



## The Past, the Present and the Loud, Loud Girl

A word of warning: never, *ever* try to cut your fringe when you're in a bad mood.

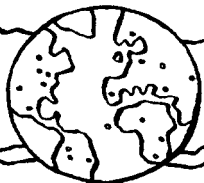
I gazed at my reflection in the toilet mirrors while a bunch of girls who were in the year below me charged about screaming and giggling about something or other in the background.

Hopefully, it wasn't my hair, but I couldn't have blamed them if it was. One single, solitary chunk of fringe was cut so high that a big, shiny patch of forehead positively *gleamed* at me in the mirror. My fringe would've looked better if I'd just let Tor's hamsters *gnaw* on it for a while...

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ALLY'S WORLD



*the* PAST,  
*the* PRESENT *and the*  
LOUD, LOUD  
GIRL

KAREN McCOMBIE

~~for LORNE sausage banana~~

~~for LORNE sausage BONELLA~~

~~for LAUREN BANANA~~

for LAUREN BONELLA !

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## PROLOGUE

Dear Mum,  
I've decided to do something.

Don't panic: it's not like I'm about to pierce my lip, or enrol for the next Mars mission, or run away with the circus and juggle clowns or something. (Although you'd probably think all that was cool.)

It's just that, you know how I've been keeping a box with all our photos and school reports and stuff for you to see? Well, no you don't – which is the problem – but trust me, that's what I'm doing.

Well, anyway, apart from those bits and pieces, I've decided that I'm going to start writing down some of the things that happen to all of us; the things that matter, anyway. It's not going to be like a diary or anything – I don't exactly have the patience for that. (Though I did buy one a couple of Januarys ago; it was half-price in the stationery shop up on the Broadway. I started out OK, prattling on about *what* I'd done that day and *what* I was feeling and *what* we'd had for tea, but by

January 10th I was just doodling flowers on the page. And the entry for January 15th just said “BORED, BORED, BORED”, so I kind of chucked it in after that.)

So this time, I think I’ll do it like an essay... Only it might be a bit on the long side. You know what I’m like. Remember that last report you saw when I was at primary school? “*Ally is very bright and imaginative, but her mind does tend to wander...*” Hey, guess what? Nothing’s changed. It’s like Grandma says, I’d get twice as much done if I stopped wittering for five minutes. Which is sort of true, I know. And which is what I’m doing now, I suppose...

OK, so back to my plan.

I think I’ll do it like I’m writing it for some stranger to read, ’cause – sorry, I don’t mean to give you a hard time about this – it might make me too sad if I just set it all down for you. I suppose that’s because I know it’s not exactly likely that you’re going to come walking through the door in the next two minutes or anything, and beg to read this...

But then, if – by some mind-blowing magic – you did, you’d have all our pictures and things to look at, *and* be able to read all my stories about what’s been going on with me and Linn and Rowan and Tor. And, of course, Dad.

Speaking of Dad, I think I'll start with his fortieth birthday, 'cause that was when Kyra turned up, and when – don't panic – we nearly lost Tor...

Love you lots,

Ally

(your Love Child No. 3)

# Chapter

# 1

## WELCOME TO MY (WEIRD) WORLD...

Look at a map of the world, and find Britain (small, jaggedy, sort of in the middle).

Look at a map of Britain and find London (big blob, down in the south).

Look at a map of London and find Crouch End (weird name, nice place).

Look for Palace Heights Road (number 28, to be precise).

When you find number 28, stand on the pavement opposite and look at the terraced house with your eyes half-crossed (all fuzzy like that, it seems almost as posh as the ones on either side of it. *Uncross* your eyes and you'll see that it's actually pretty tatty round the edges).

I'm Ally Love, and this is where I live with my dad (Martin), a power-mad control freak (my seventeen-year-old sister, Linn), a complete airhead (my fifteen-year-old sister, Rowan) and a space cadet (my seven-year-old brother, Tor).

OK, so now look up, past the big bay living-room

window, past the first-floor bay (my sister Rowan's room) until you see a tiny window at the top – my attic bedroom.

That's where I've woken up nearly every morning for all of the thirteen years I've been on this planet, and where I'm normally very happy to wake up. Except for one particular morning...

It was weird – for some reason, my whole head was vibrating.

But then, there are plenty of weird things in this world. Like nose hair. I mean, if the point is that it's there for protection, then why doesn't it grow in your mouth too? (Blee...)

And electricity. It doesn't matter how many times the principle's explained to me, I still don't get it. But don't get me wrong, I am pretty *pleased* about it. Dad sometimes likes to light these big, fat, coloured candles we have in the living room, but until they invent a candle-powered TV (that would need a *really* big, fat candle, I guess), I'm OK with electricity, however weird it is.

Of course, plenty of people – including my oldest sister – think our parents are weird for giving their kids odd names (me, I got off lightly out of the four of us), but I think it just goes to show that some people have no imagination. And anyway, when they get to know the story behind

each name, they usually think it's pretty cool after all.

Oops, there I go. Getting sidetracked by weird stuff when I was supposed to be talking about the head-vibrating thing. But I do that a lot (get sidetracked, not have a vibrating head) – so get used to it.

Anyhow, it was a Sunday morning when I felt my head vibrate. At first I didn't panic; I just told myself that there must be a giant articulated lorry parked in the street outside, its engine throbbing so hard that it was shaking the house from the foundations right up to my little room under the eaves. That, or maybe it was a low-flying plane, rumbling through the skies above our house, sending tremors from the roof tiles down.

Then I noticed something else – one side of my face and neck were as hot as a very hot thing. A vibrating head *and* a burning-hot face...

OK, so *then* I started to panic. Compared to people like my airhead sister Rowan and my ditzy best mate Sandie, I know I come over like I'm confident and logical. But underneath, I'm basically a world-class worrier...

What had they told us at school about meningitis? Did the telltale signs include victims hearing a persistent droning noise that made their

heads vibrate? Was it a common sign to feel one side of your face burning up? I couldn't remember.

Then all of a sudden, the noise and the vibration stopped. In its place, there was silence, broken only by one small noise.

"Snurph."

My eyes flicked open. I was awake, and instantly flooded with relief.

I didn't have the first warning signs of meningitis.

I wasn't about to be carted off to the Whittington hospital down the road.

I turned my head on the pillow and found myself nose to nose with Colin.

"Don't mind me," I muttered, as he moved in his sleep, settling himself more comfortably in the cosy pile of people fur that he'd come across.

As I tried to pull my long, brown hair slowly out from under him, he gave another snuffly cat snore and started off with his loud, droning purr again.

Freeing myself, I flung back the duvet and left Colin to it. I padded over the old, worn carpet and did the morning ritual I've done ever since I was tall enough to reach the ledge on my tiptoes – staring out of my tiny window at the view of the Palace, perched on top of one of London's only proper hills.

"Well, Ally Love," I said to myself, "You could

have been famous; you could have gone down in medical history as the first person to suffer from Vibrating Head Syndrome.”

I shot a glance backwards in the direction of Colin, who was now sprawling his whole body and three legs (hey, I’ll explain later) across the whole pillow.

Then I thought of something *truly* weird: do cats’ heads vibrate when they purr?

I walked back over to Colin, and clamped my fingers round his face.

“Yeee-oow!”

My scientific experiment didn’t prove the vibrating theory. What it did do was show that cats really, *really* don’t appreciate having their heads squeezed when they’re sleeping.

Trust me, I’ve got the bite-marks to prove it.

Now that I knew I wasn’t going to die (well, eventually, yeah – but not right that *second*), I should have been skipping down the stairs to breakfast with a stupid grin of relief on my face.

But I didn’t. Mainly because my fear of immediate death had been replaced by an ominous feeling that I’d forgotten something...

Uh-oh.