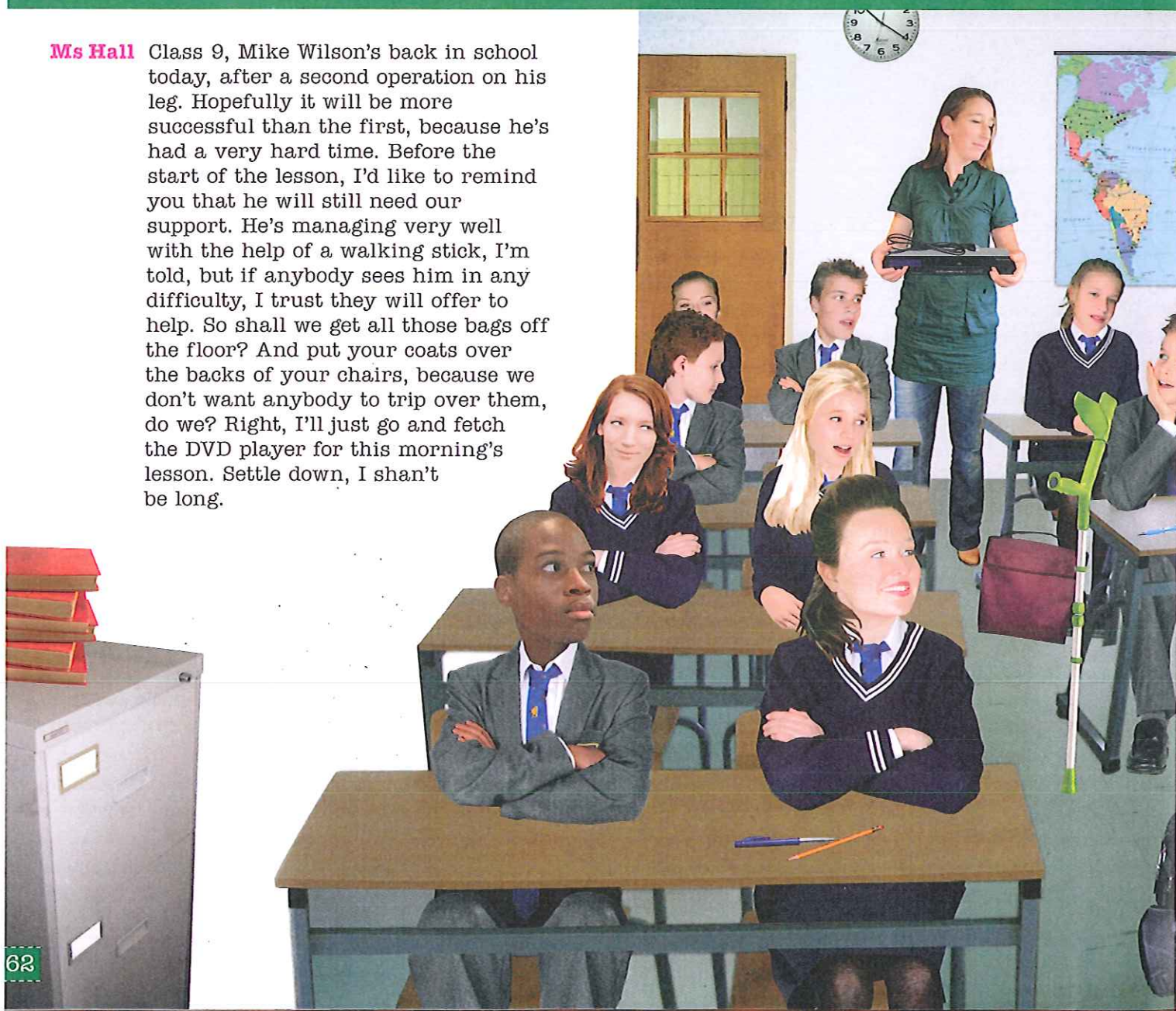


Running away?

A sore point

Ms Hall Class 9, Mike Wilson's back in school today, after a second operation on his leg. Hopefully it will be more successful than the first, because he's had a very hard time. Before the start of the lesson, I'd like to remind you that he will still need our support. He's managing very well with the help of a walking stick, I'm told, but if anybody sees him in any difficulty, I trust they will offer to help. So shall we get all those bags off the floor? And put your coats over the backs of your chairs, because we don't want anybody to trip over them, do we? Right, I'll just go and fetch the DVD player for this morning's lesson. Settle down, I shan't be long.



Mike



I'm back at school now, which is great because I was getting really bored. My leg still hurts a bit but it's OK. Our PSE lesson was a bit embarrassing though, and something the teacher said started me thinking ...

Do Dutch pupils have any lessons in Personal and Social Education? When and where do you think sensitive topics should be discussed – in class, at home, with your friends?

Five minutes later ...

Josie I'm so pleased you're back, Mikey! I've been worried sick about you. Will you be able to sit at your desk?

Darren If you go on like that, you'll make him feel worse.

Mike Yeah, I'm managing fine. It doesn't help if people fuss too much.

Josie I'm ever so sorry, Mikey. I wish I could do something. Does it hurt?

Mike If I'm on my feet a lot, it does. The doctors fixed it with metal pins but that didn't work, so now they've joined the bones together. There's a good chance that it will heal, but I'll never play football again.

Darren That's a real shame, but you weren't that good anyway, were you?

Ms Hall Sorry about the delay. Hello, Mike, nice to see you again! Now class, in last week's PSE lesson, we were discussing why so many young girls run away from home. We then looked at the sensitive question of teenage pregnancies. Can anybody remember what the latest research showed? Yes? Darren?

Darren My mum reckoned this was an unsuitable topic for third formers, Miss.

Ms Hall Well, I regret that opinion, because Personal and Social Education is on the school curriculum and this is an important subject. According to a recent survey, Britain has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in western Europe. And this can of course lead to family breakdown if the teenager doesn't get lots of support from her friends, her brothers and sisters and so on. Er, you look uncomfortable, Mike. Are you feeling all right? OK. Now, Darren, you are welcome to leave the class if you have any objections but ... not so fast ... I was planning to show you a few scenes from a very moving and amusing film. The title of the film is *Juno*, and it's about a young Canadian teenager. Has anybody in the class already seen it? No, well Juno has unprotected sex with her boyfriend and gets pregnant. She thinks about abortion but her family is very supportive. In the end she has the baby who is then adopted.

Josie Mikey? You OK? What's the problem, Mikey?

Mike Nothing, I've just realized something. And it's not my problem, it's my sister's.

At cross-purposes

Mike Hi Sharon, can I come in?

Sharon No. Permission refused. Go away. I'm expecting a call from someone.

Mike Please, I just want to talk to you about something.

Sharon And I just want you to hop off. Get out and shut the door behind you ... Which part of 'get out' have you failed to understand?

Mike If you've got a personal problem, I'll listen sympathetically and stand by you when you confess to mum and dad. Or do you think I should talk to them for you? Anything to prevent our family from breaking up.

Sharon Have you gone completely insane?

Mike I'm sure you feel embarrassed about this, but it'll only get worse if you don't confide in anyone. I've heard you talking to Namil but she won't be able to help.

Sharon What do you mean, help? I don't need any help. I'm not the one who has to marry a stranger.

Mike What stranger? If he's the father of your baby, he won't be a stranger, will he?

Sharon Baby? What baby? What are you saying about me?

Mike Nothing. Sorry. We had a PSE lesson about unwanted teenage pregnancies.

Sharon What, and you immediately thought of me! Charming!

Mike I'm sorry if I misunderstood, but I overheard you talking about women's refuges with Namil. And I know that's where runaway girls shelter, so ... Sorry.

Sharon You idiot. If you want my advice, you should stop listening to other people's conversations. Listen, it's Namil who's in trouble, not me. And if I share her secret with you, will you stop spreading rumours about me?

Mike Yes. I promise. Cross my heart. Sorry.

Sharon And stop apologizing, will you? It gets on my nerves. OK, so you know Namil's family? She's a cousin of Rashid's.

Mike Spud?

Sharon Yeah, Spud. Well Spud's uncle and aunt have arranged a marriage for her, and not surprisingly, she's dead set against it. In fact, she's refused to consider it.

Mike I don't blame her! But if they insist and say she must, she'll have to, won't she? Then she won't be able to finish school or see her friends again.

Sharon Well, there's a difference between a forced marriage and an arranged one. I mean, Namil's parents can discourage her from having boyfriends that aren't from Pakistani families, but they won't force

Sharon

Kid brothers, honestly! Mike is always getting the wrong end of the stick, and it's because he listens to other people's private conversations. I've got enough to worry about with Namil.

Have you got any brothers and sisters and if so, are they nosy? Where do you go when you want to have a private phone call or talk to your friends alone? How would you advise a friend who was talking about running away from home?

her into a marriage with someone she doesn't know. I hope they won't, anyway. They've made her wear traditional clothes from time to time and she has considered running away, but I think I've persuaded her to stay.

Mike Have you? That's brilliant!

Sharon Well I'd hate to be in her shoes. I've been able to help her think about her options and then talk them over calmly with her parents. But until she does, don't you dare breathe one word of this to anyone, all right? Because I'll break your other leg if you do, OK?

Mike OK Sharon. I won't tell anyone. And I'm sorry if I ...

Sharon I'd just shut up now if I were you, little brother. Why don't you go and make me a milkshake? You're not that useless ...



Heart to heart

Dear Namil

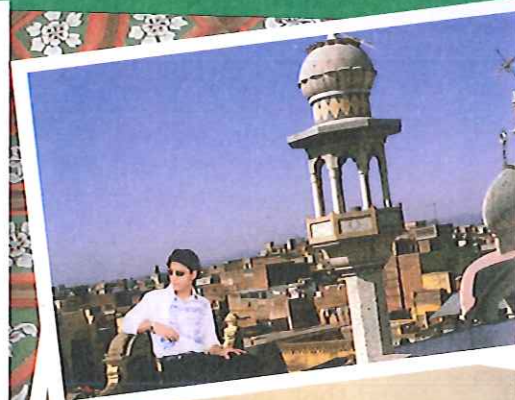
I hope you won't be offended if I write to you and describe myself and my life here in Pakistan. I am not yet 35 years old. I have lived in Rawalpindi all my life, except for the four years when I studied Design Engineering at your splendid Nottingham University. Our families are distantly related and even though your upbringing has been in a western culture, I am told you will appreciate the old customs.

I know you fear that you won't be able to finish your education if you leave your country. My advice is that you should continue with your studies after we are married, because I know you are very young. If you come to live in Rawalpindi, you will be able to attend the famous Fatima Jinnah Women's University. The FJWU is a place of academic excellence with outstanding research facilities and a well-equipped library. There are many undergraduate courses, including an excellent course in English. It would be a good idea for you to continue with your studies of Shakespeare and other famous writers and poets there.

You will certainly be concerned that life with me in Pakistan will be strange and lonely for you. I am sure you will miss your friends' company at first, but I have younger sisters who will introduce you to other women. If you agree to meet me somewhere, I think you will find that we have more in common than you suppose.

If you do not find me attractive, I will accept your decision and never bother you again. I am not an unreasonable man and I will not force myself on you if you show yourself to be unwilling.

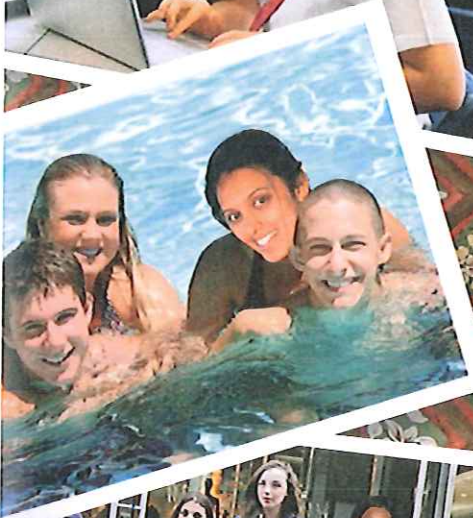
With the greatest respect and best wishes
Hussein





To some Muslims, arranged marriages do not seem strange or unnatural. At the same time, modern European girls find it hard to accept that their parents will choose a husband for them.

Are there girls in the Netherlands who have to agree to arranged marriages? Do you know anyone whose parents expect them to wear traditional clothes? How do they feel about it?



Dear Hussein

Thank you for your letter. I must admit that I was surprised and shocked when I first heard that my parents wanted me to marry you. I couldn't believe my ears. I am only sixteen years old and I haven't even thought about marriage yet. I cannot imagine marrying anybody, especially not somebody I've never met.

My parents have brought me up as a Muslim girl, and I try to understand the customs and traditions that they have always believed in. At the same time, I have a wide circle of friends, boys and girls that I meet at school or chat to on Facebook. I have often felt torn between those two worlds, because my English friends are allowed more freedom than me. When I heard about you, I felt even more confused.

If I come to live in Rawalpindi, I won't be happy. I'm sure your sisters' friendship would make me feel less homesick, but I'd miss my own friends and family too much. Your university sounds very good, but I don't want to study anywhere that's women only, and I'm not sure I want to study English anyway. Basically, I don't know what I want, but I am convinced it is not an arranged marriage.

I hope I haven't upset or disappointed you because I'm sure you are a very nice man. I spoke to my parents about you last week and they have agreed that I can stay in England if I want.

Yours truly
Namil

Gretna Green

1 Gretna Green, in Scotland, has been a haven for romantic lovers for more than 250 years and this tradition is still going strong today. So, how did Gretna Green become the world's number one marriage venue?

5 The Scots are warm, hospitable and loving people who have always had an open and progressive attitude towards marriage. Other countries, including England and many other European countries, hold different values.

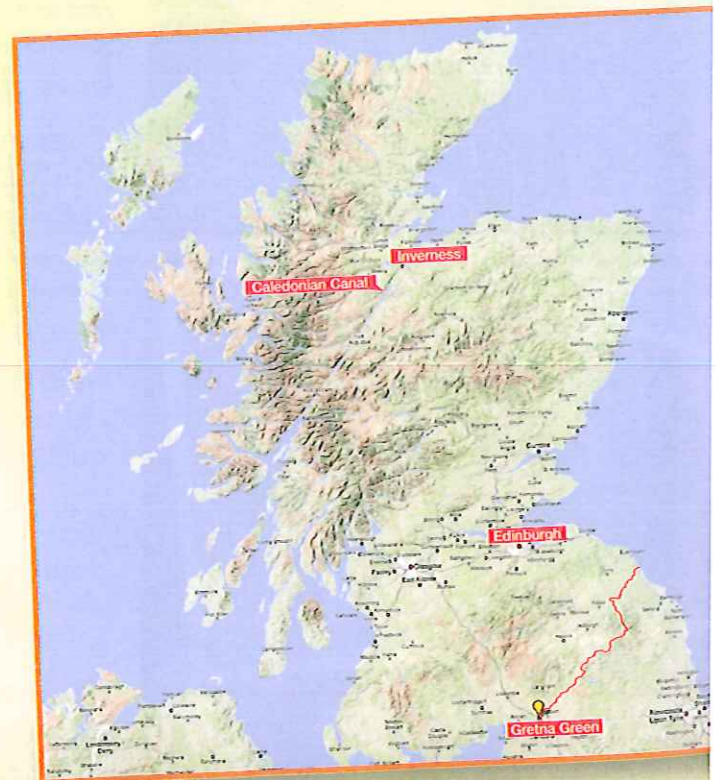
10 Traditionally, in Scotland, boys of fourteen and girls of twelve could get married, with or without their parents' consent. In England, an Act of Parliament banned such marriages in 1745, with the result that runaway couples fled to Scotland for their marriages.

15 On the stagecoach journey from London to Edinburgh, Gretna Green was the first place across the Scottish border to rest and change horses. So began its long connection with the romance of the runaways. The ceremonies were often carried out at the blacksmith's over the anvil – the 'Blacksmith Priest' would shoe
20 the horses and marry the lovers! This remained the tradition for over 100 years.

Then in 1857 another Act of Parliament was passed. This stated that the couple had to live in the area for 21
25 days before they could be married there. However, the hospitable Scottish locals took runaway lovers to their

hearts and gave them places to stay (or hide!) for the compulsory three weeks and the weddings went on. In 1940 Parliament stepped in once again to outlaw the 'Blacksmith Priests' and their anvil marriages.

30 After that, only a Minister of Religion or an authorized Registrar could conduct marriages.

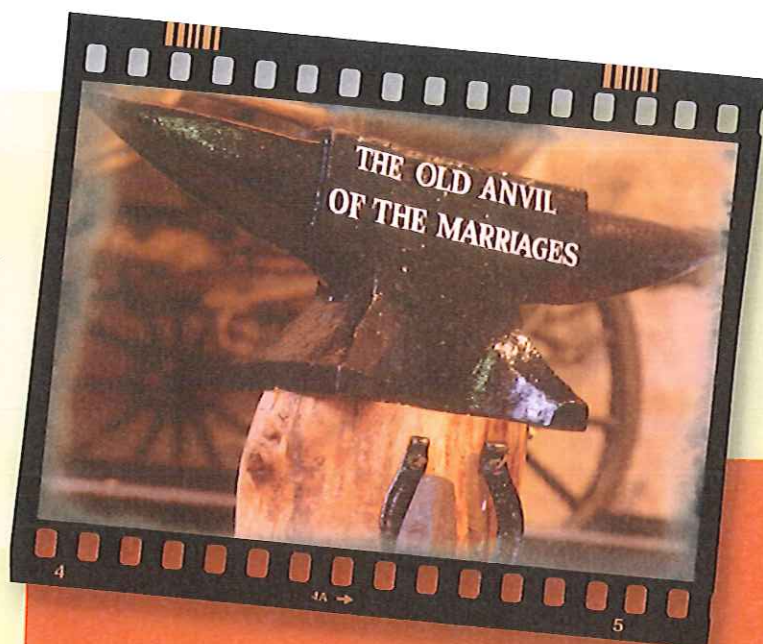


Nowadays, couples no longer need to be living in Scotland in order to get married there. If they are over sixteen, they do not need their parents' consent either, whereas in England, parental consent is needed for couples under eighteen. So the Gretna Green romances live on. Many thousands of lovers – not just young ones – have continued to get married in a place with such a romantic history.

All modes of transport have been used to deliver couples to the anvil: car, van, lorry, fire engine, horse and carriage, horseback, bicycle and motorbike. One couple arrived with their boat in tow. En route to Inverness for their honeymoon on the Caledonian canal, they stopped off at Gretna to be married, then continued up north. The boat was decorated with streamers and balloons and the traditional 'Just married' sign had been placed on the back, together with two L plates.

Another couple had arranged their wedding to fit in with their journey to Aviemore to take part in the international sled-pulling competitions. Their twenty-one Husky dogs waited outside whilst the marriage was being held.

More than one couple has arrived without a common language and these marriages require the presence of an interpreter. You may wonder how they arrived at a point where they wanted to marry here!



Traditions of an Anvil Wedding

⁶⁰ In popular folklore, the blacksmith and his anvil have become the lasting symbols of Gretna Green weddings.

In the old days, the village blacksmith was the heart of any village, always at work making horseshoes and fixing carriages and farm equipment in his workshop.

⁶⁵ As a 'forger', the blacksmith joins hot metal to metal over the anvil, in the same way the blacksmith priests forged a union between hot-headed runaway couples in love.

The hammering of the anvil to seal the marriage has become a well-known sound. It is said that like the ⁷⁰ metals the blacksmith forged in the heat of the fire, couples were joined together in the heat of the moment and held together forever.

The big issue

A

Immaculate Nabumansi, 17



Immaculate has been missing from Haringey, North London, since 9 November 2008. Her current whereabouts are unknown. There is great concern for Immaculate's welfare, as her disappearance

is out of character. She is urged to contact someone, even if it is just to say she is okay. She can call the 24-hour confidential service Message Home on Freephone 0800 700 740 where she can get help and support. Immaculate does not speak any English. She is originally from Uganda and speaks Luganda.

B

Have you seen this child?



Robert Connor was six when he went missing from his caravan during a family holiday four years ago. The photograph on the left shows how he looked then.

Robert has not been seen for four years. He is now ten years old. The photograph on the right is a guide to what he may look like now. It is digitally enhanced and produced by experts at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, USA.

Robert's parents have not stopped hoping that their son is alive and well, living somewhere with someone. If you know anything at all, please contact the hotline or go to FindRobert.com. Thank you.

C

Spare bedroom?

Nightstop - Leeds

We need volunteers to provide emergency accommodation for homeless young people.

Can you offer a meal, a spare room and washing facilities? Expenses paid (£4.50 - £9.50 per night)

Supported Lodgings - Leeds

Carers needed to provide a home for young people aged 16-18. Do you have a spare bedroom? Can you provide a safe place and support?

Expenses paid (£85 - £110 per week)

All volunteers receive training and 24-hour support. For further information contact us on 0113 2757314 or futures@barnardos.org.uk

D

APPEALS UPDATE

GOOD NEWS Missing boy found!

On March 18th 2006, four-year-old Ronnie Joyner went missing from his home in Harwich. A nationwide search revealed no clues and his whereabouts were a mystery. We are delighted to report that last night, Ronnie was found safe and well with his granny who had taken him on a ferry boat to France. The 78-year-old has Alzheimer's disease and was very confused, but Ronnie's father, Henry Joyner, 45, told our magazine: 'I won't be letting my mother babysit again, that's all. All's well that ends well.'



E

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



The top prize is £3,000, second prize is £1,500, third prize is £600 and fourth prize is £300, with 11 other prizes of £100 each.

If a raffle packet was not enclosed in this issue of Amnesty magazine, or you would like to request more tickets, please contact us on 020 7033 1777 or raffletickets@amnesty.org.uk

Slam

The hero of this story is a teenage skater. We meet him here with his friend Rabbit ...

So this one evening, I was messing around down at the Bowl, and Rabbit was there, and ... like I said, Rabbit isn't the most incredible brain box, but even so. This is what he said.

'Yo, Sam,' he said.

Did I tell you my name is Sam? Well, now you know.

'All right?'

'How's it going, man?'

'OK.'

'Right. Hey, Sam. I know what I was gonna ask you. You know your mum?'

See what I mean about Rabbit being thick? Yes, I told him. I knew my mum.

'Is she going out with anyone at the moment?'

'My mum?'

'Yeah.'

'Why do you want to know whether my mum's going out with anyone at the moment?' I asked him.

'Mind your own business,' he said. And he was blushing.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Rabbit wanted to go out with my mum! I suddenly had this picture of coming into the flat and seeing the two of them curled up on the sofa, watching a DVD, and I couldn't help but smile. My mum wasn't the best

judge of boyfriends, but she wasn't that stupid.

'What's funny?' said Rabbit.

'No, no, nothing. But ... how old do you think my mum is?'

'How old? I don't know.'

'Guess.'

He looked into space, as if he were trying to see her up there.

'Twenty-three? Twenty-four?'

This time I didn't laugh. Rabbit was such a moron that it sort of went beyond laughing.

'Well,' I said. 'I'll give you a hand. How old am I?'

'You?'

He couldn't see the connection.

'Yeah, me.'

'I dunno.'

'OK. I'm fifteen.'

'Right. So what?'

'So. Say she was twenty when she had me.' I wasn't going to say how old she really was. It might not be old enough to put him off.

'Yeah.' Suddenly he got it. 'Oh, man. She's your mum. I never twigged. I mean, I knew she was your mum, but I never did, like, the sums ... Shit. Listen, don't tell her I was asking, OK?'

'Why not? She'd be flattered.'

'Yeah, but you know. Thirty-five. She's probably a bit desperate. And I don't want a thirty-five-year-old girlfriend.'

I shrugged. 'If you're sure.'

And that was it. But you can see what I'm saying, can't you? Rabbit's not the only one. My other friends would never say anything, but I can tell from how they talk to her that they think she's OK. I can't see it, but then you never can if someone's related to you, can you? The point is that I've got a thirty-two-year-old mother that people – people of my age – fancy.

Having a very young mum is one problem, but it gets worse when history repeats itself. Sam's girlfriend thinks she's pregnant, so they meet in Starbucks to discuss ...

Can you just buy pregnancy tests in a chemist's?' here. That was another good question. I didn't care whether you could or couldn't, but it was something to say.

'Yeah.'

'Are they expensive?'

'I don't know.'

'Let's go and have a look.'

We slurped the last bits of our drinks through the straws and slammed the cups down on the counter both at the same time. I still think about that, sometimes. I'm not sure why. Partly it's because the slurping noise sounded childish, and yet we were making it because we were in a hurry to find out if

we were going to become parents. And partly it's because when we put the cups down at exactly the same moment, it seemed like a good sign. It wasn't, though. Maybe that's why it stuck in my memory. There was a chemist's next door to Starbucks, so we went in there but we got out quick when Alicia saw a friend of her mum's in there. She saw us too, this woman, and you could tell she thought we'd gone in to buy condoms. Ha! Condoms! We were way past condoms, madam! Anyway, we realized that we could never go into a chemist's that size – not just because we might be spotted, but because neither of us would be able to ask for what we wanted. Condoms were bad enough, but pregnancy tests were in a different class of trouble and embarrassment altogether. We walked on to the Superdrug round the corner.

The cheapest one was £9.95.

'How much have you got?' Alicia said.

'Me?'

'Yes, you.'

I fished about in my pockets. 'Three quid. You?'

'A fiver and ... sixty pence in change. One of us is going to have to go home for more money.'

'I can't. I've already disappeared once.'

She sighed. 'OK. Wait here.'

I went back to Starbucks, spent my three quid, waited twenty-five minutes and then went home. And I turned my mobile off, and left it turned off.

The hard part was telling their parents. Alicia's mum and dad weren't too pleased, and then they had to tell Sam's mum ...

Something made me ring the doorbell, rather than just get out my key and let everybody in. I suppose I didn't think it was right to let Alicia's mum and dad in without warning Mum first. Anyway, there was no answer but just as I'd got my keys out, Mum came to the door in her dressing gown.

She knew something had happened straight away. I think she probably knew what that something was, as well. Alicia, her mum, her dad, four unhappy faces ... Put it this way, she probably wouldn't need three guesses. It had to be sex or drugs, didn't it?

'Oh. Hi. I was just in the middle of ...' But she couldn't think what she was in the middle of, which I took to be a bad sign.

'Anyway. Come in. Sit down. I'll just go and put something on. Put the kettle on, Sam. Unless you'd like something stronger? We've got some wine open, I think. We don't usually, but ... And there might be some beer. Have we got beer, Sam?'

She was babbling. She wanted to put it off too.

'I think we're fine, thanks, Annie,' said Alicia's mum. 'Please, can we say something before you get dressed?'

'I'd rather ...'

'Alicia's pregnant. It's Sam's of course. And she wants to keep it.'

My mum didn't say anything. She just looked at me for a long time, and then it was like her face was a piece of paper that someone was screwing up. There were these folds and lines and creases everywhere in places where there was usually never anything. You know how you can always tell when a piece of paper has been screwed up, no matter how hard you try to smooth it out? Well, even as she was making that face, you could tell those creases would never go away, however happy she got. And then this terrible noise. I'd never see her if she ever found out I was dead, but I can't imagine the noise would be any different.

She stood there crying for a little while, and then Mark, her new boyfriend, came into the living room to see what was going on. So Mark explained the dressing gown. You didn't have to have any special powers to read the minds of Alicia's mum and dad. Their minds were easy to read because they were written all over their faces and eyes. You people, I could hear her dad saying to me, even though he wasn't saying anything now, just looking. You people. Do you ever do anything else? Apart from having sex? And I wanted to kill Mum, which was a coincidence, because she wanted to kill me too. 'Of all the things, Sam,' Mum said after what seemed like ages and ages. 'Of all the things you

could do. All the ways you could hurt me.' 'I wasn't trying to hurt you,' I said. 'Really. I didn't want to get Alicia pregnant. It was the last thing I wanted to do.'

'Here's a good way of not getting someone pregnant,' said Mum. 'Don't have sex with them.'

'I didn't say anything. I mean, you couldn't argue with that, could you? But her argument did mean that I could only have sex two or three times in my life, and not even that many times if I decided I didn't want kids. That decision wasn't mine to make any more, though. I was having kids whether I liked it or not. One kid, anyway, unless Alicia was having twins.'

'I'm going to be a grandmother,' said Mum. 'I'm four years younger than Jennifer Anniston and I'm going to be a grandmother. I'm the same age as Cameron Diaz and I'm going to be a grandmother.'

'Cameron Diaz was a new one. I hadn't heard her mention Cameron Diaz before.'

'I'm sorry, said Alicia's dad. 'Well. There is a great deal about this whole thing that is unfortunate. But at the moment we're more worried about Alicia's future.'

'What about Sam's?' said my mum. 'Because he had a future.'

'I looked at her. Had? I had a future? Where was it now?

'I wanted her to tell me that everything was going to be all right. I wanted her to say that she'd survived

being a very young parent, so I could too. But she wasn't telling me that. She was telling me that I didn't have a future any more.

'I need to talk to my son in private,' said Mum.

'There isn't any private any more,' said Alicia's dad.

'Anything you have to say to him involves us.'

'We're all family now.'

I could have told him that was a stupid thing to say. Mum went nuts.

'I'm sorry, but I'll be talking to my son in private for the rest of my life if that's what he and I want to do.'

'And we're not family. Not now, and maybe not ever.'

'Sam will always do what's right, and so will I, but if you think that allows you to come into my house and demand the right to hear my private conversations then you've got another think coming.'

Alicia's dad was about to have a go back, but Alicia stepped in.

'You're not going to believe this,' she said. 'But Dad's actually quite clever most of the time. He wasn't clever just then, though. Dad, do you think you'll ever want to talk to me in private without Sam and his mum being around? Yes? Well, shut up, then. God. Honestly.'

And her dad looked at her, and then he smiled, sort of, and so did my mum, and it was all over.

From: *Slam* by Nick Hornby