

The Parent Agency

Extract 1

'...so I thought maybe on my birthday, next Saturday, when I wake up, it would be good if waiting outside was an Aston Martin DB6...' Barry was saying, in between forkfuls of low-sugar, low-salt baked beans on jacket potato.

'An Aston Martin! Write that down, Ginny!'

'I'm writing it down, Kay!'

Barry carried on looking at his dad. He had chosen not to recognise his younger twin sisters. Barry often snuck a glance at his dad's Daily or Sunday Express, as he knew that James Bond would have to be aware of when dangerous stuff was happening in the world, and he had read that some countries did this to other ones, sometimes. So similarly he did not call his eight-year-old twin sisters Ginny and Kay but The Sisterly Entity or TSE for short.

He did, however, out of the corner of his eye, catch them doing that sarcastic thing they did, when one of them – Barry didn't like separating TSE into two, as that was kind of recognising that they existed, but if he had to, he would refer to them as Sisterly Entities One and Two – would pretend to write down something he said, as if it was really important. Which of course was their way of saying that it wasn't important at all. Barry really hated it when they did that.

'...so, Dad, on our birthday can you take us somewhere in a Rolls-Royce? Which you can keep in the garage next to the Aston Martin!' said Sisterly Entity One.

Ha ha ha! laughed Sisterly Entity Two, (I'm not very good at doing their laugh) who was still running her index finger across her palm as part of the pretending-to-write-down-stupid-stuff-Barry-says mime.

Yeah, well, they're not that expensive to hire. I checked online,' said Barry, trying as much as possible not to look at them. 'And then maybe you can have, like, a tuxedo Dad ready for me to wear and a cake with 007 on it, and all my friends can come dressed as Bond villains, and maybe you can have the film soundtrack playing, and you, Dad, you can be Q, showing me gadgets, like a jet pack and a pen that's actually a gun, and—'

'Sorry, Barry, what?' His dad put down his *Sunday Express*.

'Weren't you listening? Da-ad!'"

'Barry, please don't say 'Dad' like that.'

'Like what?'

'Like when you give it two syllables. And go right down on the second one. On the -ad.' This was Barry's mum speaking.

The Parent Agency - Extract 2

'Write that face down, Ginny!'

'I'm... a... really... stupid... looking... boy...!' said Sisterly Entity Two, moving her finger slowly across her palm.

And suddenly a feeling that had been welling up inside Barry for... well, since his dad had closed the door on Jake and Taj and Lukas just before tea, but in another way for much longer than that, maybe ever since he'd understood that, unfortunately, his name was Barry - a feeling that he wanted to both cry and shout and break something all at the same time - exploded out of him.

'I hate you because you're boring! And tired ALL THE TIME! And always TELLING ME OFF FOR NOTHING! And saying, 'That's a swear,' when all I've done is say BUM!'

'Barry. That's a swear!' said his mum.

'NO IT ISN'T! And because you're so much nicer to THEM...!' He pointed at TSE. They both grinned at the same time. '...than to ME! And because...!' Barry realised by now that he was doing the list in his bedroom. He decided to miss out Numbers 8 and 9 - 'Not being glamorous' and 'Being poor' - since even in his rage he knew that they might just sound a bit too horrible out loud, especially as loud as he was speaking now. 'And... YOU NEVER, EVER MAKE MY BIRTHDAY REALLY GOOD!!'

There was a short pause after he shouted this. Then Sisterly Entity One said:

'Write that down, Ginny.'

'I'm writing it down, Kay.'

'Right,' said Barry's dad. 'Well, if that's how you feel, we won't have a screening of Casino Royale on your birthday!'

'GREAT!' shouted Barry and he threw the DVD across the room. It spun round in the air as it made its way towards the sink. Barry was secretly quite proud of the throw; his wrist had flicked sharply as he'd released the disc, like an Olympic discus champion.

'BARRY!!!' his dad shouted. So loudly that, for the first time this dinner time, Barry's mum looked up from the dishwasher. Just in time to be hit in the eye by a copy of Casino Royale, starring David Niven.

'OW!' she said, falling backwards and out of sight again.

Barry heard a bump. Then one of the egg-timers, the red one, fell of the kitchen counter and smashed.

Uh-oh, he thought.

'RIGHT, BARRY, THAT'S IT! GO TO YOUR ROOM!' said his dad, pointing upstairs - stupidly, really, as Barry knew the way.

'ALL RIGHT I WILL!' Barry shouted back.

And because he was a little frightened by now, he ran out of the kitchen as fast as he could, swerving at the last minute to avoid the bits of glass and sand from the egg-timer which was sprinkled all over the floor.

The Extraordinary Life of Katherine Johnson

Extract 1

1955 was a big year - for Katherine and the rest of the world. But at the time she didn't know that it was going to change her life forever. On 29th July 1955 the USA told the world that it was going to launch artificial satellites into space to orbit the Earth. This was massive news!

Only four days later the USSR announced that it too was going to launch satellites into space in the near future. Relations between the two countries grew more than a little tense. This started what is called the space race, which properly kicked off two years later. On 4th October 1957 the USSR launched Sputnik, the first satellite to orbit the Earth. It orbited the Earth for three weeks until its batteries eventually ran out, but it kept going for another two months before tumbling down into the Earth's atmosphere. It burst into flames, crashing down to Earth as a fireball close to where it was first launched.

Next, the Russians set their sights on sending a human into space, and the man for the job was called Yuri Gagarin. Before he could take on this huge once-in-a-lifetime mission, he had to train for years. Meanwhile, the American government wasn't too happy that the Russians had aced the Sputnik mission, so they kept trying to prove that they were bigger, better and stronger than the USSR. However, America had some catching up to do, and fast. While governments fought and experts paced up and down wondering what to do next, Katherine was working away at the maths needed to get people to and from space. Not long after the launch of Sputnik, Katherine published a document that made it clear that America was ready to have a go at space travel. To make it even clearer, NACA became NASA on 29th July 1958. Now the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, it became a space agency with a mission to send people into Earth's orbit and beyond.

The Extraordinary Life of Katherine Johnson

Extract 2

Katherine soon met a man named John Glenn, who was to make his journey to space in a rocket called Friendship 7. By this point Katherine had already proved that she was a master of numbers, so John knew he could trust her completely. While he trained, Katherine worked hard calculating how to get him into space and back home again.

As he was to become the first American to orbit the Earth and Katherine was to become the woman who would get him there, they both had very important work to do.

1962 came and Friendship 7 was ready and waiting to be fired into Earth's orbit. The mission was huge, and more than a little nerve-racking for everyone involved. NASA had lots of different experts watching John during his mission to make sure that he was safe.

Back on Earth, Katherine was running the show. There was a lot of pressure on them both! But John trusted Katherine, believing in her amazing ability to move numbers around in her brain. Before boarding the rocket, he said: 'Get the girl, check the numbers. If the numbers are good, then I'm ready to go.'

Katherine's calculations got the rest of the Mercury Seven into space too, but she wasn't finished yet.

The success of John Glenn's mission was a huge victory for the USA. The space race with the USSR was heating up. Ambitions now soared much higher than the Earth's orbit, and Katherine started work on a project that would be the highlight of her career at NASA - Apollo 11, the moon landing of 1969.

Katherine had been researching the maths that it would take to get people to the moon, and with every breakthrough she made, the idea became more of a reality. Finally, in 1969, the time came. Apollo 11 was the mission that carried Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins to space, and on to the moon.

The astronauts were launched in a rocket called Saturn V from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on 16th July 1969. And by ten o'clock in the morning the three men were circling around the Earth. At a time when most Americans were having breakfast, three humans were on their way to the moon for the first time!

The London Eye Mystery - Extract 1

'Kat?' I said.

'What?'

'What does it mean when something is up your street?'

'Huh?'

'Salim said The Tempest would be right up my street. He acted in it at school last term.'

Kat laughed. 'We've been reading it at school too. Mr Moynihan keeps making me read Miranda's part and she's such a ... dishrag.'

I considered this. 'So it's not up your street?'

'No way.'

The pod was nearing one o'clock. 'What d'you think of Auntie Glo?' Kat asked.

I remembered what Dad said about her leaving a trail of devastation in her wake. Then I remembered how she'd said I was like Andy Warhol, a cultural icon. 'I don't know.'

'Me neither. I heard Dad say to Mum that Auntie Glo drives him bananas. And I found two empty bottles of wine on top of the fridge.'

In my mind's eye, Aunt Gloria turned into a motorist with driving goggles and a huge consignment of bananas in the back seat.

'You mean, she drives him bananas the same way I drive you nuts?' I said.

'Bananas. Nuts. Round the bend. Off your trolley. Whatever.'

She laughed and I joined in because it showed I knew what she meant even if I wasn't sure what was funny about Aunt Gloria making Dad feel insane.

The London Eye Mystery - Extract 2

We walked over to where Mum and Aunt Gloria were having coffee. ^[L]_[SEP] 'Let's lie,' hissed Kat.

'About taking that ticket from a stranger.'

She grabbed me by the wrist so hard it hurt.

'Lie,' I repeated. 'Hrumm. Lie.'

'We could say that Salim got lost in the crowds, that he—' She let my wrist go. 'Oh, forget it,' she said. 'I know telling a lie with you is useless. And stop doing that duck-that's-forgotten-how-to-quack look!'

We reached the table where Aunt Gloria and Mum sat talking up another storm. We stood by them in silence. A pounding started up in my ears, as if my blood pressure had shot up above normal, which is what Mum says happens to her when Kat drives her distracted.

'There you are,' Aunt Gloria said. 'Have you got the tickets?'

Kat waited for me to say something.

I waited for Kat to say something.

'Where's Salim?' asked Mum. 'Not still in the queue?'

'Hrumm,' I said. 'No.'

Mum looked as if Salim might be behind us. 'Where then?'