

## Slummy mummy Lucy Sweeney

***'Since it's people in towns who like badgers, we should exchange them for urban foxes,' says my mother***

Shortly after our arrival at my parents' house for a long weekend over the half-term break, my mother reveals that she is throwing a "little party" to celebrate. Since she does nothing by halves, I am immediately suspicious.

"To celebrate what exactly?" I ask, trying to sound more measured than I feel.

"Everything," she says. Sensing rebellion, she becomes more expansive. "The fact that Daddy and I are still alive and have most of our marbles; that you and Tom haven't got divorced; that we haven't lost any sheep over the winter; all sorts of unexpected triumphs."

"Those don't sound like very positive reasons for a party," says Husband on a Short Fuse. "Particularly since I didn't realise that my relationship was hanging by a thread."

He shoots me the kind of look that he gives to clients when they ask for a cat flap to be cut into a pair of sliding doors at the end of a building project.

"I remember the saggy middle period of marriage only too well," explains my mother, completely ignoring the presence of her grandchildren. "Fortunately, in the Seventies people were much less conservative. We stoically got on with everything life threw at us."

"What do you mean?" asks Husband on a Short Fuse.

"We just had sex with other people," booms my mother.

"Oh my God," I say. "That is too much information."

"Some of them are coming tonight," she adds. "The ones who are still alive. And who remember to turn up."

"This is a bit like a country version of *Shameless*," comments Eldest Son.

"At our age, just hanging on is a reason to celebrate," says my mother emphatically. My father nods, but I can see that he's not wearing his hearing aid.

"We've invited that lovely couple from the other side of the hill," he says. "He's got some interesting ideas about culling migrants."

"You mean culling badgers," interrupts my mother. "He says that since it's people in towns who like badgers, we should exchange them for urban foxes."

"He sounds just like the kind of person I want to spend an evening with," says Husband on a Short Fuse.

"What about food?" I ask, noting that there is nothing obvious to eat.

"This is my last great triumph," says my mother, leading us towards the fridge.

"Not home cooking," pleads Husband on a Short Fuse.

"You'll be glad to know that everything is shop-bought," she says, opening the fridge door with a flourish. It is full of Findus lasagnes.

"They were on offer. I got them before they were withdrawn," she says. ■



## Things you only know if you're single

Hannah  
Betts



**...that one can never be too old.**

Disturbing dispatches from the World o' Tweens. One of the more socially acceptable breeders shares the following: "My seven-year-old recently informed me that she had been invited on her first date. When asked what this entailed, she replied: 'A boy and I have dinner, while you and his mother or father sit at another table.'"

"When I suggested that she was too young to engage in such an activity, she screamed: 'How dare you deprive me of this opportunity? I have been waiting for this moment *my entire life*.' I can only hope that she learnt this phraseology from *High School Musical*."

*O tempora! O mores!* Delay in such matters is surely all. The world of erotic interaction is quite ghastly enough without embracing it in prepubescence. Science suggests that the longer she or he stalls such dalliances, the brighter a youngster is (thank you, the Institute of Ragingly Conservative Research). Save it for the future. Meanwhile, paying it any more than derisory interest as a nipper would be akin to emotionally investing in the weather.

No less an authority than this column's former class mistress, Mrs Melhuish, frustrated by yet another 13-year-old weeping over some passing delinquent, issued the edict: "Young ladies, stop wasting your time on ridiculous relationships that are doomed to failure with boys who have no more idea of their own minds than you. There'll be plenty of room for that sort of rubbish later." How right she proved. ■

## I don't give a monkey's...

Carol  
Midgley



**...for "provocative" clothing.**

One in 12 people blames rape victims for their own fate if they flirted with their attacker or were drunk at the time. A different but equally delightful survey finds that a quarter believe women who wear skimpy clothes are partly responsible for being raped. Isn't that lovely? Who are these morons? Do you know them? Because I don't. If any of my friends said to

me: "Look, mate, go and get changed, you look a bit 'rapey' today. When getting dressed we must always keep the sensibilities of rapists uppermost in our minds," I'd direct them immediately to the nearest rest home for incurable misogynists.

This is like looking at a morbidly obese person who can't stop stuffing their face with burgers, nodding sagely and saying: "Well, it's obvious who's to blame here. All those cows you've been eating."

Surely a mole with cataracts can see that rapists "cause" rape, not skirts and blouses. If clothes magically created rape then every high street, pub and workplace would be a scene of carnage, as men leapt on every passing female while saying, "If you will wear

high heels and a tight jumper, this is what you must expect." But they don't. Which kind of proves that the problem lies with attackers, not with fabrics.

To anyone who thinks otherwise, can I remind them that elderly people are sometimes, horrifically, raped by intruders while lying in their own beds. None of them to my knowledge was wearing a push-up bra at the time. The point of the SlutWalk marches two years ago was to make this rather obvious point.

Can we stop letting violent men off the hook by blaming fashion? By this logic, the next time a toddler gets bitten by a dog you'll have to blame the child for having too tasty a leg. Point the finger at rapists, not Topshop. ■