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Opening extract from
My Secret Rockstar Boyfriend

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Nevermind the . . . ?

OK, I may not have been born yet when Kurt Cobain died (hey, does that mean I could be his reincarnation? I've got the right hair for it,¹ if nothing else) but have you LISTENED to Nevermind lately? That's Nirvana's breakthrough second album, in case you are unlucky enough not to be familiar with it already. It was released in 1991, but I swear if it came out tomorrow it would still sound new.

Let's not forget that Nirvana were the most groundbreaking band for a whole generation². I can only imagine what it must have been like when Nevermind really was brand new, released into an unsuspecting world of 80s pop, a time when the edgiest rock scene still consisted of Guns N' Roses and similarly big-haired buffoons.

I'm not saying there's nothing good around these days – that would be stupid (and, hello? Have you heard of Grimes, or the Internet, or Nando's, or any of the other excellent stuff that wasn't even around in 1991?) I'm just saying I'm really, really happy to live in a time when I have the luxuries of modern life AND Kurt Cobain's back catalogue at my fingertips, to ransack to my retro little heart's content.

1 *i.e. Unintentionally yellow/bleached-blond mess that I cut myself with the kitchen scissors.*

2 *This may not be MY generation, but I still get a say. I am a spiritual child of the nineties, so humour me. Please?*

Comments

As usual, Chew – you are the voice of someone else's generation. And that's why you're pretty unique.

seymour_brown

Chew, tell Seymour to stop being such an enabler – you both need to get out more. If he tells you otherwise, don't listen. Maybe you should try an open relationship. Seymour, FYI, there's no such thing as 'pretty unique'. A thing, or person, is either unique or it isn't. End of.

Nishi_S

Aw, you guys. Et cetera. By which I mean STFU, both of you. Open relationship? Nish, I'm so telling Anna you said that. Anyway, I'm off – MIC is starting and you know how I hate to miss it. I'm not even joking. I've got a date with E4 and a pack of Hobnobs. Living the dream.

Tuesday-yes-that-is-my-real-name-Cooper

'No, but seriously – don't you think that I might be pre-empting a big comeback? When all the hipsters are wearing them in six months' time, who'll be laughing then?'

'I will,' Nishi says. 'In six months' time, Chew – I will still be laughing. At you. Because you're wearing those dungarees.'

'But –' I open my mouth to protest, even though I kind of suspect she's right.

These dungarees aren't really doing anything for me. Probably because they're shiny leopard print, frayed at the edges and have a crotch that's veering perilously close to looking like I've done a poo in it. Possibly, at some point in this garment's weird life, somebody has.

I give it one last go. 'You don't think it has just a teensy Debbie Harry at CBGB's sort of a vibe to—'

'No, Chew,' Anna interrupts, accepting no arguments. 'Nishi's right. Just . . . no.'

'Now take them off,' Nishi adds. 'We'll meet you next to household tat, OK?'

I close the curtain of the makeshift changing room and take one last look in the mirror. I'm not too bothered about the fact that my arse looks approximately the size of a small country. Well, I kind of am, if I'm honest, but I try my very best not to think about it. I bring other skills to the table, so there's not much point wasting my life wishing I looked like some dreamy Alexa Chung type. It's never going to happen – sad but true – so I'm pretty sure that coming to terms with the truth this early on in life

makes me about 37% more productive. Whenever I catch myself obsessing – about my wayward weight, my lack of cheekbones or my weird knuckles – I remind myself that it's wasted time I could be spending on my blog, or learning Arabic, or eating a delicious pizza. It doesn't always work, but I'm nothing if not a trier.

Anyway, chub aside, I am most definitely bothered about the fact that I don't look cool. In any way, shape or form. I look like a demented toddler. I am forced to admit that my friends are right.

So I begin the laborious task of peeling myself out of the second-hand dungarees – worryingly their synthetic fabric is already making me a bit sweaty – and back into the pale blue second-hand nightie I'm currently wearing as a dress, along with white tights, ballet slippers and a ratty old-man cardigan. I'm going for Courtney Love circa 1990 – back when she had her old-old nose.

This is to go with my current hair – the bleached-blond disaster. I make a point of dyeing my hair a new colour once a fortnight at the very least. I try to go for a strong enough statement each time that I have to formulate a completely new look around it. Sometimes I even try out a slightly different personality. I don't have the pain threshold for piercings, and my attention span is way too short for a tattoo. The idea of something that lasts forever scares me. Hair dye – bright, brash, but not a long-term commitment – is the ideal mini-rebellion for the essentially cowardly girl. Everyone notices it and comments, but if you really don't like it, all you have to

do is stay in and wash your hair ten times in a row. Better yet, dye it another colour over the top.

‘Hang on a minute – did you say household tat?’ I shout from behind the curtain. ‘You two aren’t *nesting* already, are you? You’ve only been going out for about five minutes.’

Fully dressed again, I push the curtain aside, to find that there’s nobody around to hear me. Anna and Nishi have already disappeared out of sight. The charity shop is almost silent, and the only person I can see is the old lady behind the till, who is giving me evils like I’m about to stab her for her pension cheque. I smile at her as sweetly as I possibly can as I hang the hideous dungarees up where I found them. I make sure that they are in exactly the right place and very, very neat – showing that the younger generation can in fact be courteous and helpful.

I find Anna and Nishi tucked away in a corner, examining a vintage tea set.

‘It’s been four months actually,’ Anna says – unlike me, waiting until I’m standing next to them, and using her indoor voice.

‘And you’re already buying shared crockery.’ I sigh. ‘That must be true love.’

‘Hey, what does a lesbian take on the second date? A removal van.’ Nishi cackles at her own joke.

‘Am I allowed to laugh at that?’ I ask seriously.

‘No,’ Anna tells me, giving Nishi a cautionary look. ‘Because it’s not funny. Anyway, how long have *you* been going out with Seymour?’

I suppose I ought to know this. I have to think hard, and I'm still not sure.

'Well, I must have known him properly for nearly a year, I suppose. Because when we met him at that party it was definitely summer – I remember because I had on that yellow playsuit I got in Beyond Retro. You know, the one with the palm-tree pattern that looks a bit like something Lucille Ball might have worn in an *I Love Lucy* Hawaiian holiday special. I have no idea when we actually started going out. Ask him – he's way more likely to remember the specifics.'

'Oh, he'll definitely remember the exact date. He'll probably remember what he was wearing and every single witty remark he made.' Once again Nishi cracks herself up. 'Come on, don't look at me like that – you know what Seymour's like. He's quite . . . self-involved, isn't he?'

'I'm obviously drawn to self-involved characters,' I say sanctimoniously. 'I seem to be surrounded by them.'

Nishi, clever as she is, doesn't turn a hair at this. 'Hey, I'm just looking out for you. That's what best friends are for. Keeping things real.'

Anna and I look at each other and roll our eyes fondly.

'Chew's right, Nish – let's go and get some food,' Anna cuts in, diplomatic as usual. 'I'm starving.'

Unbelievably we leave the charity shop empty-handed. This is almost unheard of, but it's been a slow day for chazzing. At least my mum will be pleased – she doesn't understand our 'morbid fixation on dead people's crap'. She's always trying to throw my stuff out when she

thinks I won't notice, or she decides she's going to 'draw the line' at taxidermy, or that scary Victorian doll I once brought home.

We troop across the road to our favourite cafe, Macari's. It's like a cross between a school canteen and a 1950s diner. We grab our favourite booth and take it in turns to go up to the counter and order. The others get baked potatoes, but I feel like I want to have at least some indulgence in my life on a Saturday afternoon, given the failure of our shopping trip and the fact that I still have a hard-earned tenner burning a hole in my pocket. So I order cheesy chips, an ice-cream sundae, a chocolate milkshake and also a Coke because I am thirsty.

'Impressive,' Nishi notes with a sarcastically raised eyebrow.

She's right, even if she does have a slightly smug attitude and a worrying obsession with kale. By the time I'm done, I feel sick. I make sure to leave one overcooked brown chip and exactly half of one ice-cream wafer, so that it's like none of it actually happened; I didn't finish all that food, so it doesn't count.

'What are we doing next?' I ask, slurping air from the bottom of my milkshake.

'Falling into a diabetic coma?' Nishi suggests.

I've known Nishi since we were five. We've been best friends since junior school. We're more like sisters by this point – I'm an only child and Nishi has all brothers. By this, I mean that we argue like siblings and don't feel any need for good manners or common courtesy around each

other. I feel totally myself with Nish, in a way I don't always in the outside world. Nobody else quite gets the two of us.

However, I am properly delighted that she and Anna have got together. They met online, on a Riot Grrrl message board; then it turned out that Anna lives really near us, even though she's a year younger and goes to the fancy all-girls school on the other side of town. Sometimes if we have a free afternoon Nishi and I try and convince her to bunk off and hang out with us, but she's far too strait-laced and we're not exactly major rebels, so we usually make do with going to Macari's or the noodle bar together at lunchtimes or after school. Anyway, Anna's always embarrassed about us seeing her in her navy-blue school uniform when we can go to college in our jeans. Or revolting second-hand nylon nightdresses in my case.

Even though – as I have just been reminded – we have only known Anna for the past four months, she fits right in. It's great having her in our tiny little gang. They don't make me feel like a third wheel, and it's like we're kind of a family, as I've been there with them since the beginning. I feel a bit like their child or something. A slightly overgrown child who will probably be living with them when she's thirty, eating all their food and not giving them a moment's peace. Actually that sounds like a pretty good plan for my future adult life – I must suggest it to them; maybe they can get a house with a spare room for me one day.

When they had their first 'in the flesh' date, after

months of messaging and then awkward phone calls, Nishi arranged to meet Anna in a Starbucks and made me secretly sit at the table behind her, in case Anna turned out to be a freaky old man or something. I sat there wearing a beret and reading a newspaper, mostly trying not to laugh and make a spectacle of myself. Nish ended up calling me over to introduce me, and the three of us spent the whole afternoon hanging out in town together. It's pretty much set the pattern for their whole relationship.

Most of all, it's nice to see Nish so happy for once – I love my badass friend, but it's actually kind of cool to see that she *does* have a sappy side. In all the years that I have known her, I never would have guessed it could happen, but they are properly in love.

It's a good thing I've got Seymour, otherwise I might feel left out. The fact that this has happened is basically a small miracle – as I would never previously have dreamed I'd be able to get a boyfriend like Seymour. I'm still not entirely sure how I managed it. I'd casually admired him from afar at college for ages, but never thought much of it – just like half the girls in my year, which is unsurprising, as he is so good-looking *and* plays in a band.

Then, somehow, we got chatting in the common room one day when he saw me reading a vintage copy of the *NME* that I'd bought off eBay. He seemed genuinely sweet and interested, so I even forgot to be nervous as I explained to him the cultural significance of *Meat Is Murder* by the Smiths. We kept hanging out together and actually became friends – he started coming round to

borrow my charity-shop records or even to ask advice on his band's demo tapes. It took a while, but things kind of went from there.

It's probably a good thing that we were friends before we got together, as I know I'm not really pretty enough to be going out with someone like him – luckily for me I somehow eventually won him over with my incessant chatter and encyclopaedic knowledge of Jared Leto films. Handsome boys love that sort of thing, right? Seriously, he looks like when they put glasses on a ridiculously handsome actor in an American teen movie, to make it obvious that he's the 'clever' one. He plays guitar and sings in a band called Terminal Ghosts. Despite Nishi's sniping, my friends think he's cool; my mum loves him. Actually my mum mostly loves him because he has a slightly posh voice and unusually good table manners, plus he once sided with her against me in an argument about which of the Bee Gees are dead – but that's not the point. Even when he's being annoying, they all generally take his side. It's always like, 'Chew, what did you do?' Fair enough, really. I guess we all know I'm punching above my weight.

Sometimes I have to remind myself that I bring different qualities to the table – like the fact that I do better than him at college, and that before he met me he thought Iggy Pop was just some old guy in insurance adverts.

Anyway, I really shouldn't have to remind myself that life is pretty sweet at the moment. It's nice to have this

brilliant little group around me, after years of just Nishi and me doing our own thing against the tide. It's like the world has caught up, and being the slightly odd, clever kids has suddenly paid off for us.

We've got our A levels coming up in a couple of weeks' time, and I'm weirdly excited about the whole thing. I really like all the subjects I'm studying, particularly English, which has been my favourite subject for as long as I can remember. I love writing, and it's been awesome to leave maths and science behind. I'm not a fan of any subject where there is only one correct answer – if something is set in stone like that, it's so boring; that just isn't how my brain works. It's probably why I also love really rubbish reality TV – I'm all about the journey.

This is partly why I'm trying to spend a lot of time working on my blog at the moment. It's a really fun hobby; obviously it's grossly self-indulgent because it's all about me and the music and other stuff I'm into, and nobody reads it except for my friends and my mum. Still, I think it's good practice for my writing. I would love to be a journalist one day; it's my dream to become a writer and move to New York. Or at least London.

'We could go and try on ludicrous clothes we can't afford in Urban Outfitters?' Anna suggests for our next Saturday-afternoon activity.

This is pretty much our favourite thing to do. Which is why she's Nishi's kind of girl – and mine. She doesn't need to ask us twice.