

# THE ASPARAGUS BUNCH

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**Jessica Scott-Whyte** was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland. She studied French and History for her BA in University College Dublin, then moved to London where she completed an MA in Fashion Journalism at the London College of Fashion. After freelancing as a fashion journalist for some years, she then crossed over to the press relations side of the fashion industry, a career move which led her to Paris, France in 2012, where she still lives today with her husband and two children in a neurodiverse family. Jessica remains terribly nostalgic of growing up in the nineties and wishes she could go back to that incredible era of POGs, Art Attack, Ring Pops, Goosebumps books, cereal box prizes, The Crystal Maze, boy bands and Super Nintendo.

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THE  
ASPARAGUS  
BUNCH

JESSICA SCOTT-WHYTE



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# Introduction

*(The completely pointless part that nobody reads)*

This is a waste of time.

Chances are you've already snuck a peek at the last chapter and know how the whole thing ends, so what good is an introduction to you now?

My 'we're kind of a big deal' book publisher, however, insisted they knew better and said that I had to write an introduction – no ifs, ands or buts.

I told them they were delusional and that there was no way I could write an introduction without using the words *if*, *and* or *but*. Then they got cross and told me I had an attitude problem.

So, here's my introduction:

*Hello.*

*My name is Leon.*

*I have an attitude problem.*

# 1

## The Basics

### Everything you need to know about me:

1. I'm Leon John Crothers
2. I'm 4,779 days old (13 years and 1 month, if you're mathematically challenged)
3. I live with Caroline
4. I've been 'moved on' from 6 different schools
5. I'm currently attending Deluney College (school #7)
6. Most people think I've got an attitude problem

### Everything you need to know about Caroline:

1. Caroline Angela Crothers is my mum
2. I call Caroline by her first name
3. Caroline doesn't mind that I call her by her first name
4. Caroline is, among other things, a single parent, a whistler, a knitter and an indiscreet nosepicker
5. Caroline rides fairground attractions for a living
6. Caroline doesn't think I've got an attitude problem

**Everything you need to know about my  
attitude problem:**

1. It has nothing to do with the fact that I'm from Blackpool
2. Or my squeaky noise phobia
3. Or my deep hatred of baked beans
4. Or that I own 14 identical yellow hoodies
5. Or my opinions on trainspotters
6. Or how I eat my Cadbury Creme Egg

## 2

# Soggy Chips

Tea at ours is very straightforward.

Tea meaning dinner if you're not from round here.

You see, Caroline's a hopeless cook.

As soon as I was old enough to coherently tell her this, I took matters into my own hands:

**Monday:** Fish and chips

**Tuesday:** Chicken and chips

**Wednesday:** Pizza and chips

**Thursday:** Egg and chips

**Friday:** Sausage and chips

**Saturday:** Steak and chips

**Sunday:** Curry and chips

I wouldn't call myself a picky eater. I'm just not keen on surprises. And Caroline isn't keen on me skipping meals, so this way, everyone's a winner.

And as we're on the subject of meals, maybe just a quick word about the chips.

I eat my chips plain (no ketchup, vinegar, mayonnaise etc.



– only salt) and they can't touch any other foods on the plate. It generates stress. Unnecessary stress. Don't waste your time wondering why I don't just eat my chips from a separate plate – spare me. Been there, hated that.

As I was saying, tea at ours is very straightforward.

I always sit beside the kitchen door with my back to the shelf where Caroline keeps her collection of ceramic ducks, because they're hideous, and Caroline sits at ninety degrees to my right. Over the years, I've encouraged Caroline to sit there so that she'd have a nice view out of the kitchen window but really, I just don't like her sitting directly opposite me at mealtimes. I don't like anyone sitting opposite me at mealtimes. Who needs to see all that chewing and swallowing? Listening to it is bad enough.

Conversation is to be kept to a strict minimum. It drags out the eating process. For me, eating is really more of a hassle than anything else and something I prefer to do alone. I only eat at all because if I don't, my vital organs will eventually stage a mutiny. Caroline has a thing about the two of us eating together whenever her work schedule allows, for 'bonding' purposes. In the past, this has been a frequent source of arguing, but we've finally come to, what I think, is a fair compromise: mealtimes spent together – ask only about the weather.

So, like I said, tea at ours is very straightforward.

My story, however, is anything but straightforward and starts right here.

To give you a more accurate timeframe, it was a Monday evening, two weeks before I was due to start at Deluney

College: my new, new, new, new, new, new, new school.

The two of us were making our way through our fish and chips in relative silence, when suddenly, out of nowhere, Caroline said the strangest thing:

'I'm worried about you.'

I quickly scanned my plate to see if she was referring to a runaway chip situation, but everything seemed in order, so I just carried on eating.

Caroline cleared her throat.

'Leon, I was thinking that before you start at your new school, you—'

'Correction: new, new, new, new, new, new, new school.'

'OK, before you start at your new, new, new, new, new, new, new school, it might be a good idea that we go and see someone who helps young people who've trouble making friends and, well, interacting with people in general. What do you think?'

I stabbed a piece of battered fish with my fork.

'No thanks, Caroline.'

Case closed, I figured. Caroline had asked a question (albeit a non-weather-related one) and I'd answered. But the same question came back again the following night over breaded chicken, and *again* on Wednesday between mouthfuls of margherita. Normally I wouldn't describe Caroline as annoying, but this new teatime routine was pinching a nerve.

Then, on Thursday, she changed tactics:

'I've made an appointment for you to see Dr Snot on Saturday afternoon.'

I looked up from my egg and chips.

'What?'

'On Saturday afternoon you've an appointment to see Dr Snot.'

'Dr Snot?'

'Snot.'

'It's not.'

'What?'

'*Snot.*'

'Yep. Snot.'

'Dr *Snot?*'

Caroline knew full well I'd fall for her plan. If someone tells you there's a man alive with a name as stupid as Dr Snot, of course you're going to go and see him. You're *obliged* to. The conversation was now distracting me to the point that some of the yolk from my egg had dripped off my fork onto my chips. Beads of sweat were forming on my forehead and my elbows were starting to itch.

'*Fine*, Caroline, I'll go and see him,' I said, as I scraped my food into the bin.

# 3

## Dr Snot

Two days later, we were sitting in the waiting room of Dr Snot's surgery. Caroline passed the time with a stack of sticky magazines that she'd picked up from the reception desk, while I tapped my chin with my index finger to the rhythm of the clock that was mounted on the wall.

When we were finally invited into his office, Dr Snot was sitting behind his big, brown, shiny doctor's desk, wearing a white doctor's coat and a pair of ugly doctor's glasses. He was bald, with some wiry grey hair sticking out of his ears, an unhealthy-sized belly and a few too many moles on his face. He basically looked like your average, close-to-retirement physician. *Complete* disappointment.

I turned to leave.

'What are you doing?' said Caroline, nudging me back in. 'We just got here.'

'You said you wanted me to go and see Dr Snot,' I answered. 'I've seen him, so I can go now, right?'

She sighed heavily. 'Leon, I didn't mean to go and see him, *literally*.'

'It's all right, Ms Crothers,' said Dr Snot, with an impressively

deep voice. 'Lovely to meet you, Leon, and thanks for taking the time to come all this way just to have a look at me. Good to see that you're a lad who keeps his word!'

We sat down.

'Snot isn't really your last name, is it?' I said.

'Beg your pardon?' said the doc.

'Which controversial family tree are you trying to distance yourself from?'

'Leon,' Caroline hissed under her breath.

'Was your grandfather Hitler's secret love child or something?'

'Leon!' Caroline shrieked.

I threw my eyes down to the floor. When Caroline's voice gets loud it means I've said something that's likely to have caused upset, anger or offence.

'Sor-ry,' I told my shoes. 'I may have said something that has caused upset, anger or offence.'

I waited a moment for the expected '*listen here, young man*' speech but none came, so I looked up at Dr Snot, who was leaning over his desk with his hands cupped under his chin. He was smiling.

'Tell me, Leon, what do you think of Milky Ways?'

Now I was *really* confused.

'Are you questioning the meaning of life?' I asked him. 'Or are you planning to take up astronomy as a hobby when you retire?'

'No, no, the chocolate bar!' the snot doc laughed. 'Did you know that Milky Ways have been a favourite of mine since I

was a young—'

'The Milky Way bar is a chocolate-covered confectionery bar with a nougat centre, manufactured and distributed by the Mars confectionery company. It was created in 1923 by Frank C. Mars after the famed malted milk drink (milkshake) of the day, which was in turn named after the Earth's galaxy. The American version of the Milky Way bar has a caramel and nougat filling, while the European version has just an airy nougat filling. The Milky Way's low density of 0.88 grams per centimetre cubed means it floats when placed in milk, a phenomenon that was used for an advertising campaign across Europe in the late 1980s.'

'Very impressive,' said the doc. 'Your mother had already mentioned to me on the phone that you had a great passion for the world of confectionery. Who knows? Maybe someday you'll be the next Willy Wonka!'

The doc got up from his chair and squeezed himself around the side of his desk.

'Leon, I would like that you and your mother come back and see me next week for a chat, before school starts. Would that be OK?'

'Not a chance,' I said. 'Willy Wonka's a fictional character in literature with lunatic tendencies who exploited ingenious dwarfs as slave labourers and was a few Everlasting Gobstoppers away from being charged with infanticide.'

Caroline hurried me out of my chair.

'OK, Leon, let's be off.'

I stood up.

'Keep in mind, Dr Snot, that the American version of the Milky Way bar contains 240 calories in each 52.2-gram bar, while the British version only contains 95 calories. I say that because you're visibly overweight, so you might—'

Caroline yanked my hoodie.

*'Leon... hop to it. Now.'*

'That went better than expected,' I said to Caroline as I pogoed out of the doc's office on one foot.