

Got Any Goss?

by Chris Rose

"Got any goss?"
 "Any what?"
 "Any goss?"
 "What's 'goss'?"
 "'Goss' – for 'gossip'. Got any gossip?"
 "Er, no," said Corinne, and started to walk off. She hadn't been at the school long. She didn't really have any friends there, and felt unhappy. She had moved to this new school only a few weeks ago when she had moved to North London with her Mum and her little sister. She still felt shy and embarrassed when she talked to the other students. Alicia carried on walking beside her anyway.



"You know, I like you really," said Alicia to Corinne as they walked along the street. "Some of the other girls think you're a bit weird, but I think you're alright".
 "Er, thanks," said Corinne. She wasn't really sure if Alicia had complimented her or not. She felt uncomfortable and a bit embarrassed with Alicia. Alicia was probably the most beautiful girl in the school – everybody knew it - and she always had great clothes. Today she was wearing a big red Tommy Hilfiger jacket over her school uniform. She looked brilliant. Corinne felt even more embarrassed than usual walking along the street with Alicia. Alicia carried on talking.
 "You're always really quiet. You always have your head in a book, reading. Some of the other girls think you're strange because you never talk about anything. Some of them think you're a snob and you don't want to be with us."
 "No! No!" shouted out Corinne suddenly. "That's

not it! That's not it at all! I'm not a snob, I'm just a bit shy, I guess".

"Yeah – it's difficult moving to a new school where nobody knows you, and you don't know anybody. It happened to me a few years ago. I was new at school and I didn't know anybody. I soon made loads of friends – it's easy."
 Alicia carried on talking all the way as far as Corinne's bus stop. She was a real motor mouth, she never stopped talking. She only stopped when the bus arrived and Corinne got on.
 "Bye, Corinne! See you tomorrow!"
 "Bye, Alicia!"

Every evening Corinne wrote her diary. In her diary she wrote about everything that happened to her during the day. She also wrote about her feelings, her hopes, her plans and her dreams. Her diary was a friend for her, and she always carried it with her in her bag. That evening she wrote about her meeting with Alicia.

Something incredible happened today! Alicia Wilkinson started talking to me. Alicia is the most beautiful girl in the school. She's got loads of friends and a boyfriend who's older than she is. He's 20! He's got a job at a design company, or something like that. She told me all about him. His name's Anthony, but everybody calls him Anto.

*She said some of the other girls think I'm weird because I never talk to them, and all I do is read books all the time. I don't think a person's strange because they read books.
 I'm going to see Alicia again at school tomorrow.*

Before she went to bed, Corinne looked at herself in the mirror. She wasn't as slim as Alicia, that was true. She often tried dieting, but it never made any difference. She had a pair of big thick glasses which she always wore. She tried taking them off sometimes, but her eyes hurt if she didn't wear them. She wanted to get contact lenses, but her Mum said they were too expensive. She thought her face was too square, and thought about Alicia's long oval face.

She started thinking about Alicia's boyfriend, Anto. It was incredible to have a boyfriend as old

as twenty. She thought about what he was like, and imagined that he would be really handsome. Then she remembered her own boyfriend, Ray. She hadn't seen Ray for a couple of weeks because he lived in South London, where Corinne had lived before. Now they had moved it was difficult to meet very often. Some weekends they met up and went to the cinema, or to McDonald's, or just went for a walk around the shops. Ray was really nice. She had known him for a long time – they had lived near each other and grown up together. Ray was like Corinne – they were both a bit shy, they both read a lot of books and didn't have many other friends. When they were at elementary school, some of the other children used to laugh at them. "Ray loves Corinne!" they shouted. "And Corinne loves Ray!" Corinne remembered feeling really embarrassed. They were together all the time, and eventually they became boyfriend and girlfriend just because it seemed natural. She took out her diary again, and started to write.

To be honest, I don't know if I love Ray or not. I mean, he's a really good friend, and we're really similar to each other and we get on really well, but I don't know if that's really love. I like to be with him, but...I don't know...it doesn't feel like love!

She stopped writing and went to bed feeling unhappy.

The next day at lunch Alicia asked Corinne to come over and join her friends. They were all sitting around a table together, eating the sandwiches they brought for their lunch every day.

"This is Corinne," said Alicia to all the other girls. "She's not weird. She just reads a lot of books!" Everybody laughed really loud. Corinne felt embarrassed and went red. She didn't know if they were laughing at her or not.

"Anyway, Corinne's my mate!" said Alicia. Corinne sat down at the table and ate her sandwich. She didn't talk to anybody, but just listened to the other girls. They all talked about clothes, their boyfriends, and what they would do if they had lots of money.

"What would you do if you had loads of money?" one of the girls asked Corinne.

"I don't know really," she replied. "I'd probably just travel loads. I'd love to go to Africa."

"Africa!" shouted the girl. "Why do you want to go

there? You should go to Miami or Los Angeles, to America. That's the best place to go!"

"I think I'd prefer Africa," said Corinne. She didn't speak any more after that. Nobody asked her any more questions. They didn't even ask her if she had any good goss.

Alicia was waiting for Corinne when school finished.

"Hi!" she said, and smiled. "Listen, Anto's coming to pick me up in his car soon. Why don't we go for a ride together?"

Corinne was really excited, but she also felt a bit nervous.

"I don't know. I've got loads of homework to do."

"Come on! We'll give you a lift home. You can meet Anto!"

At that moment, a big red BMW stopped next to them.

"Hello girls!" said the man driving. It was Anto.

Two minutes later they were in the car, driving along the road where Corinne usually walked or took the bus. Alicia was talking to Corinne.

"You know, I really admire you," she said.

"Why?" asked Corinne, surprised.

"You remember today when the other girls were saying what they would do if they had loads of money?"

"Yes?"

"Well, I thought they were all saying really stupid things. I really admired you for saying something different. It's really good if you're individual, if you can say what you really think and not let yourself be influenced by other people."

Anto turned round.

"Yeah, that's absolutely right!" he said. "I like a girl who can say what she thinks". Then he smiled at Corinne. Corinne turned red. She didn't know what to say. Anto really was as handsome as she had imagined. He had short black hair, dark skin and a really big smile. Corinne felt his big dark eyes watching her. A few minutes later, they arrived at Corinne's house.

"See you around!" shouted Anto as he and Alicia drove away.

That night, Corinne wrote all about Anto in her diary. When her boyfriend Ray phoned, she was surprised, and felt a bit guilty. They arranged to meet up on Saturday anyway.

Alicia didn't go to school for a few days after that. Corinne began to think that perhaps Alicia was angry with her for some reason, but then she

remembered that Alicia often disappeared for a few days. She wasn't really a very good student.

Three or four days later, something incredible happened. Corinne was coming out of school when she saw the big red BMW parked outside. And there was Anto – looking at her!

"Hi!" he said. "I thought we could go for a ride!" Corinne was really shocked. As usual, she felt embarrassed and didn't know what to say.

"But where's Alicia?" she asked eventually.

"Oh, well, I guess she's not feeling too well at the moment. I haven't seen her for a few days to be honest."

"Listen, Anto. I don't think I can come out with you today. I've got loads of homework to do."

Anto laughed. "But you've always got loads of homework to do!"

Well, why not? She thought, and got into Anto's car.

They drove away really quickly, and Anto turned up the car stereo really loud. Corinne was worried that someone would see them together. What would she say to Alicia?

They started talking. Anto asked what she did in her free time.

"Not much really. I read a bit, sometimes I see my boyfriend, but not often because he still lives in South London. Often I just go for a walk in the park on my own."

Anto didn't seem to be interested, and started talking about himself. He started talking about his plans for the future. He wanted to start his own business. It was the only way to get really rich, he said.

"If you always work for somebody else, you'll never get rich. You have to make your own money."

"Why do you want to be rich?" asked Corinne. Anto just laughed.

"Everybody wants to be rich, don't they? It's obvious!"

Corinne didn't know what to think. Sure, it would be great to be rich. She could do loads of things, and help all her family and her friends. But some people just wanted to be rich to get a bigger car. Corinne didn't really see the sense in that. Anto just laughed when she told him.

"Alicia's right," he said, "You are a bit different! Don't worry, I like you anyway."

When they arrived at Corinne's house, Anto kissed her on her cheek. Corinne ran out of the car without saying anything. That night, Corinne wrote pages and pages in her diary. She wrote

down all her thoughts and feelings, all her hopes and worries.

Alicia was back at school the next day. Corinne went red as soon as she saw her. What should she say? Alicia smiled at Corinne.

"Hi!" she said. "Got any goss?"

Oh my God, thought Corinne. I certainly have got an incredible piece of goss, but I can't say anything to Alicia!

Finally, it was Saturday. Corinne felt relaxed – she didn't have to meet anybody – she could forget about everything for a while. She decided to go for a walk on her own and went down to the local park. She had discovered this place soon after moving up to North London, and it had become one of her favourite places. She went to the children's playground, sat on one of the swings, put her head in her hands and tried to think. She heard somebody coming, but she didn't look up because she didn't want to speak to anybody. Then she heard a voice.

"Hello beautiful! I thought I would find you here." Oh no! It was Anto!

"What are you doing here?" she asked in surprise.

"I thought I'd come and look for you," he replied.

"You told me you sometimes come here for a walk."

"Anto, listen. I really like you, but what will I say to Alicia if she sees us together? I think I should go". She started walking out of the park. Anto carried on walking beside her anyway. He carried on talking about himself, as usual. Corinne wanted to go home, but when they got to the street, there was another problem. A big one. Coming along the street towards them was a group of girls. One of the girls was tall and beautiful and wearing a red Tommy Hilfiger jacket. Yes, without doubt, it was Alicia.

Alicia was looking at Corinne and Anto with surprise. Corinne felt panicky. She didn't know if she should run away, or stay where she was. What was she going to say to Alicia now? Anto remained completely calm. He didn't seem to be surprised or worried at all.

"Hello beautiful!" he said to Alicia, with his usual smile. "I was waiting for you. I knew you were coming this way!" Then he kissed Alicia.

Alicia seemed to be happy.

"While I was waiting for you, I met your friend Corinne," carried on Anto. "What a coincidence, eh?"

"Yeah, that really is a coincidence," said Alicia, and looked at Corinne.

They all decided to go for something to eat together, but then Corinne had her third big surprise of the day. They were walking along the street near her house, when she saw a familiar face walking towards them. Oh no! It was Ray! She had completely forgotten about their date. "Hi!" said Ray, looking a bit surprised. "Who are all these people?"

Corinne introduced Alicia and Anto. "These are my new friends," she said.

"Nice to meet you," said Ray. Corinne thought she was going to die. The surprising thing was that none of the others seemed to be worried, or even surprised.

"Why don't we go and get a burger?" said somebody, and all the others agreed.

At the burger place, Anto sat down next to Corinne and Ray sat down next to Alicia. They spent nearly all the afternoon there, just sitting, drinking coke and talking. The surprising thing was that Alicia and Ray seemed to be getting on very well together.

"Hope to see you again soon!" said Ray to Alicia when it was finally time to go home.

"I bet you do!" thought Corinne to herself, but she didn't say anything. She was surprised to find herself feeling a little bit jealous.

"You didn't tell me you had a boyfriend!" said Alicia to Corinne on Monday morning. "I bet there are lots of things that you haven't told me!" Alicia was really curious. Too curious.

During the lesson, Alicia very carefully and quietly put her hand into Corinne's bag. She knew what she was looking for. Corinne had told her that she always wrote a diary, and that she carried her diary in her bag with her every day. Eventually, she found a small black book – this was it! Corinne's diary!

During the break she took the diary into the bathroom, locked herself in the toilet, sat down and started to read.

Today I met Alicia's boyfriend Anto. He's really handsome – tall with dark hair and dark eyes. He smiled at me. He's got a really nice smile...

Alicia was surprised to find so much about Anto. She carried on reading.

...when I came out of school today, Anto was waiting for me in his car. I couldn't believe it! He took me for a ride. We talked for ages...

Alicia was furious. She felt like shouting or crying. She went out of the bathroom and looked for Corinne. Corinne was sitting in the classroom on her own, reading a book. Alicia grabbed the book and threw it on the floor. She started shouting at Corinne:

"How could you! I thought you were my friend!"

"Oh my God!" shouted Corinne. "Alicia! Why did you read my diary? How much did you read? Oh no!"

"I read enough to find out that you've been going out with my boyfriend!" replied Alicia.

"Yes, but..."

"But what? It's true, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is true, but it's not all the truth. You have to read more!" Corinne picked up the diary and found the page Alicia had read. She carried on reading where Alicia had stopped.

We talked for ages...but I don't think I like him really. He's really handsome, sure, but we're too different.

"And so?" said Alicia. "What do we do now?"

"That's a good question," said Corinne. "What do we do now?"

What should Alicia and Corinne do now? Here are three possible endings:

1. Alicia and Corinne swap boyfriends.
2. Corinne decides to stay with Ray, understanding her true nature, and rejecting Alicia and Anto's values.
3. The girls make up, get rid of their boyfriends, and realise that true friendship is much more important.