

FRIDAY JANUARY 1ST

I never have and I never will fancy any of the stupid boys at my school but I'm going to have to pretend I do or people will start thinking I'm weird. Honestly, just because I like football and can't be bothered with make-up, that doesn't make me a freak. Or a lesbian, as some people have suggested.

My best friend Liz, who's really into psychology, has tried to explain my tomboyish tendencies by saying that I'm suffering from a severe case of penis envy. She told me that a man called Freud, who was the most famous and brilliant psychologist in the world ever, has said that all girls are jealous of boys because they've got penises and we haven't. Most girls sort of get over it but obviously I'm still eaten up with jealousy, which is why I try to be like boys.

Told Liz that this was rubbish. This Freud person might have been really brilliant but he must have been totally mental too. And he obviously never played football either. There's no way I'd want to have a penis, etc. Especially when I see boys doubled up in agony after they've been hit with a football in the groin. It's just that I like to do lots of stuff that boys enjoy. What's wrong with that?

My parents aren't much help either, and Mum especially is always on at me these days.

You'd think they'd be happy I'm not interested in chasing boys so there's no chance of me getting pregnant and becoming a gymslip mum like the newspapers are always on about, but no.

When I pointed this out to them today, Mum said, 'You a mum? Don't make me laugh. Remember the doll we bought you for your seventh birthday? The one whose head you tore off and used for a football?'

This wasn't true actually. It was Chris's friend Gary who decapitated the doll when we couldn't find a ball to play with. But, OK, I didn't stop him, and since it was done anyway, there was no point in refusing to join in the game. Didn't mention any of this to Mum – even though it all happened seven years ago, it would only set her off again about how much the doll cost (it cried 'real tears' and wet itself!) – so she droned on.

'And the pram that you tied ropes to and used as a go-kart?'

This was true, I suppose, although of course I could only go downhill, and steering was a problem so I ended up knocking out my front tooth on a lamppost but it had been wobbly (the tooth, not the lamppost, of course) and due to come out anyway. Despite this my parents refused to fork out the usual one pound Tooth Fairy money, which I thought was a bit mean.

My dad's attitude doesn't help much either. When I mentioned the gymslip mum stuff to him he just glanced up from his paper and said, 'Do girls wear gymslips these days? I never see you in anything but scruffy jeans with holes in the arse and knees.'

So much for parental support. Wish everyone would just leave me alone. Still, I suppose I'll have to try and be a bit more feminine this year, if only to shut annoying people up, so I've added some girl stuff to my New Year resolutions:

My New Year Resolutions:

1. Never to argue with English teachers

If I'm tempted, I only have to remember what happened when I complained about being cast as the greedy, grumpy mum in *Jack and the Beanstalk* at Christmas. Mrs Conner changed my part to the back end of the cow Jack sold for magic beans at the market. Wouldn't have minded so much but the front half was Terry Docherty, who has personal hygiene problems – and excessive flatulence. I nearly passed out several times trying to hold my breath so as not to inhale the fumes.

2. To play for the school football team.

Though how I'm going to persuade our totally sexist PE teacher to let me join I don't know. Why can't he see that I'm just as good as any boy at football? Also I can swear and foul people better than most.

3. To grow proper breasts.

Not that I really want them as I'm sure they will slow me down at sports and encourage idiot boys to try and look down my front like they are always trying to do with Liz, who is a double D already. Still, I don't want to be a freak and I'm getting totally fed up with being called stupid names like Goose Bumps and Ikea Girl (flat-packed, ha ha).

My Aunt Kate has given me a leaflet with illustrated chest exercises to do. She says they helped her when she was my age but I'm *not* going to do them while chanting, *I must, I must, I must improve my bust!* as she suggested. I mean, it's not voodoo or anything so results can't depend on reciting a stupid mantra.

Mum doesn't think the exercises will work as she says they are really to develop supporting muscles for boobs and 'Ha ha, you don't really have anything *to* support yet, Kelly Ann.' Thanks, Mum. But I'll give the exercises a try anyway. Failing that I'll just have to save up for implants.

4. Never, ever to make a total idiot of myself by falling for any stupid boy.

Nearly all my friends have done this now – even Liz, who wore perfume that smelled like cat pee for a whole week because a boy she fancied said he liked it (until he told her he'd been joking and it smelled like cat pee). Still, that isn't as bad as some people like Fiona McNulty, who still keeps a Kleenex her boyfriend borrowed to blow his nose on their first date. I just can't understand it. Now don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against boys. In fact one of my best friends, Chris, is a boy, and he's great. Also boys are generally better at football, PlayStation games and climbing billboards – all stuff I really like – so they can actually be more fun than girls sometimes. But, honestly, fancy (never mind fall in love with) any of them? I mean, most of them are total idiots (except for people like Chris, who I must admit is really super smart and wants to be a doctor), and not many of them look like film stars exactly.

5. To snog at least one boy this year.

Yeah, I know this doesn't seem to gel with what I've just said but the fact is, my arch enemy Shelly is spreading rumours at school that I'm a lesbian. Just because I don't snog boys. Not that there's anything wrong with being gay of course, if you are gay, but I'm not and I definitely don't fancy girls. I guess the easiest way to stop Shelly is to get spotted tonguing some boy but I'm not sure who or how. Also it has occurred to me that

maybe I'm not all that snogable. I'm not blonde or busty like Liz, which is what most guys seem to like (though Liz says not). She is slightly plump, which really annoys her so she's always on some stupid diet or other. She says that guys actually like skinny girls like me but that, yeah, developing boobs might help.

Maybe I could bribe some boy to snog me? I bet Gary, Chris's best friend, would snog me if I lent him my PlayStation game *Demon Assassins*. He loves that game but can't find it anywhere now. But what if he told people about it afterwards? Could I trust Gary, or any boy really, to keep his mouth shut? If word got round that I'd practically paid someone to snog me it would be just too humiliating. No, it's too risky. I'll just have to try and attract one of them, though God knows how I'm supposed to do that.

SATURDAY JANUARY 2ND

Chris was a bit weird today. He came round to my house in the afternoon but when I opened the door to him, instead of walking in like normal he just stood there and gawped at me. Then he said, 'You look nice, Kelly Ann.'

I stared back at him, surprised. 'What?'

Then he seemed to realize how odd he'd sounded as he reddened and explained, 'I mean the skirt. Your skirt is nice. A Christmas present?'

I looked down at the short pink skirt Aunt Kate had bought me and frowned. Hated the stupid thing. I mean, did she have to buy pink? Anyway, I hate wearing skirts and much prefer jeans or combats but Mum has made me wear it. She says I'm too old to be a tomboy now and everyone will think I'm a dyke if I carry on like this.

Told Mum she can't call people that now, it's not right, and she has to say female gay person. Mum said, female gay person her arse, she hadn't got time for long-winded talk like that, but anyway I'd wear the skirt Aunt Kate bought for me or else. And while she was at it, the day I've got the money to fork out on my own clothes will be the day I tell her what to say or not to say in her own house, but she wouldn't advise it even then if I wanted to avoid a black eye and that's if I was lucky.

Charming.

I was still thinking about my argument with Mum when she came up behind me, smoking a fag as usual.

'Are you two going to stay there all day with the door wide open letting the cold in? It's Baltic out there, for God's sake. Well seen you lot don't pay the gas bill.'

Chris came in, closed the door behind him and said, 'Happy New Year, Mrs—'

Still annoyed with Mum, I interrupted, 'You can't let cold in, you can only let heat out.' I looked at Chris now. 'Isn't that right, Chris?'

I wasn't good at science the way Chris was, but I remember some teacher talking about this last year. I was sure Chris would back me up, but he wimped out.

He said, 'Er, erm, it depends on how you look at it, I suppose.'

My dad joined us in the hall then. 'There speaks a diplomat.' He shook Chris's hand. 'Happy New Year, son. Come on in and have a drink.'

We all piled into the living room, where my big sister Angela was sitting amusing herself by picking bits of pink fluff off a black jacket. She's done this every day since Christmas, when her boyfriend bought her an angora scarf which moults onto everything it touches. I'd have got rid of them (scarf and stupid boyfriend) but my sister is the sort of sad person who probably finds purpose in this pointless, never-ending activity.

Since it was the first time Chris has been here since the New Year, Dad offered him a

'Lite' beer, which he usually keeps for adults who are driving and don't want to go over the limit. Don't know how anyone can drink beer. Even the smell of it is awful. Must say I'm glad I'm not a boy and so won't have to spend a lifetime drinking such vile stuff, although Chris seemed happy enough to accept it.

Mum and Dad used this lame excuse to start drinking more alcohol too ('hair of the dog', Dad called it) but I just had Irn Bru. We toasted the New Year yet again, then Chris was made to kiss Mum and Angela. He must have thought he'd have to kiss me too as he leaned over towards me, but I saved him from this embarrassment by pulling away and high-fiving him.

Dad made the usual idiotic conversation with Chris that adults all seem to think is expected. 'Christ, son, you haven't half grown. You can't be far off six feet. Must be nearly as tall as your dad now and he's no midget.'

Chris muttered some polite reply.

I said, 'You only saw Chris a week ago, Dad. He can't have grown that much since then. He's not a mushroom.' I turned to Chris. 'C'mon, let's go upstairs. We can have a go on the new game I got for Christmas. Bring your beer with you.'

I made for the door and Chris got up to follow me but then Angela butted in with, 'Mum, you're not going to let her take a boy to her bedroom, are you? She's fourteen. Much too old for that now. You never let me take boyfriends to my bedroom, do you?'

Mum said, 'Oh for God's sake, Angela, it's only Chris.'

Dad backed her up. 'Don't be daft, Angela. They've known each other since they were not long out of nappies. Chris is just a pal.'

'Still, it's not fair,' Angela huffed. She looked at Mum. 'Aren't you going to stop her then?'

'Like your father said, she's known him since she gave up nappies.' Mum looked at me and laughed. 'That will be nearly three years then.'

I sighed. 'Yeah, right, very funny, Mum.'

'Well, you did take a bloody long time to potty train. I'd visions of having to buy you Pampers for a wedding present.'

Why do all adults want to embarrass teenagers? Even people like your parents who are supposed to care about you. Come to think of it, *especially* people like your parents. Mind you, I think I must have the most embarrassing parents in the entire world. Even when, unlike Mum just now, they're not deliberately trying to be.

I said, 'Look, Chris, why don't we just go to your house? I could do with getting out of here for a while.'

Chris agreed so he quickly gulped down the rest of his beer and followed me into the hall. I put on my jacket then sat down on the stairs to pull on my trainers. Angela came out at this point. She said, 'What do you think you're doing?'

I tucked my laces into the sides of the trainers and stood up. 'What does it look like I'm doing? Duh!'

'You can't wear those with a skirt.'

'Can.'

'Can't.'

'Can, can, can.'

'Can't, can't— Oh, this is childish.' She opened the living-room door and screeched, 'Mum, look what she's wearing!'

Mum came out, still smoking her fag. Or probably another fag. 'Oh, for Christ's sake, what is it now?' She looked down at my feet and laughed. 'Bloody hell. It's Florence.'

'Florence Nightingale?' I said, puzzled. Couldn't see how I looked like a Victorian

nurse.

'Florence from *The Magic Roundabout*, you eejit. Now go put on the shoes I bought you for Christmas. You asked for them, after all. They cost forty pounds and I'll be buggered if they're going to waste.'

'I asked for new trainers, not stupid high heels I can't walk in.'

But it was no use. Mum made me put them on. I'm sure Angela is to blame for this. She's probably told Mum I'm getting slagged off at school for being too boyish. Mum never used to notice or care what I wore before.

I put them on and teetered outside with Chris. It was cold but at least it had stopped raining – though the pavement was still soaking wet so there was no way I could take off the four-inch heels and walk in just thick black tights. Had to hold onto Chris's arm for support, which annoyed me but Chris didn't seem bothered and later put his arm around my waist to steady me further. I was almost starting to get the hang of balancing in the things with his help when we arrived at the bottom of the road, only to find it flooded right across from a blocked drain. Damn. Why hadn't Chris mentioned this to me?

'It's not deep, Kelly Ann. Just an inch or two at most on this side.'

I looked down at my feet in the stupid heels. It might have been OK if Mum had bought me wedges. Glanced over at Chris's footwear. Sturdy thick-soled leather boots. All right for some.

Chris glanced at my feet too, then back at me. 'No problem, Kelly Ann. I'll carry you.'

Considered this. Chris *had* got a lot taller, as Dad had said. It's odd to think that just two years ago we were around the same height but now he's nearly six inches taller even in heels – well, with me in heels, I mean. Unlike other boys in my year who'd grown suddenly, he wasn't spindly and was quite sturdily built, maybe because of all the football training he does. Since I'm skinny he could probably manage to carry me quite easily without dropping me but I decided against it. Seemed too pathetically girly. Besides, the narrowest bit of water was less than two metres across. I was sure I could clear it easily.

I said, 'No, it's fine. I can jump it.'

'Kelly Ann, I really don't think that's a good idea.'

'Rubbish! I came second in the long jump in the whole of our year last summer. Honestly, this will be easy.'

I squirmed free of Chris and took a few steps back to get a bit of a run at it.

Chris tried to stop me. 'No, Kelly Ann, don't! You weren't wearing heels when you—'

Too late. I'd tried to launch myself across but tripped and ended up face down in the cold, dirty water. At least it wasn't sewage water – or I hoped not anyway.

'– came second in the long jump,' Chris finished.

He helped me up and handed me my right shoe, which had come off. I squelched miserably back home with Chris in tow. Of course Mum got on at me for 'ruining' my outfit. I think she suspected I'd done it on purpose or something.

Changed into my comfy jeans in my room, then put on my new PlayStation game and shouted downstairs to Chris to come up and join me. A few moments later he knocked on my door then came in. I patted the space on my bed beside me and continued with my game but he didn't join me right away. Instead he stood by the door and said, 'Are you sure you're OK with me being here, Kelly Ann? Maybe you'd be more comfortable if we went downstairs.'

'Don't be stupid. Why would I feel uncomfortable? I never have before. Don't let that idiot sister of mine bother you. It's not like you're a normal boy to me, anyway. More like a brother.'

'Yeah.' Chris smiled, relieved. 'We're just good friends, right?'

'Course, I said, handing him his controller. 'The best. But I'm still gonna enjoy ripping you apart.'

'You wish! Prepare to die at the hands of Hawkeye.'

Although Chris had never played this particular game before he still beat me, which was annoying but he *is* probably one of the best in our school at this kind of stuff.

Still, I'm no newbie and got pretty close. Took out three of his men in a single grenade attack and successfully carjacked another. But when I hurtled down the hill in my jeep to splatter Chris, he killed me with a single sniper shot to the head. He's ace at these – that's why he's called Hawkeye. I was down to my last life and couldn't respawn, so that was that.

'Never mind, Kelly Ann. What about a game of Monopoly? You always win at that. Only because you cheat, of course.'

I kicked him playfully on the shin and got out the Monopoly board. We played for hours but eventually I bankrupted him and it was time for him to go home. God, how I loved Chris being around. Just hoped he would never change.

Before he left I said, 'We'll always be friends, Chris, won't we?'

'Sure. Why? What's the matter?'

'Nothing . . . It's just that, well, everyone seems to be changing this year. Practically all my friends have got obsessed with make-up and boys now.'

Chris smiled. 'Not likely to happen to me.'

'Suppose.' I smiled back. 'But you seemed a bit weird earlier. Different.'

Chris shrugged. 'I was just surprised at the skirt. Don't think I've ever seen you in a skirt. You looked, well' – he paused, then put on a stupid high-pitched Pinocchio voice – '*like a real girl.*'

'Idiot,' I laughed. But I repeated my question seriously, just to be sure. 'So we'll always be friends then?'

'Yeah, definitely. Always.'