

Rose's Blog

1st December 2009

Nearly Christmas and school pantomime time. Cinderella this year, and all my friends are in it. Molly is Chorus and Kiran is a Palace Dancer and guess who I am? Hot Stuff Rose from the market place, the unsecret love of Simple Simon, the Skateboarding Prince! But best of all is Indigo, because he is an Ugly Sister. Only he is not ugly at all, in fact he looks quite worryingly pretty in a dress. He has to ride a unicycle on stage because that is how the two ugly sisters get to the ball (Cinders goes in a wheelbarrow) and he has to sing a duet with the other ugly sister which he does very well indeed.

Everyone has promised to come. Michael and Caddy and Buttercup, and all the parents and David and Saffron and Sarah. Sarah was not too keen at first though.

"How is that Icelandic witch?" she asked.

"Gone, gone, gone," I told her. "A hundred years ago. You have got to come and see Indy in a purple dress with a pink wig, Sarah! You may never get the chance again.

"Pink and purple?" asked Sarah.

"And doing a fan dance and singing a duet with the other ugly sister. *Angel of the Morning*. Reggae, with harmonies!"

"Oh Rose, it's a bit tempting," said Sarah. "I so rarely get a chance to show off my wolf whistling skills."

"And later he rides a unicycle with his skirt hitched up."

"Okay I'm coming," said Sarah. "Save me a seat at the front and don't sell tickets to anyone from Iceland (the country not the supermarket)."

So I agreed.

Tom was a lot easier to persuade.

"Absolutely I'm coming," he said. "I'll be there if I have to swim. What fantastic casting! Hot stuff, Rose! And it's about time Sarah and Indy got together again. She'll never be able to resist him when she sees in him a dress but just in case, Rosy Pose, it might be a good idea to have some mistletoe about."

Oh yes. It might.

"Are you really truly coming?" I asked.

"I'm counting the hours," said Tom.

So am I!

9th November 2009

My brother Indigo and his friend Tom (who lives in New York and is also my friend (in fact, I got him first)) have many things in common such as ridiculous hair, and weekend jobs in music shops, and liking maths which they say is fun,

and little sisters. That is what they call me and Frances:
little sisters.

Indigo and Tom, when they run out of other things to talk about, like to exchange little sister stories, and I don't think much of it, considering I am thirteen and Frances is only just about five. Tom's latest little sister story was about when Frances, left alone with a pair of really sharp scissors for the first time in her life, hurried to make the most of the opportunity by cutting off all her hair. He took a photograph of her to show us. I must admit Frances is a good ruthless chopper. In patches at the front she was nearly bald.

It happened that at exactly the same time as Frances was cutting off her curls, I, with the help of two friends who should have known better, was dyeing my hair. Blue and purple stripes. With a kit bought from the chemist with my birthday money, and extra ink to make sure from mummy's illuminated manuscript phase (thankfully over). If you try yourself, my advice is, leave out the ink. The blue and purpleness of my hair was nothing in comparison to the blue and purpleness of my ears and my neck and my face in trickly stripes, and I think that was due to the ink. It was very hard to get off, and before we had hardly begun, Indigo had taken a photograph, and minutes later Indigo's own little-sister-and-hair-styling story was on its way to America. And so was the photograph he had just taken, now with a title: 'Rose, purple, blue.'

"Delete it at once!" I commanded Tom, but he didn't. Instead he printed it in black and white and purple and blue on sticky back label paper. He made me into forty eight stickers.

"What are you going to do with them?" I asked furiously (only I didn't know how to do furious by email so I did frantic like this: *what are you going to do with them*).

"Haven't decided," said Tom (aggravatingly, like this ;o}) "Still thinking, Rose."

He thought too long. While he was doing it Frances stole those stickers, and she took them to school and shared them with her friends. And they used them to graffiti New York (or as much of it as they could reach).

"The demand was huge," said Tom. "You are the new neighbourhood art, Permanent Rose. Of course the original forty eight didn't last long, (you being so famous over here) but since then... well, it's amazing! Everywhere I go. You! Rose, purple and blue!

I don't know why I didn't think of it years ago."

19th October 2009

What Happened to me on My Birthday

Which was ages ago. Weeks. Because now I am thirteen, and all the things that go with a birthday, such as height measuring on the kitchen wall and surprise phonecalls from Saffy and Sarah and Tom-in-New-York (but Tom will never manage a surprise phonecall as good as the one that said,

'Just fetch Indigo for a quick word, Permanent Rose!' and was on the other side of the door when I ran to do that little thing), and Caddy and Michael bringing Buttercup over, and Buttercup singing Happy Birthday Dear Rose all by himself after only two weeks of training, and the cake Mum painted with food colouring roses, red and orange and silver and gold, and the presents and cards...

All those things are over. And people are no longer saying 'I can't believe you are thirteen, it seems no time since you were a little tot of two...'

Which brings me very tidily onto what happened to me on my birthday.

Because I too could not believe I was thirteen, but it was true and it felt very strange and not all as I had imagined it would when I was eight and nine and ten and eleven and twelve and longed and longed to be thirteen, and catching up with Caddy and Saffron and Indigo at last. Which of course did not happen.

I mentioned all this to my slightly too intelligent friend Kiran, who said, "Time is linear, Rose."

My birthday was on a school day. I spent most of the morning of that day forcing Kiran to explain her conceited remark (see above) and it took her all of assembly, double maths (fancy having double maths on your birthday), break, and ran on into drama. By which time I had managed to disprove her narrow minded theory of doom, and she was shouting a bit, and so was I. Neither of us were doing what everyone else was doing, which was working in pairs to

improvise a scene between a teenage shoplifter and police officer (again).

What Kiran was shouting was, "God, Rose, you are so opinionated! You think you can out think the speed of light!" And what I was shouting was, "I do not have to even bother to out think the speed of light; I just have to wait for the moment to come around again. Look at the moon."

"If you say 'Look at the moon,' one more time I'll kill you," said Kiran.

'Look at the galaxy then," I said. "Look at the whole spinning universe. Look at yourself! You've been talking in circles all morning."

Kiran lunged at me and dumped me onto the mattress that we use for improvising faints and falls. So I went for her ankles. And then we were both put into detention.

Detention. That's what happened to me on my birthday.

(Reasons for detentions have to be written on the detention slips that go home to our parents. Mine said, '*For inappropriate and immature behaviour while questioning theory of linear nature of time cf. circular form of ditto with ref. to speed of light as visual concept only. 45 mins.*')

"Immature behaviour!" said Kiran. "Why do they always put immature behaviour? Stop laughing, Rose!"

28th September 2009

Saffron and Sarah have gone away. That's what happens if you pass too many 'A' levels: you have to pack up everything

you own and move out of your home. To university. Poor things, but nobody made them. It was their idea from the start. Anyway, they have headed South (like the swallows) and they will not be back for weeks and weeks. They travelled in a convoy, Saffy and Sarah in front in Sarah's red car, Sarah's parents following after in their enormous landrover thing piled to the roof with clothes and computers and kettles and quilts, and last of all Mummy and Caddy burning too much oil and shedding too many tears so (explained Caddy later) they drove all the way in a sort of thick blue fog.

And now at home it feels very empty indeed. Just Daddy and Mum and Indigo and me. And David-in-the-attic.

Thank goodness for David-in-the-attic.

It is lovely how much space he takes up when he comes into a room.

9th September 2009

I love this time of year, the beginning of September. All the colours seem just right. The sky is a thinner, clearer, blue than it was in August and the shadows on the walls are as purple as the plums in Sarah's garden. Outside my classroom window the leaves on the willow tree have been so faded by sun and rain and wind that they are as much silver as they are green.

Kiran, who is reading over my shoulder, says 'Stop writing about boring colours, Rose!'

Okay, I will write about boring Kiran instead.

Kiran is not pleased to be back at school. I am. I like to see my friends. Molly is too; in fact she was ready to come back from halfway through the holidays when she got a new desk. Her pencil case (full of needle sharp pencils) was organised weeks ago, and her school uniform all laid out, even the socks.

"I am *longing* for homework," Molly said, polishing and polishing her empty desk.

Even Kai was glad to be back at school. "At least there are proper full size football pitches here," said Kai.

But not Kiran. Kiran has had a job. Three pounds an hour for washing up teacups in the park cafe.

Three pounds an hour!

"I worked for it," says Kiran.

I suppose she did, but not terribly hard. She was often let off the washing up to take a cup of tea to the ice cream man, or to feed left over sandwiches to the ducks, or to mop the tables under the lime trees. Also, whenever Molly and I went to visit, the cafe owner gave us free cups of tea and lollies and sent us off to the swings. And all the time Kiran got richer and richer. Lucky, loaded Kiran; she has more money under her bed than anyone else I know. No wonder she did not want to come back to school.

"Stop writing about my money, Rose!" commands Kiran, once again leaning over my shoulder.

Okay.

25th August 2009

School Uniform Shopping

I cannot write much because I am so exhausted. Today I went school uniform shopping.

I started off with Mummy, looking for trousers. She was very droopy about it and after 11 or 12 pairs in quite a lot of different shops she sat down in Starbucks and would not get up.

So Saffron had to take over, and she lasted until new school bag time. And then she stamped off snarling "That's it. You're on your own. I've finished with you for ever. Goodbye."

Just because when I said turquoise with flowers I meant turquoise with flowers NOT turquoise with flowers and very small purple butterflies. What is so difficult to understand about that?

Daddy did shoes. It was torture. After an hour or two I longed to be adopted. I did not care by whom, as long as they had no opinion on what I chose to wear on my feet.

They are my feet, after all.

Daddy disgraced me shoe shopping. He stood outside the thirteenth shop and bellowed, "There is a circle of hell exclusively made up of shoe shops and they are all of them full of twelve year old girls. The Chinese had the right idea when they bound their daughters' feet."

He was not arrested. I think he should have been. And so should all those people who nodded and murmured when they heard him and said he was quite right.

PE kit tomorrow. I am not wearing a tracksuit whatever it says on the uniform list. Or plain trainers with no flashes and non marking soles. Someone will have to help me find things that are completely different and yet so exactly the same that I will not get put in detention when I turn up with them instead.

Simple.

2nd August 2009

The Reason I Went Camping

(I Only Went So I Could Tell)

"I don't know how your mother copes!" said my father.

That is true. He doesn't. And he cannot ask her because she is in Italy with Saffron and Sarah and Sarah's parents. They said she needed a break.

When he first heard this Daddy remarked that he also needed a break, but when he found out that the country she would be breaking in was Italy, he murmured, "Too many painful memories," and shut up. Years ago, when he was much younger (and I hope better looking) Daddy behaved very badly indeed in Italy. And the consequences are with him yet.

So there he was, poor thing, left behind with Indigo and me, and then Indy got tickets for a three day music festival, the sort where you camp, and so did David, and their friends Patrick, Marcus and Josh. And I began my great pestering to be allowed to go too, and Indigo, David, Marcus,

Patrick and Josh all backed me up and promised to look after me.

At first Daddy said no way on earth would he let a twelve year old go camping with five seventeen year old boys at a rock festival.

But I took no notice of this, and I went on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and I must admit that one of the good things about Daddy is that he is not quite as stubborn as the rest of the family and in the end he broke. "Go then!" he cried. "Go! Only don't blame me if you catch pneumonia/trench foot/nits/swine flu/far worse." And added, "I don't know how your mother copes!"

Then he went shopping and came staggering back with wellies, antibacterial spray, cereal bars, baby wipes, earplugs, a very loud whistle from the camping shop, (the sort you blow to attract attention when you have broken both legs half way up a mountain), and many other things which he said were absolutely necessary for camping at music festivals. Also he had a serious talk with me, during which he explained that the the ear plugs were in case the music was too loud, and the whistle was to be blown if I was annoyed by any whistle-fearing festival goers, and the antibacterial spray was to be squirted on everything I touched, and that I must carry my mobile phone, switched on, at all times, especially in the loo.

"Why especially in the loo?" I asked.

"Because there you will be ALONE," said Daddy. "Stop screeching and rolling about like that! I am not being funny.

If you are not going to take this seriously you will not be allowed to go."

So I squirted myself with antibacterial spray and tried on the wellies.

And I was allowed to go.

It was a very strange experience; not a bit what I had expected. The music, for instance, which was not at all the sort of stuff I would listen to in ordinary life, was transformed (by sky and clouds and stars overhead and mud and enthusiasm underneath) into sound so mesmerising I could hardly bear it to stop.

Everything jangled, brighter and stronger, harder and scarier, than ordinary life. The smell of the hamburgers from David's hamburger stall. The colour of a red helium balloon, escaped from a girl's hand and climbing higher and higher through the windy sky, the feel of the ground under my sleeping bag at night, hard and knobbly as dragon's back. Rain and sun and noise and quiet.

I forgot to use my antibacterial spray, and I didn't need the whistle once. I don't know what happened to the earplugs. I gave most of the cereal bars to some little kids I met in a puddle. And I am sure Daddy has never experienced a music festival loo, because if he had he would know that it is the last place in the world that you would take your mobile phone for a quiet chat. The trick is not to breathe at all, never mind speak. (Especially when you have a bodyguard of seventeen year old boys on the other side of the door.)

But I survived.

Just.

I'm not sure if I could survive twice, though.

I fell asleep in the car home. I fell asleep in the bath. I fell asleep on the sofa eating bread and honey, and I fell asleep over the computer.

"Go to bed," advised Daddy.

"I will," I said, "as soon as I've sent one email."

"Ah," said Daddy, and went away so that I could be private.

(I only went so I could tell...)

There is not one musical thing about Daddy, except his whistle. He has a lovely whistle. When I woke up again he was whistling a tune I knew well: '*(Everything I do) I do it for you.*'

He stopped when he knew I was listening.

(...Tom.)

13th July 2009

Oh dear, it has been so long since I updated this blog that some of my friends think I am dead. How very sad if that were true and I wonder who would come to the funeral. Crowds, I hope, all roaring and howling with grief. People showering roses down from hot air balloon baskets would be nice, and speeches and fireworks.

Kiran, my best friend, is reading over my shoulder. She says she will be happy to see to arrangements and will make especially sure that my maths teacher has a good seat at the front so that he hears all the speeches. I bet he will be

sorry then that he has put me in detention six Tuesdays and Thursdays running, and never for the same reason twice.

I have been in detention for:

1. Texting Tom in New York an early morning Good Luck message for his exams. Is it my fault that 7am in New York is the middle of maths in the UK? No.

2. Wearing my luminous orange leg warmers when I had run out of other more school uniformish things to put on my legs.

3. Hand stands.

4. Giving in homework finished for me by David. I didn't ask him to do that. I had no idea that he had filled in all the blanks on my worksheet in disguised hand writing until it was too late.

5. Renewing my henna tattoo in class.

6. Helping Kai write a birthday poem for Molly which was very difficult because nothing rhymes with Attenborough and very little with David.

So, six detentions. I am being victimised. No wonder I have not updated my blog.

The latest family news is that Saffron and Sarah have left school forever. It has been all tears and year books and prom dresses and "What will we do if we don't get our grades?" for weeks. They need four Grade A 'A' levels each so that they can go to Law School. They'll never do it. Sarah missed loads of school being ill when she was little, and Saffron didn't even learn to read until she was eight. Caddy says they need not worry about not passing because they always need car part attendants at the zoo.

Or they could help David on his burger stand.

Or Daddy in his junk shop/fine art gallery.

And Mummy says she could probably get them some modelling at her Art College too.

So. Nothing to worry about there. And meanwhile they have both passed their driving tests.

A long time ago Sarah talked about the bright red open top sports car she would one day own.

And now she does.

7th June 2009

Kiran and I have just had the results of our interesting not-revising experiment. After we had understood them thoroughly and completely Kiran said, "Sorry Rose." And I said, "It's not your fault you're a natural genius."

I'm revising next time.

Half term was brilliant. Indigo and Tom and Kiran and Molly and I all camped in our garden. At the bushy, bumpy end where the guinea pig hutches used to be. We had a fire every night and ghost stories and wild concerts. The last night was the best of all. David came with his burgerstand and set it up by the fence. Michael and Caddy brought fireworks. Saffy brought Oscar and Sarah brought marshmallows and also Hot Date, who brought a saxophone. (Thank goodness Indy and Sarah are friends again). When David heard the saxophone he abandoned his burgerstand and got his drumkit out of the shed.

Nobody bothered trying to sleep. We wrapped ourselves in blankets and stayed awake all night and the smoke from burning guinea pig hutches rose high into the sky, and blotted out the stars.

16th May 2009

At school all we do is exams. Molly is working very hard, revising, but Kiran and I are trying an interesting experiment. It is to see how well we manage to do with no revising at all. It is my idea. I think revising is cheating. I think you should just be examined on what has sunk into your head naturally, not what you manage to squash in during the last few panic stricken days.

BAN REVISING, that's what I say.

Buttercup my nephew is nearly two now. He can say all our names, and his own too. Carlos. Only, he is rather confused. "Who's Carlos?" we ask. "BURRACUP!" yells Buttercup. Tom (who is coming over at half term, hurray, hurray!) says, "There are some truly weird names in your family P Rose, but *Buttercup for a boy!* Whose insane idea was that?"

Oh dear. Oh dear. Mine.

I called him Buttercup. I thought he was a hamster at the time.

Indigo. Indigo is regretting Ilsa. Too late. I have now met Sarah's Hot Date. He is hotter and datier than Indy ever was. He has got his own car too.

Indigo has a bike.

So.

30th April 2009

First, I am going to talk about my father. Daddy. That is what I call him. It is partly habit, and partly because I like to be aggravating: he says 'Daddy' makes him think of little sticky clutching hands. 'Call me Dad,' he pleads, 'Pa, Pop, Father, Pater. Call me Bill, for goodness sake, after all, it is my name.'

But I don't.

Daddy's chief characteristic (in his dreams) is his enormous artistic talent. In real life, outside of all dreaming, it is his ability to get away with things. Such as suede shoes, loud humming, running a dodgy antique shop which he calls a gallery, playing Bach's Greatest Hits as background music in the dodgy antique shop, unacknowledged extra children (until I found him out), and multiple girl friends at the same time.

Which brings me straight to Indigo, Sarah, and the Icelandic Witch.

I have been having lectures today from Saffron and Sarah on the subject of my big problem, which is that I would like everything and everyone to stay exactly as they have always been for ever and ever.

True.

Well, that is not how life works, says Sarah, and adds that she could not care less how many midge bitten Icelandic tour guides Indigo took leave of his senses to photograph on his recent escape. They are about as interesting as the

geysers and the breakfast menu, continues Sarah, and quite frankly she does not give a toss.

Pause for breath.

Saffron fills the pause by enlarging on the subject of how unimportant Indigo is to Sarah, with particular reference to 'A' levels, gap years, law school, and real guitarists who look the part. Indigo-based jokes begin and are very, very funny. Poor Indigo. But serve him right. We laugh so much our ribs hurt and Sarah goes home perfectly cheerful.

And about ten minutes later I go after her because I have stopped laughing and am back with my big problem again. I arrive at Sarah's house at exactly the same time as her father, and for some minutes we stand together in the front hall, stunned. Sarah clearly believes she is home alone and from her bedroom come these words (bellowed):

'CURSE OH CURSE OH CURSE. CURSE ALL ICELANDIC WITCHES. MAY THEY BOIL IN ICELANDIC MUD. AND CURSE THAT BLASTED BOY. CURSE ALL MALE CASSONS. GRINNING PERFIDIOUS WRETCHES. INDIGO CASSON, CURSE YOU. OUT OF MY LIFE FOR EVER AND GOOD RIDDANCE. HA'

On the word 'ha' Sarah fell silent, but we in the hall did not.

Sarah's father and I applauded like mad. 'That's my girl!' cried Sarah's father. 'Hooray! Well said! Encore! Encore! Don't you agree, Rose?'

'I do, I do,' I yelled, clapping until my hands stung. 'Encore from me too. Do it again, but louder!'

By this time Sarah was out of her bedroom, and taking bows to left and right on the landing above. 'Thank you, thank you!' she called. 'Your support was unlooked for but is much appreciated. I am afraid I have no time to repeat the performance as I need to get ready for a very Hot Date.'

And vanished.

So Sarah's father and I stop clapping and he says, 'Cup of tea, Rose?' and I say, 'That would be nice.'

And in the kitchen he asks, 'Did I say the right thing, Rose? I find this parenting lark very hard sometimes. Two sugars and no milk, pet.'

'You were wonderful,' I say, and give him three sugars because he looks so weary, and because it is so quiet upstairs, none of the loud music and hairdryer noises that usually indicate preparation for a Hot Date.

And when I get home I say to Indigo, 'Sarah thinks you are exactly like Daddy.'

Indigo looks utterly stricken.

Which I think is a very good sign.

23rd April 2009

I have never been so tempted to press SELECT ALL :
DELETE

Indigo is back from Iceland where we should never have let him go even though he said it was wicked.

He has:

A suntan

A snowtan

17 mosquito bites (the earliest in the season he explains, rather proudly)

Used his ice axe on real ice at last

Wrenched his shoulder using his ice axe on real ice at last

Crossed the arctic circle on a special arctic-circle-crossing-boat

Sleep deprivation.

He is in bed, passed out. Dead with exhaustion. It is not possible to wake him, not with noise or cold water or pulling him out of bed and dumping him on the floor. But before he collapsed he did say that I could unpack his rucksack, and so I up-end it while he snores and find (Hurray!) the camera.

Let's have a look.

Ah!

Outside school, whole family, as seen through coach to airport's rear view window, waving goodbye.

Two pictures of chaotic interior of coach.

Sea from several thousand feet up in sky.

Reykjavik airport.

Black sand. White snow.

Large merry group of familiar faces in a crowded bunk beddish room flinging pillows about.

Several screens of darkness with blurs which may or may not be Northern lights.

Photo of perfectly normal breakfast with cereal and jam.

Geyser

More geysers..

Mud.

Snow.

Goodness.

It is still impossible to wake Indigo, and so I do not know the name of the white blonde, round faced, skinny jeaned, Icelandic witch who grins from 47 of the remaining 54 photographs which my brother has taken on this camera.

Which is not his camera, by the way. Not at all. It was kindly lent to my parasite-chewed, skin-peeling, Deep-Heat-Rub-reeking, treacherous brother by Sarah, his girlfriend, for the purpose of photographing landscapes.

NOT

GIRLS!

"That girl!" I screech into the sleeping one's only visible ear. "That girl! Her name?"

And from somewhere deep in dreams, somewhere close to the Arctic circle, some far off place of photo opportunities for long legged blondes, Indigo murmurs, "Ilsa."

Ilsa? What kind of a name is Ilsa?

"Wicked," whispers Indigo, still fast asleep.

25th March 2009

Indigo is packing to go to Iceland this Easter. He does this by loading as many tracks as possible on to his iPod whilst Sarah and Saffron and I run around with fleeces and cereal bars and suncream and ski gloves and waterproofs and

cameras and thermal hats and phrase books and packets of hot chocolate that you make by just adding water.

'Do try to see the Northern Lights,' says Mummy.

'Don't mention the recession,' says Dad. 'It may be a sore point.'

(How little they seem to know their son. My brother Indigo is the least likely person in the world to either ignore the Northern Lights, or mention the recession.)

'I'll miss you, mate,' says David, as if he was going for a year instead of just-over-a-week.

I have more or less forgiven David for what he did to me after Valentine's day (I have not yet forgiven Tom, who is sending cheerful messages as if nothing had happened) (Nothing *did* happen. That was the problem). I have noticed that I am getting good at forgiving David, and I suppose this is because I have had to do it so often. David, who in the past has posted me on unknown trains without any ticket, wrecked my bedroom, shopped me to the grown ups when I went to live in the zoo, and caused my sister to be sliced open by a drumkit (among many other things), now says very solemnly to Indigo, 'I'll take care of Rose while you're gone.'

'Thanks, mate,' says Indigo.

9th March 2009

After Valentine's day when Tom did not send me a valentine I did a good bit of moping and moaning until my brother Indigo kindly noticed. And then I allowed him to drag out of me what was wrong. Indigo understood completely and

said he would very subtly and carefully ask Tom whether he sent valentines to other people but not me, or whether he just forgot. Indigo said he was sure the answer would be just forgot, and he reminded me of all the other things Tom had forgotten and I was beginning to feel better BUT THEN that great big nuisance David who lives in our attic and plays a drumkit in our shed and is forever interfering in our lives came bouncing in.

And he said, "Indigo, mate, I have texted that prat Tom and asked him what he is thinking of, upsetting our Rose like he has. Oh hullo, Rose."

What a pity murder is illegal, and probably so messy too. Otherwise I would.

14th February 2009

Happy Valentine's Day Although I Prefer Pancake Day. Less Stressful.

My friend Kiran is very, very lucky. Her birthday is on Valentine's Day. Naturally she gets birthday cards, and of course people add after the Happy Birthday an extra Happy Valentine's. So she gets loads and loads and the postman is always very impressed. It would be fairer if she explained to him that it was actually her birthday, not incredible popularity, but she doesn't.

Kiran was still ripping open cards when Molly and I arrived at her house for the Annual Valentine's Day Moan.

Molly began.

Very gloomily.

After arranging her Valentines in a tidy line on Kiran's mum's kitchen table. Two cards, and two edible tributes.

"I can guess who sent them all," she said, and sighed.

That is the fatal thing about Valentine's cards. You can't help guessing. And then, how your heart sinks when you recognise your mother's pathetically disguised hand writing. Or even worse, your Gran's. (Yes, Molly's Gran, I am talking about you. No one else does Card Craft with cut out pictures from Saga magazine that we know. Or recycles old envelopes previously addressed to The Sunny Side Residential Home. You will have to try harder if you want to be mysterious next year.)

The second of Molly's cards came from the next door dog, and included a poem.

Molly says she will kill me if I put the next door's dog's poem on line.

The edible tributes were:

1. A pink marshmallow heart on a stick which her Brown Ted was found clutching when she woke up this morning.
2. A packet of Love Hearts selotaped to a red paper rose from Guess Who?

We can all guess who, unfortunately. There is only one boy in the world who spells Molly so it looks like Moley.

No wonder Molly sighed.

BUT do not be too sorry for her! Think of me! I am almost

100% certain that the only Valentine I received came from my favourite-person-in-the-world's LITTLE SISTER!

"That is so not good," said Kiran, shaking her head.

I know.

Molly and I did not cheer up until Kiran unwrapped a very glamorous looking purple and silver birthday parcel which turned out to contain school uniform.

Then we all went into town with Kiran's birthday money to make ourselves feel better with retail therapy. And all the way into town we chanted:

The Dog's Poem

It's very jolly

To live near Molly

Even though her cat has died

She still has me faithfully by her side.

It was signed with an actual muddy paw print.

(Now Molly will kill me.)

14th January 2009

I am the only person I know who does not live in a centrally heated house.

"Can't we get central heating?" I moan at Daddy.

"Certainly," says Daddy, "if you can find a plumber who will do it for free."

"The frost patterns on the windows are lovely," remarks

Mummy, when pursued with the same question. "Besides, it is nearly Spring."

I don't know if I would call January 14th nearly Spring, but it is true, the frost patterns are lovely. Molly and Kiran came here for a sleepover so that they could see them for themselves. They prepared for this subzero experience with fleeces over their pyjamas, space blankets on top of their sleeping bags, socks and hats and fingerless mittens, hot black currant and hot water bottles.

None of these devices worked. I knew they wouldn't. By midnight the air was icy. Kiran and Molly begged to come in bed with me but I cruelly would not let them, and so they huffed and moaned and blew on their fingers until hypothermia set in, and they went quiet at last.

But in the morning they thought it was worth it. The frost patterns were spectacular. Our huffings and moanings and shivering breaths had crystallised on the thin glass of the windowpane into a frozen forest of wild spinning fern patterns. And then the sun rose yellow and hit them from behind, and it looked like the window had been blasted by the breath of an arctic dragon, all swirling flames of fire and ice.

But we forgot it when Saffy came in with hot chocolate and a blow heater to defrost any survivors (she explained). When we looked back again the magic was all gone. The window was just wet grey glass, with puddles on the windowsill.

"It will be here again tomorrow," I said.

"But we won't," complained Kiran and Molly. "Oh, it's not

fair! Oh, you are so lucky! Oh, why can't we live in houses with no central heating?"

"Well," I said. "You could always turn it off."

Then Kiran and Molly went a bit quiet and thoughtful for a while, until Kiran said, very loudly and firmly,

"That would be BONKERS, Rose!"

And I have to admit, she was right.