say you haven't."

I said, "No."

She mentioned, "Oh good, that's a relief, so it's got to be about the birds and the bees then? You see, now how can I put it? Hmm...OK...well..."

I shouted, "No! Anyway, I know all about that already! No, look, what if I paid for Ben's and James's entrance fees as well as my own, could they come along on Sophia's 10th birthday trip to Alton Towers too? What do you think, good idea or not?"

She responded, "Of course they can come. The people carrier will be able to fit all 7 of us; but you must understand that it'll be a very special day for Sophia, and she may not want you and your mates to come, so I'll have to ask her first."

Sophia might not like it, and I bet she doesn't say why. Maybe she won't like either James or Ben or even both!

At 5.34 p.m. I phoned them up. James said, "Sick, man, I can't wait to go on all those fantastic rides, we just have to hope it doesn't rain!"

Ben said, "Great! I'm so looking forward to that. Thanks, mate! Oh, this is wonderful news! Because now I'll have something in common with my cousins."

I asked, "Why's that? Don't you get on with them?"

He said, "Well no, it's just that they always seem to have a lot more money than us. I suppose it's because my uncle and auntie are both criminal lawyers, so they can

afford to go there every year; and every other year for 2 weeks they fly off to Disney World in America, and once they even went to Australia for a month! Oh yes, and I'd forgotten about this, but around 5 years ago they once went to Africa! To Africa of all places! And they stayed there for 3 months! It's not fair! It just makes me sick!"

At 6.58 p.m. I started getting all excited about going to Alton Towers, so I went upstairs to my bedroom, and I wrote the words for my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 10, *Trip to the Theme Park*.

TRIP TO THE THEME PARK

BABY

I'm getting used to walking,
I've even started talking,
These things take time to master.
Oh, but I am learning faster.
And mummy likes to teach me something new,
So, what is it today we're going to do?

MOTHER

You've spent most of your time on the ground,
By the end of today you'll have found
You can have lots of fun.
As there's much to be done,
With so many rides
And very good slides
They may have funny looking swings,
And plenty more of other things
Come on now, love, are you ready?

BABY

May I bring my big, brown teddy?



August has...

The most family holidays when
We can put down our briefcase and pen,
Just leave the desk behind
So that we can all find,
The fun we seek in the welcome fresh air.
In the park, on the beach or at the fair.

Friday 1 August *National Day, Switzerland*

Horatio Nelson destroyed Napoleon's fleet at the battle of the Nile in 1795.

That was in the days when we ruled the waves. Now the way to success (especially on the sports fields) is to waive the rules.

Sophia had this terrible argument with mum about me and my 2 mates coming along to Alton Towers. She then shouted at me, "It's my birthday, not yours and *yoo-hoo*, hello, I'm not on the ceiling, I'm standing right next to you. You hardly look at me when I'm talking to you, why can't you look straight at me just for once? And why can't you go on the piano, so you can stop that hand flapping

thing you do sometimes? I wish they would own up and tell us that you were adopted from birth, because the rest of us in this family all have thick, wavy, black, or dark brown hair. Where on earth does that straight, dark, ginger mess come from anyway, hey? You haven't inherited either dad's black hair or mine, mum's, and Claudia's dark brown colour either... very strange indeed. And you're so nothing like our family. Maybe you can go and find your own weirdo relations and leave us in peace ... I hate you!"

She may have a point about me being adopted, and I do kind of remember dad telling me once that Great-Granddad Upton-Smyth's hair was ginger before he went all white. I don't need her to tell me where I can look, and I like to flap my hands as well, it helps me concentrate. So, she can stuff it!

Saturday 2 August

Wild Bill Hickok was shot dead at the Number Ten Saloon in South Dakota in 1876.

Anybody would be wild, faced with a loaded weapon. A thirsty stranger in the Wild West would've been well advised to fetch a couple of bottles from an off-licence (if there were any then).

Mum, James, Ben, Sophia, Zoe, Kylie and I all went in dad's people carrier for a day trip to Alton Towers. Sophia didn't say a word to me, and Kylie was forever staring at Ben with her light green-blue eyes and kept on touching her long, curly mousy hair for some reason. Zoe was doing the same at me, so to avoid eye contact I kept on talking to James and Ben. We finally arrived at Alton Towers at 12.30 p.m. Before we went on the rides, mum made sure that we all ate our packed lunches on a table alongside the massive pond with the white swan boat rides, and we made plans to meet back at the main gates at 5 p.m.

We boys went on the Corkscrew, then we were soaking wet from the Log Ride, and an hour later we were

wobbling and falling about in the Funhouse. Ben and James told me they liked the Nemesis and the Black Hole, but I was terrified and very nearly sick during both rides.

Mum and the girls didn't have a good time either, because the girls kept on falling out over which ride to go on.

She moaned, "I won't be taking you girls here or to any other amusement park again, until you all grow up!"

The journey home wasn't nice either. Our family always fall out, especially when we're out and about, and these times can be the worst times as well.

At least Sophia did like mum and dad's £50, my £10 and the *silly* girly make-up presents from her mates.

Sunday 3 August

100,000 troops from Iraq invaded the small neighbouring state of Kuwait in 1990.

The generals were confident that occupation would be permanent, but it was not long before they were disillusioned. No doubt the Iraqis had an eye on the Kuwaiti oil wells. I have heard that petrol from that source was on sale at petrol stations bearing the sign Q8. Some advertising agencies are not short of corn!

Mum left home at 3.30 p.m. to go and collect Claudia and Charlie at the train station. Apparently, the train was late, but by 4.32 p.m. Claudia had finally introduced everybody to her latest boyfriend, who seemed to be another slouch layabout with long, wild, mousy hair and stubble for a beard.

They were both dressed like relics from the early 70s, with their baggy scruffy denim jeans (with holes in), long colourful cotton tops and heavy boots with soles as thick as a bath sponge. Also, I think I noticed that Charlie had this terrible odour of burnt joss sticks about him, which seemed to penetrate right through the whole house.

Monday 4 August *Bank & public holiday, Republic of Ireland*
The Czechoslovakian soldier Emil Zatopek and his wife Dana, who were born on the same day in 1923, each collected gold medals in athletic events in the 1952 Olympic Games.

The odds on them being born on the same day are long, but if I was around in those days and had a bet on them both getting gold medals then I would've been very rich indeed!

Today at 10.24 a.m., mum, Claudia, Charlie and Sophia all went clothes shopping in Canterbury. As soon as they left at 10.16 a.m., I took Topsy to the Co-op to buy myself a nice big packet of wine gums, but only to be eaten in my bedroom on the same day when Claudia and Charlie go back to Truro.

I spent the rest of the day playing computer games in my bedroom whilst listening to Classic FM, with my windows wide open, I might add.

At 7.56 p.m. I finally ended up packing my backpack and 2 big suitcases for my holiday and left them with the others in the lounge; this time round I will be bringing my diary.

Tuesday 5 August

The first USA income tax was introduced in 1861.

We always seem to adopt all the worst habits from the Americans. In the case of taxing income, however, we beat them by about 80 years.

It was a good job I didn't forget to give dad a letter for him to collect my exam results on 14 August, and I also added that I'll phone the day before to remind him. At certain times of the year, dogs aren't allowed to go on the beach. It's the 6-week summer holiday, so we chose not to risk it.

By 3.30 p.m., excluding dad and Topsy, we were at the Poplar Zareba caravan site in Anderby Creek. It was so good to see our lonely old 6-berth white, Blue Bird

caravan once again. As soon as we parked, mum went to the office to pay the annual rent and collect the keys, while Claudia and Charlie had to quickly dash to the bogs. Sophia and I went to the caravan.

She moaned, “Why can’t we get rid of this old-fashioned caravan and buy a new 1 with a nice shower unit? And why can’t we bring our TV? Honestly, Clarence. Well, I think Anderby Creek is just so boring! And every year Zoe always goes to those exciting Centre Parks...every year! It’s not fair! Not fair! This is only between us, you understand.”

I couldn’t believe it. I said, “Sophia just be thankful that we’ve even got a caravan. I know we could move it to a caravan site near Appletown, but personally I’m with mum on this. Such things like family holidays, I think it’s a good idea to get away, right away for a while. Some people don’t even have holidays as they can’t afford it. Anyway, if we did have a TV, you most probably wouldn’t want to do anything else. So shut up! Here are the others: they’re coming back right now, so cheer up and help me unload!”

She soon brightened up and the others didn’t even notice that words had been said between us.

Wednesday 6 August

American swimmer Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel from France to England in 1926.

It would’ve been a lot quicker to take the ferry, and she wouldn’t have got wet either.

By 11.05 a.m. we were back on the beach and there was a quiet, *calming*, low tide. To our left stood a few boys fishing in some pools of water and about 5 young school-age girls building sandcastles. There wasn’t any wind, but everybody had their wind breaks up except for us. A few sunbathers were getting very red and brown on their towels, and in the distance, others could be seen messing

about in the sea, playing cricket, football, and beach volleyball. We started walking bare foot, and once again our toes melted into the soft, silky, golden sand.

We then came across Adrian and Eddie Kay, Daniel and Kelvin Hickson sitting on the grass and talking to each other. After saying hello and making plans to go around to each other's caravans, we took ourselves far away from them and everybody else.

We were all enjoying mum's picnic of cheese and pickle sandwiches and pasta when Charlie started telling me about him and Claudia. He said, "Well, I'm 22 years old and I met Claudia when I was playing my guitar with my Pagan band in our local shopping centre."

I supposed that this would explain his weirdo clothes and constant odour of burnt joss sticks.

Mum suggested, "Why don't you all go and play in the sea for a while, so I can be left alone in peace to do some sunbathing. Then maybe I'd have the chance to finish off my exciting murder mystery book?"

Our holiday just must be a lot better than this! Surely!

At 6.45 p.m. everybody else went out to the Creek Tavern, except for me, that is, I decided to stay in the caravan to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 11, *The Beach*.

THE BEACH

BABY

There's this strange thing I'm touching,
It's soft and keeps slipping away.
I'm seeing people just laughing.
I want to live here. I want to stay.

MOTHER

Now, love, we're on holiday for 2 weeks.
And this stuff that you're touching is soft sand.
Oh, no! You can't rub your hands on your cheeks.
Sand will make your eyes sore, so that is banned!

Thursday 7 August

In 1996, NASA scientists unveiled what they believed was new evidence to support the theory that there could be life on Mars.

Paul and I would so love to meet a nice alien, but life could mean any living creature. So, we could have an invasion of gigantic exotic butterflies or miniature long-haired monkeys, for instance, 1 day.

Today I woke up feeling good, for the sun was shining and I was determined to enjoy this holiday whatever. But my dreams were dashed when, as we were back on the beach sunbathing, my phone was indicating that I had a text from Lexie. It read:

Dear Clar,

I'm sorry, but I thought it would better if it was done this way. It's about the Devon Senior Sales job. Due to a long-term illness with their chosen applicant, dad has now been offered the position.

It was nice to have known u & I won't ever forget ya!

Luv

Lex

x

Mum asked, "So, Clarence, who was that texting you just then? James, Ben, Jason?"

I said, "Oh, no, it wasn't either of them. It was Lexie who texted, she's just dumped me and she's moving to Devon."

Hugging me, Claudia said, "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear about Lexie, Clarence. I know I've never met her, but it sounds she was just using you. There's plenty more fish in the sea."

I replied, "Thank you ever so much for your nice kind words."

Friday 8 August

The Japanese city of Hiroshima was destroyed by the most powerful weapon the world had ever known – the atom bomb – in 1945.

It would be hard to imagine, let alone comment, on this moment in time.

This morning, we all set off for the long 4 miles there and back beach walk to Sutton-on-Sea. We all ended up drifting away from each other as we walked.

As we were coming back after looking round the shops, I decided to text James once we'd got back to the caravan. At 7.56 p.m. I wrote:

Hi James,

About us 4 going out on 3rd Sept: well, it's off! Lexie has dumped me; she's moving to Devon, & she'll be gone when I get back from my hols. Cu when I return or when school starts.

Clar

Saturday 9 August

The first official nudists' beach was opened at Brighton in 1979.

I hope these selfish people realise that, if everybody followed their example, all the clothing manufacturers and retailers would go bust, there would be no need to shear sheep, who might suffocate as a result, and all the models would be unemployed.

Today was our caravan site's outdoor sports day and the weather being just perfect, they had us running all the races you can think of from the sack race to the hurdles. I came 3rd in most of them, and Sophia won the egg and spoon race. The last was the 3-legged race. I paired up with Sophia, and as we approached the finish we were just ahead of Adrian and Eddie and just behind the leaders, Daniel, and Kelvin, who suddenly fell in a small dip in the

grass and caught his right foot in the dip and twisted his ankle. Daniel fell right on top of him, so we won, while Claudia and Charlie came last. I couldn't believe how unfit they both are.

I helped Daniel and his mum carry Kelvin back to their caravan. So, only Daniel will be coming on our beach walk on Wednesday to Chapel St Leonard's now.

Sunday 10 August

US President Herbert Hoover was born in 1874.

I'm certain he didn't invent vacuum cleaners in his spare time.

Today mum said, "Right, I just heard on the radio it's going to be a hot day today. So, I think it's about time we all took our usual once a year visit to that massive strawberry field near Sutton-on-Sea. And on the way back we'll get some of those lovely fish and chips, yes?"

Everybody agreed with her, so we took all day strolling along the beach and picking the organic strawberries in the very stuffy humid weather. When we'd finished, we all quickly ran back to the beach to enjoy eating our delicious strawberries and welcomed the lovely freshness of the sea air once again.

At 9.04 p.m. I started thinking about people enjoying their food and for some of them how messy they can get whilst eating it and this had given me my next idea for another *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 12, *Feeding*.

FEEDING

MOTHER

Feeding you is quite a giggle,
As you never cease to wriggle.
The food goes east, west, north, and south.
Most anywhere, but in your mouth.

BABY

I'm so very sorry, Mum,
With 4 fingers and a thumb,
I must confess.
I make a mess,
I'm too speedy.
When I'm greedy
And so, I get jam-packed,
But I'll clean up my act.
As I get used to how it feels
To savour all those lovely meals.

When I had finished my phone beeped. I had a text from James, which read:

Hi Clar,
Sorry about Lexie. To be honest, I couldn't really feel any good vibes from her. A gold digger at heart, I think. A person you can't trust²save your life, unless of course you've won the *lottery!*
The right person is out there somewhere, so don't dwell on it; enjoy the rest of your hols, cu.
James

Monday 11 August

Hadrian was acclaimed Roman Emperor by his troops in AD 117.

It must be almost unique to have a wall named after you. The family spent a few days in the north-west 2 years ago and I was surprised how much of the wall was so well preserved after nearly 2,000 years.

Throughout the night we had the most terrific storm with very strong winds nearly bashing our poor old caravan to kingdom come. It was with such great intensity, that at 1 point it felt as if we weren't firmly on the ground and we could've been lifted into the air and blown away into the

unknown, never to be seen again! It was very exciting and at the same time quite frightening, though I didn't let on. Not surprisingly, not a single person managed to get a good night's sleep, so today we were all shouting about *stupid* little things to 1 another.

By 11.05 a.m. Claudia was telling me off, as usual, about having too much caffeine, when we heard this loud knock on the door. Immediately she opened the door and there stood Adrian and Eddie huddled together under a massive white and red golf umbrella. We had all forgotten they had been coming over. Luckily, we had just enough food to last the day, which consisted of digestives and crisps; nobody wanted to go out in the pouring rain, so we ended up playing Monopoly. It took hours; in the end, Charlie won.

Claudia announced, "Now we're going to Chapel St Leonard's this Wednesday, and we're leaving at 10 o'clock in the morning. Daniel is coming along. Would you like to come too? We have chosen there simply because it's a shorter beach walk than to Sutton, and we haven't gone there yet this year."

I said, "Yes, we'd love to come, but only if the weather is good, of course."

I'm so glad they came around, because it could've been the worst day ever for this holiday.

Tuesday 12 August

Gold was discovered near Dawson City, Yukon Territory in Canada in 1896.

Back in July 1996 there was a nice old couple living in Mr. Leggett's house. Jock was always looking for ways to get rich quick. On 1 of their wedding anniversaries, Shelia bought him a metal detector. I know this because he showed it off to dad and the old penny he had found in his back garden. He was rubbing the mud away and being very excited. "Oh no, it's dated 1934, not 1933! I'll have to start again tomorrow." Apparently, a year out makes a

real difference. Well, all I can think is that 1933 must be a rare year for some reason.

At last, we woke to the sun shining through our caravan windows. Looking through the kitchen's half-empty cupboards, mum suddenly said, "Hmm I think it's about time we did some food shopping."

So, at 10.53 a.m. we all piled into the people carrier and went back to Sutton-on-Sea. None of us children wanted to go, so Claudia and Charlie were left in charge and in the end chose to play tennis and crazy golf. With hired tennis rackets, Sophia and I played against the others, and we had a great time beating them 6 games to 1. After our crazy golf game, we went to the café and sat outside with our delicious chocolate ice creams while we waited for mum.

A good, day with no arguments.

Wednesday 13 August

In Paris, Dr Odin discovered a cancer microbe in 1912 and predicted that this could lead to a cancer vaccine.

It's a good job that there's so much time and money spent on cancer research these days, and it would be a well-merited tribute to Dr Odin if there were to be a breakthrough in the centenary of his discovery in 4 years' time.

Well, I didn't forget to phone dad to remind him about my school exam results letter. It was a good job I managed to get hold of him because he had forgotten. I gave him a rundown on our holiday, about our recent thunderstorm and he told me Topsy's missing us, especially me for some reason. After mum, Sophia and Claudia had all spoken to dad, I mentioned that I would be phoning him again tomorrow, so he can let me know my results.

At 9.55 a.m. Adrian and Eddie came over, and after our goodbyes to mum we set off on our beach walk to Chapel St Leonard's. All the way there and back the weather was

warm but very windy, and we finally arrived at 12.25 p.m. After our fish and chips take-away, we decided to get out of the wind and went into town to spend loads of money in the amusement arcade without winning a penny. Going back, Sophia kept on grabbing David's hat. Everybody was laughing; finally, he had to tell her off and to leave him alone. To my surprise, she did as he pleaded.

Thursday 14 August

New York City actors at the Academy of Music were arrested for wearing costumes on a Sunday in 1901.

That will never to be a worry for those Brighton nudists!

We had heavy showers on and off throughout the day. So, I wasn't in a good mood to phone dad, but I did as I'd promised. Awesome they were: English B, which was surprising; maths A; geography A; history B, wow that was also a surprise; A* for music practical and A for music theory, phew!

Mum said, "This is brilliant news, well done, Clarence, so much better than your last year's mock grades."

Sophia asked, "Why don't we go out and celebrate?"

Mum replied, "Yes, that's a good idea, why don't we all just dodge through the showers and go to straight back to the Creek Tavern?"

Then I had a thought about asking if anyone would like to have a game of pool. But as soon as Charlie offered, I silently cringed. I had forgotten he's a pools champion.

Let's just say I won't be making that mistake again!

Friday 15 August

Lord Mountbatten ended his reign as the last Viceroy of India and joined the spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi in celebrating the success of the hard-fought campaign for Indian freedom from the British Empire in 1947.

I decided to investigate this a little further by looking through my *C to I encyclopaedia* book. With more than

450 million voters, India is the world's largest democracy. Lord Mountbatten left them with a vast network, international ports and working farms and factories, all of which have contributed to industrial success. Today, India has many industries and large modern cities, although 1,000,000s of people still live in extreme poverty.

All day it was extremely hot and very muggy and the only way we could get any breeze was to go back to the beach and stay there for as long as we could. At 12.03 p.m., Claudia asked, "I feel like going for a swim, does anyone want to join me?"

I replied, "No, I'm not in the mood."

Sophia said, "I'm not either, can we play football instead?"

Charlie sighed, "Well, I'm getting hungry, so why don't we just start eating our bacon sandwiches and Victoria sponge cakes and then decide after that?"

Mum said, "Good idea," and we started eating our lunches. But then suddenly a couple behind us started arguing the toss and of course we all had to listen.

The lady demanded quite loudly, "And why are you going to the solicitors then? I can't live like this any longer. This holiday was supposed to help us put things right again, but it hasn't worked, has it? When we go back home, I'm going to seek some advice from my solicitor about custody of Eva and Jackson."

The man whispered, "Please, can you keep your voice down, you're showing us up."

She shouted, "I don't care who's listening," and turned to look in our direction. "I want everybody to know what a useless slob you are," and with her beach bag she marched off leaving him to pack up the rest of their belongings. When things had quietened down the girls decided to nominate us boys to go and buy 5 chocolate ice creams.

Charlie and I were just about to enter the café when the same couple were being ushered out by a red-faced lady manageress saying, "...And for your information we

expect our customers to behave appropriately in our café. You're quite welcome to buy things from the shop, but you 2 are now barred from this café permanently."

I wouldn't like to be a fly on a wall in their house.

Saturday 16 August

Jesse Owens, the Black American athlete, won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936, much to the chagrin of Adolf Hitler, who believed in Nordic supremacy and refused to shake the winner's hand.

How pitiful. A big man making himself look small. Yep! No wonder he couldn't win a great war.

Today I woke up just in time to catch the weather forecast on the radio: rain all day. So, mum suggested that we should spend some of our rainy-day cash and we ended up back in the Creek Tavern once again. We all thought this was a great idea. While we were eating our fish and chips, the manger suddenly walked over and put on the TV, then we all watched the Beijing Olympics. Usain Bolt won the 100-metre dash, and not surprisingly, in 9.69 seconds, breaking his own record in the process. We couldn't believe it as we watched his performance, which makes me wonder: how can anybody (or any gadget, for that matter) measure a hundredth of a second?

We finished the evening off with Sophia having a go at *Diamonds are Forever* on the karaoke. It was so bad that all the other customers started *sniggering* and talking loudly over her. Sneakily, we left and waited for her outside. She didn't speak to us for the rest of the evening. With a little training, she could be a very good bass.

Sunday 17 August

300 people in the south of France were poisoned after eating rye bread made from ergot-infected grain in 1951. Three died and 50 went insane.

That shows you need to be careful what you eat. I've never

picked mushrooms in case they turned out to be toadstools.

We were all on the beach when mum's phone rang. Afterwards she announced, "Everybody, that was Auntie Phyl. She's coming here with cousin Emma tomorrow, arriving at about midday and they will be staying for the afternoon."

I said, "That's nice." The others didn't say anything. Sophia said nothing from the moment she got up, still fuming about yesterday. But her mood soon changed when I woke up in terrible pain. I had been sunbathing and had forgotten all about piling on the suntan lotion. I was as red as a beetroot.

Sophia laughed, "Ha! You're so *stupid* sometimes and this has made up for yesterday." I wasn't in a mood to retaliate, so I ignored her for the rest of the day.

Monday 18 August

200,000 railway workers, carters and stevedores went on strike in sympathy with striking Liverpool seamen in 1911.

It strikes me (no pun intended) that there is an urgent need for statisticians to calculate whether the employers or the (non) workers win the day more often. 1 thing is sure: the customers always lose.

I had the most painful sleepless night ever. Auntie Phyl and cousin Emma finally arrived at 1.01 p.m. Apparently; there were lots of hold-ups due to road works. At 1.14 p.m. we all walked down to the beach. Mum and Auntie Phyl started reminiscing about their good old school days and when Auntie Phyl started dating dad's twin brother, Uncle Anton; how they made her sister, Auntie Christine's life a complete misery, and how Auntie Christine finally got her own back on them by making special home-made dinners, puddings, and drinks, where I can only guess what went inside them. Then Auntie Phyl remembered how the move went, then it was how Uncle Anton's new computer job

came about.

Then suddenly Sophia started burying Emma in the sand and took quite a few photos of us all; then she wanted to bury me. My skin was still very sore, so I wouldn't let her. They all laughed, why? I didn't think it was even the slightest bit funny.

After our picnic, we walked towards the caravan and Auntie Phyl drove back to their brand-new house in Northampton.

Tuesday 19 August

ITV soap opera Coronation Street celebrated the 1,000th episode in 1970.

I read somewhere that the plan was to screen only a few episodes and then take stock. More than half a century later, mum says there is 1 of the original cast members still playing the same role. I reckon he has forgotten his own name by now.

According to the weather forecast it would be a good day for our usual annual beach walk to Mogs Eye, with our cricket set packed ready to play once we reach there. Well, this time the weatherman got it totally wrong. Pointing upwards, Sophia shouted, "Hey! I can see massive, dark clouds up ahead! I bet you it's going to pour down in a minute."

Mum replied, "It's a good job we've brought our jackets along with us." Just then the heavens opened, and I mean really opened. So, we headed straight for the old, smelly, abandoned toilets. All of us were absolutely bursting to go – everybody wanted a wee except for me, I needed a poo. In the end, they all decided against going into the loos. But I couldn't face going behind a bush, so thank goodness mum had a few pocket tissues in her beach bag. I carefully laid most of the single sheets down on the disgusting seat as best as I could. This is the fastest poo I've ever done while holding my nose.

Afterwards we decided to risk walking back. To cheer ourselves once we reached our destination, we bought wrapped take-away fish and chips and ate them in the caravan with a nice hot cup of tea, the best cup of tea ever!

Wednesday 20 August

When the pleasure cruiser Marchioness collided at night with a dredger on the river Thames in 1989, it cost the lives of 26 partygoers.

What makes this dreadful accident even worse is the fact that the victims were just trying to enjoy themselves.

At 9.16 a.m. Claudia and Charlie left for Sutton-on-Sea, leaving the 3 of us behind. Mum smiled. "I know he hasn't smoked in here, but this caravan does still smell of smoke and joss sticks." Sophia and I agreed to do a spring clean.

Sophia grumbled, "I can't stand the bloke, he's such a weirdo. I try my hardest to make conversation with him, but all I get is *Uh*, or *cool* and that's it."

I told her, "Well, he's 22 years old and he met Claudia when he was playing with his band at their local shopping centre."

Sophia smirked, "Wow, I raise my hat to you, sir."

Mum smiled. "Let's just hope she doesn't end up marrying the guy. I recently bought this nice big rich chocolate cake because I just knew they'd want to go out on their own 1 day."

After our massive slices with our big mugs of coffee to wash it down with, we went back to the beach.

They both met up with us at 6.04 p.m. and we all ended up back in the Creek Tavern having a go and losing at Bingo.

Thursday 21 August

Soviet tanks rolled into the Czechoslovakian capital, Prague, in 1968 ending with Alexander Dubcek's extensive reforms, which had been introduced over the previous nine months.

How quickly the world can change. So, 40 years later the Soviet Union has ceased to exist, and the Czechs and Slovaks have gone their separate ways.

I can't wait for this time next week because that's when we're all going back to Appletown. *Yippee!* Compared with last year's holiday, this 1 has so far been terrible. There have been countless arguments and horrendous weather conditions we have had to contend with so far.

Friday 22 August

The world's most famous painting, Leonardo da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', was stolen from the Louvre in Paris in 1911.

When I first saw the Mona Lisa, I couldn't believe she was supposed to be smiling. She looked bored to me!

By 12.34 p.m. we are all sunbathing, having a nice time on the beach in perfect weather.

Then we saw 2 men going around with clipboards. At 1.58 p.m. it was our turn to be rudely interrupted. "Hi there, isn't it a lovely day today! Please let me introduce myself, my name is Ted McClain and over there is my fellow campaigner, Freddy Hickson."

Mum moaned, "Whatever you're selling, we're not interested, thank you."

Shaking his head, Ted smiled. "Oh no, we're not selling anything, you see we're protesting about the wind farm proposal."

Mum asked, "Are they planning to do this here then?"

Ted replied, "Yes, they're going to be placed between Anderby Village and Anderby Creek, spoiling our lovely sea view in the process. So, the reason why we're both here this week is because we're asking people whether

they could attend next Thursday's meeting in the community hall at 7 p.m. Or if not, would they mind signing this protest form instead."

Claudia said, "Well, believe it or not, I'm for using wind turbines. But I wouldn't want them in my back garden, so to speak. Well, I'd prefer firms making electricity by using the sea waves, and when I get my own home, I'll be getting solar panels on my roof for definite. Well, we're all on holiday and unfortunately, we're due to go back home on that day, but I can put my name down on your sheet."

In the end we all signed the form and wished them good luck with their campaign.

Claudia is not a big supporter of wind turbines, so that was a surprise!

Saturday 23 August

Scenes of fanatical hero worship marked the funeral of rock and roll king, Elvis Presley, in 1977.

The real tribute to Elvis is that he is as popular now as he was in the 1960s. There has never been a pop singer who inspired so many impersonators.

Through our windows we saw Daniel and his mum helping Kelvin back into their car. We walked over to say our goodbyes as they went back to their home in Leeds. The rest of the day we 4, Adrian and Eddie, were dossing around the caravan site in the hot sun talking about last year. Adrian laughed, "Ha! Have I ever mentioned to you lot about the time when we took part in a charity static line parachute jump in St Neots?"

I said, "No what's that about then?"

He replied, "Well, first we were all taught how to jump, which took place the day before, and then the following morning we went up in the plane. That was a bit scary, I can tell you. I took the first plunge, then it was Eddie's turn."

Sophia asked, "What was it like? It must've felt wonderful, something you'll never forget, I'd imagine."

He grinned, "Yes, it was the best thing ever, but then I must tell you about this girl who just wouldn't jump the first-time round. But she then changed her mind and had to wait until the afternoon to go back up to take the jump again on the next flight. You should've been there because it was hilarious. She jumped, then she got stuck holding on to the bottom of the plane, so she was pushed off."

For ages we laughed about it, but at least she was brave enough to go up there again.

Sunday 24 August

George Stubbs, the artist who specialised in painting horses, was born in Liverpool in 1724.

If I could paint, I would prefer portraits; although I wouldn't be able to pretend that an ugly face was pretty.

Adrian and Eddie went back home to Derby. The rest of the day was spent on the beach getting on each other's nerves once again. Not long now, only 5 days to go until we all go back home to Appletown.

Monday 25 August *Bank & public holiday, England, Wales and Republic of Ireland*

Allied troops taking control of Paris in 1944 were greeted by 15 miles of cheering crowds.

Not the way most people would've wanted to pay their first visit to the French capital, but the warmth of their reception must've gratified the troops.

Rain and yet more rain, so we stayed inside the caravan until it finally stopped at midday.

Mum suggested, "I think it's about time we all went out for some fresh air and go to the local shop, yes?"

Sophia nodded, "Oh, I'm so with you there, good idea, Mum."

15 minutes later, Claudia screamed. “Whoa! Ouch! Oh no! I’ve just banged my right arm and it really, really hurts, ouch!”

Sophia shouted, “Hey, look! Claudia’s gone and missed the front doorstep and she’s fallen, just look at this wet muddy grass, it’s gone all over her hands, face, and clothes.”

Bending down, Charlie said, “Oh no, here, just let me help you up,” but then he slipped too and landed right next to Claudia’s legs, and we all just started laughing, including Claudia.

We all finally managed to leave the caravan at 1.15 p.m.

Tuesday 26 August

Julius Caesar landed in Britain in 55 BC.

He was by no means the last invader. I suppose it would’ve seemed strange for them to see a country with many trees and without long straight roads.

Mum thought it was time that we went to the Bottons Pleasure Beach in Skegness. The day started out well with no family disputes. By 12.30 p.m. we were all coming away from the ghost train ride and it was pouring down with rain yet again and everything changed. Mum called it a day.

Sophia moaned, “Why can’t we just go to that amusement arcade over there? It might stop.”

Mum didn’t agree. “And it might not,” she began, “we don’t have much money, and anyway do you want to go to the fish and chip shop, or do you want some Cheerios?”

Sophia answered, “Or we could end up eating in some posh restaurant.”

To change the atmosphere, I turned the news on. Barack Obama had just been nominated by a major political party to stand for President of the United States.

I said, “Now, I wonder how many people will end up

voting for him?" Then suddenly we had some peace and quiet at last. My little diversion had worked. Phew!

At 7.34 p.m. I started thinking about what happened today in Skegness. I decided to go and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 13, *Tears and Smiles*.

TEARS AND SMILES

MOTHER

Sometimes when you start to cry,
I'm not sure if you're in pain.
And need me to mollify.
Or just showing off again,
But 1 lesson I have learned.
When you play *Jekyll and Hyde*
Your tears can often be turned.
To happy smiles a mile wide.

BABY

I can't cry when you tickle my toes.
Or pull funny faces at me,
I forget why I cried I suppose.
So, then I respond happily.

Wednesday 27 August

Russian Air Service Lieutenant Pyotr Nikolayevich Nesterov was arrested for looping the loop in his aeroplane in 1913. He was the first person in the world to achieve this feat.

Yesterday's crime became today's entertainment.

More showers again, so yet again it was staying in the caravan. For most of the day mum was as usual tidying up after everybody, but Sophia, Claudia and Charlie were all busy listening to their iPods, reading their eBooks and texting their mates. But suddenly out of the blue so did I. James had sent me yet another text which read:

Hi Clar,

NEWS FLASH! Markus has 6 months at Her Majesty's pleasure. Mr. Leggett caught him stealing expensive gold necklaces/cash from his house. Cu when u get home in a few days.

James

Mum asked, "So, who's that texting you, Clarence?"

Smiling, I replied, "James. He's just told me that Markus has been locked up for 6 months for raiding our neighbour's house, Mr. Leggett's, of all places."

She laughed, "Ha! Ha! Yes! Now, that's worth a double celebration!"

So, we dodged the showers and headed straight back to the Creek Tavern. We ended up playing Bingo again and surprisingly mum won it. With her £20 winnings she bought each of us big take-away packets of fish and chips. Luckily the rain had just stopped, so we took them to eat on the beach and watched the sunset.

Thursday 28 August

Richard Wagner's Lohengrin was performed for the first time at Weimar in 1850.

I had to wait another 150 years to hear this masterpiece, but it was worth the wait.

After our delicious cheese and pickle sandwiches, we packed our suitcases and bags ready for going home. Just before we left, mum had her last quick tidy-up and treated the caravan windows with a Vaseline pot, so they wouldn't rust over the winter months. Apparently, she'd read this in 1 of her women's magazines.

We finally got home at 7.13 p.m. As soon as we walked through the front door, Topsy was wagging her tail, licking our faces and we could smell dad's wonderful cooking of sausages, oven chips, fried eggs, and beans, drifting out and across from the kitchen area for the rest of us to eat; it

was great because we were all starving.

Friday 29 August

Dr Martin Luther King made his famous speech calling for racial harmony in 1963.

A lot has happened since then. There are black pupils in my class at school and there are no more rows and scraps than you would ordinarily expect.

Claudia and Charlie left at 11.30 p.m. Apparently; Charlie wants Claudia to go to his mum's house in Hull for a week before they return to their studies on 7 September. As soon as they left, I went straight upstairs to my bedroom and opened my long-awaited big packet of wine gums and indulged the lot to celebrate. Topsy followed me. Sometimes I have often wished mum had brought home a nice outdoorsy type of cat instead.

At 7.03 p.m. I went upstairs to my bedroom to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem 14, *Be Careful with Fluffy the Cat*.

BE CAREFUL WITH FLUFFY THE CAT

BABY

There's this big fluffy ball living in our house every day,
Right now, it's lying down on a mat on the kitchen floor,
If I pull a little here and there it may come and play.
Ouch! That hurt me, no I don't think I like you anymore.

MOTHER

Now, love, you must be very careful with Fluffy our cat.
You can't go around pulling her long golden hair.
Look! She's trying to go back to sleep on the kitchen mat.
She's old and she needs to be stroked, with lots of care.

Saturday 30 August

A 'hotline' was established between the Kremlin in Moscow and the White House in Washington to improve communications in 1963.

I suppose it must've had the desired effect. And I do believe there haven't been any open conflicts between them since.

I thought mum would be very tired all day, but she wasn't. She was right there in her element singing to her Abba songs as she sorted out all the dirty washing and caught up on Twitter and Facebook. She even phoned up Annie and told her all about our caravan holiday, and then she took Topsy out and even stopped off to buy some stuff at the Co-op on the way back home.

Sophia and dad were out all day. Sophia went to Zoe's and dad was at work; then he went to The Black Pig.

No piano lesson either: Mr. Willis had to cancel, something about his mother being poorly. Then James phoned saying, "Hey Clarence! You never guess what?"

I said, "Your parents have got you a nice new bike?"

He laughed, "No. So, I've just had a phone call from Jason, he told me that Ben has a brand-new girlfriend."

I asked, "Really, so who is she?"

He shouted, "Well! It's Gorgeous Tammy Page from school! And you'll never guess where he met her."

I suggested, "At a bus stop?"

He sighed, "No. He met her in Woodsfield Park."

I asked, "Wonder how long this relationship will last?"

He said, "I've absolutely no idea."

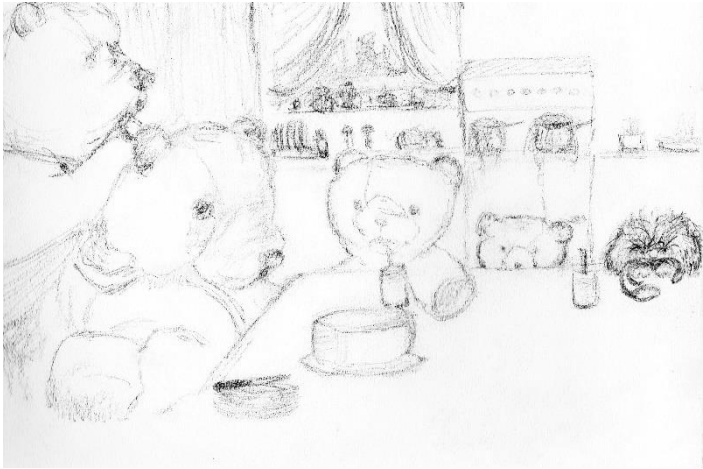
I replied, "Well, we'll just have to see then, won't we."

Sunday 31 August

Coca Cola was on sale in Britain for the first time in 1900.

That was a long time ago. Wow, I'm amazed.

This was the longest August ever! Roll on September!



September has...

A special day when granny and granddad
Are honoured by the family.

Granddad tells tales of when he was a lad.
While children listen happily.

Monday 1 September

In America, the law on the employment of children under the age of sixteen was amended in 1916 so that they were not allowed to work at night, more than eight hours a day or in the mines.

That tells you all you need to know (and probably prefer not to know) about the kind of life I could've lived if I had been born a century earlier.

A week tomorrow I'll be going back to school. Markus isn't there for the next couple of months, and I have to say I'm glad about that. Colin will be the only person missing him. Wait a minute, Colin might end up taking his place. Oh no... what a nightmare! It could be just as bad as before. Oh blimey! Now I've really got something to look forward to!

Tuesday 2 September

The Great Fire of London started in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane in 1666.

No shortage of toast for breakfast that day. Obviously, this was a dreadful calamity, the only consolation being that the inferno helped to banish the Great Plague from the capital.

Last night I had a dream that I was on my own sitting on the seat in Woodsfield Park by the duck pond, and as it was a nice warm day, I'd gone there with Topsy.

Afterwards we walked to the Co-op, and I bought a massive bar of Cadbury's fruit and nut chocolate bar, yummy!

Wednesday 3 September

Britain declared war against Germany in 1939.

Anyone still alive who served in the army, navy or air force would be over 80 now. In a few years' time there won't be anybody left to tell us what it was like from personal experience.

Lexie and I should've had a few hours with James and Katrina today. I'm glad now it was cancelled because the weather was diabolical with winds up to 80 miles per hour and I wouldn't have got all my hours in on the piano either.

Thursday 4 September

By the end of this day immediately after the start of the Second World War in 1939, nearly a million children had been evacuated from London and other major cities to safer areas.

It must've been frightening, especially for the very young children to be taken from mum and dad and looked after by complete stranger's miles from home.

At 9.16 a.m. I was coming downstairs and overheard dad talking to mum in the kitchen. “Now, what about this Saturday? I know I’ve booked the day off, although I’d really prefer to stay at home, work in the garden and look after Topsy rather than go to this *stupid* wedding.”

If I were mum, I would’ve let him stay at home and his son Clarence as well if he wanted to. But mum was furious. Storming out of the kitchen she made a phone call to Annie.

She said, “Hello, Annie, would you mind doing us all a favour and dog-sit all day for us on Saturday? That’s great. You’ve got nothing else planned and we won’t forget her food and basket, that’s fantastic. Thank you very much. Bye, love.”

She told dad, “Hard luck, you’re definitely coming because Annie has offered to look after Topsy for us.” With a huff and a puff my poor dad went out to sulk in the shed at the bottom of the garden.

Friday 5 September

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was wound up in 1991 following a spate of declarations of independence by member countries.

I’ve still got an atlas published in the 1950s, but I couldn’t find several of the countries that I know today. Never mind – so long as England is still there it doesn’t matter.

Mum had a letter from my future fat, lazy step-granddad. Gary wrote about their wedding plans. As well as us, they have also invited a few friends from their street and their day centre. There’s going to be a big posh marquee in their back garden, and we’re all going to eat our celebratory lunch of fish and chips; that’s my grandparents for you.

So, we’re all going back up north to visit Granny Roberts’, soon to be Granny Price’s house. Only 5 years ago she was living in Manchester, and now we’ve got to drive up to Scarborough. Yet another long journey. Great!

At 6.37 pm. I started thinking about taking journeys in

cars, so I went upstairs to my bedroom to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 15, *To Granny's by Car*.

TO GRANNY'S BY CAR

BABY

We're off to somewhere now.
In this thing on wheels,
It's making an awful row.
I'll soon know how it feels.
To sit inside and go.
My tummy's rather queer
This could be fun, although.
I'm glad my mummy's near.

MOTHER

Yes, you'll like your first drive.
In daddy's nice new car,
Granny's home is not far.
And we'll soon arrive.
She longs to feast her eyes.
On just how much you've grown
And how the time has flown.

Major Roads to Scarborough

A28

A2-M2

M25-Dartford Tunnel

M25 North

Circular M/Way – M1 going North

Junction 44 turn right onto the A464

Saturday 6 September

Sir Len Hutton died in 1990.

Granddad Upton-Smyth only had to hear the name of this distinguished English cricketer mentioned to set him off on a lavish tribute. He got so carried away that he never noticed we'd all nipped away for a cup of coffee.

Getting to Scarborough was a total nightmare. We had numerous stops at the service stations, hold-ups, roundabouts, and zebra crossings. I've no idea why dad always insists on driving when it comes to long journeys. "What the hell... what do you think you're doing, get out of our way, *stupid* woman," and "*Aaah! Stop! For pity's sake! You could've killed that young girl, blithering idiot! Old gits like you shouldn't be let loose on our ROADS!*"

As usual I could tell that mum wasn't best pleased, as she kept on looking away with rolling eyes, not saying a single word. It's a good job he never opens his side window.

We finally arrived with only 20 minutes to go. Granny Roberts kept Gary and the rest of us waiting for a further 10 minutes. She eventually hobbled down the aisle with her walking stick, all breathless and flush-faced, looking nice in her long, light pink dress and short white veil. Then we had to go out and straight onto the steps of the building. Suddenly, from nowhere, there was this gust of wind and Granny's veil was blown straight into my new step-granddad's face. After *sniggering* and pretending to smile, Granny finally threw her flowers up into the air. As they came down, Sophia caught them with a beaming smile on her face.

Afterwards, we all had horrible disgusting fish and chips in the hired posh marquee in their picturesque garden. The 3-tier cake was delicious, made by the now Granny Price herself. At least I know now how mum inherited her talent for cooking. The best man's speech was virtually non-existent.

The music they provided was this old bloke playing jazzy songs on his old 1980s electric keyboard. When they all started getting drunk and singing and dancing to Frank Sinatra's *My Way*, dad decided it was time to make our excuses and quickly left.

Dad's mood never changes when he's driving, so coming back in the dark was a lot scarier. Falling asleep in the car when dad's driving is never an option.

At least Topsy was very glad to see us.

Sunday 7 September

The first Miss America beauty contest was held in New Jersey with eight contestants in 1921.

In 10 years', time I can see Sophia and Claudia both showing off at the Miss UK Beauty Contest: Sophia and her rival contestants telling the judges about their hobbies and what they would like to do in the future, and Claudia with her fellow protesters shouting out "Rights for women!" with the possibility of imprisonment!

All day I was still half asleep from yesterday's very *exciting* day. Poor old dad had to go to work and mum spent all the morning updating her Twitter and Facebook pages. Sophia and I slouched around in our pyjamas, making the best of what time we had left before starting back at school on Tuesday.

I couldn't even find the energy to write my yesterday's entry, so I did that today as well.

Monday 8 September

General Dwight Eisenhower broadcast the news of Italy's surrender in 1945.

The Italians are much better at opera and football.

This morning, I got my school bag all packed, then after my dinner of fish and chips I got out my uniform to see if anything was missing from what I had to wear on my first

day back at school; there wasn't.

At 8.15 p.m. I started thinking about getting ready for the following day, which gave me yet another idea for my next *Mother & Baby* poem, so I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 16, *Clothes*.

CLOTHES

BABY

My cupboards are full of clothes.
Vests, dungarees, baby-grows.
Hats, coats, gloves, and socks galore
So, I don't need any more.

MOTHER

I know you have a lot of gear.
Oh, but I can tell you, my dear,
The things you wore at first were small.
Now they no longer fit at all.
Just think how long your clothes would last.
If you did not grow up so fast.

Tuesday 9 September

Soap rationing ended in Britain in 1950.

A whole decade when boys could justify not washing behind their ears.

The first day back at school, but Sophia and I didn't seem to mind. The fact that the sun was shining straight through our big kitchen window could've had something to do with it.

I expected to find Colin now as our top male bully, but I was a little surprised when I walked into registration and spotted at the back of the class a new boy sitting on his own. He looked as if he could be a lot of trouble. He had his hands interlocked behind his short straight blond hair

and his legs were sprawled out nearly touching Ben's chair in front. It turns out that his name is Matt Roddy, and he has the same *pathetic* attitude and is the spitting image of Draco Malfoy in the *Harry Potter* films. He laughed, "Ha! Hey, you, what's your name? It wouldn't be ginger nut, would it?"

I said, "No, and would you please excuse me, your legs are blocking my way."

He replied, "So what then, why don't you go the other way instead, ginger nut?"

Karen turned around. "Hey, new boy! He's Clarence, we all call him Clueless, because that's exactly what he is." And everybody started chucking pens and rubbers at me.

Luckily Mr. Spurgeon walked into the classroom. "Calm down! You all need to stop this nonsense right now! Pick up those items, and everybody will be doing detention in the cooler during morning break."

So, it now looks as if Colin and his gang have new competition on their hands. Great!

Wednesday 10 September

Steffi Graf from Germany won the US Open Championship in 1988 to become the first tennis player to win all four of the major tournaments, Wimbledon, France and Australia.

I'm hopeless at tennis, although I do love playing it. I will make it to Wimbledon someday.

This new boy, Ruthless Matt, is a lot worse than Markus.

In the canteen I was on my own eating my Wednesday chip lunch and minding my own business, when suddenly Colin and his best mate in tow, Crazy Craig Mason, chose to join me. They wanted to know if I had anything on Matt.

I didn't disappoint them. "Well, this morning just before registration, Mr. McGann caught him and Lisa standing in the main corridor at the bottom of the stairs. They were shouting at each other, so he made them do

detention in the cooler.”

Craig asked, “Wow! Well, I wonder what that was all about?”

Colin said, “I don’t know, though it’s been rumoured that he’s Lisa’s new next-door neighbour, so perhaps it’s something to do with that.”

Let’s hope that all this new interest in Matt could end up being a blessing in disguise for me.

Thursday 11 September

Black Americans rioted in Atlanta, Georgia in 1966 protesting about racial discrimination.

That subject again. I’ve already said more than enough.

Sick! Colin was right: Matt is Lisa’s new neighbour. Apparently, Matt is in his bedroom every evening until late, with his strange mates playing loud heavy metal music, and their bedroom side walls are adjacent.

Also, in the lunchbreak I had a voicemail from Ben saying Colin fancies Lisa.

Friday 12 September

In 1967 Governor Reagan called for the escalation of the Vietnam war.

So much for all those protests and look where it got them.

Well, I had a hassle-free day because, from morning right through to home time, Colin and his mates decided to gang up on Matt. Oh yes, and at last all the geography students finally got to meet our brand-new teacher, Mr. Sim. He must be at least 45 or 46 years old, has light brown hair and seems to be extremely clumsy. Because, straight after introducing himself, he somehow managed to trip over Colin’s feet; then his pen flew out of his hand!

He shouted, “That wasn’t funny! Now, where’s my pen?”

James said, “Sir, here, I’ve got it, it landed by my foot.”

Then Lisa handed me a note, which read; ‘Blundering Mr. Sim – pass it on.’ Hilarious!

Saturday 13 September

White students opposed to desegregation boycotted classes, rioted, and attacked black students in 1974.

September seems to be the month when we can’t get away from white and black, Chelsea FC, or disasters or anything else monotonous for that matter.

Mum had a phone call from the wedding organiser about our booked 8 November catering. “Clarence, the couple have decided to do a *Blues Brothers* themed wedding. They’ve got their singers, and they’ve asked me to ask you if you can play the songs from the film. I told them you could. I know I shouldn’t have gone ahead without asking you, but we are a little short of money.”

I snapped, “I don’t even like that style of music. I don’t know this early 1980s *Blues Brothers* film!”

Mum grovelled. “I’m so, so sorry, Clarence, but you do know I couldn’t really turn them down, and you do have well over a month to start practising.”

Luckily my piano lesson was due, so when I got there, I asked Mr. Willis if he could teach me these tunes. Afterwards he lent me his *Blues Brothers* sheet music, and he suggested I should hire it from the library or ask a friend if I could borrow it. I thanked him, and as I was leaving his house, I phoned Ben to ask if he’s got it in his DVD collection.

Ben said, “Yep! You can come tomorrow at 2 o’clock.”

Sunday 14 September

In a bizarre episode in 1978, Georgi Markov, a Bulgarian defector, was poisoned by a tiny capsule in a pellet-gun hidden in an umbrella which stabbed him in broad daylight in central London. He died four days later.

This is a complicated way to kill somebody. I’m surprised

the plan succeeded. Still, I don't expect to have reason to consult a library book entitled *A Helpful Guide to Those with Murder in Mind*.

Well, I practised the *Blues Brothers* music, but I couldn't really get into it, so I dropped it.

I reached Ben's house at 2.01 p.m. and apologised for being 1 minute late. Ben didn't even notice. "Hi, Clarence, you might not like the music, but if you like watching extremely funny films with car crashes, shootings, a violent nun, army tanks and helicopters, then, Clarence, you're in for a treat, mate."

3 hours later I came out of Ben's place excited, though not quite hook line and sinker, but it was close. Let's just hope nobody ends up dying.

I raced home and went straight to the piano and did my best blues piano pieces ever so far.

Monday 15 September

Tanks were used in battle for the first time in 1916 by the British army against German forces.

Not a very subtle way of reducing world population to preserve resources. Sadly, whenever an engineer, a scientist or medical researcher stumbles on a brilliant way of improving the future prospects for people, some other entertaining character will use the discovery to achieve the opposite effect. Think of drugs – or the computer.

Ordered online dad's Flying Scotsman model locomotive for his birthday present.

Tuesday 16 September

The first copier able to produce documents at the press of a button was launched by Haloid in 1959.

Despite my pessimistic comments yesterday, I must confess this has proved to be an asset without exception.

Matt is no longer on his own. He now has a gang of boys and girls behind him. In English, Matt, and his new best mate Lanky Luke Stevens backchatted at Blunt Mr. Groves, of all teachers. Luke laughed, “Ha! Well, Mr Groves, who’s going to be cooking your dinner tonight, then? Could it be your darling wife, or will it be your...mum?”

Matt said, “His mum, of course! I’ve heard on the grape vine he’s left his wife, is that true...sir?”

Mr. Groves shouted, “Luke and Matt! Please go and stand in front of the whole class with your backs facing us and stay there until the end of the lesson! Don’t ever do that again!” Afterwards they had to tidy up after everybody in the canteen. Ha! Serve them right!

All evening, I practised playing Mr. Willis’s *Blues Brothers* music.

Wednesday 17 September

In 1940, after several weeks watching the RAF winning the Battle of Britain in the air and counting the cost of Luftwaffe losses, Adolf Hitler abandoned Operation Sea Lion, his intended invasion of Britain.

It still took the man with the comical moustache another 5 years to accept defeat.

I’m a little bit annoyed, but in some ways I’m very glad because today I learnt that Mr. Collins will be taking his pupils down to Portsmouth next Thursday and Friday to study Nelson’s private life and his battles as a general. So, Matt and Luke should be going for sure.

Also, James told me, “Have you heard the latest news, Clarence?”

I asked, “No, I haven’t. What’s this all about then?”

He replied, “Well get this. Colin is now dating...Lisa. That’s a turn up for the books, isn’t it!”

I said, “Are you definitely 100% sure about this?”

He grinned. “Yep! Well, I ‘accidentally’ overheard Lisa telling Karen all about it.” Wonderful!

Thursday 18 September

After twelve days of talks at Camp David in Maryland, Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel signed a peace treaty between the two countries in 1978.

Having read about events in the Middle East over many years, it seems to me that this has been 1 of the very few occasions when something remotely encouraging has happened in relations between these neighbouring states. However, just look at the picture now (or not, if you're squeamish).

All day, mum was busy in the kitchen preparing for the birthday party at the Town Hall of a well-known spoilt daddy's girl, soon to be 13 years old, called Amelia Pritchard. The phone rang as I was just about to leave for school, so I answered.

It was her posh dad: "Yes, hello, this is Mr. Pritchard speaking, I'm just phoning to discuss my daughter's 13th birthday party arrangements. Please, is it possible for you to play and sing any Elvis, Queen, Standau Ballet, and Abba songs? I'm sorry for the lateness of my call, but we are a very busy family, and we simply forgot to make this special request earlier. If you can do this for her, we would be very grateful. Thank you."

At 4.10 p.m. I started thinking about people going out to parties, so I went upstairs to my bedroom to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 17, *The Party Invitation*.

THE PARTY INVITATION

BABY

Mummy, what's this I've got here I'm showing you?
It looks fun with lots of things that I could do.

MOTHER

Oh look, you've got a birthday party invite.
From your nursery friend who lives over the road there.

We can't let them down, so we must be polite.
We'll shop for a card and gift like a cuddly teddy bear.

Then after my fish and chips dinner, I went into the lounge and for the rest of the evening right up to 1 a.m., trying not to strain my voice, I quietly sang these artists' songs myself on the piano. Nobody dared to complain – so they didn't.

Friday 19 September

Thomas John Barnardo, an Irish doctor who founded Barnardo's Children's Homes, died in 1905.

I notice that the men and women who dedicate themselves to helping young people to make the best they can of their lives are nearly always already in important jobs, yet still manage to squeeze in extra hours and days to launch new ventures, like the worthy Dr B.

Last night's party was just dreadful. In a week's time I'm going to be a new member of Appletown's Young Singers Group!

Oh yes, I was just about to leave for school when we had a knock on the door. Thank God dad had already gone to work, because I had to sign for his Flying Scotsman model locomotive. Blimey, he'll soon be 49, so in a year's time he'll reach 50. Now that is old.

Saturday 20 September

Ferdinand Magellan started his round-the-world voyage in 1519.

That long ago, he would not have had much idea what he might encounter on such a journey.

At 10.13 a.m. Dad opened my birthday present and he nearly squashed me half to death.

He said, "Oh, thank you, Clarence, this is the best present I've ever had from you. Well, I can't really

concentrate on it just now, because I've planned to meet up with a few of my mates in The Black Pig in just under an hour's time, but I promise you when I get back home, I'll play with it then. Thank you again, son," and he went off with a big smile on his face – for once.

During my piano lesson I told Mr. Willis I had decided to join his singing group. He smiled. "Clarence, I'm glad, this is wonderful news. So, I'll see you next Friday and Saturday then."

Sunday 21 September *International Day of Peace*

Stonehenge was sold at an auction at Salisbury for £6,000 in 1915.

Even if I were to convert that sum into today's prices, I believe that the mysterious buyer must have struck a bargain. If he or she had waited for another century or so, the buyer could have transported it (stone by stone, of course) to the Antiques Road Show for valuation first.

Today was a warm day for September, so Ben and I took Topsy around the block. I'm so glad we did just as we were entering Woodsfield Park, we came across a medium-sized brown sack on the edge of the lake. Suddenly Topsy started *whimpering*, so we went over to investigate. I decided to open it and there inside were 5 of the cutest brown puppies ever, all of them struggling to stay alive. Ben said, "I know, I've got my phone, why don't I phone the RSPCA?"

I said, "Yes, good idea." They came about an hour later and took them away.

When I got home, mum asked, "Why do you look so sad? Did something happen on your walk?"

I said, "Well yes, actually, something did happen: Ben and I saved a few mongrel puppies from suffocating."

She asked, "How was that then?"

I replied, "Well, Ben, Topsy and I came across this sack on the edge of the lake and there were 5 barely alive

brown puppies inside. Ben had the idea of ringing the RSPCA and they ended up taking them away. It was just horrible; no animal should suffer like that. I don't know how people can be so cruel."

She sighed, "Yes, I agree with you. It was a good job that you and Ben were there, because those puppies would've died for certain. You know, most people would love to have their very own puppy, but now that the RSPCA are involved, they'll soon have good homes to go to. Well done, love."

Monday 22 September

British viewers witnessed the debut of independent television in 1955.

For the first time, viewers were able to see lovely advertisements repeated at intervals so that they could soon recite them by heart. Nowadays the voices are so incredibly loud that you can't hear them because your fingers are thrust in your ears.

Well, all last night I couldn't go to sleep. I kept on thinking about the puppies. But I needn't have worried, because during registration Ben came up to me. "Hey, Clarence, I've just received a phone call from the RSPCA. They told me that they have managed to save all 5 puppies, and they've got 3 families to look after them. Also, they've said that the police have arrested some bloke already for doing it."

I asked, "It wasn't Colin, Craig or Matt, was it?"

Ben replied, "Oh, no, they've all just walked into the classroom, unfortunately."

It's autumn now, only 3 more months to go and Thursday 1 January will soon be in my sights! Can't wait!

Tuesday 23 September

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, died in 1939.

Ah, that must be the fellow who wore a Freudian slip (whatever that is).

When I got home from school at 3.34 p.m., I wanted to practice the *Blues Brothers* music, but I couldn't! It wasn't anywhere to be seen. I looked inside the piano stool, under the stairs and in amongst the books on the lounge book shelves, in the kitchen, in my bedroom and the study. Finally, at 10 p.m. I did find it, of all places, under a pile of books in the hallway. I've no idea who put it there. Mr. Willis's sheet music will be living under my bed from now on!

Wednesday 24 September

Ninety Soviet diplomats were sent home from the UK accused of spying in 1971.

Surely half a dozen would have done a better job. Nearly a hundred people dressed to look ordinary (I assume) would arouse my suspicions if I was looking for spies.

Because of yesterday's missed practising, I had to catch up, so did 7 hours on the *Blues Brothers* music. Only 6 more weeks to go.

Thursday 25 September

President Eisenhower sent troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce the racial desegregation of schools in the southern states in 1957.

The same colour divisions had also applied to bus passengers. Yes, you should be careful who you sit next to, but not because of their skin colour. Some man may have just eaten a garlic sandwich, or a beautiful girl could suddenly throw her arm round your shoulder and horrify

you with a passionate kiss. No, you can't take any risks.

Mum had called an urgent sibling meeting and told us that she had forgotten to tell us about Granny and Gary coming down this Sunday for Grandparents' Day. She said, "Look, you don't have to be around, but I would like you both to buy a present for them, something small that won't break the bank."

I asked, "And when will they be going back?"

She said, "Don't worry, they'll be gone by Monday."

Straight away Sophia started texting Zoe and I phoned James to see if he could play the Mario Special Cup this coming Sunday instead. He replied, "Oh yes, of course, you can come over to my house from midday onwards if you would like."

At 7.45 p.m. I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and started thinking about what to write for my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 18, *The Hidden Friend*.

THE HIDDEN FRIEND

BABY

Mummy, I think you're eating too much.
Your tummy's grown big – and nice to touch.

MOTHER

Good gracious! What made you ask me that?
Of course, that's your new friend. I'm not fat.

BABY

So, a new playmate for me.
Maybe a she or he!

MOTHER

You are getting impatient to know,
We must wait for your friend to grow.
We had to wait a long time for you.

Look at you now. How quickly you grew.

BABY

I've had a brainwave while I've been dribbling.
Until we know I'll call my friend 'Sibling'.

Friday 26 September

A young physicist, Albert Einstein, published his daring new theory in 1905, asserting that mass and time were not fixed, thus overturning all hitherto accepted ideas about the laws of physics.

Physics is a closed book to me, so I don't know.

I've now joined the Appletown's Young Singers Group. Mr. Willis was sitting at his piano. "Oh good, Clarence, we've got a tenor, girls! I'm glad you've joined us, especially today, because 2 of the boys have phoned in sick and the twin brothers are currently on holiday in Australia for a fortnight. Don't worry, I'm sure you won't be the only boy by next week."

So, I had to sing with 10 girls, 9 of whom I knew from school, but I didn't recognise the pretty 1 with long, wavy, mousy hair. She really caught my eye. We sang Christmas songs and Disney songs, which will be featured in our very first concert on Monday 22nd December in the theatre lobby just before the pantomime *Mother Goose* starts at 7 p.m.

Saturday 27 September

The world's first passenger railway opened between Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington in 1826.

I'm told that it took much longer before the toys appeared in the shops.

Mr. Willis is now a changed man. He's very happy that I've joined his singing group. "So, Clarence, do you know all the girls at my Friday singing group then? Melissa,

now, she was looking at you.”

I asked, “Really? So, who was that then?”

He smiled. “Ha! Well, she’s the shy 1 with the long, wavy, mousy hair. Her full name is Melissa Goodwin; she sings soprano, she’s 15 years old and goes to the Appletown Independent School.”

I said, “Oh well, to be honest I did notice her, but I didn’t think she was looking at me. Perhaps she did it because I’m the newest member of the group.”

On my way home I passed the Co-op, which reminded me, so I popped in to buy a box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates, wrapping paper, sticky tape, and a card.

I spent the rest of the day wrapping my present for my grandparents.

Sunday 28 September *Grandparents’ Day*

Nearly half a million people signed a covenant to defeat the introduction of an Irish Parliament in Belfast in 1912.

Politics is an everlasting saga on the Emerald Isle.

Mum was busy tidying the house and finished it just in time before our grandparents arrived at 11.58 a.m. Sophia and I wished them a happy day, gave them our presents, quickly made our excuses, and left.

At James’s house he beat me on all 4 Mario Special Cup races, but I did win at chess. We arranged to play the next Mario Shell Cup races sometime over the Christmas holiday.

When I arrived home everybody else was watching the BBC1 6 p.m. news. I said my hellos and went straight on my computer to start my English essay, which is about a disorganised family on holiday. Ha! I’ve got plenty of experience on that subject.

Monday 29 September

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich after negotiations with Germany claiming he had secured “peace in our time” in 1938.

Those words must have haunted him a year later.

In the playground everybody was talking about our head girl, Brainy Charlie McDonough, catching Lisa and Karen picking on a poor defenceless year 8 girl in the girls’ toilets. They were both sent to the cooler for an hour.

Afterwards Matt went on a horrific rampage, marking everything he could see on the corridor walls and doors, picking on me, Ben, James, and Paul. Well, I just couldn’t let that go, so I went and told Mr. Dingles. Matt was also sent to the cooler and was given specific instructions to clean up his mess. Serve them all right for stepping out of line!

Tuesday 30 September

Professor Alexander Fleming discovered an anti-bacterial agent which destroyed many kinds of harmful bacteria in 1928. This unassuming mould subsequently led to the introduction of the pharmaceutical drug, penicillin.

A wonderful discovery, but not for my family, I’m afraid. Both mum and dad are allergic to it. Sorry, Mr. F.

After I finished my lunch, I was heading for the playground when I heard Ben’s voice shouting, “Clarence! Hey, it’s me, Ben, I’m over here, I’m just behind you!”

Turning around, I asked, “Yes, what’s the matter with you, what is it, Ben?”

Panicking, he came running up to me. “Clarence, I’ve just heard Lisa talking to Karen and it isn’t good. She says that Matt is looking for you. It’s probably about yesterday’s fiasco; I’ve just seen him, and he isn’t very happy. If I were you, I’d go and make yourself scarce... somewhere!”

I said, “Oh right! Thanks, Ben,” and I started running.

“Hey, there! Watch it! You’ve just knocked my *Human Biology* book on the ground! Clueless! You’re going to have to pick that up now, aren’t you!” Swot Marina Parkinson screamed.

Picking up the book, I apologised, “Sorry, Marina, here’s your book, I’m sorry I’m in a hurry!” Then suddenly I ploughed straight into Toby, very nearly knocking him right over; somehow, I managed to save him. “Oh no! Oh, I’m sorry, Toby! But I can’t stop, I’m very sorry, truly I am!” It took me ages to find somewhere to go, and in the end, I found the quietest corner of our big library.

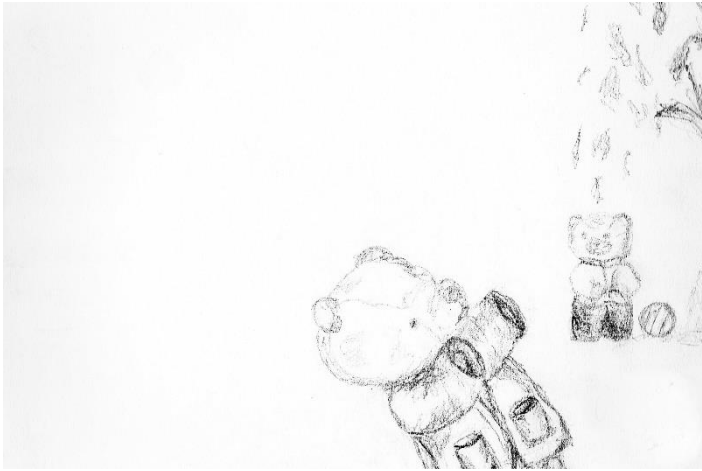
Luckily Matt didn’t find me! Such a relief! Phew! Then I noticed Activist Anita Dobbs was also sitting there, so I ended up telling her all about my ordeal. She whispered, “I’m so fed up with all these obnoxious idiots. They always seem to just get away with it in this pathetic, unjust school. It isn’t right.”

Shrugging, I replied, “I agree. And it wasn’t that long ago when it just started and ended at the school gates, but now with the internet being like it is, it’s all very worrying indeed. But how can we go about it?”

She sighed, “Look Clarence, I know you told the teachers about them, which was quite excellent by the way.”

Interrupting, I smiled, “Thank you, and that means a lot coming from you.”

She smiled, “Look, I don’t know what I can do, but I promise you, Clarence, I’ll be doing something, you just mark my words.”



October has...

A sight to feast your eyes upon the trees,
The gorgeous colours never fail to please.
As leaves mutate from green to gold and brown,
And early autumn sends them tumbling down.

Wednesday 1 October *Independence Day, Cyprus*
The first credit card was issued by the Diners Club in New York giving credit at 27 restaurants in 1950.

The idea soon spread worldwide. Obviously, many people were thrilled at the prospect of being able to buy things they always wanted when they hadn't got enough money. The only problem was that they were still broke when the statement arrived at the end of the month.

I've no idea why Matt didn't turn up to school. I hope he's decided to leave us and go to some place like Appletown's Young Offenders Unit! If he has, then he might be having the time of his life, bossing everybody around and so forth! On the other hand, maybe he wouldn't be what they call 1 of the 'top bosses' or could even be known as 'the runt of the litter' just like our Topsy.

Thursday 2 October

Part of a Roman city wall was uncovered in London while other buildings were being demolished in 1903.

40 years later the Blitz brought colossal destruction to the capital, but as a small consolation, when the rubble was cleared quite a lot of fascinating evidence was revealed about the lives of long forgotten generations.

Still no Matt. And he missed the photos being taken of himself and our new class. When it was my turn, at the last minute I remembered to cover my horrible spotty forehead with my long fringe. I keep still forgetting to buy some spot cream!

But it was unfortunate for a girl in year 7, Quiet Angie Eccles. By lunchbreak text messages were flying all over the school claiming that she looked like some alien with a crazy hairdo out of *Star Trek*. What a shame that not a single person mentioned anything about it to her. I know I would have done.

At 7.34 p.m. I started thinking about what happened at school today, so I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 19, *The Photograph*.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

BABY

This is strange, I'm looking at me!
I'm so still and looking very smart.
And standing next to a tree.
Maybe it's a special kind of art.

MOTHER

That's you in that photograph there.
With your big blue eyes and fair hair,
We need to hang it up somewhere.
Ah! I know right behind this chair.

Friday 3 October

St Francis of Assisi died at the age of 44 in 1226. He was so venerated that he was named a saint only two years later, and half a century after that the majestic cathedral in the famous city of Assisi, built to honour him, was consecrated.

For sure, I was never destined to become a saint. If I set out to achieve such a formidable objective, I would fall at the first fence (as they say at Aintree), or in other words, give in to the first attractive temptation.

Finally, Matt is back. Ben found out from a text from Jason that he was given permission for leave because he had to appear as a witness at the Appletown Civil Court.

No Melissa at singing tonight. I mustn't forget to go to Boots tomorrow on the way home from my piano lesson to buy some spot cream.

Saturday 4 October

Soviet Russia launched Sputnik, the first satellite, into space in 1957.

I find it amazing that it only took us another 12 years to land on the moon. I call that rapid progress.

Had to cancel my piano lesson as I was sick at least 4 or 5 times in the bucket beside my bed. Mum kept an eye on me throughout the day. I told her, "You know, this terrible flu bug is making me feel absolutely...dead to the world. I do hope you, or anybody else for that matter, don't get it."

Mum replied, "Oh, I'm so with you there. Well, I don't think you'll be going to school on Monday, and you may not be well enough go on Tuesday either."

And I couldn't even get the chance to go out and buy my spot cream either. I'll just have to do that when I'm feeling a bit more with it.

Sunday 5 October

The airship R101 exploded and crashed in flames in France on its maiden flight from Britain to India, killing the crew and 48 passengers in 1930.

Like the *Titanic* 18 years earlier, this disaster happened on a maiden voyage. Maybe we ought to dispense with maidens and always start with the 2nd trip. After all, most people hate Mondays and would like to begin each week with Tuesday. Somehow, I have a strange feeling there is a snag with my logic.

I was in bed for the whole day, but sometime during the morning all I was hearing was mum and dad having this very heated shouting match from downstairs; it seemed to go on for absolutely ages. Then at 1.34 p.m. there was this big bang noise, then silence. Afterwards, Sophia came bursting into my bedroom. "Hey, Clarence, you'll never guess what: Topsy has just gone and done this massive sloppy poo and it's all over the bottom stair, the carpet stinks to high heaven. Mum has put Topsy in the back garden, she's so angry!"

I said, "Yes, and now that you've opened my bedroom door, I think I can smell it too. Oh no, and now I think I'm going to be sick, where's my bucket?"

Pointing to her left, Sophia moaned, "It's right there. I can't stand being in this house any longer. I'm going to see Zoe, and if she isn't in then I'll go to Kylie's instead."

I shouted, "And close the door behind you!" Then I was throwing up all my lovely lunch of chicken soup and toast.

Monday 6 October

The Chinese Government banned all foreign visitors to Tibet in 1987.

If I was old enough to travel on my own before then, this wouldn't have been on my list of places to visit anyway.

I phoned up the school and told them about my flu bug. They said not to come back until I'm fully recovered. So, I concentrated on my *Blues Brothers* music.

Feeling a little better, so at 2.34 p.m. I decided to take Topsy out for a walk around the block. I wondered if a little fresh air could help me think up something for my next *Mother & Baby* poem too. It didn't work, because about halfway round Topsy spotted this big stripy ginger cat; she kept on pulling on her lead and finally escaped. I couldn't believe it. She had me running everywhere: I went up Pink Lady Avenue, then straight down into Cox Street, turning left into Brambly Street, then up through the massive main gates leading to Woodfield Park. Finally, when I did catch up with her, she was by the Co-op's main entrance sniffing around a black Labrador which was tied up to a lamp post. I came home feeling absolutely shattered.

Tuesday 7 October

London Bridge, which had been dismantled brick by brick, was reassembled at Lake Havasu City, a new desert resort in the USA, in 1971.

This ought to have inspired imaginative developers everywhere. Stonehenge could be similarly transported to a new museum in Birmingham – conveniently central for all Brits to visit.

Today I phoned up school to say that I should be back in tomorrow. I've never felt so hungry and tired in all my life. But by 2 p.m. I started feeling a bit better, so I decided to take Topsy out again for a nice, slow walk. But just as I was turning right into Granny Smith Street, suddenly it hit me! Yep, I finally had my next *Mother & Baby* poem.

Leaning down, I said, "Sorry, Topsy, for doing the shortest walk ever. But what if say in about 10 years' time there'll be yet another global pandemic? All of us will be in lockdown for weeks or maybe months on end, wearing

face coverings, constantly washing our hands, and we'll have to keep 2 metres apart from each other? What do you think?"

She barked, "Woof, woof, woof...grrrrrrrrrr, woof!"

I sighed, "No, I wouldn't like it either. Come on, let's go. I've got some writing to do." *Mother & Baby poem 20, Global Pandemic.*

GLOBAL PANDEMIC

BABY

Mummy, why hasn't daddy gone to work today?
Is he poorly or it could be my birthday?

MOTHER

No, it isn't your birthday and thankfully he's not ill,
You see there's this horrible virus going around, and so
He's going to be working from home for the time being.
Things should get back to normal soon, I'm sure it will.
Hey look! Is that your favourite cuddly bear, Polo?
Can we play with him, or shall we do some singing?

Wednesday 8 October

112 passengers were killed and 250 injured in 1952 when three trains collided at Harrow and Wealdstone Station in London in the worst railway accident in British history.

Harrow has the greatest number of casualties of any rail accident so far, but I dread to think what the statistic would be if 1 of those exciting new 200 mph trains were to be involved in a derailment or collision.

As I was locking up my bike in the bike shed, James came rushing up to me: "Clarence, it's been totally brilliant here this week, do you want to know why?"

I replied, "I'm sure you're going to tell me."

He laughed, "Ha! Well, almost half the pupils and a few of the staff have all been off sick with this flu bug, just like you had, including, wait for it ... Matt and Colin!"

I grinned, “Ha, that’s brilliant! A nice quiet week at school was just what the doctor ordered.”

On the way home, I finally went to Boots and bought some Freederm Gel. I slapped some on my forehead in the downstairs bathroom and remembered to repeat it just before I went to bed.

Thursday 9 October

East and West Germany were reunited as one nation in 1990 and fireworks lit up the sky over Berlin as the city’s streets were filled with celebrating Germans.

It is frequently said that we have a north/south divide in England. So maybe a wall could be built somewhere. At least it would reduce the unemployment figures.

Nothing much happened today except that James wasn’t at school. Ben laughed, “Ha, ha! Snort! Tee, hee! Well, this morning he had to go A&E because his mum couldn’t separate his eyelashes, they were all stuck together like glue. Ha, ha! Snort! Tee, hee! Tee, hee!!!”

Friday 10 October

LBC, the first British commercial radio station, was launched in 1973.

Granddad Upton-Smyth had a saying: “We need to improve the programmes, not increase the number of outlets.” He may have had a point.

Today I saw Melissa as I walked into the hall. I sat just behind her, and she turned around. “Hi, I’m Melissa Goodwin, and I think you’ve got a great tenor voice. How did you find out about this group then?”

I replied, “Oh, right, Mr. Willis teaches me piano lessons on Saturday mornings.”

She smiled. “Oh, so you can play the piano. I’d really love to be able to do that, I bet it’s a lovely feeling playing something like Mozart on the piano.”

I asked, "Mozart? I can't believe it. You like Mozart? He's my favourite composer of all time."

She said, "I agree, I never get bored hearing his music."

I asked, "Do you ever listen to Classic FM?"

She shrugged. "No, I don't, why?"

I said, "I can fully recommend it, because they're always playing Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Sibelius, Elgar, Holst, Chopin, Puccini, Handel, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, Shubert, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Strauss, Haydn, Brahms, Vivaldi, Verdi, Schumann, and other tunes like The Great Escape, The Dam Busters March, Schindler's List, Jurassic Park, The Entertainer, Maple Leaf Rag, Superman, The Lord of the Rings, The Godfather, Gladiator, E.T., Indiana Jones, The Liberty Bell, Jerusalem, Hebrew Slaves Chorus. I could go on and on and on and on an...."

She smiled, "And on and on... OK, all great stuff. Oh well, I think we should have Pomp and Circumstance March number 1 as our National Anthem, but there you go. Anyway, I don't suppose you'd be interested in showing me a few scales at my house, sometime?"

I said, "Yes, I can do next Saturday at 10 o'clock in the morning."

And that was it, so I'm now taking my old Yamaha electric keyboard to hers next Saturday at 10 a.m.

So far, I've been using the Freederm Gel for 3 days, but no improvement just yet!

Saturday 11 October

Diminutive French singer Edith Piaf, widely known as 'the little sparrow', died in 1963.

What a moniker! Still, I suppose it's better than 'bighead' or 'nutcase', which are 2 of the politer handles applied to classmates from time to time.

The phone rang when dad was just leaving for work, so he called out, "Claudia's on the phone and she's a little

upset.”

Mum took over. “Oh hello, love, so is there something wrong? Really... Sorry... he’s left you for...Kirsty Whyman... What, your best mate Kirsty? I don’t blame you, love. Do you want to come over for a couple of days? So, you think you’ll be all right then. Claudia, you’ll find somebody else, I’m sure of it. Yes, you will! Bye, love, bye.”

Afterwards she announced, “Yes! I’m going to put my Abba CD on again. Well, that didn’t last long, hey? This is the best news ever!”

Then the rest of us were in such a celebratory mood, dancing away and singing. Mum even phoned dad to ask him to pop into the Co-op to buy a large chocolate cheesecake and a big tub of vanilla ice cream and a big, thick double-cheese Margarita pizza when he finishes work. Yum, Yum. Good old MUM!

I haven’t forgotten about my spots, as I’m still using the Freederm Gel.

Sunday 12 October *National Day, Spain*

British nurse Edith Cavell was executed by firing squad in 1915 for helping allied prisoners to escape.

Not the finest way of recognising outstanding courage and self-sacrifice.

Today I noticed a slight improvement concerning my spots! I think it’s well worth carrying on using the Freederm Gel, but I’ve got to stop worrying about them. So, I’ll not be examining my forehead again until this Friday.

Monday 13 October

The Boston Red Sox defeated Pittsburgh Pirates to make baseball history by winning the first World Series in 1903.

I know as much about baseball as the Americans do about cricket, which is not saying very much.

For some reason, Ben wanted to know if any of my sisters were dating anyone. So, I told him all about Claudia's unwelcome love triangle situation. Then suddenly James just kept on talking about how he's in love with Katrina and Ben was the same about Tammy and how they're so right for them. I should've kept my mouth shut.

Tuesday 14 October

In Manchester, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny were imprisoned in 1905 for demanding votes for women. This marked the move towards militancy in the suffragettes' campaign.

It was a long journey from being thought not bright enough to put a cross on a voting slip to becoming prime minister. But they've made it!

Our dreaded school photos arrived today. I still looked the same as last year and the year before, but at least I'm not showing any of my horrible spots this time round, which is good.

At 4.32 p.m. Topsy and I were just crossing over the road into Bramley Street when we came across a load of panicky old women surrounding an extremely heavy man bent forwards with his right hand over the top of his left arm. Mrs. Robinson was there too; she was ordering everybody about and that included me.

She asked, "Clarence, do you have your phone on you?" I nodded.

Then she said, "I think Martin Mansfield's having trouble with his heart, so please can I borrow it as we need to phone for an ambulance right now." Then she started checking him to see if he'd got a pulse. "Yes, he's alive, but only just." Then Topsy instantly started *whimpering* and sat down beside him.

I handed her my phone. "I think this is of my dad's old drinking pals."

Taking my phone, Mrs. Robinson replied, "Thanks for this, yes that's right, I believe he is, Clarence," then she

started speaking to somebody from the general hospital.

I said, "Dad has the day off work today."

Mrs. Robinson turned around. "Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry, but I must speak to this boy who's standing next to me for a moment, thanks. So, Clarence, as you only live just around the corner, why don't you go home and ask your dad if he could go to the general hospital with Mr. Mansfield in the ambulance maybe? I'm sorry, Clarence, but I must speak to this other person now."

I said, "Good idea!" so then Topsy and I immediately ran home. Luckily, he was in. "Your mate Martin from The Black Pig is in trouble and we, I mean Mrs. Robinson and a few other ladies, think it's his heart."

Dad shouted, "I'm coming right now!" and the both of us ran back. We got there just as the ambulance pulled up in front of us, then 2 paramedics, a man, and a lady, got out and went over to Martin and quickly lifted him onto a stretcher.

Mrs. Robinson came over to me. "Thank you for letting me borrow your phone, Clarence. Who knows, we may have just saved his life."

Getting into the ambulance, dad told me, "Clarence, I'll phone you later when I know more. Well done, son."

In the end, dad didn't phone us and Martin's wife, Vera, finally dropped him off at 9.45 p.m., poor Martin had suffered a mild heart attack, so from now on its beta-blocker and cholesterol pills and he asked me if I could go and visit him as soon as possible.

Vera has offered to pick me up tomorrow at 6 p.m.

Wednesday 15 October

Amnesty International was founded in 1961 as a non-political organisation to help prisoners of conscience.

I overheard a loud-mouth so-and-so the other day declare that everything is political. I wish I could work out what he meant.

So apparently for the rest of the day Mrs. Robinson went around telling everybody about Martin Mansfield's unfortunate illness. I know this because at school a lot of people came up to me and said, "Mrs. Robinson told my mum about how you saved a person's life yesterday." I'd never felt so popular in all my life.

James said, "If I were you, I'd buy him a get-well card before you go tonight." And so, on the way home I did exactly that. I popped into the Co-op and bought a card and 4 very big Cox's apples as well.

At 6.02 p.m. Vera picked me up in her big old clapped out light brown Ford Cortina. As I got in, I showed her what I had brought Martin.

Her reply was, "Thank you. Those are his favourites."

When we arrived, we walked down the numerous hospital stairs and corridors. About 15 minutes later we arrived at Martin's bedside.

"Oh hello, darling." He smiled.

She said, "How are they treating you, my love?"

He revealed, "They're all very kind staff in here."

Turning around, she smiled. "Good, oh, this is ..."

Interrupting, he replied, "Oh, I know you, you're Nick and Charlotte's lad, so was it you who saved my life then?"

I smiled. "Yes, I'm Clarence and I've got some apples for you and a get-well card." Then he suddenly sat up in his bed and gave me this massive Cadbury's fruit and nut bar and a thank you card.

I said, "Oh, you shouldn't have done that but thank you anyway. So, when do you think you'll be out then?"

Moaning, he said, "Well the doctor hasn't told me yet, but I hope sometime next week."

When I arrived home, I immediately hid my massive chocolate bar away in my bedroom's secret hiding place, to be eaten at Christmas time.

Thursday 16 October

British voters elected a Labour Government in 1964. Harold Wilson had a majority of only four seats in the House of Commons.

Maybe the loudmouth did have a point.

At the end of our terrible cross-country session, Mr. Brookes went around handing out letters about our once-a-year doubles badminton tournament between the 2 secondary schools. This year our school is to go to the Appletown Independent School at 1 p.m. next Friday.

I received a phone call from Mr. Richards to remind me about our cancer charity Mozart concerto event at the Milton Keynes Theatre on Wednesday 29th October. He mentioned that there are 2 more extra band rehearsals on 26th/27th October with the same programme as when we were in Cardiff. This will be followed by a charity ball. We're all going to be staying overnight at the Cock Hotel in Stony Stratford. I told him that I can make those dates and was very glad he phoned me, because I had forgotten all about it.

I might be able to sneak away early, catching a taxi back to the hotel or something like that.

Friday 17 October

The Zeppelin L2, the world's largest airship, exploded killing all 28 people on board in 1913.

Statistics say that you are safer travelling by air than crossing a main road, but the number of victims in a single accident like this makes it difficult to believe.

Well, this morning I was standing in front of the downstairs bathroom mirror examining my forehead. I couldn't believe it! Not even the tiniest pimple could I find. That Freederm Gel is very good, so good in fact that I can now start recommending it to a few people.

Melissa lives in a massive 4-bedroom house in Russet

Avenue. They've got a high, light-brown fence with a gate situated in the middle, and just behind that on the right side is a small tree on a big patch of grass. There's a number 2 plate on a dark-red front door, and in the driveway is a nice, big black Range Rover with tinted windows. I know this because she pointed out her house on the way home from singing practice. Awesome!

So, as well as having no spots for the first time for 2 years, I also now know where to go for our very first date tomorrow.

Saturday 18 October

Dancing bears were banned from the streets of Berlin in 1927.

If they dance, surely, they must enjoy it, I suppose.

I took Topsy out at 9.11 a.m. This walk must've been the quickest and shortest she has had ever had in her life. With my keyboard in my hands, I shouted out goodbye and left.

When I got to Melissa's house, her mum answered. "Oh, hello love, and who are you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, did Melissa not mention my coming over this morning? My name is Clarence and I'm from the Friday evening Appletown's Young Singers Group. The other day your daughter asked me if I could show her some piano skills." I smiled.

She said, "Oh, OK, you can come in, I won't bite."

As soon as I walked into their hallway and closed their front door, a baby girl started crawling over to me.

Melissa appeared and said, "Don't mind Claire, she's only my baby sister. My mum has always claimed she was an accident. I think she's just adorable, she's always making funny babbling noises and pulling *silly* faces."

"Yes, she's very cute," I replied.

She said, "Please excuse the mess with all these toys everywhere. We can plug the keyboard in the lounge."

During my lesson, we were frequently interrupted by her mum popping her head around the corner asking us if

we needed a drink, and then Claire crawling all over the lounge carpet as well. Despite this, I think Melissa could become a very good pianist and I told her so. For some reason, she then started to blush.

At 12.35 p.m. we fixed our next date for Sunday, when we'll meet at McDonald's at 7.30 p.m.

At 7.54 p.m. I started thinking about Melissa's baby sister Claire and how she kept crawling around on their carpet, so I decided to go upstairs and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 21, *Crawling*.

CRAWLING

MOTHER

I think you're in the mood to play,
Your toys are too far away.
So, I'll teach you how to crawl.
You could reach your biggest ball.
Use your hands and then your knees,
You'll move forwards when you please.
It's quite easy, just watch Mum.
Then see how far you can come.

BABY

I didn't know what knees were for,
They feel so funny on the floor,
But it will really be a treat.
When I can stand up on my feet.

Sunday 19 October

The Holtermann nugget weighing 830 lbs was mined at Hill End in Australia in 1872. It was the largest gold-bearing nugget ever to be discovered.

It would've been way too large for a wedding ring!

I've decided that I really like Melissa, her mum, and her little sister Claire. I can see myself being related to this

family.

Monday 20 October

World stock exchanges collapsed after massive losses were suffered on Wall Street in 1987.

I do not want to know how the Stock Exchange works. So out of curiosity, I looked on the internet and came across the *Financial Times* newspaper. I could hardly understand a word of it. High finance is a complete mystery to me, and they appear to use a different language.

Mum told me that Vera had just phoned us to say that Martin is to be released from the general hospital in a few days' time and thanked us for all our help. She has also invited all of us over for their New Year's Eve party.

Tuesday 21 October

The first women peers took their places in the House of Lords in 1958.

If I was in charge, I would've called it the House of Lords and Ladies.

Before going to school, I took Topsy out and we got caught in this flash flood and were absolutely soaked. It was a good job I've got many school uniforms. For the first time in my life, I was exactly 10 minutes late. I had to go to reception where the secretary told me off. Not a nice experience.

Then during the morning break Anita came up to me. "Clarence, I've got it! So, every week my mum buys the *That's Life* magazine and in it there's a letter competition and I'm going to write everything on school bullies. Yes?"

I replied, "Yes, getting everybody talking about it, that's a brilliant idea." So not such a bad day after all!

Wednesday 22 October

The shocked and devastated people of the mining village of Aberfan in South Wales were mourning for 116 children and 28 adults killed when a rain-soaked colliery tip slid down to the village burying the school in 1966.

Horrific! I reckon the survivors would never want to set eyes on the area again.

During registration we were all told about a fire drill which will be happening sometime today. The fire alarm eventually went off at 2.30 p.m., in my music lesson. Everybody had to make their way down to the playground and was made to stand out in the rain and finally we were all accounted for.

Mr. Browning told us, "Well done, everybody. You did very well, but you ought to be just a little faster next time, please. And don't forget in a real fire every second count, it really does, because once when I was about 14 years old, our house did catch fire actually and I can tell you, it was the most.... scariest time in my life; we all very nearly didn't make it out alive. So just remember that. Now, you can all go back to your classrooms, and I don't want to see anybody running. Thank you."

Next time, sir, you'll need to do the fire drill during my PE lesson, please. Just typical of this school!

Thursday 23 October *Proclamation Day, Hungary*

The first Ford model T car to be built outside the USA came off the production line in Manchester in 1911.

Another centenary coming up.

In games we all played round robin badminton doubles matches to prepare ourselves for our once-a-year badminton tournament.

I must do some revising soon.

Friday 24 October *United Nations Day*

43-year-old Anna Taylor sailed over Niagara Falls on a barrel and survived in 1901.

I never cease to be amazed at what some folks will do for kicks.

The coach ride to the Appletown Independent School was very noisy. Colin and Matt started chucking items at each other over everybody else's heads. It was a good job it was only a 10-minute drive there and back.

Once we arrived, names were drawn and unfortunately, I was paired with Ben.

He said, "I don't know about you, Clarence, but I am feeling absolutely, fantastic because we won our first ever doubles match! Isn't all this just, so awesome!" Great!

Saturday 25 October

The 'Fab Four', the Beatles, received their MBEs from the Queen in 1965.

It is hard to imagine what Her Majesty would have said to the lads. "I think your music is really cool," perhaps. Or maybe not.

I've been reading that the stock exchanges throughout the world have experienced the worst decline in their history with drops of as much as 10% in 1 day's trading. Back in January, we had Black Monday. Yesterday has been christened Frightful Friday. How about Terrible Tuesday, Warning Wednesday, Shocking Saturday, Stop-the-World-I-Want-to-get-off Sunday?

It isn't long now until the *Blues Brothers*, wedding. I can't let mum down now. I've got to be ready for that!

Sunday 26 October *EU and British Summer Time ends, National Day, Austria*
Winston Churchill became Prime Minister for the second time at the age of 77 in 1951.

A glutton for punishment.

Yesterday I forgot to put my clocks back. It put me out for the rest of the day.

When I was with Melissa in McDonald's, everything was going quite well. She just kept on telling me about her childhood days as we sat there at 1 of the many window view tables. Looking outside I could see there were 11 parked vehicles, 2 white cars, 4 red cars, 1 green car, 1 black truck, 1 very dirty white van and 2 red motorcycles.

Then at 8.45 p.m., I had a thought. "Oh my God, I've just thought of something: my mocks are coming up towards the end of November," I said.

Melissa wasn't happy. "So?"

I said, "Well, I haven't done any revision, and I've got a load of maths homework that needs to be completed by the time I go back to school, so we might have to put things on hold until my exams are finished. What do you think about that? Good idea or not?"

"Clarence, your exams aren't taking place until the end of November, that's a whole month away. So, are you saying I'm not as important as your *stupid* mock exams?" she snapped. Then she started getting up from her seat.

"No, you're important too, of course you are," I replied.

She smiled. "That's all right then. Why don't I phone you later in the week to rearrange our next date?"

I said, "Sounds like a good plan, we'll do that."

Monday 27 October *Bank & public holiday, Republic of Ireland*
On the London Stock Exchange in 1986, new computerised systems allowed share dealing to go on around the clock.

More workaholics. Depending on the state of the market,

whenever the Stock Exchange is featured on TV news, there are scenes of either barely controlled excitement or faces disappearing into hands as if the end of the world was nigh.

At last, had a great day! I started very early with my maths and then Sophia went to her new after-school drama club called Dress Up Performing Arts rehearsing for *Oliver!* I then grabbed my opportunity and played my *Blues Brothers* music pieces. Even the band rehearsal was good as well!

Tuesday 28 October *Proclamation Day, Czech Republic*
The Statue of Liberty in New York was dedicated in 1886.

I may be dreaming, but I have a vague recollection that the statue was built in France and shipped to America. If there is any truth in this, I suppose there is a direct connection with the French motto.

I spent most of the day packing my suitcase for the Milton Keynes trip tomorrow. Melissa phoned. I told her about my next forthcoming 2-day trip with the Appletown Orchestra.

She replied, “Oh right, so you’re going to Milton Keynes! That’s where those very famous concrete cows are. And that’s where that old – a cock-and-bull story – phrase comes from. So, when can we go out again? What about next Saturday evening?”

I suggested, “Well, Sophia will be performing in *Oliver!* at the Town Hall and it starts at 7 o’clock that very evening. She’s playing 1 of Fagin’s boys and a prostitute as well.”

She screamed, “Oh good, that’s my favourite! But I’ve never seen it performed on the stage before. I’ll see you at my house at about 6. 30 then, bye!”

Major Roads to Milton Keynes

A2

M2

M25 turn eastwards through Dartford Tunnel

Stay on M25 until second turn off.

‘M1 north’

Up and over the M25

Junction 13

Wednesday 29 October

In China, the tomb of Mongol warrior leader Genghis Khan was discovered by Russian archaeologist Peter Kozlov in 1927.

Maybe some people go around searching for burial plots as a hobby.

With my suitcase fully packed, mum drove me into town. This time the coach was already waiting for us at 12.30 p.m. As we left, mum was waving like mad. During the ride my phone beeped, and I saw I had a voicemail from her as well, asking me to phone, which I did as soon as we arrived in Milton Keynes.

This time round I felt a lot better with my performance, and we had 3 encores as well. After the show Mr. Richards congratulated us on such a brilliant show, then he reminded us about our Johann Strauss Concert on 14th February 2009 at 7.30 p.m. and it's in our local Town Hall.

Against my will I was persuaded to go to the charity ball. It felt like I couldn't breathe for people crowding around me wanting my autograph and people getting drunk. Worst of all, some bloke was sick all down my suit. I was glad when we got back to the Cock Hotel at 1.32 a.m.

Thursday 30 October

Aspirin was on sale in Britain for the first time in 1905.

There are so many drugs in the chemists' shops these days

that I've lost count.

Before going down, I quickly wrote my yesterday's diary entry because I was way too tired to do it when I got back this morning. Then I made my way down the stairs to enjoy a massive fried breakfast and an extremely hot cup of tea. We finally left just after lunch.

The drive back to Appletown was uneventful and mum was already there waiting and waving. Once I was off the coach, she hugged me like I'd been away for years, asking me a load of questions about the concert and telling me how Topsy had really missed me. At least I do have a mum; some people haven't, so I kissed her back on her left cheek and afterwards for 15 seconds I hugged her tightly.

Mum smiled, "You can be such a sweetie sometimes."

I said, "I shouldn't think my sisters would agree."

She laughed, "Ha! I'm sure that's not the case. Let's go and get 2 pizzas from the Co-op and cook them at home."

I replied, "Yes, that's good! And can we have a chocolate cheesecake as well? Because I'm absolutely starving, so much so that I could eat a horse."

She said, "Go on then, of course we can, and I'll get some chocolate ice cream to go with it too while I'm at it."

Finally, I went to bed absolutely stuffed at 11 p.m.

Friday 31 October

Charles Taze Russell became the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1916.

They are by no means always welcome, but I'm sure they mean well.

By 5.58 p.m. Sophia was all dressed up like the most, vilest witch I've ever seen. But before she left our house, I gave her and the other witches and ghosts strict instructions not to knock at our front door, because we're going to make it look like we're not in, like every year.

She screamed, "I'm still coming around to ours!"

I said, "There's no need to lose your temper like that."
She sighed, "OK! Fine! But only if I have some money."
"Excuse me?" I asked.

She growled, "Ha! You heard me."

I said, "You can have some, but you'll need to ask me again, but in a much *softer* and *kinder* voice, please."

She whispered, "OK, fine, but only if I can have some of your money and plenty of it, please. Thank you."

I smiled, "Ah ha! Yes!"

She moaned, "What on earth are you going on about?"

I said, "Well, on the 29th of April, I promised myself I'd teach you all about how to use good manners before this year is out. And I've done it! So yes, you can."

She snarled, "Ha! Very funny!" Then grabbing all of my spare change and with a big frown on her face and left. But she did keep to her word, which is saying something!

At 7. 05 p.m. I went to my bedroom and to write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 22, *Temper Tantrums on Halloween*.

TEMPER TANTRUMS ON HALLOWEEN

BABY

Mummy tells me, "It's Halloween today,"
But she also says, "I'm way too young to go".
Well, I'm afraid I'll have to display.
My worst ever monster act – and so
By frightening her I'll snarl, scream, and shout,
Wave my long, ugly tentacles about,
Stamp my big, scary claws in protest.
And I'll try to do my very best.
To make her change her mind – oh dear!
Hmm, no chance of that then, I fear.

MOTHER

Oh no, not again – another paddy,
Pack it in now, or I'll tell your daddy.



November has...

Armistice, so put your hands in your pockets.
Also, sparklers, Catherine wheels and rockets.
Which light dark skies on each Guy Fawkes Day
Comfort your pets or keep them well away.
As some animals do fear the noise
But a lot of fun for girls and boys.

Saturday 1 November

In 1938 Orson Welles broadcast a dramatization of H. G. Wells' novel 'The War of the Worlds'.

Briefly frightening. Better than the real thing though.

At 9.04 a.m. I told mum and dad about Melissa Goodwin.

Mum smiled, “Oh, now that’s nice. So, when do you think you’ll be able to introduce us all to this Melissa then?”

I suggested, “What about tonight? I’m taking her to see Sophia perform in *Oliver!* I just hope I’ve made the right decision.”

Mum said, “In that case, why don’t I drive us all to Melissa’s house then?”

So, at 6.30 p.m. we were all there on their doorstep with me introducing everybody, and 2 minutes later Melissa got into the car. We literally ran straight in and plonked ourselves onto our seats as we’d missed the start of the show. At first, I couldn’t recognise Sophia as it was hard to see her with their dreary brown caps and shabby old clothes on. At some point Sophia’s cap accidentally fell off her head during the *Pick a Pocket* performance, Melissa laughed, and it was quite loud. During the 2 pub songs, *It’s a Fine Life* and *Oom-Pah-Pah*, Sophia wore a very revealing tatty grey, white dress, high boots and brightly coloured make-up on her face.

When the show finished, we all went backstage to congratulate her. She wasn’t best pleased. “How dare you laugh at me like that? It wasn’t my fault my cap got accidentally knocked off, and who are you anyway?” she said looking daggers, straight at Melissa.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude,” Melissa apologised.

I said, “Oh, I do apologise, and this is my new girlfriend, Melissa Goodwin, who goes to my singing group on Friday evenings.”

Sophia gave us such a disapproving look, shrugged her shoulders, and turned around to hug mum and dad.

Sunday 2 November

Arthur Balfour, the British foreign secretary, offered support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine in 1917.

It took 3 decades to create Israel. Everything seems to take time in that neck of the woods. I sometimes think that when everyone wants everything, then they don't get anything at all.

This morning dad came up to me. "Son, I'm afraid your mum and I think you're on the rebound from Lexie."

I asked, "Do you think so?"

He nodded, "Yes, son, we know so. Now what are you going to do about it?"

Mum suggested, "Leave her?"

Sophia smiled. "Good, you can definitely do a lot better, Clarence."

I said, "If you think so. It's just that this dating game is all virtually new for me. I'll tell her soon, I promise."

Mum said, "But you can't finish with her the same way that Lexie did it though. You'll need to do in person."

The rest of the day was spent revising and practising *The Blues Brothers*.

Monday 3 November

The electro-cardiograph new machine, which monitored heartbeat, was introduced in Holland by Willem Einthoven in 1903.

I don't suppose this was in the mind of Mr. E, but maybe this could prove to be a useful piece of equipment for anyone going to those speed-dating sessions. It would enable them to make up their minds quickly as to whether they have found Mr. or Miss Right.

Just before registration, Matt saw the biology teacher, Butch Mrs. Brand, and a TA, Button nose Mrs. Hadden, hugging each other in the staff car park. So, of course, everybody got texts that they are having a *secret* lesbian

affair. If they are supposed to be secret lovers, personally I don't think they would be hugging each other right in front of everybody to see.

Tuesday 4 November

Under the command of General Bernard Law Montgomery, British troops defeated an Italian/German army in the crucial Battle of El Alamein in 1942.

From what I've heard listening to a reminiscing granddad; this was a crucial turning point in the war.

Well, as we watched BBC1 10 p.m. news, we were told who the next American president is going to be. I don't suppose the election of Obama will change the minds of those who regard black people as inferior, but hard luck, folks; you'll have to live with the situation. I reckon most of my generation the other side of the pond will be happy to see the end of the skin colour issue.

Wednesday 5 November

Richard Nixon was elected US president in 1968.

And for some reason the subsequent scandal became known as Watergate. Since then, every other controversial event of any importance has been dubbed some kind of 'gate'. I expect any scandal involving sheep would be christened Ramsgate. Er, perhaps *not*.

Today all the classes were ordered by Mr. Browning to go to the main hall.

He announced, "Yesterday, I became aware of a malicious rumour that Mrs. Brand and Mrs. Hadden are having a secret affair." All over *sniggers* were heard. "May I have silence, show some respect please. It's totally untrue, and I will find out the person or persons responsible for this, I promise."

Matt had to do detention in the cooler, and he was there all afternoon. Ben told me that Colin had apparently

reported him.

Later in the evening, mum, dad, and Sophia all went out to see the Woodsfield Park's firework display. I opted to look after Topsy and managed to get down with some of my revision and *The Blues Brothers* music as well.

Thursday 6 November

Dwight Eisenhower, the US president, was re-elected for a second term of office in 1956.

I don't recall he had any connection with gates, but then of course that was long before the Nixon affair.

As I was locking up my bike this morning, James was there already waiting for me.

He said, "Hey, you'll never guess what. Last night Matt went for Colin just outside the Co-op. The shop manager threatened to call the pigs; I was there and saw everything. But unfortunately, he changed his mind and didn't do it."

Friday 7 November

German nuclear physicist Hans Geiger introduced a new instrument to measure radioactivity – the Geiger counter – in 1908.

As I'm always saying, I understand even less about physics than I do about Japanese grammar, which is zero minus.

While I was enjoying my lovely home-made Bolognese, mum reminded me about the wedding. The weather wasn't good, so instead of going to singing I spent the rest of the evening practising Mozart and *The Blues Brothers* music.

Feeling absolutely shattered, I finally went to bed at midnight.

Saturday 8 November

William Rontgen discovered X-rays at the University of Wurzburg in 1895.

Now that was a useful discovery. What is fascinating is now being able to see a baby before it's born. Quite remarkable.

My phone had a text from Melissa, which read:

Hi Clar,
Missed u last night. Hope everything's OK with us.
Speak soon.
Mel
X

Because of the wedding, I didn't text her back.

Well, nobody was killed, but it was a little scary. Towards the end of the day, the bride's father and groom's father got so drunk that they started arguing and fighting right in front of everybody. The bride stormed off crying into the ladies' toilets and the groom had to take his dad outside. The 2 families made it very clear they didn't like each other.

After a while things started to settle down, and a little later the groom came up to me and asked if we could cater for a New Year's Eve party. Just then mum butted in telling them that we couldn't as we were already booked. This was true in a way. We finally got home just before midnight.

Sunday 9 November *Remembrance Day, UK*

The biggest power failure in history caused a blackout all down the eastern coast of Canada and the USA for more than nine hours in 1965.

The only consolation must have been the somewhat smaller electricity bill.

I went straight for it and at 3 p.m. I decided not to see her and phoned her up instead. I told her, "I'm so sorry, Melissa, I think the relationship isn't working so I'm finishing it, but we can still be mates."

She started crying buckets. "No! Are you sure you want to dump me? You are the best thing that has ever happened to me!"

I was quite surprised at her reaction. I suppose I didn't fully realise how much she really liked me. I told her, "I'm still going to the singing group on Friday evening but it's not on next week because of *Children in Need*."

Looking down, she shouted, "I do know that, Clarence!"

Monday 10 November

In 1988 the US Air Force unveiled the Lockheed F. 117A Nighthawk 'stealth' aircraft, designed to be invisible to radar.

It still took quite a while before any action was taken.

Today James asked me about Melissa.

I told him, "Well, my parents told me to finish with her, so I did that yesterday."

He smiled. "So, you finally dumped her, that's brilliant, matey. Maybe I could find you somebody else."

I suggested, "Well, just let me dedicate November to my revision, but around Christmas time or in the New Year you could try then," and he agreed.

Tuesday 11 November

At last, in 1918, after two days of negotiations, Germany surrendered in the early hours of what has been celebrated as Armistice Day on every anniversary for nearly a century.

Yet, another centenary 10 years from now.

On the radio before leaving for school I heard about the QE2 setting off on her last voyage to Dubai. I bet Her Majesty will have a mixture of proud and sad memories of the day she broke that bottle to launch the ship named after

herself. The QE2 is a well-made good, old ship. But this country just couldn't afford to keep it in service, so it had to go.

I wonder if Markus will come back to school. When he does get released, I'd like it to be in amongst the Dubai community, or in fact anywhere across the sea would be preferable.

Wednesday 12 November

Rev. Chad Varah founded the Samaritans helpline in 1953.

I bet there must be loads of distressed people rescued from despair since this helpline was opened. Good on you, Rev. Chad Varah, for coming up with such a kind idea!

Today at 8.56 p.m., mum came into the lounge and asked, "Clarence, please can I come to your school and watch you play in the football match for *Children in Need* on Friday?"

I told her, "Well, you don't have to come and watch me play, it's not compulsory."

She smiled, "I know it's not, but I promise I'll try my very best not to embarrass you."

I asked, "Don't you have anything else to do?"

She shrugged, "Nope! I'm free all afternoon."

Sighing, I replied, "OK, I'll see you outside by the big gates at 1 o'clock." Wonderful!

Thursday 13 November

The first automatic telephone exchange operated at Holborn in London from this day in 1927.

That was in the days when you automatically listened to the live voice of a human being at the other end of the line – I am reliably informed. Whoever introduced "Press button 1" and "Your call is in a queue" should have been put to sleep and featured in a hall of infamy.

Well, I mentioned to mum that tomorrow's weather

forecast is going to be showers. Her reply was, "Clarence, I can't just not go, love I've never seen you playing football before."

Friday 14 November

Moscow Dynamo football club trotted onto the field at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge stadium with a bouquet of flowers for each of their opponents in 1945.

That gives the lie to the statement that rugby is the gentleman's game.

I remembered not to change into my school uniform. We all had great fun getting our own back chucking wet sponges at our teachers in the Woodstock's. Then it was our friendly mixed football match on our field, with our rivals the Appletown Independent School. The field was very muddy from this morning's rain, but we still played.

Mum shouted, "You can show those Independents what you're made of." She was waving her arms like a teenage *pompom* girl, moving up and down on the side lines. In the end the match was drawn 2-2.

By 3 p.m. we were all changed into our different school uniforms and packed in our biggest assembly hall. Mr. Browning smiled, "Let's start by saying well done for such a brilliant game. But now I need to tell you about our mutual schools taking part in a poetry competition." A mixture of moans, sniggers and cheers echoed around the hall. He continued, "*Everyone!* Settle down....Now, the subject is *love* - 14 lines or less. You can write 1 poem each - on paper, then you'll submit your work to the English Departments no later than midday on Friday the 23rd of January. It's open to all year groups, and the 14 lucky winners will be announced during the morning assemblies on Friday the 6th of February. The successful entries will be published in a pamphlet and the money raised will also go towards *Children in Need*. So, good luck to all those who wish to have a go."

Well, I'm not dating anyone at present, so a *stupid*

love-sick poem is out for definite. I think 1 of my *Mother & Baby* poems should be fine. Well, I've got just over 2 months, so plenty of time to write a few more. Now, I'll do this in 2 stages, so on New Year's Eve, I'll pick 2 poems, then I'll make my final decision on Thursday 22nd of January.

Saturday 15 November

Pu Yi, the youngest ever Emperor of China, succeeded to the throne at the age of two in 1908.

He must have had far worse teething problems than any other emperor before or since. It must have cost a lot of yen to pay the Imperial Nappy Changer!

Today mum was in 1 of her moods, which could have been something to do with 'women's problems' (whatever they are). Dad was having a go at fixing the kitchen sink, *huffing*, and *puffing* away as usual, and Sophia was *screeching* away on her violin preparing herself for next Saturday's grade 2 exam. So, I decided to make myself a lovely cheese and pickle doorstep and a nice big mug of hot chocolate to wash it down with. Then at 7.34 p.m. I went upstairs to my bedroom to think about reasons why babies would start to cry. At 8.23 p.m. first I thought about writing something that requires the baby getting hungry, but as I had already written *Feeding* back in August, so then I decided to write 2 other *Mother & Baby* poems. *Mother & Baby* poem 23, *Teething* and *Mother & Baby* poem 24, *Nappy Times*.

TEETHING

BABY

I've not had a pain like this before,
It makes my mouth feel ever so sore.
It seems the trouble is with my gums,
But not so bad when I suck my thumbs.

MOTHER

From your cries there must be something wrong,
Ah, of course I should've known all along.
It's your teeth coming through, I can tell.
And right here is this nice teething gel.

NAPPY TIMES

BABY

I'm now starting to cry.
Because I don't feel dry,
Not happy-go-lucky
So, Mummy, I'm mucky.

MOTHER

Yes, love, it's time for your new nappy.
Oh, yes, another lovely big job to do.
And soon you'll be ever so happy.
Because once again you'll feel much fresher too.

Sunday 16 November

King Henry III died at the age of 65 in 1272 in the Tower of London. He had reigned for 56 years, a record period for an English king. But for most of the time he was too weak and incompetent to govern; the Earl of Leicester and later the king's son – subsequently Edward I – were in control.

And I thought Pu Yi had problems.

I can't believe it, *Get Me out of Here* and the *European Championships* are both back on TV! Mum and Sophia just love watching Ant and Dec and football. At last, some peace and quiet in the evenings for the next 3 weeks, which is excellent news for me!

Monday 17 November

The first time a submarine travelled underwater was the very short journey from Portsmouth to the Isle of Wight in 1904.

I was querying the prospects of invisible aircraft the other day. Well, in a way they managed to produce these invisible ships. I rest my case.

This morning mum had a phone call from Annie asking if anyone in our house could look after her 1-year-old grandson tomorrow for a couple of hours in the evening. Mum told her that dad's working on the late shift and she and Sophia are going to Sophia's parents' evening, then afterwards they'll be going to the Co-op. Then she turned to me to see if I would be interested. She said, "Annie's daughter Cathy can pick you up at 6 o'clock. Please, we need an answer right now because they're quite desperate. It'll be absolutely fine leaving Topsy for a couple of hours, and I'll pay for this Saturday's piano lesson if you say you'll do it."

Reluctantly I said, "Oh, hmm.... oh, OK, if I must." I then had an idea about writing a very short nursery rhyme. It's now 11.03 p.m. I'm extremely tired, but I can't really go to bed until I've written down *Tom the Black Cat*, so here it is.

TOM THE BLACK CAT

Tom the black cat, Tom the black cat
Is always in so much trouble.
He's forever teasing the next door's dog Jack,
But 1 day Jack gets his own back.
And chases Tom into a potato sack.

Tuesday 18 November

George Gallup was born in 1901. His name will always be associated with the Gallup Polls.

No comment.

I did my very first babysitting job. When I arrived, their baby Zack was already asleep in his bed. Cathy and her boyfriend, Jake Carmichael, left me alone with the phone number in 1 hand and the baby monitor in the other. They also left the TV on and said that I could eat anything I wanted. When they had gone, I went straight into the kitchen to do my revision. I was halfway through my maths homework when Zack started crying, so I raced straight upstairs. He was standing up in his cot all red-faced, dummy on the mattress, with tears streaming down, anxiously looking for his mother.

I told him my *Tom the Black Cat* nursery rhyme. It made him smile, but when I finished, he started crying again, so I repeated it again and again. In the end I picked him up and started rocking him in my arms, singing it to him instead, as I was pacing up and down his boxroom of a bedroom. At this point, I was really kicking myself for not creating a suitable lullaby as well.

Anyway, he *did* go to sleep, finally. I carefully laid him down in his cot. Then suddenly I heard a car coming in their driveway. I checked my watch, and it was 9.27 p.m. Realising I had left the TV on; I quickly crept out and dashed downstairs to the lounge and turned it off just before they walked in.

Cathy asked, "So how was it? Did he wake up then?"

I replied, "For most of the time he was fast asleep, but he woke up at half past 8 and I've just got him to sleep again."

Jake smiled. "I'd love to know what your secret is, because no other babysitter has ever been able to do that before. Well done, this is just fantastic. Brilliant stuff!" He then drove me home.

Wednesday 19 November

In 1987, 34 people were killed at Kings Cross underground station in London when rubbish built up underneath an escalator and caught fire.

I can't imagine a more horrendous way to die, especially

as the victims would have understood there was virtually no hope of escape.

Mum had a phone call from Cathy. Mum said, “Well, Clarence, Cathy and Jake were so pleased with your babysitting skills that they want to know if you could do it again, but this time on New Year’s Eve, and you’d be staying over there, as well as £35 in your pocket!”

I asked, “What about poor Topsy? She’ll be left on her own for hours on end, and what about those horrible Mr. Leggett’s noisy fireworks? She’ll be absolutely frightened to death!”

Mum smiled, “Yes love, you’re so right. What if we do this party? I’ll ask Martin and Vera if they would like to come over here instead. We can put on the best spread ever and invite as many people as possible, so that we might end up with lot more party and wedding bookings, you never know. Yes, that’s such a brilliant idea, you’re so good, Clarence. What would we all do without you, hey!” then she headed straight for the telephone.

At 8.15 p.m. I started thinking about when the 3 of us were a lot younger: on a few occasions we had good old Mrs. Black looking after us whenever mum and dad went out. So, I decided that after my usual hot luxurious bubble bath I would go to my bedroom and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 25, *The Babysitter*.

THE BABYSITTER

BABY

Mummy, you look so nice, you’re all shiny and black,
It seems to me you’re dressing up to go out.
And Jenny is coming here again until you get back.
Hope so, for she lets me chuck my toys about.

MOTHER

Now, love, it’s bedtime and you must promise me.
You are going to be on your very best behaviour,

For your babysitter's coming over for her tea.
We like Jenny, she's a real gem and our saviour.

Thursday 20 November

In 1947 Princess Elizabeth married Philip Mountbatten, a cousin she had first met at her parents' coronation ten years earlier.

I'm afraid that the number of recorded diamond wedding anniversaries is in steep decline.

This coming Monday will be the start of my mock exams. But today I just couldn't get going with them at all because Sophia was constantly playing away on her *stupid* violin, and it rained all day long. I'll try again tomorrow!

Friday 21 November

The Mayflower, carrying 102 pilgrims, landed at Cape Cod (now Provincetown) in 1620 to establish the first permanent colony in North America.

Obviously, those aboard were not the type who buy many pairs of slippers or fireplaces. If they were looking for a new world, they found it.

At 7.15 a.m. I was coming out of the bathroom, and I bumped into mum. She shouted, "I can't believe this! I've just weighed myself and I'm a stone heavier than I was this time last year! Well, it's no use dieting just yet with Christmas coming up. So, for now I'll have to just put up with it and let this be my New Year's resolution. That's it: my final decision has just been made. Although this time I'll just have to stick to a good sensible diet and do plenty of exercises, not like how I did it last year!"

Oh, I really must get on with my revision! Ah! But not until I've written my next *Mother & Baby* poem: *Mother & Baby* poem 26, *On the Scales*.

ON THE SCALES

MOTHER

I know the scales don't lie.
And yet, although still I
Display a dropping jaw,
To hear you've put on more.
Then ever this time round,
Especially when I have found.
It's harder when I try.
To lift you right up high.

BABY

I just can't avoid putting on weight,
Growing bigger seems to be my fate.
To help mum I'd like to think.
There's some way that I could shrink.

Saturday 22 November

President John F Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald in an open limousine in Dallas in 1963.

In view of the number of US presidents who have met this fate (or worse), if I ever had to choose between canvassing for the White House and crossing the Niagara Falls on a scooter blindfolded, I wouldn't find the decision all that easy.

Sophia knocked on my bedroom door. "Wish me luck, then."

Shrugging, I shouted, "Oh yes, break a leg and all that." I must've got it right because she came into my room and kissed me on my left cheek.

When I finally got up, I asked dad, "So, what was that all about then?"

He replied, "Oh, I'm not sure, but I think your sister is doing her violin grade 2 exam today."

At last, I managed to get a load of revision done, and

Sophia passed with flying colours. So, for her sake, we all celebrated with delicious Domino's Margarita pizzas, and for afters a few slices of mum's rich dark fruit cake which she made yesterday. Delicious! Then I went straight to my hiding place in my bedroom and ate all the MASSIVE Cadbury's fruit and nut chocolate bar I got from Martin. Afterwards, I felt so uncomfortable that I had to have some Andrews Liver Salts to settle my poor old stomach. I won't be making that mistake again!

Sunday 23 November

The Rockefeller Institute was launched in 1907 with a \$2.5 million gift from the philanthropist John D. Rockefeller.

I used to think philanthropy was a subject you could study for a degree! Now I'm most impressed by those who donate anonymously. I'm afraid I would want people to know I'm not a miser, but I'm not proud of that.

I worked on my very funny gangster essay all day. I couldn't stop smiling and thinking about my main character, who's based on Markus. If only he knew!

Monday 24 November

Lee Harvey Oswald, who murdered the American president two days earlier, was himself shot dead by Jack Ruby in front of the world's press in 1963.

Those who live by the gun will die by the gun. I'm certain that is a misquotation.

I handed in my yesterday's English essay to a very pleased Mr. Groves. Also, I started revising for my maths mock exam.

Tuesday 25 November

The British government bought shares in the Suez Canal in 1875.

You must understand what is involved in buying and selling shares. This Clarence doesn't.

At 5 p.m. I was listening to Classic FM while I was in the study writing my story about a hopeless gangster, his gang, and his moll for my English essay. Then on the news I heard that a car bomb in St Petersburg in Russia has killed 3 people and injured 1. Even more bombs; I can't believe what this world is coming to!

Wednesday 26 November

US president George Washington proclaimed this day to be a Day of National Thanksgiving in 1789.

I give thanks to all those people who put up with my funny ways, but not on 1 special day. Every day.

In the morning, I had the most terrible time during my maths mock exam. I just couldn't finish it in time. I was in the middle of the last but 1 question when the bell went off. But in the afternoon, to my relief, my geography mock exam was rather easier.

When I was coming back home it was literally chucking it down like nobody's business. I got absolutely soaked to the skin. So, excluding my geography mock exam, a day I would very much like to forget.

Thursday 27 November

More than one and a half million allied war prisoners were released by Germany a few days after the Armistice in 1918.

Never before could there have been so many long-anticipated reunions. For most couples it will have been a moment to treasure, but unfortunately not every story will have had a happy ending.

In my music mock exam, I only just managed to finish my theory paper, but the practical side I think might've gone rather better.

Friday 28 November

Nancy Astor was elected MP for Plymouth in 1919, the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons.

I find it strange that it took so long for this to happen when so many of the subjects debated affect women's lives. Even girls of my age can be heard discussing things in a way that would not have occurred to me.

My English exam was just dreadful. With my story entry I must have wasted half an hour thinking what to write. In the end I thought of that day when I saved Martin's life, but I wrote it as a lot more adventurous and exciting. I finished it just as the bell went off. I'd be very surprised if I get good marks for these mocks. I mustn't let myself get like this ever again!

Later, when I arrived at singing practice as usual, Melissa was already there. She wouldn't give me any eye contact. She totally blanked me out through the whole evening. I'm not bothered at all; I can get on with my life for good now.

Saturday 29 November

Plans were agreed to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states by the United Nations General Assembly in 1947.

Look where that got them. If there is a political enigma that will never be solved, this is it.

At the end of my piano lesson, Mr. Willis asked, "So, Clarence, how are you getting on with Melissa then?"

I told him, "Oh yes, we're no longer a couple."

He said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought the 2 of you were very well matched. But what do I know, hey? Now, do you have the *Blues Brothers* sheet music with you?"

I handed it back and while thanking him I mentioned about our next year's Johann Strauss concert at our local Town Hall. My little diversion worked! He soon forgot about Melissa, and for the rest of the lesson I played *Wine, Women and Song* and the *Die Fledermaus* (Overture) Op. 362.8. Brilliant piano lesson.

Sunday 30 November *First Sunday in Advent St Andrew*
The first hearing aid was designed by Miller Reese Hutchison in America in 1901.

Mum says dad only hears what he wants to hear. The rest goes out the same ear it came in.

At 9.34 p.m., the telephone just kept on ringing and ringing and ringing, so finally mum got up to answer it. I heard, "Oh hello, Bob, is she all, right? What? Slipped? Oh no, that isn't good, not good at all."

Then in the lounge mum told us, "That was Uncle Bob. Yesterday he received a letter from Great-Auntie Maggie telling him that last month she slipped on her wet doorstep, so she's on the waiting list for a hip replacement. She now has a social worker who has just helped her to move into the nearby retirement home. So, I've written down her new address and I must remember to put a get-well card in with her Christmas card. Poor Great-Auntie Maggie, I bet she won't last long in there, knowing how independent she is."

I asked, "So, what's going to happen to her old house then?"

Sophia moaned, "Oh Clarence, don't you know anything? For some reason England has always paid a lot of money for Scotland's medicines and for their communities such as retirement homes, schools, and sport centres. She can keep her house; they don't have to sell their houses like we have to. Oh, how I'd love to go and live in Scotland 1 day."

I replied, "Oh, but why wait? There's an empty house in Scotland right now."

She shouted, "Can I detect a little sarcasm there?"

I replied, "Yep! And I've got the most excellent teacher that anyone could have."

She huffed, "I'm going to take Topsy out for a walk."

I said, "Good! And maybe you could take her out for about an hour or so."

She said, "Yep! I just might do that."

I suggested, "You could even take Topsy out for a nice long walk tomorrow too."

She screamed, "What's wrong with you today?"

I said, "Nothing's wrong with me. Anyway, I've just thought of something, you could even make taking Topsy out your New Year's resolution perhaps?"

She shouted, "Yes, and when I've left school, I might take up dog walking. No, I can do much better than that actually: I shall have a dog grooming business instead! And I shall call it, Pawfect! Yes, I think that's such a brilliant idea."

I said, "You might find that name has already been taken. Anyway, I don't think mum would allow you to do it here."

She shouted, "Ah, ha! So, names can be changed, and I can always get a mobile van, duh!"

Mum said, "Right, now this argument has gone on long enough, all this shouting isn't doing anyone any good."

Sophia said, "OK, Mum, yes, you're so right. So, because of Clarence being like he is, I've just changed my mind: I'm now going to Zoe's house instead, so there!"

I shrugged. "Well, you might find her out, she might be shopping at the local garden centre or something."

She grinned. "For your information, I know she's in! She's already invited me over! I said, I'd be at hers by 2 o'clock. But no, I've just changed my mind yet again! All I need do is to phone her back and say, 'Zoe, I've just had this argument with my *pathetic* brother, so I'm coming over right now', so put that in your pipe and smoke it!"



December has...

If we're lucky a lot of snow,
Snowmen, sledges, and snowball fights galore.
Christmas tree lights are all aglow,
And carol singers knocking at your door.

Monday 1 December

The first kidney transplant was successfully achieved in Boston in the USA in 1954 and involved twin brothers.

I assume that identical twins would be able to swap any organs knowing they had a fit (to use the surgical jargon).

Well, we had our first Christmas card through the front door. It was from mum's friend Annie. We'll have to go up into the loft and get down our early 1970s battered old Christmas tree and the same old decorations soon.

When I came in from school at 3.34 p.m., mum made us all sit down at the kitchen table. She said, "Right, I've bought Auntie Maggie's get-well card, and while we're all here, we may as well get all the Christmas cards done too."

So, there the 3 of us were, signing and passing cards to

I another. She could've done all this on her own; but no, every year we children must join in as well.

At 6.30 p.m. I finally got down to some piano, practising my 2 Strauss numbers.

Tuesday 2 December

A 61-year-old dentist, Barney Clark, became the first person to have an artificial heart inserted into his body in 1982. The surgery was performed by Dr William DeVries at the University of Utah Medical Centre. The heart was made from plastic and glass fibre reinforced fabric.

It would not be very romantic to inform your girlfriend "Darling, I love you with all my plastic and glass reinforced fibre."

Ben has given me my very first Christmas card. I opened it in front of him and there it was as always, a massive cross from Zoe as well. I thanked him and, on the way home, I popped into the Co-op and bought the cheapest Christmas bumper box I could find and signed my name in 3 cards.

Wednesday 3 December

Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson died of a stroke in Samoa in 1894.

Treasure Island was the first book I read twice over. I've always liked adventure stories, and this is the best. Stevenson was a prolific writer. Another intriguing story from his pen is *Jekyll and Hyde*. To read all the books I would like to, I'd need a 48-hour day and a 10-day week.

I forgot to take my Christmas cards to school. I may have to give some more, so this year I think I may as well wait just a little longer to hand them out, like for instance on the very last day!

Thursday 4 December

Dr Christiaan Barnard successfully performed the first ever transplant of a human heart from one person to another in 1967.

What with scientists trying to help us live to 120, we will have enough time to collect so many replacements that we won't know how much of us we are.

I received 3 more cards today. They were from the usual 2, James and Paul, but – very surprisingly – Colin as well. Maybe I've got it all wrong; for some unknown reason he must like me now, or does he have a cunning plan up his sleeve?

Friday 5 December

The first stretch of British motorway was opened in 1958: 5 miles of the new Preston Bypass.

I always thought the first motorway was the M1 (which seemed logical). I have delved into this today. In a way I was right, in that it was the first to be completed. However, the Preston Bypass was the first stretch of the M6, which took longer to be opened for traffic.

Today in geography, Mr. Sim was busy walking back and forth giving us our exercise books, when Colin accidentally did this loudest cough ever.

Jumping backwards, he shouted, "Woah ... Colin! You've just made me drop all these books, now they're all sprawled out everywhere! I've got to pick them all up now! Or would you like to help me?"

Colin sniffed. "I can't, sir, you see, I've got this back problem. I'm having trouble kneeling now; it gets very painful just here, in my lower back area. Do you want to see?"

Mr. Sim said, "That's very funny, didn't you have PE yesterday?"

Colin replied, "Oh, oh yes, that's right, sir, I can remember now, it definitely started this morning, so I

must've pulled it during rugby yesterday."

Then, after singing practice, mum and Sophia had just been voting for Joe Swash to win *Get Me out of Here!* It was the last episode. Oh yes, according to Sophia, Joe Swash is known from *EastEnders*, and he won it.

Saturday 6 December *Independence Day, Finland*

The Irish Free State was born in 1921 after more than 500 years of British rule.

Surely this should have ended the disputes between the countries, and at the same time the violence between Protestants and Catholics? But no, it didn't.

Today at 9.30 a.m. I was in the lounge, just about to go on the piano, when Sophia came in.

I said, "Oh, so why are you all dressed up? This is highly unusual for you. You're usually in your bedclothes around this time."

She responded, "I've been asked to go out with Zoe and her mum to do some Christmas shopping and I'm going to be out for most of the day, because after that I'll be going back to Zoe's for some grub."

I replied, "Do you realise that in just over 3 weeks it'll be 2009 and I'll be finished with my diary forever! Yep! So, no more dairy entries for me!"

Sophia asked, "You definitely don't want another diary then?"

I shouted, "No! And if anyone should decide to buy me 1 for Christmas, then I'll make sure I buy them 1 for every year for as long as they live, whoever they may be."

Sophia asked, "Really?"

I said, "Yes, really. And you have my permission to tell the rest of them."

Looking out of the window, Sophia said, "Oh, Zoe's outside. Clarence, would you mind answering the front door for me? I've forgotten to pick up my purse from my bedroom. I won't be long," and she quickly ran upstairs.

Opening the front door, I said, "Hello, Zoe. Yes, Sophia is ready, she's just in her bedroom, apparently, she needs to take 2 purses."

Zoe shrugged, "Sophia has 2 purses? I didn't know that."

Coming back downstairs Sophia smiled. "Hi, Zoe, I've got my purse, so we can go now."

Zoe shrugged. "I didn't know you had 2 purses, Sophia."

Sophia asked, "What do you mean, 2 purses? I haven't got 2 purses."

I said, "Yes, you have, and there's the other purse, it's right next to the telephone."

Quickly grabbing the purse, Sophia replied, "*Whoops!* Oh, yes, I do have 2 purses*silly* me, see ya!"

Sunday 7 December

Physician James Herrick was the first man to diagnose a heart attack in a living person in Chicago in 1912.

I've had enough! All this talk about heart attacks, there're loads of people dying from them and I've got a family member and friend who have both died from this terrible condition this year already!

Mum had asked dad if he could get the old Christmas tree and the decorations down from the loft. Finally, he made it up there after his afternoon sleep. So, there was mum traditionally taking photos of dad, Sophia and me putting our old, thick, dark red, gold, and silver tinsel on our poor old, battered tree. Afterwards we enjoyed a box of Roses chocolates and sang along to the same Christmas songs CD as we worked on making the whole lounge nice and Christmassy once again.

After our spaghetti Bolognese dinner, we all enjoyed 1 of MUM's home-made chocolate fudge cakes. Everybody had a very good day today and to finish it off we all went to bed late with extremely full bellies. Yummy!

Monday 8 December

Japanese bombers attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941, sinking or damaging all eight battleships.

Calendars always seem to ‘celebrate’ anniversaries of so many assassinations, battles, catastrophes, depressions and so on through the alphabet. For every good news story, there are at least half a dozen tales of woe.

At 7.30 a.m. I was in the kitchen enjoying my breakfast when mum came in and said, “Well, do you know that only 6 months ago today little Andrea was born. It won’t be long until she starts walking, then before you know it, she’ll be going to school. I just can’t believe how time flies by so quickly, it’s amazing.”

I shrugged. “Right, well I never think about it really.”

She said, “Oh, you will when you’re much older, trust me on that.”

At 4.37 p.m. I started thinking about family members and their friends getting together to celebrate Andrea being 1 in exactly 6 months’ time, so I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom and write my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 27, *Birthday*.

BIRTHDAY

BABY

There’re a lot of people here.
Making such a fuss of me,
There’s nice music I can hear.
And these parcels I can see.

MOTHER

Everybody has come to celebrate.
Because this is a very special date.
You were born 1 year ago today.
And we’ve bought you some new games to play.

Tuesday 9 December

The first custom-built aircraft carrier, Ark Royal, was launched in 1914. The ship had space for ten aircraft.

Only 4 months after the outbreak of the First World War. Somebody must have been convinced for quite a while that it would soon be needed.

Today I had an idea about writing another Christmas list, but this time for my family:

Dad, an expensive book on trains
Mum, anti-ageing cream and perfume
Claudia, a £10 book voucher
Sophia, a violin book

Right, this Saturday I'm going shopping to get it over and done with!

Wednesday 10 December

The married French scientists Pierre and Marie Curie were awarded the Nobel Prize for physics in 1903.

Obviously these 2 working together as a married couple worked very well. But in my book, I don't think that this situation should ever be considered, for obvious reasons.

Just before Sophia and I went to school, we had 12 Christmas cards come through the post.

Mum opened them all, laughing, "Ha! Some of these cards are so hilarious."

I replied, "Well, I'm not really interested."

Sophia said, "Neither am I. Anyway, we need to be going, we don't want to be late for school."

Mum smiled. "Well, as I'm not doing anything this afternoon, I'll make the Christmas pudding. Yes, that's a brilliant idea! I must say so myself."

Thursday 11 December

King Edward VIII announced his abdication in 1936, enabling him to marry Wallis Simpson, an American divorcee who was not acceptable as queen by the Royal Family. He was never crowned.

If he had not spurned the throne, we would not be celebrating Queen Elizabeth II's diamond jubilee in 2012.

At 6.05 p.m., mum, dad, Sophia, and I were all eating our dinner of fish and chips.

I said, "Oh, I really hate these horrible short days we Brits get every year. And why on earth do we have to keep putting the clocks back? Look, it's only 6 in the evening and see how dark it is out there. I can't wait for 21st of December, which is the longest night of course, and it's only 10 days to go! All that lovely, warm spring weather to look forward to!"

Sophia shrugged. "Well, I disagree, I absolutely love this time of year. They say there's going to be snow in January next year. And you can get snow in Spring as well, you know!"

Dad grunted. "Well, I'm with Clarence on this, and don't get me started about the damn clocks. But, once I can remember the government embarked on a trial that saw the clocks move forward in March 1968 and not turn back until October 1971, so in the morning we all had to go to school in the dark and..."

Sophia moaned, "Yes, we've all heard of this before, you nearly got hit by a car, so for the next following weeks you had to wear reflective armbands."

Mum smiled, "Oh, I love having my birthday just after Christmas Day, I always buy a few bargains in the sales."

Sophia smiled, "Yes, we all know that too, oh ... except for Clarence, him being in his own little world and all that, as usual."

I shouted, "For your information, young sister of mine, that's where you're wrong and I do know she does that."

Sophia replied, "Oh, you do surprise me, so you do take

note of what's going on around here then sometimes.”

I laughed, “Ha! Ha! Very funny! Very funny indeed.”

Friday 12 December

Guglielmo Marconi transmitted a wireless message from Cornwall to Newfoundland, which is 2,000 miles, in 1901.

It would not be overstating the case to call this the birth of global communications.

Finally, at the end of the day, we were all given our mock exam results in an envelope. I opened it up when I got home. It wasn't good. For the music practical I got an A, but I couldn't believe it, a B+ for the theory. The next result was geography: I got a B; I thought at least I would've got an A for that. The next result was maths: I got a C; and my worst result was in English where I only got a D. I think this could be average for my year group, I suppose.

Things didn't go right at singing practice either. Some people are getting a little nervous about performing at our Christmas concert in the theatre lobby, which will be on the 22nd.

Not a good day at all! The only good thing was looking at all the same old Christmas lights along the High Street as I cycled back home.

Saturday 13 December

Samuel Johnson died in the city he loved in 1784.

He expressed that love when he asserted, “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life”. I'm not at all sure he would be so enamoured if he fixed his eyes on the 21st century capital with its gridlocked traffic, forlorn shopping streets and the never-ending noise that I encountered when my sisters and I spent a few days there with mum not long ago. I wish I'd chosen to stay at home like dad did.

After my lunch I decided to go downtown to buy the

family's Christmas presents, as I promised myself a few days ago. I managed to get everything on the list, as well as 3 rolls of wrapping paper and a big box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates for mum's birthday present too. I even remembered to give Mr. Willis his Christmas card.

A positive day at last!

Sunday 14 December

Prince Albert died of typhoid at Windsor Castle in 1861, leaving Queen Victoria to survive 40 years of widowhood.

I suppose it's a cliché these days, but it was an open secret that he was her rock; that she was able to carry the burden of the monarchy alone for nearly 40 years is testimony to her courage and determination.

For some reason I started getting quite panicky about Christmas morning in case somebody presented me with a new diary. So, I decided to give everybody concerned a copy of my first Christmas wish list. I sent Claudia hers by email.

Well, I'll just have to hope that I've done enough!

Clarence's Christmas Wish List

Electric Yamaha Keyboard with headphones

Microphone

Music stand

iPhone or Minolta camera with tripod

Historical book on any foreign country

The latest book on UFO sightings and abductions

Parker pen

Monday 15 December

The Beatles' first song, 'Love Me Do', broke into the UK top twenty in 1962.

Still, it could've been much worse. They could have

chosen to call the group the Cockroaches!

During registration, we all were comparing our mock exam results.

I told Ben my results, and he said, “Well, at least you got an A, I didn’t even get that. My highest score was for geography, but I only got a B and that is my best subject, as you know.”

Matt jumped in, “I can’t believe it! I’ve got an A for maths! *Woohoo!*”

Ben asked, “But that’s your worst subject, how on earth did you do it?”

Matt shouted, “That’s for me to know and you to find out, see ya!”

Then Colin moaned, “I mainly got Cs, but my worst result was a D- for English, and that’s my best subject of all time. Right, that does it, I’m no longer going to mess around in any of my classes, starting from January!”

Ben said, “Well, Lisa, Karen, Fiona, and Stacey all came top, which wasn’t surprising considering how intelligent they all are. So, I’m guessing we must’ve come about middle of the year. I know I don’t mess around in class, but I’m with Colin on this! So, from January I’ll be devoting myself to nothing else but concentration on my schoolwork!”

I replied, “Good idea!”

Tuesday 16 December

Rasputin, the Siberian monk, died in 1916. He was a notorious drunkard and womaniser and became unpopular because of the way he had won the trust of the Tsar and his family. He was stabbed, poisoned, and shot and yet an autopsy showed that he was still alive when thrown from a bridge into the icy waters of the river Neva. He was stabbed, poisoned, and shot and yet an autopsy showed that he was still alive when thrown from a bridge into the icy waters of the river Neva.

For some reason the killers failed to strangle him or hit his head with a hammer. They really should’ve made sure he

wouldn't be reborn.

James came to me during the morning break. "Clarence, I've got this girl in mind. You will like her. Her name is Laura Marks, and she has long auburn hair. She's 19, doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, and has nothing to do with drugs. Loves classical music and can play the acoustic guitar and, best of all, she's single right now. So, what do you think? Would you like to meet her?"

I said, "Well, so she's 19. Hmm, that makes her 3 years older than me!"

He sighed, "Look, Clarence, why don't you think on it? You can let me know before or sometime on Christmas Eve."

I smiled, "Good idea, I'll do that then."

He suggested, "But I wouldn't leave it any longer if I were you."

I said, "I shan't, I promise."

Wednesday 17 December

In North Carolina, Orville Wright was the pilot of the first power-controlled flight in history in 1903. The wood, wire and fibre contraption covered the distance of 120 feet in twelve seconds.

From such modest beginnings, a whole new world of air travel transformed the lives of people. A red-letter day.

During the lunchbreak everybody started talking about what they wanted for Christmas and what they are going to be doing.

Lisa grinned, "Oh, we're going to Spain, what are you going to do, Karen?"

Karen announced, "We're going to go to Scotland for Christmas, then we'll be seeing the New Year in as well. I can't wait to go. What about you, Colin?"

Colin said, "We're going to visit my auntie in Wales, like every year. It's just fantastic at her house, we get loads to do, it's great. What about you, Clueless, what are you

doing?”

I replied, “Oh, not much, I shouldn’t imagine.”

Colin laughed, “Ha! Ha! You must be the only person in the whole class who isn’t going anywhere. Even Toby’s going to some gender identity clinic in London. Ha! That’s so hilarious! I wonder what name he’ll pick?”

Ben shouted, “Hey! Why can’t you go away and leave us alone? And if Toby does go ahead with his sex change, then I think he’ll be more of a person than you’ll ever be!”

Karen sighed, “Colin, just come away, it’s just not worth it. In any case, is that Mr. Browning walking down the corridor?”

Colin moaned, “Oh, no, it is him! OK, but I do know where you both live.”

Thursday 18 December

Supposed human remains were found on Piltdown Common in Sussex in 1912. They were dubbed ‘Piltdown Man’ and were declared the evolutionary missing link that Charles Darwin wrote about. In 1953, the claim was shown to be an elaborate hoax.

The right date for that entry should’ve been 1 April.

Today in registration I asked Ben, “Where’s Colin? He should be here by now, he’s never late.”

He said, “I don’t think we’ll be seeing him and his gang for the remaining 2 days of this year. Anyway, Clarence, did you hear anything strange last night?”

I suggested, “Well yes, I did. Let’s see, it must’ve been around half 7 in the evening. Now, Sophia and I were in the lounge, and we just kept on hearing these load popping noises which seemed to come from our front garden. And this morning we found a lot rubbish on our grass; it was a total mess. Mum wasn’t happy about it at all.”

He moaned, “Yes, I know, they did it to us as well. It was Colin and his gang.”

I asked, “How do you know?”

He replied, “Ah, now our house has secret cameras all

over the place. Mum didn't want to get the police involved, but she has already been into school to show the footage to Mr. Browning."

Tomorrow is our last day at school for this year, and like always in the afternoon all of us pupils will have to watch some of our teachers perform a *silly* pantomime in the main hall. At least we won't be doing anything else.

Friday 19 December

William Pitt became the youngest British Prime Minister at the age of 24 in 1783.

He didn't take time to enjoy life before rushing into the thankless and arduous world of politics.

I finally gave out my 4 Christmas cards this year. Now, except for Colin and his gang (because they were in the cooler with Mr. Dingle), the rest of us had to sit through *Cinderella*. Funnily enough, this time round the best actors were the science teacher Mrs. Brand, the handsome Prince and Mr. Sim as the wicked stepmother. It was a fantastic show, at last! Such a shame I didn't get to sit with my favourite gang of all time!

As I was just coming home, James reminded me, "Hey, Clarence, don't forget about our next Mario Shell Cup races meeting."

I said, "Oh right, yes, I'd forgotten all about that. Would you like to come over to my house? Say on Sunday morning at around 10 o'clock?"

He replied, "At yours! Yes, brilliant, I'll see you then."

Singing practice was much better than last week, but someone sneezed, so I might be ill again soon. Wonderful!

Saturday 20 December

Bangladesh won independence from Pakistan in 1971.

This is 1 more stage in the independence of the subcontinent. First India secured its independence from Britain; then it split with Pakistan on religious grounds.

This morning when I was coming down to the kitchen, I heard mum talking to somebody on the phone and I guessed it was Claudia. Mum said, “Yes, of course you can, but only if you wouldn’t mind her sharing your bedroom. OK, see you in a few days’ time, bye, love, bye!”

Then mum came into the kitchen and announced to Sophia and me, “That was Claudia on the phone. She will be bringing her friend Reggie Jones. She’s staying over from the 23rd to New Year’s Day. So, please don’t mention anything about her useless ex-boyfriends, because we really need this Christmas holiday to be the best we’ve ever had.”

Sophia said, “We won’t. Anyway, Reggie? Isn’t that only a boy’s name?”

Mum replied, “Well, actually no, I was considering giving you it, but your dad wouldn’t have any of it. Mum replied, “Well, no, I was considering giving you it, but your dad wouldn’t have any of it. I really like it; it’s quite an unusual name for a girl.”

Sophia smiled, “Phew! That’s such a relief! I’m glad you didn’t. In any case, we wouldn’t want another Christmas like last year and the year before that and the year before that. This year it’s going to be much better; you just wait and see.”

Mum sighed, “Hmm, we’ll have to see, won’t we?” and went out to the shops.

So, we’ve got Claudia coming up again. Great!

Sunday 21 December

A Pan Am 747 jumbo jet heading for New York crashed near the town of Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988, killing all the passengers and crew and eleven people on the ground from falling wreckage.

I think it was Winston Churchill who proclaimed that jaw, jaw, jaw was always better than war, war, war. This episode goes to show how little notice has been taken by dictators and politicians.

James was 10 minutes late and we quickly got down to business with the Mario Shell Cup races. For a long time, he was winning. He said, "This is great, I'm beating you, Clarence, yet again!"

I replied, "I don't think so, I've just overtaken you," and I kept it up right to the end. He wasn't happy. Then we played chess. I shouldn't have done it, but to cheer him up without making too obvious mistakes I let him beat me, it being the shortest day of the year and the Christmas holidays and all that. We arranged to play the Mario Banana Cup in the February half-term.

Monday 22 December

Rosemary West was convicted of ten counts of murder and sentenced to life in 1995. Her husband, Fred, was also charged but committed suicide.

This is yet another husband and wife working together. Considering their choice of employment, I'm not certain whether this supports my argument on the subject!

At 2.34 p.m. I was in the kitchen just finishing my tomato soup and toast when mum started asking me, "So, Clarence, will you be singing a solo piece at the concert?"

I told her, "Yes, I'm performing *Walking in the Air*."

The concert went OK, but my singing wasn't good at all. Right, that's it; I'm going to have some private singing lessons with Mr. Willis as well. I'll arrange it with him when I go back there in 2 weeks' time.

Tuesday 23 December *Emperor's Birthday, Japan*

In 1972 Japanese general Tojo and six other military leaders were hanged for crimes against humanity in 1948.

There's no time limit for administering justice, it seems.

Claudia and her friend Reggie arrived at 12.02 p.m. Reggie has dark-brown eyes, jet-black, wavy hair and very long legs.

At 1.05 p.m., I was just about to go into the kitchen when I heard Reggie talking to mum and dad, so I stopped and listened. “Your Clarence, he’s such a sweetie. That Mozart piece he played for me and Claudia about an hour ago was fantastic. *Genius*. How I really wish I could play like that.”

Dad said, “Yes, but I’ve no idea where he gets it from because I don’t think anybody else in our family can play.”

Mum butted in, “Well, before I met you, Dad, I used to play a little myself. Maybe I’ll go back to it 1 day, probably when I’ve got more time, like when Clarence and Sophia fly the nest, so to speak.”

Then I heard people moving, so I quickly grabbed my coat and took Topsy out to the Co-op and bought Reggie a box of Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates for her Christmas present. When we got back at 2 p.m., mum told me, “Clarence, Annie phoned about 5 minutes ago to see if any of us would like to go with her to watch the pantomime matinee of *Mother Goose* as she had 3 tickets going spare. The girls have all gone and I’ve got to go out to do some Christmas shopping. Dad will be back from work in a couple of hours, so I’m afraid it’s just going to be you and Topsy for a while. And I guessed you wouldn’t mind, as you’re not the type of person who’s really into going out to pantomimes and other similar shows, are you?”

I replied, “That’s right and you have a good time.”

She said, “Great, see you then, just make yourself something nice to eat, bye.”

I said, “Good idea!” and went to the kitchen to make myself scrambled egg and baked beans on toast; for afters I chose a slice of chocolate cheesecake, then went upstairs to my bedroom, Topsy following behind.

At 7.30 pm. I started thinking about people getting all excited about going out to watch men performing as women and visa-versa, messing around in their *silly* costumes; though some would suggest how pantomimes always seem to give off this magical atmosphere. So, I

wrote the words to my next *Mother & Baby* poem. *Mother & Baby* poem 28, *The Pantomime*.

THE PANTOMIME

MOTHER

This is what we Brits call a pantomime,
I see you're having a fantastic time.
Now that rather large dame is really a man.
And that handsome king is really a woman.

BABY

Wow! This place looks very nice and really big.
I hear laughter from people all around me,
I'm seeing this strange lady wearing a wig.
And there's a gigantic funny looking bee.

Wednesday 24 December *Christmas Eve*

In 1888, showing signs of mental instability and following a quarrel with fellow Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh cut off his own left ear and gave it to a woman called Rachel.

I hope she was grateful. According to the Wikipedia website, he shot himself 6 years later. What a waste of talent.

Just as I suspected, I've got yet another cold. Mum and Sophia went shopping for their last presents, so at 11.32 a.m. I took my opportunity and went upstairs to my bedroom and wrapped up all of mine.

By 11.48 a.m. I was sitting in the lounge, just about to send James his long-awaited text, when Claudia walked in: "So, who are you texting, Clarence?" she asked.

I said, "Oh, it's to a mate of mine called James, I'm just letting him know something."

"Oh, yes?" Leaning over my shoulder, she read, "'About this girl called Laura I can...' ah, ha! Is it you can, or you can't meet her? Which is it, Clarence? If it's

can't, is it because you fancy somebody else who is a little older than you and has jet-black hair with the name of Reggie? If it is, then I'm afraid she's already taken!"

Then Reggie came in and Claudia shouted, "Here, Reggie! I believe our Clarence might have a crush on you."

Reggie grinned. "Ha! You can rely on us; we won't breathe a single word to anyone; this will be our little *secret*. Look, Claudia, he's blushing!"

I shouted, "How dare you! How rude of you both... And no way am I ... blushing. I've got a cold; therefore, I've got a temperature."

Then Claudia suddenly grabbed hold of me from the back and Reggie took my phone, deleted my words and at 11.55 a.m. this text was sent.

Hi James,
Sick! Would like2meet Laura.
Cu,
Clar

I received a text back at 11.57 a.m.

Hi Clar
Wicked! Sick, man! I'll text her tonight. b in touch.
James

At 8.03 p.m. I went upstairs to my bedroom and started thinking about people going out shopping; after a while I came up with the words for my next *Mother & Baby* poem 29, *In the Buggy*.

IN THE BUGGY

MOTHER

I take you for a buggy ride – oh boy!
Everyone knows you are my pride and joy.
They peep inside and tell us.

We make them feel quite jealous.

BABY

When I'm in my buggy - ooh!

I can see the sky so blue.

Oh wow! And who's that over there?

They're so cute - I just want to stare.

Thursday 25 December *Christmas Day Bank & public holiday, UK & Republic of Ireland*

German and British soldiers played football and exchanged gifts in a one-day Christmas truce during the First World War in 1914.

Perhaps red cards and sin bins should be part of the rules of war. Come to think of it, perhaps there could be a device made for banning war altogether. Naivety is my middle name.

At 8.15 a.m., mum knocked on my bedroom door. "Aren't you getting up yet?"

I called, "I'm sorry, but I feel awful."

Mum replied, "Clarence, you've only got a slight cold, and we do have a guest staying here, so please, show some respect and get dressed and make it quick. We're all waiting to open our presents."

So, I had no choice but to go downstairs already dressed. Well, I didn't get a new diary, which is brilliant. Sophia gave me a very nice silver Parker pen. Mum had bought me an electric Yamaha Keyboard with headphones and a book about America called *America's Got History*. Dad had got me a small Kodak camera, and the latest UFO book called *Britain's UFO Sightings and Abductions*. Claudia and Reggie gave me a microphone and a music stand. And as usual from my distant relatives I received money via bank transfer, to the sum of £200! Everybody else loved their presents from me, including Reggie, who, still smiling, gave me a great big kiss on my left cheek. "Oh, this is a lovely present, these are my best chocolates,

thank you ever so much. Actually, as our dinner isn't until later, I'm going to open them up right now!"

Mum announced, "Oh, it's 9 o'clock! I'll just go and ring Auntie Diana in New Zealand before they go to bed, then after that I'll start making the turkey dinner."

After the Queen's speech, Sophia played charades with mum. Claudia and Reggie played Scrabble. Topsy wanted to go out for a walk, but in the end, she had to go in the garden. As usual dad fell asleep on the sofa, and for once in my life I did the same.

This time next year, I'm going to be either at Ben's or James's house, and they'll invite me over to theirs from 23rd December until the New Year, just like Reggie. But this very special person will be the best-behaved guest they could ever have to stay.

Friday 26 December *Boxing Day Bank & public holiday, UK & Republic of Ireland*

Peter Pan (sub-titled 'The boy who wouldn't grow up') was written by James Barrie and received excellent reviews when premiered in London in 1904.

Without a doubt, PP is my favourite pantomime. I believe I've seen it 4 times.

When I got up, dad had already gone to work. Mum was busying herself hoovering the carpet; and Claudia and Reggie were still in bed. When I was in the kitchen making my cup of tea, Sophia moaned, "I feel absolutely...terrible, my throat is so sore, I think I might be coming down with another cold. Just my luck, I wanted to be 100% fit for our New Year's party. Thanks very much, Clarence!"

I said, "You must've caught it from somebody else, because I haven't got a sore throat with mine."

She replied, "Oh, I need cheering up. So, what shall I do?"

I suggested, "Why don't you ask mum, Claudia and Reggie if they would like to go out to the sales with you?"

She smiled. "That's such a brilliant idea, I'll go and do that."

By 6.45p.m. I started thinking about people going out Christmas shopping and finally getting to meet Santa Claus in some shop or other, and it gave me an idea for another *Mother & Baby* poem. So, at 6.57 p.m. I went upstairs to my bedroom to write my last ever *Mother & Baby* poem for this year. *Mother & Baby* poem 30, *Santa Claus*.

SANTA CLAUS

BABY

When we went shopping today
There were people everywhere.
They kept getting in our way.
I could only sit and stare,
Lots of people fussing about
Mummy said, "Just wait and see!"
Once in the store I soon found out.
Such a big surprise for me.

MOTHER

You thought that he was very weird.
With his red coat and his white beard,
But Santa Claus soon made you smile.
His presents made your day worthwhile.

Saturday 27 December

The International Monetary Fund was founded in 1945.

Personally, I wish we could go back to the barter system.
Love of money is said to be the root of all evil.

Well, mum had a lovely 45th birthday and she really enjoyed eating all her Thorntons Classic Collection chocolates. Annie came over at 10.35 a.m. They both went out for the day. Annie treated her to see the *Mamma Mia*

show in London. At 8.45 p.m., mum phoned us up and I answered. "Oh Clarence, is everything OK? It's an interval break now. We're having such a wonderful time here! The theatre is absolutely jam-packed, and everybody is laughing, singing and dancing in the aisles," she said.

I replied, "Oh, we're all fine and I'm so glad you're having such a good time. I'll be asleep when you get back, so I'll see you in the morning, bye."

She said, "Yes, you're right, we'll be back very late, most probably in the early hours of the morning, so goodnight, love, sleep tight, bye!"

You wouldn't even see me dead in there! With all those people laughing, singing, dancing, and prancing all over the place. Not my cup of tea at all! Definitely not!

Sunday 28 December

Six weeks after the end of the war in 1918, women turned out to vote in the general election for the first time. At this stage, however, suffrage was only granted to property-owning women over the age of 30.

What a strange limitation. No wonder it didn't last.

Mum came back home very late this morning. So, it was, 2 a.m. when I finally went to sleep.

Then later at 10.54 a.m. I was busy in the kitchen preparing an early lunch, of 2 chocolate spread sandwiches, when dad came in with his pyjamas on. He sniffed, "I can't believe it! I've finally managed to book a week's holiday and now I've got man flu! I wonder if I'll be able to swap them for sick leave instead. Yes, I'll phone up my boss this afternoon and ask him."

I replied, "Oh, that'll be good if you can do that! Anyway, you couldn't have got it from me because I've only got a cold. But I'm starting to feel a lot better now. So that's good news, isn't it!"

He moaned, "Hmm, so in that case when you've eaten your lunch, you'll be able to take Topsy out, then. Right, I'm going back to bed." I should've kept my mouth shut!

Monday 29 December

London's Tate Gallery was flooded when the river Thames overflowed in 1928, ruining priceless pictures stored in the basement.

I trust they rescued the watercolours.

At 9.50 a.m., mum walked into the kitchen. "I've just had this text to phone your Uncle Bob. He says your Great-Auntie Maggie had been very ill and she died in her bed late last night. The funeral is going to be a week from today.

Sophia said, "That's going to be my first day back at school, so I can't go."

I replied, "Oh no, that's where you're wrong, Sophia, we've both got an Inset day on that day, plus the fact we might be in the Will, so we'll have to go."

She shrugged. "Know it all!"

Tuesday 30 December

King Michael of Romania was pushed into abdicating by the Communist government in 1947.

Now he could have died as a destitute old man, but what I do know is that their Communist rule lasted until 1989.

I received an email from James at 3.34 p.m.

Hi Clar,

Given Laura your phone number. She's going to ring u on New Year's Day. She's excited to meet u.

James

Fingers crossed it isn't yet another disastrous relationship. Today at 6.45 p.m. I was looking at some young boy saying *silly* sport jokes, on YouTube. Then I remembered a couple of Sundays ago I'd watched the cyclist Chris Hoy win the *BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award*. So, this got me thinking about writing down all the things that

have happened over this year that I didn't comment on at the time. In the end I googled 20 winners, 16 sport events and 4 talent shows:

Winners and Dates

Dancing on Ice 13 Jan-16 Mar – Suzanne Shaw, RAF Bovington

6 Nations Rugby Championships 14-19 Mar – Wales

University Boat Race 29 Mar – Oxford

Grand National 5 Apr – Comply or Die, Ireland

London Marathon 13 Apr, Men – Martin Lei, Kenya;

Women – Irina Mikitenko, Germany

Snooker World Champs 5 May – Ronnie O'Sullivan

F.A. Cup Final 17 May – Portsmouth

Champions League Cup 21 May – Manchester United

Britain's Got Talent 31 May – George Sampson

Open Golf Championships 17-20 Jul – Padraig Harrington

The Derby 7 Jun – New Approach

Sailing race, Olympics 8-24 Aug – Paul Goodison, Beijing

Air Rifle Shooting, Olympics – Abhinav Bindra, Beijing

Swimming, Olympics – Michael Phelps, Beijing

World Chess Champs Women's, Russia 28 Aug-18

Sep – Alexandra Kosteniuk; *Men's, Bonn* 14-29 Oct –

Viswanathan Anand

Formula 1 Season 2 Nov – Lewis Hamilton

X Factor 13 Dec – Alexandra Burke

Strictly Come Dancing 21 Dec – Tom Chambers

Wednesday 31 December

After serving as a Nazi officer in World War 2, Kurt Waldheim replaced U Thant to become Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1971.

That is 1 of the most extraordinary changes of direction I've ever heard of. Appropriately it marks the end of a year and the beginning of a new chance to make a real contribution to a better world.

I promised myself back in November to choose which

Mother & Baby poem to submit to the school poetry competition. I must say I've really enjoyed writing them. Looking through all 30 of them, so I've just decided that on Thursday 22nd of January I'll enter either poem no. 1, *The New Arrival*, or poem no. 2. *Recognition*. Also, I've just decided that I'll be writing some more, but not until after my exams. But I'll change them to *Mother & Toddler* poems, and I could also do *Father & Toddler* poems as well! Maybe I could even have a go at some song writing too, yes, good idea! But I've still got to keep to my word, so I'll not buy myself a scrapbook until I've completed all my last school exams in June.

Well, I'll now sum up by recalling what I've done for my first time ever in each month of this year, so here goes:

January: Usher Hall in Edinburgh - (Appletown Orchestra)
possibility of seeing 3 ghosts?

February: A friendly goat; 100th birthday party (Great-Granny Eliza Upton-Symth).

March: St David's Hall in Wales - (Appletown Orchestra)
Tipsy Jazz composition (dad); funeral in Scotland
(Great- Uncle Paddy).

April: Lexie, love-sick poem.

May: 5-day school trip to Dorset.

June: First *M & B* poem; crop circle or hoax?

July: Appletown Carnival; helped mum's business.

August: Alton Towers; AS exam results; Anderby Creek
(caravan holiday); Lexie dumped me.

September: Went to Scarborough (Granny Josie and Gary's wedding); RSPCA (Ben and I rescued 5 puppies from drowning out of the Woodsfield Lake).

October: Saved Martin Mansfield's life; dumped Melissa;
Milton Keynes Theatre - (Appletown Orchestra)
Sophia (good manners).

November: Winning the school badminton competition;
Zack (babysitting job).

December: Appletown Theatre (singing group solo song,

Walking in the Air); Great-Auntie Maggie died.

It's 7 p.m. I've got to go now; Cathy has just arrived! But before I go, I can't believe it myself, to be honest, but I've had a good time writing in this diary. But no more! Got the T-shirt! A well-deserved pat on the back for me! Yes! So, I've really enjoyed doing the numbers bit and reading the interesting historical facts. And finally, I've found out a few things about myself that I didn't know before. Ah, but never again will I tackle another year! Wicked!

Chapter 2

Happy New Year!

It is 9.30 a.m. Thursday 1 January 2009 when Clarence receives a phone call from Paul.

PAUL

Hey! Happy New Year!

CLARENCE

Hello, Paul, and the same to you too.

PAUL

How did your first ever overnight babysitting job go?

CLARENCE

Baby Zack was a total nightmare! Well, talking about last night, I had this funniest dream ever!

PAUL

Really? I bet it wasn't as good as mine, which I'll tell you about after I get to hear about yours but carry on.

CLARENCE

So, it's in the future. I'm married to Zoe, and we have a baby son called James.

PAUL

Ha! That's a laugh: you hate Zoe.

CLARENCE

I know! Anyway, then suddenly we're talking about having our very own home and we're having this extremely hilarious conversation with this estate agent lady called Muffin Sniff-Bottom.

PAUL

Ha! That's brilliant!

CLARENCE

Then, this lady approached us, and she just started singing this verse and it went like this:

"Hmm, well, we have many different types, oh yeah, You could buy this disgusting Rosehip Cottage, oh yeah. It's an ugly, petite abode and this photo I'm giving you. Shows it's right here in this derelict village called Blue."

PAUL

That's very good, I just can't wait to tell you mine.

CLARENCE

Not now, because I'm not finished yet. Right, then she told us, "As you can see, this is a very expensive cottage. It has two small, messy gardens, an extremely high, white, stone prison-like wall, a shabby thatched roof, three matchbox-sized bedrooms, a tiny mouldy kitchen and this massive, light grey outside building is where the toilet is, that everybody else would be so jealous of."

PAUL

And do you buy it?

CLARENCE

We do. And we had to pay a million pebbles.

PAUL

Pebbles? Wow, now that's funny. So, what happened next?

CLARENCE

So then when we stated moving, and the removal men just started singing too! They did two verses, and they went like this:

"Mm, ooh,
Mrs. Upton-Smyth we're

Your removal firm.
Tra, la, la.

We're here to help you.
Oooh, oooh,
You just leave everything.
To us..."

And get this! She sings three verses back!

PAUL

Ha! She's tone death in real life, so what did she sing then?

CLARENCE

Yep! They went like this.

"La, la, la ooh, yeah
So, it's goodbye.
To our number six Riverside
My love.

La, la, la ooh, yeah
Yes, it's time to move.
On to pastures new
My love.

We're sure the next people.
Will look after you.
We know they will.
Goodbye..."

PAUL

Ha! So, can I tell you mine?

CLARENCE

Not yet. Then, suddenly Sophia was standing outside crying because she had just left Ben.

PAUL

What? She's with Ben?

CLARENCE

Yep! Anyway, Zoe noticed she was holding a black umbrella and asked her if Mary Poppins had lent it to her for a while. And Sophia replied, "Yes, it was Mary who told her to get out quickly before Ben got back from work; and that she could borrow it for a week from today, but if she didn't return it by then, she would end up living with us for the rest of her life. "Then she produced this massive megaphone and announced that Ben was having an affair. Zoe asked, "Look, Sophia, why don't you get out of this terrible summer's weather and come into our skeletal, freezing, brilliantly lit lounge so we can talk about it?"

PAUL

Wow! So, is that it now?

CLARENCE

No, I'm afraid not. Then I dreamt that I had an older brother called Darren. And for some reason we all thought he was gay but were disappointed when he introduced us to his new girlfriend, Wendy Howard, and she was the spitting image of *Nanny McPhee*. Then she just appeared in our lounge, and she suddenly started communicating with an old ghost called Doris who was looking for her husband Oscar. Then I woke up. So, what happened in your dream then?

PAUL

Well, before I tell you that, last night we had a party. Honestly, I was really bored, so when Big Ben struck midnight, I started thinking about those UFOs we saw last summer. So, then I went outside, but couldn't see any. I was very disappointed. Anyway, so I ended up dreaming about them instead.

CLARENCE

Really? Yep, that UFO was fantastic, wasn't it? It was unbelievable! Such a truly amazing sight! And then on the following day, we took Topsy out for a walk to the fields, and we'll never ever forget what we discovered; that day was brilliant too!

PAUL

Well, I didn't dream about them straight away; my first dream was about me wearing my school uniform, but it was made with a mixture of brightly lit colours, and I just started singing this verse which went like this:

“Hmm, yeah, oh yeah,
And I've got my, hmm,
School's *Amazing Technicolor Dreamuniform* on
Isn't it just fantastic? Oh yeah, oh yeah.”

CLARENCE

Ha! That's funny!

PAUL

Yep! Well, then I was at my house and my mum had introduced me to some bloke called Peter and we just walked through this wobbly transparent wall and the three of us ended up inside one of them and it wasn't on the ground!

CLARENCE

Really? But you don't know a Peter, do you?

PAUL

No, I don't. But in my dream, I do. Well, there we were all talking away, then this funny tall, strange-looking alien boss just suddenly appeared. He had a very big round knobbly head, very long, golden hair, and he was wearing a sparkly-silver cape. He had a dozen little grey, scrawny aliens with large, dark, piercing eyes all walking around him.

CLARENCE

Wow! This is much better than mine. So, what did you,

Peter, and your mum talk about?

PAUL

Well, the alien boss's name was Niffixputa, the little aliens all belonged and worked for him, because he'd created them. Straight away he said that this would be the very last time he'd see us. Then we went through a wormhole to their planet, Xylos, which is in the Andromeda Galaxy. I apparently loved the place: they had giant cliffs and high, dark, and mysterious mountains and an enormous moon. But I didn't want to live there because I couldn't see a McDonald's restaurant anywhere.

CLARENCE

I'm just loving this, so what happened next?

PAUL

Well, apparently Niffixputa had this Council Ruler called Crayton, and he'd destroyed all their forests so they could have fuel. And now all their trees had disappeared, and the air was just too poisonous for them to breathe, so he wanted to know if they could live on our planet instead. Peter said, "No can do, because we have so many problems here." Then I mentioned about how *Star Trek* created new worlds with their marvellous machines. In the end Niffixputa apologised and he was a little confused as to why he didn't think of it himself.

CLARENCE

Did I have a part in it then?

PAUL

Yep! I was just coming to that. So, then you just suddenly appeared. You were happy that everything was all sorted out because you were needed to perform this major ghost role in your next school nativity play at the London Palladium. Then I woke up.

CLARENCE

Who---ooo! Ha! That's very spooky because both of us dreamed about ghosts.

PAUL

So, about that, what about when we went on that weekend on a sleepover in January? Now that was such a scary night!

CLARENCE

And we both agreed not to tell anyone about it, but then you went ahead and told a group of year 7 girls, then they all started running out of the school gates!

PAUL

Then you joined in as well!

CLARENCE

Oh, I did, that's so right. Then we had to go to Mr. Browning's office, and we had to apologise for our appalling behaviour to Tilly, Alison, and Gillian right in front of their parents. Then for half an hour we had to sit in the cooler with Mr. Collins.

PAUL

Yep! He just kept droning on and on, saying that if we were back in the good old days, he would have made us write 100 lines. Then what about Valentine's Day? Yep! I wish I'd thought of putting that unsigned card into Markus's inside coat pocket.

CLARENCE

So, who did it then, do you know?

PAUL

I do; it was James. He did it because he was getting them back for what happened to you in the canteen a few days beforehand, don't you remember?

CLARENCE

Oh, I didn't know he was the one who did it.

PAUL

What about our first day back, when they did that terrible thing to Mr. McGann? Locking him in the cupboard like that, I wouldn't have even dared to think of doing something like that, not to anyone. And then there was that fight between Molly and Lisa on the playground. Then we had the fattest twins ever, Russel and Pippa, cheating in the charity fun run.

CLARENCE

Yep! How dare they cheat like that? They'd better not do it next year, hey!

PAUL

Yep! I'm with you there, bloody cheek. Anyway, where was I? Oh, and what about that 7B class getting into terrible trouble in Mrs. Tait's cookery lesson? Also, the false fire alarm going off in *West Side Story*. That was funny too. And what about our school putting our Sports Day on Friday the 13th, need I say more! And there was that day when Markus and Colin got told off for teasing you in the library. Then in *Cinderella* some of our teachers acting like complete idiots. Yep! It's been quite a year. Remember when we went to Dorset? That was the best geography field trip ever!

CLARENCE

Yep! Mr. Saunders kept telling us all off. Then what about Fiona and Stacey fighting in the girls' toilet?

PAUL

Well, as we're talking about girls' names, I must tell you this. So, yesterday, I had a phone call from Toby. He's gone and done it! He's started taking his hormone tablets, so she's now going to be known as Smiley Libby!

CLARENCE

Good! What about school? Is she going back or not?

PAUL

She is!

CLARENCE

Wow! I wonder if she'll be wearing a skirt. And I do hope she'll be strong enough to get back at the bullies, especially Colin and his gang.

PAUL

Anyway, I think that's enough about school. How are Claudia and Sophia, do they still annoy you?

CLARENCE

Yep!

PAUL

Oh, right. And before I forget, I've just had a phone call from Jason. So, it's his birthday coming up soon and he wants me to go over for a couple of days. I haven't given him an answer yet; what do think?

CLARENCE

Well, my advice is – DON'T GO! I had a terrible time. Well, he did let me off on the first morning, but then he had me getting up at around 6.30 for the last few days.

PAUL

Why did you do that?

CLARENCE

We were feeding the animals. Once we had to chase a runaway chicken, which wasn't the best experience, I can tell you. But I did like meeting their goat, Dusty.

PAUL

That sounds absolutely...horrible. So, after this phone call I'll be making my excuses then. Anyway, I don't think I've ever told you this before, but I've written a poem

about a pet duck called Quacker for the *Children in Need* poetry competition.

CLARENCE

Well, I've got 2 poems where a mother and baby are talking to each other. But right now, I'm undecided on which to submit, so it'll either be *The New Arrival* or it'll be *Recognition*.

PAUL

Wow! That's Brilliant! I wished I'd thought of doing something like that! Talking about good ideas, my parents have just booked our summer holiday: we're going to Scotland. I'm so looking forward to it, I've never been there before, have you?

CLARENCE

Yep, we went last year to my Great-Uncle Paddy's funeral.

PAUL

Sick! I wonder how Lexie and Melissa are getting on now.

CLARENCE

Well, I think that Melissa is still going to choir, but I don't have any idea about Lexie. Have you heard of a girl called Laura Marks at all?

PAUL

Yep, I have. I think, she's really into classical music and she can play the acoustic guitar, why?

CLARENCE

It's just that James mentioned her to me a couple of days ago and she's currently looking for a new boyfriend; she's going to ring me later today.

PAUL

That's good. I hope it works out for you both. Yep! So, talking about the future, I wonder what we'll be doing? Do you ever think about things like that? I do.

CLARENCE

Yep, so what do you think you'll be doing?

PAUL

I think I would like to do something which involves space; or failing that, I'd like to have my own business and be a ghost hunter or something.

CLARENCE

Yep, I can see you doing that.

PAUL

Hey! Wouldn't it be funny if your dream does come true and you do marry Zoe and have a boy with her? But you know what I also think.

CLARENCE

No, what's that?

PAUL

I think you'll be a celebrity; you'll have a contract with Sony, playing on a grand piano, be flying all around the world performing songs like *Nessun Dorma*, doing radio and TV interviews, going to plenty of those charity auction balls and mixing with the rich and famous.

CLARENCE

Well, I don't know about that, but it would be good if it does come true.

PAUL

Yes, Mum? Oh right, sorry, Clarence, but I've got to go now. I'm wanted; we need to go out to the shops. Oh, I've got tell you this joke. So, a purple unicorn walks into a bar and asks for a cocktail. The bartender says, "Hey! We've got a cocktail named after you!" The unicorn replies, "What, *Gertrude*?"

CLARENCE

Ha! Love it! I wish I could do jokes like that.

PAUL

And before I go, I must tell you about this brand-new TV series on Sky, called *Hattie Frail*. Mum told me, it's so right up our street. It's a light-hearted, futuristic crime drama. It's about a batty old psychic lady helping the local police. Yep, and guess what? And it's on again tonight!

CLARENCE

Thanks for that and I won't forget to look out for it. I'll see you in a few days' time at school. Bye!

PAUL

At least we're in our final year, at last! Yep! Can't wait to the exams are over, bring them on! Then we'll be out of there for GOOD!!! Bye Clarence!

Chapter 3

Sophia's Golden Rants!



Who?

It is 10.30 a.m. Friday 1 August 2008; Sophia is alone in her bedroom standing in front of a long wall mirror singing *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, then a knock on the door is heard.

SOPHIA

Who is it?

CLARENCE

(opens door and looks inside)

Ha! Got ya!

(exits and closes door)

SOPHIA

Clarence!Oh, why did he have to be born into our family? Well, I know he has autism, but he's only a little bit autistic - he's quite clever really, with his musical knowledge and brilliant maths skills. But don't let him know I told you that, will you.

(Sighing)

Now, where do I start?

(Touching chin)

Hmm... Yes, so why can't I play on my violin? I need to practice!

(Annoyed face shrugging)

I know I can get a little bit squeaky, but I've only just started learning! What does he expect? To play like Venessa Mae from the very start? It takes time to become a top-class violinist! Huh! Anyway, sometimes he's not at home for a couple of weekends throughout the year because of his orchestra group, which is great. But a few months ago, during the February half term break he was away for five days!

(Happy face)

Yep, he was at Jason Hanson's farmhouse! Well, what I can say? Hmm, on one hand I had the most brilliant time playing lots on my violin and had no family arguments whatsoever. But on the other hand, hmm, not so good, because I had to take Topsy out for her daily walks! Oh well. Oh yes, and when he got back home, he was telling me all about it. So, he had to help Jason feed the animals and do all the mucking out. But the best thing *for me* was that he had to get up about half six in the morning to do it! It was so hilarious listening to him moaning away for hours on end.

(Sighing)

So of course, I couldn't just keep this to myself, could I? Anyway, talking about time, why does he have to take so long in the upstairs bathroom? And why always on a school day of all days?

(Annoyed face and shrugging)

I'm sure he only does it to annoy me. Now talking about half term breaks, so on this year's Good Friday - dad, mum, Clarence, and I were all enjoying MUM's lovely home-made hot cross buns whilst we waited for Claudia to arrive from Truro, but she cancelled on us and came home the next day instead. So, Clarence decided to eat her hot

cross buns too! I mean the cheek! Mum wasn't happy. The conversation went something like this.

(High, soft voice)

"How dare you eat at Claudia's hot cross buns? They could've had been kept for her. I'll now, to bake some more now; you know how Claudia loves her hot cross buns."

(Deep voice)

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't think of that."

"Hmm... yes, Clarence, that's your problem: you never think sometimes."

(Smiling)

Good on you MUM! Ah yes, now about travelling, what is it with Clarence and his blinking road map? I don't get it! So, the other day he'd asked me.

(Deep voice)

"Sophia, have you seen my road map? I always keep it in the bottom drawer of my wardrobe."

I suggested he should just go and Google it instead, like normal people do. Then he slammed the door and went upstairs. He eventually found it sprawled out under his bed, how on earth did that happen? I wonder.

(Smug face and shrugging)

Oh, yes and with Clarence it's always me, me, me. Like for instance, a few weeks ago Claudia was here she was very upset because she'd just split up with her boyfriend...Brad Wilcox. So, there I was consoling her in the lounge with my Westlife CD playing in the background when suddenly he just came in and spoke.

(Deep voice)

"So how did you find out about him being gay then?" I mean how *pathetic* and *insensitive* can anyone be? Then after that he just started saying, "May the force be wi..."

But before he could finish his sentence Claudia butted in saying,

(Older girls voice)

"And you're not a famous actor from *Star Wars*."

Then he started putting his right arm out and started

pretending to be a Dalek saying.

(Dalek voice)

“Exterminate the Doctor, exterminate, exterminate!!!!

(Annoyed face and shrugging)

I then suggested why couldn't he just go to his bedroom and exterminate a few of his Lego toys instead? And if he didn't leave us alone, I would tell my mates about his *silly* little polar bear... Polo and how he cuddles up to him in bed every night. Then grabbing hold of his arm, I marched him out and slammed the door behind me. And guess what he shouted back? It was something like.

(Deep voice)

“Sophia! You're such a naughty person, I'm now putting my hands over my ears so I can't listen to you. You're being very rude to me! And you'd better not tell all your mates about Polo either, he's very precious to me! I've had him ever since I was a baby! You know that!”

(Sighing)

Well, I told him if he didn't go away then he'll know what'll happen. Then he shouted.

(Deep voice)

“When I'm acting out my TV films and programmes, it always makes me feel good!”

Then he went stomping upstairs. See what I mean?

(Annoyed face and Shrugging)

In any case, I'm now going to tell you about my two best mates Zoe McKenzie and Kylie Pankhurst. Right, for some strange reason Zoe really fancies him. Like for instance a few weeks ago I'd invited her over to play Wii Tennis. So, there we were in the lounge having a great time, when he just came in and started complaining about how we were playing. And there she was - flashing her eyes and smiling away at him, unbelievable! At least Kylie doesn't fancy him.... she's only interested in Zoe's older brother... Ben. Oh, yes, I'm getting so excited, what about you may ask? Well, you see, tomorrow - I'm going to be TEN. Yep! It's my BIRTHDAY!

(Rubbing hands)

So, I've chosen to go to *Alton Towers* with mum, Zoe, and Kylie. I can't wait, I'll be going on the *Nemesis*, the log floom, the black hole, the ghost train

(A knock is heard on the door)

SOPHIA

(Sighing)

Clarence!

MUM

(opens door and enter right)

It's me. Can I come in? I need to have a quick word.

SOPHIA

(Turning head to face Mum and stay there until the end of conversation)

Oh, sorry Mum, I thought you were my extremely annoying brother again! OK, so what is it?

MUM

It's about tomorrow.

SOPHIA

Oh?

MUM

Well, I'm afraid Clarence has just gone and invited James and Ben to come with us to *Alton Towers*. Look I'm very sorry about this, I'll make it up to you next year, I promise.

SOPHIA

(Turning head back round with big aggressive eyes, then slowly look upwards)

AAARRRGGGHHHHH!

What ?

It is 7 p.m. Thursday 22 January 2009; Sophia is in her bedroom on her mobile speaking to Kyle.

SOPHIA

You'll never guess what.

KYLE

What?

SOPHIA

Earlier Clarence told us that he's going to be entering his school's poetry competition to tomorrow and if he wins it, it'll be in a pamphlet!

KYLE

Really? I didn't think he could write for toffees.

SOPHIA

Ha! Neither did I.

KYLE

So, what's the plan with this pamphlet then?

SOPHIA

Oh, yes, that's going to be sold to raise money for *Children in Need*.... Anyway, he's just gone to James's house to play chess. So, I've gone into his bedroom to get the poem out of his school bag.

KYLE

Don't forget to put it back exactly as you found it.

SOPHIA

I won't. So, do you want to hear it?

KYLE

Go on then.

SOPHIA

So, he's got a baby talking to its mother. So, it's called *The*

New Arrival. First the baby says,

This is new, where I'm going.
I can see a light showing.
I'm hearing voices - it's quite loud
And it sounds as if there's a crowd.

Then the mother's reply.
So tiny, but you're my delight
A perfect vision in my sight,
So beautiful, so sweet, so fine
I can't believe that you are mine.

KYLE

That's different.... Quite good really.

SOHPA

What? Are you INSANE? I could do a lot better than
THAT!

KYLE

Clarence is going to be very famous.

SOPHIA

I DON'T CARE! HE IS THE MOST ANNOYING, SELF-
CENTRED, OBNOXIOUS, PERSON EVER! I HATE
HIM SO MUCH THAT IF I WAS OLDER, I
WOULD'VE MOVED OUT BY NOW!

KYLE

Wow! OK, keep your hair on!

SOPHIA

I thought last year was the WORST, but NO! I was
WRONG, it's this YEAR!

KYLE

It's January!

SOPHIA

I KNOW!

KYLE

Oh, right.

SOPHIA

Anyway, going back to last year. So, about my birthday. Now, surely you can remember what happened when we were coming home from *Alton Towers!*

KYLE

Clarence was being frantic.

SOPHIA

Yep! We were on the M6, and there was this massive dark cloud in front of us, and he thought there it was a thunderstorm, he panicked so much that we had to stop at a service station. And we couldn't leave once he finally understood that the car is the best place to be.

KYLE

I thought he would've known all about that.

SOPHIA

SO DID I!

KYLE

I wonder what will happen when he finishes school.

SOPHIA

I don't know, but personally, I'd love him to go away as far as possible on a gap year or TWO! I REALLY HATE HIM! AND I CAN'T BELIEVE IT THAT YOU ACTUALLY LIKED HIS POEM!

KYLE

Look, there's no use in talking to you when you'll like this, I'm going now. Bye, I'll see you at school tomorrow.

Where?

It is 10 a.m. Sunday 3 January 2010; dad, Claudia and Sophia are talking in the lounge.

SOPHIA

(looking at her phone)

Where are you going to? Because whoever's picking you up, they're a bit late.

CLAUDIA

I'm going to Cox Street, so if they don't come soon, I'll have to rearrange it for some other time.

SOPHIA

Who are you meeting?

CLAUDIA

Just a friend, she's called Stephanie. Actually, Dad she's the daughter of your old mate George.

DAD

Oh, George Paterson? I haven't seen her for ages, how is she?

CLAUDIA

She's happy now, because he's just been diagnosed as having ADHD.

SOPHIA

(turns to face Claudia)

I think I may have that.

DAD

What? You? So, what makes you think that you've got it?

SOPHIA

So, in my class there's this boy called Miles Grant and he's just been diagnosed with it. Well, a few weeks ago we were talking about his symptoms, like he can't concentrate, forever fidgeting, forgetfulness, has trouble sleeping, is easily distracted and...

DAD
(coughing)

Are you sure you're like that?

SOPHIA
I'm sorry DAD! But how would you know? You'll hardly ever HERE! You're either working or in your MAN CAVE or in that bloody PUB! And the only reason why you're in today is because you've got MAN FLU!

DAD
(sniffing)

So, it's nothing to do with you going to bed somewhere around midnight...

SOPHIA
NO!

DAD
(sniffing)

Oh OK, so you don't think that's late, then. And what exactly are you doing in your bedroom, on the computer, on your phone or are you reading a book?

SOPHIA
Anyway, it doesn't matter what I'm doing because I just can't seem to totally shut down my BRAIN!

DAD
Oh, I see, so have you tried the sea sounds sleeping app things?

SOPHIA
DONE THAT!

CLAUDIA
(looking out of the window)
Phew! Saved by the bell; my taxi has arrived.

DAD
(sniffing)

I'll take these out for you.

CLAUDIA
(arms raised)

No, it's OK. I'll take them.

(picking up suitcases)

Thanks for having me over for Christmas. I hope mum and Clarence will get better soon.

(turning to face Sophia)

Now, dad has enough on his plate, he doesn't need all this unnecessary aggro.

SOPHIA

UNNECESSARY AGGRO? You two know absolutely nothing about ME!

CLAUDIA

(walks to the porch and approaches the front door)

Well, if you're so sure that you've got it, why don't you go and on that NHS website? Anyway, before I go, you should apologise to him.

DAD

No, it's OK. Sophia's right, I am hardly ever here. Come on I'll walk you out to the taxi.

(exit Claudia and Dad)

SOPHIA
(raised arms)

YES!

When?

It is 8 p.m. Wednesday 27 January 2010; Sophia is on the computer in the lounge she is looking at some old family video recordings. Sophia comes across a young Claudia playing on a beach.

SOPHIA

(picking up the picture)

When was this video taken?

MUM

(taking the picture)

It was when Claudia was just a toddler. So, this is in Scotland.

SOPHIA

Scotland?

MUM

Yes, it's a place called Sandwood Bay.

SOPHIA

Oh, I didn't realise we've had holidays in other places. So, why did you go there?

MUM

Well, it was well before we got the caravan, and we just thought it was a good place to go. Actually, I was pregnant with Clarence at the time.

SOPHIA

Talking about Clarence that reminds me, last week I was speaking to dad and Claudia....

MUM

Yes, he's told me. I was meaning to talk to you about it, but as you know I wasn't very well. So, would you like to talk about it now?

SOPHIA

Yes, I do.

MUM

So, have you looked it up on the NHS website like Claudia suggested?

SOPHIA

Yes.

MUM

And?

SOPHIA

I think I've got it!

MUM

So, what's next?

SOPHIA

I want to get diagnosed, so then I'll know if I've got it or its just in my imagination.

MUM

So, when we got Clarence diagnosed, we went through the doctor, and it took us about a year. But now it's a lot different.

SOPHIA

What do you mean by that?

MUM

Well, it's now taking up to anywhere between two to three years.

SOPHIA

WHAT! THAT'S AGES AWAY! I CAN'T WAIT THAT LONG!

MUM

I'm afraid that's what it's like nowadays.

SOPHIA

PATHETIC GOVEENMENT! I HATE THEM! CAN'T WE PAY FOR IT?

MUM

Well, business's usually want money up front and we don't agree. Anyway, it's very expensive, and we haven't really got it on us. And what about taking medication?

SOPHIA

I WON'T TAKE ANYTHING LIKE THAT! I'LL ONLY AGREE TO IT IF I WAS IN A LIFE-OR-DEATH SITUATION!

MUM

Right.

SOPHIA

I WANT TO GET OFF THIS NASTY WORLD!

MUM

Now, you don't mean that.

SOPHIA

YES, I DO! I HATE IT!

MUM

Look, if you we go through the doctor, then we'll buy something for your birthday. I do know that the Harry Potter World is opening sometime in June.

SOPHIA

Ooh, but only if Clarence doesn't come!

MUM

OK.

SOPHIA

Yes! Love you, Mum!

MUM

Love you too.

Why?

It is 1 p.m. Monday 23 August 2010; Sophia is in the dining room speaking to mum.

SOPHIA

Why do you want me to come with you and Clarence to Anderby Creek?

MUM

It's only for a two weeks. Look, you've finished school now, so are you sure you don't want to come along too?

SOPHIA

MUM! I DON'T WANT TO GO ON HOLIDAY WITH HIM EVER AGAIN! I HATED IT LAST YEAR! AND THE YEAR BEFORE THAT!AND THE YEAR....

MUM

OK, then I think I've got the message.

SOPHIA

No, I do not think you do! Because if you truly knew how I really felt I do not think you would have asked me that! Anyway! So, when is he going to get a full-time JOB? Well, I mean he has been unemployed for over a YEAR!

MUM

(hands raised shoulder height)

Keep your voice down... he'll be down in a minute, he's going out to the Co-op.

SOPHIA

No, he's already left.

MUM

Oh, right, I didn't know that.

SOPHIA

Hey! You know a lot of people!

MUM

Yes, OK, you're right. I promise you I'll speak to him tomorrow. No, not tomorrow, I'm out with Annie, I'll do it on Wednesday instead.

SOPHIA

Thank you. In any case I'm so much better staying here, I've got dad, Topsey and Zoe is coming over for a sleepover too!

MUM

But what about the sea, and all that lovely sand!

SOPHIA

Hmm, well... as Claudia won't be there this time, I'll make a deal with you. What about if I can ask Zoe to come?

MUM

OK.

SOPHIA

Really?

MUM

Yes.

SOPHIA

GOOD! Because I asked her yesterday and she's already agreed!

MUM

(smiling)

Great!

How?

It is 11 a.m. Saturday 7 April 2012; Sophia is talking to mum in the kitchen they are discussing Sophia's ADHD question.

SOPHIA

How on earth do they think that I haven't got it, but instead I'm ...DEPRESSED! I WANT a second OPINION and if takes another two years then SO BE IT!

MUM

Let's just calm down for a bit. So, are you sleeping better?

SOPHIA

It varies. Like I've been sleeping quite well all this week.

MUM

Now what about fidgeting is that still happening a lot?

SOPHIA

Well, this week, that's calmed down quite a bit too.

MUM

What about concentration and forgetting things?

SOPHIA

Hmm, that's not so bad either? So, what's different this week?

MUM

Oh OK. Yes, of course! It's Clarence he isn't here! He's up in Scotland visiting your Uncle Bob's family for Easter! And he won't be back until next Friday!

SOPHIA

(hands on face)

AAARRRGGGGHHHHH!

Chapter 4

The Years between Jan 2009 and Dec 2018

2009

The proceeds of Great-Uncle Paddy's £105,000 estate go to all family members and to the RSPCA.

An American pilot, Chesley (Sully) Sullenberger lands his damaged airline in the Hudson River with no fatalities.

Keith Patterson dies at 85 years old; his widow Jan sells their house and moves into the Appletown Retirement Home. So, the planned revisit weekend sleepover doesn't happen.

Clarence becomes one of the winners in the *Children in Need* poetry competition and manages to achieve A* grade passes in all subjects. Clarence and Laura's relationship finishes after two months. Laura is now taking a year out with a group of mates travelling around Europe.

The proceeds of Great-Auntie Maggie's estate go to all family members.

Anita wins the *That's Life* magazine letter competition and becomes a champion for the anti-bullying campaign. She also gets invited by local radio to speak about her cause, which she gladly accepts.

Good old Arthur Willis retires from teaching the piano and hands the choir over to Mrs. Elle Darlington. He is now living with his aged mother in Canterbury.

2010

Eliza dies at 102 years old; the proceeds from all her £200,000 estate goes to a cat charity in Appletown.

British actress Jean Simmons dies at 80 years old.

James finds work as a salesperson in Dixons, Appletown.

Claudia and Reggie achieve their degrees; both are sharing a flat in Cornwall. They are working at the Eden Project: Claudia's a receptionist and Reggie's a gift shop assistant.

Bob and family emigrate to New Zealand to live near his brother Alan.

2011

Kate Middleton marries His Royal Highness Prince William.

British-American actress, Dame Elizabeth Taylor CBE dies at 79 years old.

Clarence finds a full-time job in the local library. Also, he is currently working on a song called *The Sea is Red*.

The Anderby Creek people and campaigners manage to stop the wind farm from going ahead.

American actor Peter Falk dies at 83 years old.

2012

American singer Whitney Houston dies at 48 years old.

Josie and Gary divorce each other, and Josie remarries Derrick Cartwright.

American actor Larry Hagman dies at 81 years old.

Topsy gives birth to eight Labrador cross Collie puppies. Clarence's family keeps one and names her Tasha.

London hosts the Olympic Games. Altogether *Team GB*

wins 65 medals: 29 gold, 17 silver, 19 bronze and finishes third on the medal table.

Melissa and family emigrate to Australia.

2013

A new royal baby: it's a boy! George Alexander Louis Windsor, to be known as His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge, weighing in at 8 lb 6 oz.

The caravan is still at Anderby Creek, but it now belongs to Uncle Anton and Auntie Phyl Upton-Smyth.

American competitive swimmer & actress Esther Williams dies at 91 years old.

Paul marries Kylie and they now live in Canterbury. Paul is now running his own Unidentified Detective Agency business. Kylie works as a TA at a local primary school.

Emma is now a daytime career for the elderly and also acting with the local amateur theatrical company.

It became known that Grace had been keeping a big secret. In 1944, when she was 17 years old, she met an American pilot called Henry Curtis, who died in an air raid battle. A year after, she had a boy whom she named Peter; due to family pressure, she was forced to give him up for adoption. Peter finally managed to trace his birth mother, and now both families keep in touch every week.

President of South Africa Nelson Mandela dies at 95 years old.

Jake marries Cathy, and 5-year-old Zack is their pageboy.

2014

Charlotte and Annie open a restaurant business, 'The

Glorious Café, in Appletown. Cathy and Jake are working there too. Cathy is a waitress, and Jake is the Head Chef.

Nicholas is now working as stationmaster at the Appletown railway station.

American actress Shirley Temple dies at 85 years old.

Ben and his family now live in Bedford. Clarence hands in his notice at the Appletown Library and is currently a temporary lodger, while working at the Bedford Library.

In England and Wales, same-sex couples can now marry each other.

Isabella marries her long-standing fiancé, Steve McIntyre.

2015

A new royal baby: it's a girl! Charlotte Elizabeth Diana Windsor, to be known as Her Royal Highness Princess Charlotte of Cambridge, weighing in at 8 lb 3 oz.

The Conservative Party wins the general election.

James marries Katrina and buys a house in Appletown. Katrina is a hairdresser.

First British astronaut, Major Tim Peake, leaves Earth to live and work on the International Space Station for the next six months.

Clarence and Zoe are now dating.

2016

Over four days, the Queen celebrates her 90th birthday in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

British singer/songwriter/actor David Bowie dies at 69

years old.

The EU decision is made to leave.

Leicester City wins the *Premier Championships* with odds to win at 500-1.

Major Tim Peake returns to Earth in the Soyuz capsule; he lands safely on the Kazakh Steppe in Kazakhstan.

English singer/songwriter George Michael dies at 53 years old.

Jason marries Libby, and now they're making daily podcasts about their lives living together on their farm. They currently have 8,000 followers and counting.

8-year-old Zack enters the local talent contest singing with pop group *Time Out* and wins. He is also the lead guitarist.

Irish broadcaster Sir Terry Wogan dies at 77 years old.

Christine is now a granny to Isabella's twins, Scott & Ian.

2017

Topsy dies at 9 years old, a family funeral takes place in the back garden.

Josie & Derrick are now living in a retirement home in Milton Keynes.

Clarence wins the *Autism's Got Talent* competition (Mermaid Theatre, London) with Beethoven's *Piano Concerto no. 5, Op. 73, E flat major, Emperor*. Clarence is now appearing on BBC3 series *Autistic Superstars* and the annual *Genius of Autism* event at the Carnegie Hall, New York, America. Also, he signs his first contract with Sony. And his debut charity single *The Sea is Red* is now

raising funds Autism Bedfordshire, where he is a patron.

English actor Roger Moore CBE dies at 89 years old.

American singer Chuck Berry dies at 90 years old.

British entertainer Sir Bruce Forsyth CBE dies at 89 years old.

2018

The UK & Ireland was struck by the ‘Beast from the East’.

Professor Stephen Hawking dies at 76 years old.

10-year-old Andrea joins a local amateur theatrical group.

Clarence is now appearing on TV/radio promoting his *The Sea is Red* UK tour; starting at Usher Hall 3/5/19 and ends at the Brighton Dome, 9/10/19; & debut double album *My Favourite Arias & Christmas Songs*; released on 1/10/18.

A new royal baby: it’s a boy! Louis Arthur Charles Windsor, to be known as His Royal Highness Prince Louis of Cambridge, weighing in at 8 lb 7 oz.

His Royal Highness Prince Harry marries Meghan Markel.

Ben marries Sophia, she sings/plays violin at weddings.

HRH Princess Eugenie marries Jack Brooksbank.

Scientists find lake of “liquid water” on Mars.

Anita is an Environmental Correspondent for the BBC.

The art installation ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’ at the Tower of London marks one hundred years since the first full day of Britain’s involvement in the First World

War. The artists are Paul Cummins and Tom Piper.
The Royal Family pay their respects at the Cenotaph to mark the 100th anniversary of World War One and the signing of the Armistice.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex announce they are expecting a baby next year in the spring.

Claudia marries Reggie, who now starts IVF treatment.

HRH Prince Charles/ Sooty celebrate their 70th birthdays.

The Spice Girls announce reunion; tour is on next spring.
Great music! Also, are mentioned in Chapter 1 on 26 April!
Break a leg for the 2025 tour! And beyond!

Disney's Micky Mouse celebrates his 90th birthday.

New discovery a 'Super-Earth' planet is orbiting Barnard's Star; it's one of the nearest neighbouring stars to our solar system. And NASA's Insight successfully lands on Mars.

Widower Mr. Brett Richards marries Miss Jill St Claire.

American singer/songwriter Aretha Franklin dies at 76 years old.

British singer/songwriter - Olly Murs announces a 16-date UK arena tour and a brand-new album *You Know I know*.

Clarence marries Zoe; they now live in Appletown. Zoe is a freelance writer and is currently 6 weeks pregnant.

Theresa May's Brexit withdrawal deal vote is postponed; it's now set to take place mid-January next year.

Actress Dame June Whitfield dies at 93 years old.

Chapter 5

Scrapbook

THE SUNRISE

MOTHER

Good morning, looks like you've had a nice sleep,
I've just taken a few photographs of the sunrise.
Look, there is the field with some of the sheep.
Come on now, sleepy head, wake up and open your eyes.

TODDLER

You're so good with the camera, your pictures are great,
To touch them with my hands again I can hardly wait.
Someday I'll see those orange skies for real for myself.
Instead of looking up on the wall and on the shelf.

THE SUNSET

FATHER

Just look at that sunset we can both see,
Showing colours of dark orange and pink in the sky.
So, it could be nice tomorrow maybe.
Oh! It's gone to bed now in a blink of an eye.

TODDLER

I liked watching the orange ball thing disappear.
Behind those tall trees far away over there.
The sky looked so wonderful and very clear,
Next time I must remember to show Bear.

1 July 2009

SMALL HANDS

MOTHER

These small hands of yours are never still,
There's nothing that you fail to touch.
Discovering things is such a thrill.
And every day you learn so much.
It's so exciting to explore.
And find out just what things are for.

TODDLER

Some things feel nice, but some do not,
Some things feel cold, and some feel hot,
Some make me yell, "Look what I've got!"
I know, mummy, I'll tell you what –
When I grab my mug, I never break it.
Give me anything – and I will take it.
With a grip so firm
It'll make you squirm.

11 July 2009

LONG NAILS

MOTHER

I know you don't like it, but
Your nails do need to be cut,
Once again you must sit still.
When I tell you – and you will.

TODDLER

I like to use my nails to scratch,
Although they do appear to catch
On things at times, so I suppose.
That each nail grows and grows and grows,
So, use your scissors and your file.
And I'll sit quietly for a while.

OUTDOOR EXPLORING

TODDLER

Oooh! These two shoes here I can see.
They look very nice and feel very good.
I want to put them on so maybe.
Then I can walk with mummy to a wood.

MOTHER

Come on, love, now that you're excellent at walking,
It's time for you to try some outdoor exploring.

7 August 2009

CLEANING TEETH

MOTHER

Come on, love, it is time for you to go to bed,
But before that your teeth will need to be done,
This is your toothbrush you always choose red.
Not so long ago you didn't even own one.

TODDLER

Oh no, it's my bedtime and that's the time when.
Mum has to do something to my mouth again.
And she does this to me twice a day.
I wonder why it's done in this way.

16 August 2009

WHO'S THAT MAN? (DADDY)

MOTHER

There you go, my little one.
Your daddy's taking you out.
I'm sure you two will have lots of fun.

On the swings and the roundabout.

TODDLER

Sometimes mummy passes me over to a man.
She says his name is Daddy.
We nearly always go to the park in his van.
He's nice; he's not a baddie.

19 August 2009

DAD'S COOKING

TODDLER

Maybe one day you will teach me to cook.
Seems to me it could be fun to do.
If I continue to listen and look
I'd get to come over and join you.

FATHER

Oh, yes, but right now I'm cooking a chicken.
Then later I'll be making a chocolate cake.
So maybe you'd prefer to help me out then.
It is good cooking, like learning how to bake.

27 August 2009

MUMMY'S HAIR

MOTHER

Ouch! Ouch! That hurts me, little one.
I know you think it's lots of fun,
But mummy's hair is not for tugging.
And I would rather do some hugging.

TODDLER

I like to pull my mummy's hair.

When we're sitting on the chair,
But I can't keep it up for long.
Because mummy tells me it's wrong.

THE THUNDERSTORM

TODDLER

Daddy, that was such a loud banging noise,
A white thing came down and I saw it split.
I'm scared I need to hug you and my toys.
No, I don't like this, not one little bit.

FATHER

Now there, you don't need to worry yourself about this,
It's just thunder and lightning; it will go away soon.
And look at the rain, it doesn't happen much, I promise.
In America it can be worse, for they have monsoons.

1 September 2009

COACH TRIP TO THE FARM

TODDLER

This thing looks massive; I've no idea where we're going,
You've kept it such a secret I've got no means of knowing,
It could be to a market or maybe to a fair,
If you do not spill the beans, I may not like it there.

FATHER

This thing is a very big coach and now we're on our way,
The best fun you've had was when we drove to the zoo,
So, I thought you'd like to meet some more animals today.
This is your big surprise. I know they'll welcome you.
We'll be watching cows being milked and the piglets play.
And if you behave you may even get to feed a lamb
To crown what I'm sure will be a memorable day.

Also, there is a puppy who likes to chase balls, called Sam.

16 September 2009

THE MIRROR

TODDLER

What is that strange thing on the wall?
It copies every move I make.
And just me, it's very small.
Dad says, "Be careful, it may break!"

MOTHER

That's a mirror made of glass.
You see yourself each time you pass.
Look, mummy's dimples on your chin,
You've even got your daddy's grin.
Your hair is fair; your eyes are blue.
The same as mine, as you well know.
That mirror cannot lie and so
You'll know you're looking back at you.

8 October 2009

THE DAYTIME SKY

TODDLER

Wow! I can see something new in the sky.
It's very long and lovely, look, come, and see.
Oh! And there's something strange going by
I've never seen these; they both look good to me.

MOTHER

We've got to make a wish because that's a rainbow.
Such beautifully bright colours they always show.
And that there was a very small aeroplane

Oh no, goodbye sun, and back here comes the rain.

21 October 2009

THE NIGHTTIME SKY

TODDLER

Daddy, what's that big white round thing
And those small things, bright and twinkling?
There are so many of them in the sky.
It's quite dark and yet I can see them, why?

FATHER

Oh yes, look, right there is our moon.
Somebody might go up there again soon.
And we call that a star, but really, it's a sun,
It gives out loads of bright light, just like our one.

28 October 2009

BONFIRE NIGHT

TODDLER

Mummy, I can hear loud banging noises, it's scaring me,
I do hope we're not in some terrible danger, are we?

MOTHER

No, love. This is bonfire night; it happens every year.
My Guy Fawkes and his gang started it a long time ago.
They wanted to destroy the houses of parliament- I fear.
But, for some reason the gun powder just didn't blow.

5 November 2009

CHILDREN IN NEED

TODDLER

Daddy, I do like that big, yellow bear on the TV
And there're many people cheering him on too – I can see

FATHER

Yes, that's Pudsey he wears an eye patch - sadly,
Since 1980 in November *Children in Need* is aired.
Celebrities encourage us to give money,
So, charities benefit from helplines to the sight impaired.

20 November 2009

FIRST PROFESSIONAL HAIRCUT

TODDLER

Mummy, my hair keeps getting in my eyes, why is that?
I wonder what'll stop it. Should I be wearing a hat?

MOTHER

Oh dear, your hair is getting very long, I see.
I'll just go and book you an appointment at Brady's.

22 November 2009

THE WASHING MACHINE

TODDLER

Now I wonder what happens in here,
And oh, the round door is open wide.
Sometimes it makes noises in my ears,
I think I'll just have a look inside.

MOTHER

No, no, that is a washing machine,

You mustn't let yourself go in there.
We put dirty things in we want clean.
Like for instance these clothes and this bear.

24 November 2009

TRAIN RIDE

TODDLER

I'm sure I'll hear you say, "Don't be impatient," yet again.
I see a long way down the line, but there's no train.
I've seen it now, but it's not stopping, just whizzing past.
And look here is another one. I hope it's ours at last.

FATHER

I don't need to tell you, this will be quicker than a bus,
But there are times when this is more convenient for us.
Oh, and although we're going to a carnival for fun.
Your eyes will love the scenery, especially in the sun.

26 November 2009

AEROPLANE TRIP

TODDLER

Mummy, what's that big flying machine just over there?
Are we to travel on it? If so, then to where?

MOTHER

Oh look, love, now that's what we call an aeroplane.
They take folks to many countries from all over our planet.
Like to France, Sweden, Australia, Turkey, Ukraine,
But we're flying off to Canada to visit Auntie Janet.

28 November 2009

TOYS

TODDLER

I have lots and lots of toys.
An elephant – even a mouse,
Some are girls, and some are boys,
They are all around my house.

MOTHER

Can't find your favourite teddy bear,
You drop your playthings everywhere.
And all you do is sit and grin.
I need a box to put them in.

30 November 2009

THE TV

MOTHER

Let's just see what's on the TV today,
I used to watch the programme *Playaway*.
Of course, it's no longer on, but it was very good.
Look, it's *Bob the Builder* and he's sawing wood.

TODDLER

Um, no, that episode has been on TV before.
It's a nice day and I want to get up from this floor.
Right now, I'd like to be at the park and on a swing,
Oh, go on then... I'll watch Bob again making his thing.

3 December 2009

A BRUSH WITH THE LAW

TODDLER

Daddy, as it's a sunny day, can we go for a car ride?

Or maybe not, because something's happening outside.

FATHER

Oh, there's a police car parked opposite us, I wonder why?
I hope there hasn't been another burglary like a year ago.
Maybe it's time to look at some cctv cameras we can buy.
Yes, they should protect us a little better, but who knows?

MAKE ME LAUGH!

MOTHER

You haven't smiled at all today,
Maybe you're not feeling well,
When you are quiet in this strange way
I do find it hard to tell.

TODDLER

It isn't hard to make me laugh,
You can sing or try tickling me,
Pretend you are a big giraffe.
Or bounce me on your knobby knee.

8 December 2009

BOUNCING

TODDLER

I like to bounce on my mummy's knees.
Because it gives me quite a thrill,
And she is always happy to please.
As I find it hard to keep still

MOTHER

Where do you find all this energy?
You're the liveliest toddler I've ever seen.
What can I do? Goodness gracious me.

We'll have to buy you a trampoline!

10 December 2009

MOUNTAINS ARE HARD TO CLIMB

Where did we go wrong?
Happiness has to be out there somewhere.
But each night I'm dreaming of my baby,
I thought you truly loved me.
Those blue eyes and your beaming smile
I was floating way up there in the clouds.

Mountains are hard to climb,
Love can be such a crime.
I can't stand this anymore.
Since you walked out of that door.
Tears rolling down my face,
My heart is an empty place,
You know we belong; you know we do.
So why can't you stay true?

I can't play our song,
Hidden love away from view, it's over there.
Far away where I can no longer be.
Glad you didn't see me when.
I saw you just the other day,
You were holding each other, oh so close (oh so close).

Chorus x2

11 December 2009

OLLY MURS

TODDLER

Mummy, why are you so excited today?
It is only a silly show on the TV - OK

MOTHER

Oh no, it isn't silly - far from it,
This is called *The X Factor* - it's a hit!
So, that was Joe McElderry, now he's a good singer,
But between us, I'd prefer Olly Murs to be the winner.

13 December 2009

THAT WINNING SMILE

MOTHER

I find it hard to be cross.
When you flash that winning smile,
Makes me wonder who is boss.
Ah! But only for a while.

TODDLER

I didn't mean to misbehave.
I want to make amends.
If you don't love me, I'll be brave.
But can we still be friends?

MOTHER

Of course, I love you – and your grin,
So long as we have discipline.

15 December 2009

THE FIRST FALL OF SNOW

MOTHER

Ah! Look, there is a sight.
That you've not seen before,
And I believe you might.
Delight in this for sure.
Snow is pretty and white.
When it falls to the ground
From a very great height
It does not make a sound.

TODDLER

Oh, I don't like this, it feels so cold.
That's not something I want to hold,
Every time this stuff called snow falls.
Those two boys there keep making balls.
To throw at each other – what fun!
Oh, look at what that girl has done –
Built a snowman! I'm half inclined.
To like snow! I've changed my mind.

17 December 2009

IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE

It's Christmas Eve and children sing,
They wonder what Santa will bring.
As he comes wading through the snow
With Christmas sacks that overflow.

Christmas is for believing.
Christmas is for love.
Christmas bells are a-ringing.
And robins fly above.

You hear the happy sounds.

Of children running all around
Everyone is so full of joy.
Yeah, every little girl and boy.

Chorus

I walk slowly down the forest glade.
I know the gift you deliver.
Will stay in my heart forever, forever.

Chorusx2

24 December 2009

NEW YEAR'S EVE

MOTHER

Goodnight, love, it will be January tomorrow.
It's not bad news, so you don't need to be in sorrow,
Some folks have fireworks to celebrate in the New Year
So loud banging noises may just wake you up, my dear.

TODDLER

Mummy, you're looking at me in such a strange way.
I think we've had such a real lovely time today.
you're just not giving me any kind of clue.
Don't worry, Mummy, as I'll always love you.

31 December 2009

THE TELEPHONE

TODDLER

I wonder why it is whenever you hear it ring.
You're always in a hurry to pick up the thing.
You talk to yourself as if you're just talking to me.

I'm puzzled and can't work out what the reason can be?

MOTHER

Next time Aunt Jane calls, I'll put the phone to your ear,
After a moment you'll hear her voice loud and clear.
You can talk to one another though she's miles away,
It's a wonderful invention, as you'll learn one day.

3 January 2010

SNIFFLES

MOTHER

Oh no, I heard you sneeze,
A snuffle and a wheeze.
I'd better have a look at you.
I hope it's not the dreaded flu.

TODDLER

I'd like to think it's just a cold,
But to be sure it gets no worse,
Mummy, if I may be so bold.
Please have a quiet word with the nurse.

19 January 2010

THE PAINTING

TODDLER

Mummy, I did this at pre-school today.
I love paints and getting messy in this way,
I like their paintbrushes that we borrow.
I hope we can do this again tomorrow.

MOTHER

Oh, what a fantastic painting of a blue whale

And you haven't forgotten to put in his tail.
You've portrayed a beautiful tree as well,
You've got an artistic flair, I can tell.

THE SWIMMING LESSON

MOTHER

Come on, love, in the car we get.
We can't be late as it starts at ten.
You know you just love getting wet.
In our local swimming pool with Ben.

TODDLER

Oh good, it's Monday, I'm going to the swimming pool,
I like Ben as he makes everything so much fun.
Soon I'll be able to swim and that'll be so cool.
There're lots of us, so I won't be the only one.

25 January 2010

THE TODDLER GROUP

FATHER

Did you enjoy yourself today?
At our big local toddler group?
It was lovely to watch you play,
I laughed when you let out a whoop.
Surrounded by all your new chums.
And with plenty of things to do
Like banging away on your drums
Or chuckling at *Winnie the Pooh*.

TODDLER

Oh yes, it was fun,
But there was someone.
Who just wouldn't mix?

And snatched all my bricks.
When I grabbed them back
He gave me a smack,
So, you can depend.
I won't be his friend.

10 February 2010

PANCAKE DAY

TODDLER

Daddy, what's that white mixture in the big flat thing?
I haven't seen you make this before; it looks exciting.

FATHER

Hmm, I agree. And I'm extremely happy,
Because today is called Pancake Day.
These are delicious you just wait and see,
You won't want to throw anything away.

16 February 2010

WORLD BOOK DAY

TODDLER

Mummy, I can't wait to go to nursery on World Book Day,
Because I'm going in as Harry Potter that's what I say.

MOTHER

Well, in that case we'll have to do some ordering then,
But if it's arriving late, we'll have to think again.
Anyway, whatever character you'll end up being,
I'm sure you'll have a fun time with lots of reading.

4 March 2010

HE IS NOT WHAT I NEED

He is not what I need.
Because all I get is pain...

What's happened to my once-perfect guy?
We used to laugh but now I only cry,
The way he behaves these days is strange.
I used to think perhaps he could change,
I was wrong.
All along.

I know he says every day.
That he's in love with me,
But I don't want him to stay.
He is not what I need,
Because all I get is pain.

My faith in him has sadly faltered,
I can't believe how much he's altered,
The reason is so hard to find.
I must be free – I'm losing my mind.
He can't stay.
One more day.

Chorus

All he wants is control,
Thinks I'm his baby doll.
New bruises each week,
Too frightened to speak.
I'm tired of lying.
I've done all my crying.
I'm just so weary.
I don't want him near me.
He's definitely not what I need.

8 March 2010

MOTHER'S DAY

TODDLER

Mummy, where's daddy going to?
He takes me out on Sunday's - not you.

MOTHER

Hmm, well, I'm afraid you've got me,
Because it's - Mother's Day.
So, daddy's gone to see granny,
But he'll be back later today.
Remember my present and card you gave me earlier?
Well, that's what he's going to do for his mother.
Sadly, your other granny is no longer here,
So, come on let's cherish every moment - my dear

14 March 2010

RED NOSE DAY

BABY

Daddy, what's this red round thing with a silly face on it?
And why is it on your nose? It's very funny I must admit.

FATHER

Well, it's *Red Nose Day*,
That's what they all say.
Raising money for charity without fame,
And perhaps one day you could do the same.

19 March 2010

SPRING

TODDLER

Mummy, I can see the sun is gleaming,
And there're so many people not wearing coats.
It's cold and sometimes absolutely freezing,
Not yet for sun hats, beaches and sailing boats.

MOTHER

Well, love I've got some exciting news,
So, let's say goodbye to the winter blues.
And say hello to my favourite time of year,
Yes, from March to May it's spring now, my dear.

20 March 2010

PIGGYBACK RIDE

FATHER

Come on, look, would you like to have a piggyback ride?
I know you haven't done it before; trust me, you'll like it.
We're ready now, it's a nice day, so let's go outside.
And look at the flowers in our garden for a bit.

TODDLER

This is new and different, I'm so tall!
I'm holding onto my daddy's shoulder.
Those very big flowers just there look small.
I hope we'll keep doing this when I'm older.

THE MUSIC GROUP

MOTHER

C'mon, love, I'm taking you to our big Village Hall,
We'll be with others singing a song or three,
Playing games and dancing, it will be such a ball.

Yes, it will be lots of fun for you and me.

TODDLER

Oh, I haven't been to this place before
I wonder what's going to happen in here.
Ah! There are people sitting on the floor.
Hmm, I think I like this nice atmosphere.

28 March 2010

APRIL FOOL'S DAY

TODDLER

Come on Daddy it's playgroup today,
We can't be late, so let's be on our way.

FATHER

Is it? Oh, sorry, I wasn't thinking - now,
Which toy do we take? Oh yes, it's Cow.
I'll just go and get him out from your bed,
Hey! Wait a minute what is it you've just said?
Playgroup isn't on today that's Friday,

TODDLER

Ha! Ha! Got ya! Happy - April Fool's Day!

1 April 2010

FIRST EASTER

MOTHER

You look bored, so come and sit here on my knee,
You've got a white chocolate Easter Egg – whoopee!
This is not like the eggs you eat from a shell,
It is very much larger as you can tell.
It's tasty you'll be pleased to know.
So here it is - just give it a go.

TODDLER

Oh, this is yummy,
I can see you have some more.
My empty tummy
Will love this treat, I'm sure.
I like Easter day, hmm -
Hope there're more eggs to come.

4 April 2010

LONDON MARATHON

TODDLER

Daddy, I like watching the people running on the TV,
And some of them look very funny in costumes - I can see.

FATHER

These people are taking part in the London Marathon,
They're raising money for charities that they've chosen.
And just look at all the spectators cheering as they go by,
A good positive day in so many ways - you can't deny.

25 April 2010

VE DAY + 65

BABY

Mummy, why am I watching a flypast on the TV?
And why are there lots of happy people - that I can see?

MOTHER

It's because 65 years ago today World War Two ended,
They're celebrating this fact; yes, the armed forces were needed.
You see we had been fighting Germany for six years,
There were lots of destruction, death, injuries and tears.

SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

TODDLER

Mummy, I like this nice, white-haired man on the TV,
Such a calm voice talking about nature - who is he?

MOTHER

Hmm, well, that's Sir David Attenborough – also we're told,
It's a special day for him because today he's 84 years old.
So, the very first programme that he did was in 1954,
Such an inspiration to planet Earth that we all adore.

8 May 2010

THE MUPPETS

TODDLER

Mummy, what is this funny film on the TV?
So many colourful animals - that I can see.

MOTHER

These are the muppets they're very good, I'd say,
I've watched all their brilliant shows back in the day.
My favourites are Miss Piggy and Kermit,

TODDLER

Well, in that case - I'll just keep on watching it.

9 May 2010

THE WENDY HOUSE

FATHER

Knock, knock, hello, I've come for a visit.
Oh, I can't fit in, I'm way too tall!
What a shame, but I can tell you so love it,
Sitting there looking at your book on a stall.

TODDLER

Hello, Daddy, I'm having great fun in here.
These pictures are very good in this book.
I'm so very glad that you're near,
Oh, please come, so you can have a look.

10 May 2010

THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE

TODDLER

Daddy, what is this blue train called on the TV?
He has a very happy face on him that I can see.

FATHER

That's *Thomas the Tank Engine* - helpful, isn't he,
Him & his friends have adventures – look he's with Percy.
I wonder what will happen to them today.

TODDLER

I'll let you know when it ends - without delay.

12 May 2010

STEVIE WONDER

TODDLER

Mummy, I just like this is groovy music on the radio,
I can hear a jolly man singing, mouth organ and piano.

MOTHER

Well, he's a very multitalented blind, black soul singer,
Such an influential person and his name - Stevie Wonder.
Was 12 years old when he did his first stage performance,
Oh, OK then, let's pick you up and we can have a dance.

13 May 2010

MISSING DADDY

TODDLER

Where does daddy go when he's not with us?
He must miss it when I'm playing with mum and my toys,
I wonder what it is that he does.
To keep him away from the laughter and the noise.

MOTHER

You have watched me taking money from my purse.
To pay for food to eat or games to play,
Our lives would certainly become much worse.
If daddy did not work to earn his pay.

MISSING MUMMY

TODDLER

Daddy, I can't see mummy anywhere,
Let's see if we can find her, come on, Bear.

FATHER

Oh no, mummy will be with us again soon,
She shouldn't be away for too long – I hope.
You see, daddy's been decorating the spare room,
For your new sister to sleep in – I'm sure we'll cope.

14 May 2010

FIRST RAINBOW

TODDLER

Mummy, it's stopped raining, but what's that in the sky?
It's lovely, with so many colours...oh it's gone! Bye!

MOTHER

You've just seen your first rainbow, wasn't it perfect?

At the end of each one there's a pot of gold. I believe.
Oh, it's back, so let's take a picture of it,
Yes, that's such a nice one! Come, would you like to see?

15 May 2010

TIME FOR THE DENTIST

TODDLER

Mummy, is your chin sore? You keep touching your face.
I'm worried, I know; I'll go and get daddy just in case.

MOTHER

Oh no, daddy's not here as he has gone to work today.
Yes, you're right, but it's my teeth that hurt, not my chin.
Maybe soon I shall have to phone up our dentist, Mr. Lay
Ouch! That's it! I'm doing it right now; I hope he's in.

16 May 2010

WALK TO SCHOOL WEEK

TODDLER

Mummy, why are the neighbours not using their car?
Hmm, it's very unusual for them to do this - by far.

MOTHER

This is Walk to School Week, and so -
It was invented 19 years ago.
Supporting healthier lifestyles and cleaner air,
Yes, such a brilliant idea I must declare.

18 May 2010

MUMMY'S VISITORS

TODDLER

Mummy, a lady with a baby has just pressed the doorbell.
I wonder who they can be, you might be able to tell.

MOTHER

This is my sister, so therefore your Auntie Kay,
She has come over to visit us for the whole day,
And she has brought along her baby son.
Look just how big Jack is, and he's only one.

TODDLER

Wow! He's crawling like I used to do.
Oh no, those toys are mine, they're not for you!

PICNIC IN THE PARK

TODDLER

Mummy, as it's such a lovely sunny day.
Can we have another picnic in the park today?

MOTHER

Yes, you know, I think that's a very good idea – why not?
But first you'll have to wait for a while.
As I'll need to start mashing up your food into some pots
Then we'll both get dressed up, so we can arrive in style.

25 May 2010

EUROVISION SONG CONTEST

TODDLER

Mummy, what's this new song playing that I can hear?
I like it so much it's making me want to jump and cheer.

MOTHER

Yes, it's good isn't it,
So, this is the Great Britain's Eurovision entry - you see
Every spring since 1956,
The *Eurovision Song Contest* gets aired by radio and TV.

29 May 2010

THE NANNY

TODDLER

This lady's nice. I've not seen her before,
She smiled at me, but I wasn't quite sure.
If I should smile as well and say hello.
There's something going on that I don't know.

MOTHER

You know I'd love to spend all day, sweetheart.
But there is something that I can no longer shirk.
To give you the best start in life I must play my part.
And the time has come when I must return to work,
So, this lady will care for you and be your friend.
As I just can't leave you here at home on your own
Here's Nanny with whom some good times you'll spend,
And you'll find these hours I'm missing will have flown.

5 June 2010

THE GARDEN SHED

TODDLER

I like playing outside with you, Daddy, in the garden,
But right now, I'm feeling a little tired and cold.
I sit on my blanket and watch TV in my playpen,
There's Igglepiggie, that's good, as I need him to hold.

FATHER

Look, put your toys back in the shed for this year.
The winter's come and it will stay until next spring.
But I can assure you time flies and we'll be back, dear,
Playing outside again with your cars, bikes, and swing.

10 June 2010

THE BEATLES

TODDLER

Daddy, this song that's playing on the radio,
I'd like to see it, is there a YouTube video?

FATHER

So, this is a fabulous song, and it's called *Now and Then*,
They were a Liverpoolian rock band made up of four men.
The Beatles started way back in 1960, but to -
Answer your excellent question it's a - yes, they do.

MUSICALS

TODDLER

Mummy, what is that nice singing on the TV?
There're all different types of music - I can see.

MOTHER

This show is based on successful musicals - my dear,
I've always loved this sort of songs. Hey! Look here -
Those kids are singing *Electricity* it's from Billy Eliot, so
Maybe when you're older you could join a drama club too.

18 June 2010

FIRST WORDS 'MAMA'

TODDLER

I've been watching you closely all this week.
And realised you used your mouth to speak.
I'm older now and therefore not too young,
So, I cleared my throat and wobbled my tongue.

MOTHER

What was that "Mama" I've just heard you say?
Oh now, I've been so longing for this day,
And soon you won't need to point any more,
Now that'll be something well worth waiting for.

FIRST STEPS

TODDLER

Mummy, I'm getting closer to you now,
And you're using your legs somehow.
But I'm using my knees to come your way.
Perhaps I could try what you do one day.

MOTHER

Oh, love, you're coming towards me as I'm walking.
I know you're extremely good at all that crawling,
I do it by putting one leg in front of the other.
I think you want to try; we can have a go together.

19 June 2010

WIMBLEDON TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS

TODDLER

Mummy, I like this exciting racket ball game on the TV,
So many folks watching & eating strawberries - I can see.

MOTHER

The Wimbledon Tennis Championships is on every year,
Yes, it's on for two weeks starting late June. Look here -
That's a terrific shot! Now, she might just win it - I dread,
Between you & me I'm rooting for her opponent instead.

21 June 2010

GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL

TODDLER

Mummy, why are there lots of people singing on the TV?
And the band that they're watching it all looks good to me.

MOTHER

It's a folk band so it's the 5-day Glastonbury Festival, I bet
Maybe, one day you'd like to go there - down in Somerset.
Started up back in June 1970, but it isn't on every year,
And so many headliners get to perform too - my dear.

23 June 2010

AURORA BOREALIS

TODDLER

Daddy, what are the wavy lines in your space magazine?
I can see many colours of purple, yellow, red and green.

FATHER

This is the Aurora Borealis, such radiant skies, and -
They appear in countries like Canada, Alaska, Finland.
But recently they're coming up right here in the UK,
So, we'll have to watch out for future sightings - I'd say.

1 July 2010

UNIVERSE

TODDLER

Mummy, what's this big book I'm holding in my hand?
It's black pages with unusual things - I don't understand.

MOTHER

This is a fabulous book all about the universe, you see -
The black is representing an orbit - here there's no gravity.
So, this is our planet we call Earth, this here is our sun,
These swirly patterns are galaxies; this is great - what fun!

3 July 2010

BEATRIX POTTER

TODDLER

Mummy, what's this very nice book in my hand?
There's a duck wearing clothes - I don't understand.

MOTHER

This is naïve, Jemima Puddle-Duck she was created by
A fabulous children's author called Beatrix Potter, and I
Have three other great stories too somewhere in the house,
So, let's go find Mr. Tod, Tom Kitten & Mrs. Tittlemouse.

28 July 2010

GROWING UP

TODDLER

Mummy, I look quite tall.
And yet I'm still small,
But I do not want to stay this way,
I hope I'm tall like you one day.

MOTHER

Yes, love, I'm afraid the time will come.
When you could be taller than your mum.
Let's not look ahead that far,
Please stay lovely as you are.

1 August 2010

GOING TO SLEEP

TODDLER

I sleep in my big cot.
I do that quite a lot.
I sleep there every night.
And sometimes when it's light,
I find it hard to stay awake.
At least it gives my mum a break.

MOTHER

When I have a problem going to sleep
I find I can solve it by counting sheep.
You cannot add up yet, it must be said,
But I can tell when you're ready for bed.
With the backs of your hands, you rub your eyes,
That sign of tiredness you cannot disguise,
And then I will hold you close to my chest
You'll drift into dreamland – happy at rest.

7 August 2010

NOW GO TO SLEEP, MY BABY

Now go to sleep, my baby,
It's time to go to bed.
You're so very tired, you see.
You need to lay your head.

So, I will keep on singing.
Until you close your eyes,
And sweet dreams will be bringing.
You to a land where no one ever cries.

10 August 2010

**TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SAILOR, RICH
MAN, POOR MAN, BEGGAR MAN, THIEF**

TINKER

I'm a tinker I travel lots,
So, I have no fixed address.
I can mend your kettles and pots,
Will they look new? Answer's, "Yes".

TAILOR

I'm a tailor I live in Wales,
Our suits are made to measure.
We're famous for top hats and tails,
Outfits you'll always treasure.

SOLDIER

I'm a soldier I drive the tanks,
I've had many a close call.
I've lived in fields and on sand banks,
Hoping that one day I don't fall.

SAILOR

I'm a sailor I live in Hull,
Ever since I was a boy.
My life was boring and dull,
Until I played with a ship toy.

RICH MAN

I'm a rich man I live in Bath,
Many people work for me.

I'm on the straight and narrow path,
Always that's where you need to be.

POOR MAN

I'm a poor man from the East End,
Skivvy at the theatre.
Singing out loud I can pretend,
Things can only get better.

BEGGAR MAN

I'm a beggar man on a street,
I like to play my guitar.
Someone famous I hope to meet,
So, they'll see a real star.

THIEF

I'm a thief I live in Wapping,
I take opportunities like,
Nicking other people's shopping,
Soon I'll hope to pinch your bike.

21 August 2010

AN ANGEL BROKE MY HEART

When I first knew his love just wasn't there,
I felt the burning desires we used to share.
Painful memories when he'd say nothing's wrong.
Maybe my feelings for him were far too strong.

An angel broke my heart,
He was my true-to-life film star,
An angel broke my heart,
Always thought we would never part,
An angel broke my heart.

Love can be so unkind, what can you do?

When a lover tells you his love is through?
And you've tried every single thing you know.
To keep a hold onto your cupid's arrow.

Chorus

Oh, why did he have to catch my falling star?
Two distant galaxies with each revolving sun.
I'm the Milky Way and he's Andromeda.
In this life we just can't leave these things left undone.

Chorus

So, don't be afraid to show your true feelings,
He may disentangle your heartstrings.
Or he'll fly away leaving you high and dry,
But at least you could say "I did try".

Chorus

24 August 2010

GLOBAL WARMING

TODDLER

Look, Daddy, what is that girl shouting about on the TV?
And there's a load of people listening to her I can see.

FATHER

She's an activist, Greta Thunberg is her name.
She activates the benefits on global warming, and
Most people will say the governments are to blame.
We're all duty-bound to protect our seas, skies and land.

2 January 2019

Epilogue

by

Charlotte Upton-Smyth

'23 Mar 2020 – We will beat the coronavirus, and we will beat it together. And therefore, I urge you at this moment of national emergency to stay at home....'

Just recently I had been thinking about things at around the time when Clarence was born, when dad was working away in Wales, and Claudia was three years old. When I look at pictures of the three of us, Claudia looks really happy and contented, but then when Clarence was around two years old, she was no longer smiling. Well, she may or may not remember this, but here it goes. So, dad was currently unemployed, he was very busy looking for any old job going. And for quite a number of years she was having lots of sleepovers at either one of her grandparents' houses, going to afterschool clubs and not to mention that early bedtime routine she always moaned about. No, I didn't give her hardly any attention, which I am now truly very sorry for. You see, at the time, dad and I were really struggling, because we couldn't understand how Clarence was. As the weeks went by, he was becoming even more inwardly. Like for instance, so the few spoken words which he had learnt six months earlier were now replaced with constant humming noises. Then along came the hand flapping as he tiptoed across the living room carpet, and he couldn't show any signs of empathy either. So, once Claudia had the flu and she was being sick right in front of him; and he wasn't even noticing, and yes, you've guessed it, so he wasn't reaching the doctors milestones. I can honestly say it was the worst year of our lives, until one day when he had pushed a boy over in nursery. It wasn't because he was being naughty, he was just showing

frustration. The boy was OK, but it was then when we decided to visit the doctor to see if he could help us in anyway. And after all of the form filling and meetings we all had to attend to, then finally when he was just three years old, we had received the autism diagnosis, which we were ever so grateful for, because we now had the answers to our questions. Then there was further form filling so he could get help at school etc, and about a month later dad got his job working at the Appletown railway station. Then three years later Sophia was born, therefore making our family complete. I know along the way we still had a few struggles, but mainly the pictures show all five happy smiling faces once again.

But now I'm keeping my fingers crossed for the future.

The End