

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Dear Fatty

Dawn French

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About the Book

With a sharp eye for comic detail and wicked ear for the absurdities of life, Dawn French shows just how an RAF girl from the west country with dreams of becoming a ballerina/air hostess/bridesmaid rose to be one of the best loved comedy actresses of our time.

Here Dawn French shares her story, and in particular with her father who committed suicide when she was nineteen years old. She invites us into her most personal relationships with, among others, her mum and dad, her husband, her daughter and her friend Jennifer.

Dawn reveals the people, experiences and obsessions that have influenced her and that helped shape her comedy creations - including kissing, dogs, grandmas, David Cassidy, teenage angst, school, stealing, Madonna and not forgetting chocolate. She is as open about her fears and sorrows as she is about her delights and joys, and for the first time shares the experience of losing her beloved dad and later finding a tip-topmost chap in Lenny Henry.

From raging about class, celebrity and bullying to describing the highs and lows of motherhood and friendship, *Dear Fatty* reveals the surprising life behind the smile.

About the Author

Dawn French is presently fifty-one years old and almost entirely spherical. She trained as a teacher at the Central School of Speech and Drama but luckily for the kids at Parliament Hill School, she left teaching in 1981 to join the *Comic Strip* team with whom she has produced and appeared in over twenty films. Dawn made six series and various specials of sketch based hilariosity with another girl called Jennifer Saunders. She has done lots of other telly including *Murder Most Horrid*, *The Vicar Of Dibley*, *Wild West*, *Jam and Jerusalem* and *Lark Rise to Candleford*. She also does acting in plays sometimes.

She is married to a man called Len and has a daughter called Bill. She is alive and lives in Cornwall. This is the first book she has ever written ... or read.

Hoc Feci

Dawn
FRENCH
Dear Fatty



arrow books

For
Michelle Lillicrap
1968-2008
Stephen Handy
1972-2008
Marjorie Emily French née Berry
1908-Forever

SMALLER
lyrics by
Alison Moyet

Taken from the album *The Turn*

I used to dance to the drum in your chest
My feet on your feet, my head at your breast
You gave me a tune and I carry it still
And I promise my darling, that I ever will.

Dear You,

HELLO. I HAVE decided to think of this book as a memoir rather than an autobiography. As I understand it, the latter means that I have to be precise about chronology and touch on all aspects of my quite-dull-in-parts life. I think that would be quite dull because in quite a lot of parts my life has indeed been quite dull. You wouldn't want to read about those bits, believe me. Those bits would mainly be about puddings I've enjoyed and when I've set the washing machine on the wrong cycle and my quest for comfortable shoes, and the time I put a gun in a kitten's mouth. You don't want to know about that ol' faffle. So, I've decided instead to concentrate on those memories that are especially important or vivid to me. The parts of my life I can still remember the taste and feel and smell of. Otherwise we'd be here all day and I'm hoping you can be finished by lunchtime so's you can have a nap and watch *Loose Women*. (Are they really loose? I've seen no evidence thus far and I've watched a lot ... Unless, of course, the looseness is *under* the table ... oh dear.)

Here's what I've learned writing this book. Memory doesn't begin with or end in 'what happened'. In fact, I don't think it ends at all; it goes on changing, playing a kind of hide-and-seek with our minds. Some of my memories are nearly 50 years old now and sometimes the startling clarity of them makes me doubt their reality. Do all of the people I write to in these pages remember what I remember? My dad, mum, brother, daughter, friends, lovers and so on? I am lucky that I've kept diaries for large parts of my life on which I can anchor many of these memories. Even so, most of my diary-keeping is pure organisation and, annoyingly, doesn't tend to remind me of my true emotions at any particular juncture. For that I must rely on my

rapidly deteriorating grey matter, and a lot of investigative chatter with my nearest and dearest. I shouldn't really be so surprised by the alarmingly speedy erosion of my memory, after all, my waistline has disappeared entirely. Like wearing a nappy or the Lost City of Atlantis, my waist is now only a vague memory or may even just be an ancient myth for all I know.

So, it's in this spirit of reminiscence that I offer you this memoir of my life. My life so far, that is. To this end, I have decided to tell my story through letters, because this way, I can address my life to the people I've actually lived it with. It's not that I don't want to tell it directly to *you*, it's more that I know these people well, and hopefully, by the end, you might know me well too. I do hope you enjoy it. If you do, feel free to tell all your friends. If not, please replace the book neatly where you found it, and if you're in a residential area, be thoughtful, and leave quietly. Thank you.

Dear Dad,

SO, YOU'RE STILL dead. It's been 31 years and every day I have to remind myself of that fact, and every day I am shocked.

You and I only had 19 years together, and so when I think of you, I am still 19 and you are ... What age were you? ... To me, you were just the right age for a dad. Old enough to be clever and young enough to be handsome. Probably about the age I am now. Blimey, that's weird. I will soon be older than you ever got to be. That's not right somehow. A parent is supposed to be older at all times. The natural form is, *I* get older and you get ... just old. *Then*, and only then, should you be permitted to die. Even that should happen in front of the telly after a bowl of stew and a cuddle up with your missus. Not the way you died. Not like that.

I'm not 19 any more, Dad, and so many things have happened that you haven't known, so I have decided to write this book for you. I want to remember our time together and I want to tell you about lots of stuff since. So far, it's been better than expected ...

Dear Dad,

I'M HAVING TROUBLE remembering my very first memory. Each time I try I think I'm stealing other people's first memories that I've either read or been told of. I *can't* remember looking out of my pram at an adoring mother, I *can't* remember being shocked at the first sight of my own pudgy baby fingers, I *can't* remember the oddly delightful feeling of a nappy full of hot new poo. (Actually, on second thoughts, I can, but that came years later!)

There is something I *can* remember vividly, and when I experience it now, the effect is visceral. It takes me thundering right back to a mysteriously timeless but definitely very early blurry memory. The smell of my mother. Of Mum. A heady aroma that embodies birth and life and strength and sex and safety and fags. Whatever perfume she adds (currently she's favouring JLo's new honk, I noticed, when I was last in her bathroom - she's MoLo!), this smell is always there as the baseline, and for me it's magnificent and it announces that I'm home. I swear to God her cooking is flavoured with the same scent, which is why none of us can replicate her recipes. You have to be *her* to do it. I guess the scent is the code, the method of imprinting between a mother and child, and it is so potent. Sometimes even now I snuggle up to Mum just to get another headful to nourish me till the next visit.

I don't have such a strong early memory of you, Dad, although I do have one of something that happened when I think I was about two or three. I remember creeping into your bedroom while you two slept and crawling under your bed. I'm not quite sure why I did this but I suspect it was the thrill of being hidden while being so close. A sort of delicious invisibility. (I did the same thing again years later at boarding school - more anon.) It seems a bit pointless to

eavesdrop when those you'd like your eaves to drop on are fast asleep, but I suppose the joy was in the anticipation. Anyroadup, you might remember, a frightening thing happened. The bed was the kind that had low metal bars and bare springs beneath, and I only just managed to squeeze under. I must have had my hand inside one of the springs when one of you moved, resulting in a crushing pain as my little fingers were trapped. I shrieked and woke you. You leapt out of bed, full of confusion and dadly alert. You reached under the bed and, with a bit of gentle coaxing, pulled me out to safety and I ran into Mum's arms for comfort (and most likely to smell that healing smell). All of this was fairly unremarkable except for one thing. You were completely naked and, although I was in agony, I couldn't take my eyes off that weird dark dangly wrinkled thing. What *was* it? I'd never seen you without your pants on and for some scrambled reason the first conclusion I jumped to was that you were being attacked by some kind of nocturnal bed-intruding vicious hairy saggy mole-snake creature. Naturally the correct course of action, considering you had just rescued me from certain finger-death, was to reciprocate, so I lunged at your assailant with mighty force, thwacking it as hard as I could, trying to dislodge its tenacious teeth from your groin. However hard I hit, it would *not* let go or fall off and so I was forced to pull it like the keenest frontman on a tug-o'-war team. Inexplicably, both of you seemed helpless with laughter, and you even seemed to be resisting my help as you pulled on your pants and let the biting thing stay *INSIDE* them. What an idiot! I never saw it again so I guessed you'd had it put down at the vet's or perhaps left it at the zoo.

Dear Gary,

DAD WAS AT RAF Valley and we were living in Holyhead, Anglesey, so I must have been three years old and you must have been six when Hunni the dog turned up. I don't know where she came from, but I remember she was named after a little girl called Hunni Hindley-Maggs who you were at school with and who you lost your heart to. Did she know you named a dog after her? Did she feel special as a result of that I wonder? I think the dog, a cairn terrier, was officially supposed to be *your* dog, but I just want to let you know that she definitely preferred me and I loved her back with a fervent passion verging on the illegal.

After a certain amount of initial resistance she gave in to my efforts to make her lie down next to me for hours on end. Mostly because I restrained her firmly every time she tried to move. I was determined we would be spooning partners. I wanted to feel her tiny body breathing calmly, sleepily, next to mine and I wanted her to be like a Disney or Lassie dog, who could understand me and all my three-year-old problems, so I endlessly blethered on into her ear, which twitched throughout these no-doubt heartfelt monologues.

When I'd had enough of talking, which was a *long* time, and she had fulfilled enough of my desire for her to be counsellor/friend/hot-water bottle, she was also very handy as a baby or dressing-up doll. Quite a lot of my doll clothes fitted her and even suited her. She looked better in pastels – it contrasted well with her sandy fur – and I was stunned by how becoming she was in a mob cap, although I had to bite holes in it for her ears to poke through. I think that if she had shown a bit more commitment, we *could* have squeezed more stuff on, but too much wriggling prevented

any true representation of an entire outfit, complete with sunglasses and luggage.

One thing Hunni was *always* up for, probably due to the delicious taste, was liberal use of Mum's lipstick, a stunning burnt sunset-type orangey red. Wetness of nose, hirsuteness of lips and constant licking made application tricky but, with effort and tenacity, not impossible. The overall effect was stunning and in no small part reminiscent of early Dusty Springfield. Excellent.

Obviously, to achieve the baby image was a much simpler operation – lay dog on its back, put on nappy and insert dummy in mouth. Simple but effective. Hours of contented cooing and cradling followed. That's me contented of course, maybe not always her. Still, I'm pretty sure she favoured this sort of girly activity over the silly exploits *you* got up to with her – like walking, throwing and catching, running after rabbits or wrestling. Honestly, what were you thinking? She was a *dog*!

Dear Mum,

I'VE BEEN THINKING about what life must have been like for you around the time I was born, when Dad was stationed in Anglesey. When I look at pictures of you pushing me in a pram, with a toddler Gary by your side, you look so glamorous and so happy. Then I look at other pictures from that time. We must have been in RAF quarters but there I am having a bath in a bucket in the backyard. Maybe this was just for a laugh – we must have had a bathroom, surely? I know that the camp was miles from the local village and the shops in Caergeiliog and that you had to walk for hours to get a pint of milk. I also know that Anglesey is hellishly windy and flat and remote. I've seen photos where the trees are growing diagonal to the ground because the mighty maverick gales have battered them into submission. They look tipsy, like staggering drunks, lurching sideways against their inebriation. It must have been exhausting to drag both of us such a long way in that raging raw weather, and I know that often when you arrived at the shop, so relieved to be out of the bluster and so glad to see other grown-ups, it was very hurtful when people chose to speak Welsh only, to refuse to help you in English. I know you often felt lonely and rejected but for me there is a truly visceral connection. I prick up my ears when I hear Welsh, I pay more attention when I am around Welsh people. I like how dangerous and dark and a bit caustic and secretive they seem, and somehow I have fused that persistent stormy weather with my memories of that country and those seductive Taliesin people. I feel a curiously enduring connection, although by rights I'm not entitled to it. I was born there, but I wasn't bred there and I'm not *from* there, yet Wales and the Welsh prompt an acute sense of tribal belonging in me. Perhaps what I'm

feeling is a distant sense of your alienation, Mum. Because you were made to feel the trespasser, I want to belong, on your behalf. Maybe it's a bigger issue. Dad's being in the RAF meant that you (and we) followed him wherever his work took us, so we didn't get to belong anywhere. Sometimes we were in our home for less than a year. You might have only just got a job, we might have only just settled at school, and we had to move on again. Sort of legit gypsies really. Moving to a new camp, new town, new county, but strangely and rather comfortingly, always the same house - same layout, same G-Plan furniture. We seemed to have very little of our own. Just ornaments and books and odd items with which to try and personalise yet another RAF standard red-brick house.

It's no wonder both Gary and I did so much sleepwalking and sleeptalking when we were growing up. We probably harboured our fair share of new-school stress, constantly having to try to carefully negotiate our way into new groups of friends. It was chum war. There were tactics. The RAF kids were easy to befriend - they had the same itinerant experience and were sympathetic. It was the gangs of local kids that were harder to crack. They were fed up with forces kids turning up, and then bugging off before true friendships could be forged. They were often wary of us and quickly judged if we were worth the effort or not. I vividly remember that crucial testing time in the first few days of arriving anywhere new, when it was imperative to make a good show of yourself, make sure all your wares were on display attractively - humour, hipness, kindness (but with a hint of steel), intelligence, comprehensive knowledge of hit parade, courtesy, eloquence and skipping and twoball prowess. If that failed (which it usually did due to pathetic lack of élan in any of above skills), employ bribery and giftage techniques swiftly, sometimes even deploying own toys as bait. This was a supremely risky strategy and you stood to suffer a high

incidence of collateral damage, sometimes losing four or more well-loved Sindys or even a pair of champion skates or a warrior set of clackers. No matter – this is the cost of war, no one said it would be pretty, and these casualties were the price we had to pay. We will never forget them. On rare occasions, this *modus operandi* backfired and we were judged to be spineless tossers for buying our friends' affections. Then, *and only then*, would I employ my master plan, a strategy that never failed, but demanded countless hours of tireless acting. I would concoct a terminal illness – 'toxic spasm' was a good one, as was 'marrow fester' or 'trench head', or simply 'swollen blood'. All of these maladies meant I was not long for this world, and would elicit sympathy and pledges of eternal friendship from otherwise hostile enemy agents. RAF kid 1 – local kid nil. Result. I'm sorry, Mum, if it meant you regularly had to answer strange questions from concerned parents about your sickly daughter's tragic condition, but somehow I eluded retribution and moved on to the next camp with renewed vigour and no small relief that I could shake off my fatal ailment and be healthy again in readiness for the next bout of 'find some friends!'. This nomad life, which incidentally also rewarded us richly with experiences all over the country and later in Cyprus, was no doubt part of the nagging core feeling I had: that we didn't belong anywhere.

For you, though, it must have been very difficult to make a home. If it's any consolation, Mum, believe me when I say that everywhere we went was our home because you made it so. You were and are the absolute centre of all of us, and you kept us anchored when we could so easily have felt lost and confused. There might have been endless new doors but behind each one was you and Dad, making a safe and happy place for me to be. Any confidence I have had since stems from that one unassailable fact. I am loved.

Thank you.

Dear Dad,

I THINK I was about four years or so when you were posted to RAF Leconfield and we all moved to Yorkshire. Only now do I realise that I've lived in Yorkshire at all - I was so unaware of our personal geography then. I *did* know it was a long way from Grandma and Grandad French in Plymouth because I clearly remember those endless hours in the car on numerous family visits. Gary and I would physically fight the entire time, mean pinches and punches and stabs and Chinese burns. You tried word games and songs to distract us, but we were compelled to battle. That was our kid purpose. If we were scolded, we resorted to verbal taunts and competitive face-pulling, but in the main it was the corporal torture that was most excruciating and most thrilling. If any of our squabbling became too dangerous, or if he was winning, I would be sure to whinge loudly to you and appeal for justice. Gary called me 'the Foghorn' for this crime of breaking rank and grassing him up, and accused me of being 'a girl'. A girl?! How very low.

Another reason I recall these journeys is the smoke. God, the smoke! I don't know how many fags you and Mum were smoking a day but it *must* have been 100 each. You obviously regarded these journeys as a perfect opportunity to catch up on any non-smoking minutes you may have carelessly frittered away not smoking, and so put in extra smoking time to get up to smoking speed. One cigarette lit the next and we travelled along in this stinking, acrid foggy tin box for hours. Gary and me and the dog in the back seat, sucking up thousands of fags' worth of used smoke and gasping for air in a desperate attempt to stay alive. Heaven forfend we should open the window. Mum would screech, 'You're letting in the cold air! Shut that immediately!' Yes, it would have been awful to allow fresh

air to dilute the thick pea soup of swirling smog that had built up inside the car. I swear sometimes I couldn't see as far as the back of your head. How did you see out at all? Is this why you often inexplicably used the windscreen wipers on a perfectly clear day? For years I thought I was a sufferer of carsickness until I travelled in a smoke-free car and realised that smoke was the reason for my queasiness. Perhaps Gary's cries of 'Foghorn!' were more apt than we knew.

Anyroadup, I remember one particular journey back up North because there was only one topic of conversation the whole way. The Queen Mother. You told us that you had been selected as a typical serviceman, a chief technician with an average family - one boy, one girl, one nursery-school-teacher wife, dog (comes with or without clothes). A perfect family, safe and presentable enough to display to a visiting royal on a very special day for our air force base. She was coming to visit and inspect in two weeks' time! All I could think was, 'Why is she called the Queen Mother and not the Queen's Mother? Was my mum therefore the Dawn Mother?'

Apparently there was a *lot* of preparation to be made before she could possibly cross the threshold of our humble G-Plan, red-brick quarter. What?! What did we have to do? Surely, you suggested, she was supposed to take us as she found us, that was the whole point, wasn't it? Absolutely *not* as far as the Dawn Mother was concerned. Do you remember she flew into a flurry of excitement and didn't sit down or sleep once in those two weeks? *Everything* was dusted, mopped, antisepticked, hoovered, pinned up on the line and beaten, including us kids. Our house would be *perfect*, we would be perfect, it would be perfect. That Queen Mother would NOT find fault with us. We would do you proud. Gary and I had haircuts, new outfits - mine was a tartan kilt and new red patent-leather Start-rites which I had been longing for, so yay and respect to the Queen

Mother for those; Gary's was a grey suit so he could be a perfect mini-man. The Dawn Mother had a twinset and a perm and you of course wore your uniform, which I always loved because you looked so spruced and tip-top and important. Who would have thought drab bluey-grey would suit anyone? You shone in it, and it shone on you, with all buttons and belts and medals and significant regalia-type badge things duly buffed till they glinted. Nothing less would do. Mum tried to get the same shine on our faces, using a chamois leather and Vim. Well, all right, *not* that, but something like it – Brasso maybe? Gary's newly cut but still renegade thick hair was semi-tamed with liberal dollops of Brylcreem and Mum's spit on the crown. There were new socks and new pants all round. This alarmed me – was the mother of the Queen going to be inspecting our pants? This visit was seemingly more thorough than I had anticipated. Shit. Or rather, not shit. On pants, or anywhere. *No shit!*

We practised bowing and curtsying for hours until our backs and knees buckled and bled. We tried to rehearse being humble and quiet so that if the mother of the Queen 'chose to converse with our parents, she could do so in peace, please!'. The little pamphlet on royal etiquette gave us some tips: we were to speak only if spoken to (royal rules, not family rules), so – should we say hello, or wait to be said hello unto? Could we try on her crown? Or feed sugar lumps to the unicorns that would pull her pink carriage? After the initial 'Your Majesty' we were then to address her as M'am, rhymes with Spam, *not* M'arm rhymes with farm, and never M'erm ... This threw me into a panic because I felt sure I would mistakenly call her Spam from start to end.

The day came and, boy, were we prepared and perfect. Beds made with crisp hospital corners, books neatly on shelves with spines facing *outwards*, teddies and dolls scrubbed and lined up on the pillow. The house smelt of

furniture wax and Mr Sheen. A newly baked cake was on the table and the best – in fact, the *new* – china was arranged beside it, as if it were commonplace that we had high tea in porcelain lady-cups. The Dawn Mum was virtually still licking us clean like a mumcat when *SHE* arrived (do I remember it correctly, Dad?) in a *helicopter*! All the neighbours were out in the road to watch. She first went for a quick visit to a suitably presentable officer and his family at the other, pedigree, end of the camp. We were always segregated like this from the commissioned officers – they had posh detached houses with huge gardens front and back whereas us oiks lived in rows around a central play park (freshly painted for the visit – several children bore the marks on the arses of their best clothes).

And so we waited and waited for her to come. Finally, just when I was starting to get lockjaw from the rictus of holding my Queen-Mother-welcoming cheesy grin in readiness, she walked up our garden path. I had a quick glance at the stunning outfit with the matching huge hat (hang on, where's the bloody crown?!! She's forgotten the crown. Someone's nicked the crown! The crown for Chrissakes! Call the police!!), before taking a very low stoop into my ballet-influenced curtsy, holding my tartan skirt out at the sides for maximum effect so that the QM could view the wondrous calibre of the cloth. Gary did his gentlemanly bow simultaneously, and both of us remained like this for an uncomfortably long time – possibly two days. During our punishing rehearsals, we hadn't worked out when the correct moment for closure on the bow/curtsy should be. It was best to just stay there till a cough from you brought us both upright, if a bit dizzy. Looking at the photos of the event, the overlong bowing was the last thing you needed since it immediately became apparent that Gary had not washed the back of his neck. Ever. It was truly grimy from a seven-year build-up of gladiator-game mud. He brought shame on the House of French at this

critical moment but I don't entirely blame him, because what happened next would overshadow the whole day for me and haunt my dreams for years to come. As I stood up from my deep curtsy, and the blood rushed away from my head, I blinked in the light and looked directly into the face of the mother of the Queen. She was about my height (I was four years old and three foot), which surprised me. Was she, in fact, a munchkin? Excellent! I smiled my special show-every-tooth-in-your-head smile, carefully avoiding saying hello first and definitely *not* calling her Spam (*don't* say hello Spam, *don't* say hello Spam). She then reciprocated with a huge ear-to-ear beaming smile and - horror of horrors - she had a mouthful of BLACK TEETH! What? Eh? No carriage, no crown and now she turns out to be a fully certified evil witch! And she's coming into *my* house! I was dumbstruck and with my heart beating fear in my ears, I hid behind your knees and grabbed on to your legs. I remember you trying to shake me off and you even did that dadfirmpull thing to remove me, but I wasn't going anywhere. I was holding on to your leg with the grip of a randy terrier, trying to make legpuppies with you. She was in our house, chatting and drinking tea for all the world as if she *wasn't* evil incarnate ...! She looked at Gary's train set, she asked polite questions and complimented us on our lovely neat house. Had no one else noticed? Perhaps true evil, the soldiers of SATAN, can only be seen through kid-vision? So why was my brother being so suckuppy? Didn't *he* know? Perhaps it's only *girl*-kid-vision that works? I knew what to do. Hold on to your leg and refuse to either speak to her or look her in the eye. So that's what I did. I said one word when she asked me about my school. I said, 'Nice.' That was it. That's all I gave her and that was only to appear civil to the unknowing humans, the fools who knew not who she truly was. She left our house and went off to spread her evil seed elsewhere, after 20 minutes or so. The scariest 20 minutes

of my life. Does she get back in the helicopter or simply hop on her broomstick to get home? Does the Queen know what's in her midst? I'm only four, there's nothing more I can do. No one believes me. I'm helpless, hopeless, inconsolable.

I was left with this deep hidden fear for years, and then I happened to meet the QM at a reception for the arts many moons later and found her to still be alarmingly short, but much less evil, with lovely teeth.

Thanks, Dad, for the use of your leg that day. It saved my life.

Dear Hannah,

RIGHT FROM THE moment you were born, on Boxing Day 1993, and when I first looked into your eyes, I knew we were linked in a profound way. It feels a bit like we are twins born 40 years apart. I know you. Because I *was* you. I have watched you grow into your teenagehood, negotiating the assault course of your childhood using exactly the same techniques as I did. I see your thinking, I see your actions, I see your doubt, and I see your method and I know them as my own. Is it the family connection? I guess that must be a huge part of it. Is it some great cosmic joke that I should appear again in my brother's life as his daughter, just when he thought he was safe, a spooky mini me, to continue the torture? Whatever the reason, I am so glad you're here, that you're my niece and I cherish our mysterious sameness.

I can't apologise enough for the lifetime of comparison to me you have already had to, and will in the future, endure. The endless comments about how you and I are so similar must be agonising. I am quite often the culprit myself, even when I am aware of how tiresome and frankly frightening it must be for you. I remember when I was 14 like you, I thought anyone over the ripe old age of 40 might as well throw in the towel and die to alleviate their unsightly and off-putting decrepitude. Surely, it would be a favour to themselves and to everyone else if they just, like, weren't there? So I understand how alarming this comparison must seem. For a start, how could anyone be alive and *so* very fat?! What is the point of that? Well, all I can say is that I am just as surprised as you. I honestly cannot fathom the dimensions of this curious body I've been given. I was aware, from *very* early on, that it wasn't quite like anyone else's. None of the laws of physics,

nature, chemistry, biology, art *or* universal order seem to apply. I know I am a human life form, but not as we know it, Captain. Why, for instance, am I *so* short? I know the Frenchies are not tall in the genes department, hailing as we do from labouring stock, heavy, beefy men who built the first tar roads in Cornwall and from fishermen who, again, need to be robust and sturdy to haul in their living. Surely, though, their proportions were not quite as startlingly dwarfish as my own? What is my physical category, actually? Plump? Rotund? Squat? Corpulent? Buxom, possibly, in poor light? No, I defy these definitions. I've seen folk who fit those descriptions and they are not like me. I am more hobbitish, with a big dollop of Weeble. You know, the ones that wobble but don't fall down? Except I do, due to alarming lack of foot size which might otherwise offer some stability. You would think that in return for the shocking lack of leg/arm/torso length, God might have been prepared to barter and bless me with elegant long fingers suitable for pianos and rings, or even exquisite toes for sandal and nail-polish use. No no no. Not to be – got the dumpy Wall's sausage fingers and the cocktail sausage toes. Thanks, God. What about an aesthetically pleasing, well-arched neck? No no no. Got the full, direct-from-chin-to-chest fortification, with impressive turkey-gobble flaps attached. How generous of the Almighty to gift me with not just the one chin, but several reserve chins – lest I lose one? Or perhaps so that I might fashion a sail from my own face if I am stranded at sea on a raft?

Above all, what in the name of all that is holy is the purpose of these massive ocean-going buoy chests? I know bosoms are womanly but these surely belong to *many* women. How did I get the rations for the whole queue from here to the edge of the earth? Every time I see a flat-fronted woman, I want to apologise for my seemingly appalling greed. This is the kind of hoarding that gets you sent to your room with a stinging arse. I would happily

share, given half a chance. I'd love to see my chipolata toes again – it's been so long. I'd love to hold a friend's baby without seeing that strange slaverling glint in their eye when they bounce off what must seem to be enough food to propel them into their teens. I'd love to run and still see ahead on every other stride. I'd love to lie down on my back without gathering underarm beach balls. I'd love to pick up a bra catalogue and find my size in *all* ranges rather than turn each page ever more forlornly till I come across the trusted industrial 'Doreen' in white polyester – the only bap-scaffolding that comes in my staggering 42H. I have tried to customise the 'Doreen' so many times – I've added lace, I've hacked away at it with pinking shears to create a sexular-looking shelf-like effect, I've covered it in intriguing fabrics in an attempt to make it more comely. On one occasion, fortified by drink, I wore it back to front, which was ill-advised and dangerous to all in my immediate vicinity. I've hunted high and low and under and over and beyond and back to find beautiful, supportive equipment for these unfeasibly large norks. Thank God then, and June Kenton, for Rigby & Peller, a place where physical freaks like me can find refuge, get measured properly and finally get heaved into something nearly pretty. I don't think you're heading this way in the front upper department, Hannah, but if you do, fear not – I will guide you beyond the darkness, through the portal of light that is Rigby & Peller's door, with the comforting Queen's royal warrant above it. There shall you find mammiferous fulfilment and happiness.

Any road, I know you will look at me from time to time and dread the onset of this odd body shape. Fortunately, I think your mum's genes might save you. Evidence thus far points towards early intervention of good strong height genes. You even seem to have an actual neck, which goes in under the jaw and then down, providing you with a place where necklaces apparently go. How lucky you are. But

should this fleshy strangeness befall you, I want to allay your fears a tiny bit and tell you that it's not all bad. I have discovered that big breasts can precede you into a room and announce the arrival of someone to be reckoned with. This can be very useful if you are feeling nervous or shy, because the knockers do the attitude for you; meanwhile, you have enough breathing time to let your courage catch up with them. I've also experienced big bosoms as a sort of theme park for boys. They just can't seem to resist them. Every single boy I have known intimately has been utterly entranced by them and can't wait to earn access so they can play all day. Of course, not all of them have been well apprenticed in the art of bosom management. A big tip I offer you is to give boys with very small hands a wide berth. It seems cruel to exclude them but, believe me, they can't seem to get past the turnstiles into the park. They just can't. You will have to train boys to treat the pleasure domes with all due respect and to cherish them like the magnificent cherishable things they are. You will have to gently discourage any unconfident twiddling or tuning, you will have to insist on their close face-shaving to avoid chafing or grazing. You will have to fight off all attempts at actual breastfeeding, which some boys seem to regress to with zealous and baby-like oversucking. I once had a situation where a total nincompoop created a kind of vacuum on one of my pinnacles and had to be jabbed hard in the cheek in order to force a release. Painful for both of us and potentially fatal for him. You will also experience, should you be similarly endowed, a kind of sisterly regard verging on rampant jealousy from other women. They, too, wish to join in the fun or at least behold the actual wonders or at the very least hear tell of saucy chesticle adventures so as they might vicariously enjoy the thrills.

I once went to the theatre with a chum and noticed a woman in her fifties having a pre-show drink in the bar, with the most splendid front I have ever seen (the woman,