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Home

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»You're going to like it here, you really will.« I looked at the creep with the beard who was talking to me.

»Honestly, even if you don't believe me now, it's going to be a whole new chance for you to start all over. I realise it's a big change and it'll

take some getting used to, but we're going to take really good care of you and you'll soon feel at home in no time.« The guy was wearing green dungarees and small, round glasses. He kept on talking, but I'd already stopped listening...

The girl and her friends had all been sent to various different children's homes before ending up in a very progressive institution where they are allowed to do virtually anything they like. However, after the group go way too far, on several occasions, the people in charge decide that "enough's enough" and set them an ultimatum – the youngsters have just one week to come up with a plan for what they intend do with the rest of their lives.

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»We've got to do it, we promised them we would«, said Alex.

»So?« I said, as I got to my feet, »that's your problem. I didn't promise anything. And if you want to talk to them, go ahead, but I'm sure as hell not going to. It gives me the creeps just thinking about that lukewarm goat's milk.«

»We've all got a week to work out what it is that we want to get out of being here, and we've all got to get on and do something. You know, to do with work or school or something like that«, Alex explained.

»Yeah, but what kind of weirdoes are they anyway? They even asked me what I'm looking to get out being here, at this place.«

»I think they've been getting hassle from the guys at the top«, said Danny.

»Whaddaya mean the guys at the top?«

»Well, it's like there are these boss-type guys who check up on what they do here. I dunno what you call them, but if the bosses get too many complaints then the staff here get hassle.« This seemed pretty unlikely to me.

»Anyway, if we don't come up with something, we'll be sent packing!«

»Yeah, but, where to?« asked Marcel and Frank.

»I dunno«, said Danny.

»But they said when we arrived that no one would get kicked out, ever«, I reminded them.

»Looks like we've made them change their minds«, said Tommy.

»Oh, who cares anyway? One more home ain't gonna make a whole load of difference«, said Frank.

»Well, I'm getting really fed up of changing homes all the time«, said Danny.

»Okay, so, we'll have to split up then«, I said with a shrug.

»Oh, come on. That's a load of crap«, said Andreas, »Why don't you all just try and come up with something for them, it can't be that hard?«

»Well, no school's gonna take me, not now, and Alex's on probation, so he won't get anything. I s'pose Danny could try and get work in a hairdresser's and Tommy in a shop, but who knows if that would make them happy. And as for you two«, I said to Frank and Marcel, »you can't even read and write, can you?« They shook their heads.»Nah, not really.«

»Yeah, but you can learn to read and write and Tommy could become a mechanic«, said Andreas.  
»But everyone wants to be a mechanic, so the garages are hardly gonna take good ole Tommy here straight from the country's ideal children's home, are they? And reading and writing - it takes years to learn how to do that.« I looked round at them all, I knew it sounded a bit bitchy, because it made Marcel and Frank look like they were complete morons.  
»And, anyway, I'm still on probation whatever I do«, Alex said.  
»Okay, okay, so Tommy and Danny stay here, and we, well we may as well get our stuff together«, said Frank.  
»Hey, I don't wanna be stuck here alone«, said Danny.  
»Well, you know, you don't really have any choice«, I said. »Anyway, you won't be on your own. There's bound to be some new kids here soon, like maybe even some real cool lipgloss'd babes or something, who knows.«  
»Right, well, in that case, I reckon I'll stick out here too«, said Frank.  
»Well, we could see if we can come up with anything else, you know, have a bit more of a think«, suggested Alex.  
So we stayed put, sitting there together. I had this funny feeling, as if something really awful was going to happen and there was nothing we could do to stop it.

Sometimes I feel like I'm a spectator at a circus: like I'm watching my life, from where the audience are, and I keep seeing these terrible things about to happen, but I can't do anything to stop them. The only difference is that the show I'm watching is my own life and it doesn't come to an end.

The girl has met Bastian, whose parents had shunted him off to an expensive boarding school because they couldn't cope with him any more. At this point the whole group, including Bastian, have run away from the home and are making their way to Spain.

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He took my hand in his: »I've got you a present.«

»I hope you're not expecting me to pretend that I like it«, I said. Sometimes I just hate myself, the way I come out with such stupid things.

Luckily Basti just ignored what I'd said and placed a small parcel in my hand. I tore open the wrapping paper and opened a small box. It was a ring. »Look, I've had it engraved specially«, he said proudly.

I picked up the ring and turned it round: With love, Basti, it said. I was embarrassed. He took hold of my hand again and played with my fingers. »I really do love you«, he said and then he kissed me.

»Hm«. I'd forgotten what you're supposed to say in situations like this. If only I'd paid more attention to the advice in all those teen mags ... I'm sure Danny would have thought of something.

»When this is all over«, he was still playing with my fingers and gazing at me intently – I hoped I wasn't squinting –, »the two of us will go somewhere better, I'll buy us a house and then we can be happy.«

I had to think of my assignment for that week. »But I don't wanna go anywhere without my mates.«

»No problem, the house will be big enough for us all.« This was beginning to sound quite interesting.

»Hey, you lovebirds, are you coming into the kitchen, we're all going to cook something together.« Danny was leaning against the door, as nosy as ever.

»We'll be in a sec«, said Basti.

Danny stayed where she was, leaning against the door, gazing at us with interest.

»Hey, we told you to leave us alone, are you deaf or what?« I yelled at her.



»Okay, okay I'm going«. She went off in a huff.

»I got you a leather strap to go with it too, so you can wear it round your neck.«

Isn't it cows that have a ring on their ears, with the name of their owner on it? I'm not a cow, I'm a girl, well maybe a girl-cow.

»Can I put it round your neck?«

»Feel free.«

He threaded the leather strap through the ring, put it round my neck and tied it. »Thanks«, I said awkwardly. He smiled at me. He had a really sweet dimple. We went into the kitchen, hand in hand.

»Oh, don't tell me the tomboy has gone and fallen in lurve!«

What was Lars doing in the kitchen, I thought he was meant to be knackered. I stuck my tongue out at him.

»Oh, look at that, he's given her a ring!« Danny pounced on the ring. »Oh, and look what it says on the ring:

»With love, Basti«. Now isn't that romantic, no boy has ever done that for me. Oh, that is so sweet!«

Then she planted a kiss on my cheek, I said, yes; sometimes she could be so embarrassing.

»If you don't shut your big mouth right now«, Tommy threatened, »I'll tattoo something on your forehead, and I'll bet no boy ever did that to you either.«

The fugitives have been caught in Spain, and Bastian's parents collected him from the police station. Later the girl finds out that Bastian has committed suicide.

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I lay down on the bed and looked at my ring. Basti was dead and it was my fault. Should I have told him that I loved him after all? I could see it before my eyes now, the scene when he was arguing with his father. The way he had looked in that Spanish police station, so lost and lonely. It would haunt me for the rest of my life. Basti was a dreamer, he had had a dream in a world where dreams were out of place.

In our world, the world of girls and boys from children's homes, there was no room for dreams, there was no time for dreaming. We lived like battery-powered dolls. As long as there was life left in the battery, we kept ticking over, but when the battery was out of juice, we were dead too.

I don't know what it was like in Basti's world, but I don't think they had any use for dreamers there either. Maybe he wouldn't have killed himself if he had never met us, we were much too real for him.

Dreamers believe in justice, at least Basti did. When he met us, his dream world came apart. I think he paid for it with his life.

I couldn't cope with it all any more, now I had someone else's life on my conscience as well as everything else.

...

Meanwhile the girl has found temporary accommodation with a lawyer who is representing her in court, where she is facing charges for assault causing bodily harm. Almost all of her friends have either gone back to members of their families or are with foster parents, but they come to visit her.

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The driver took us all the way to my lawyer's house. The lawyer was already waiting for us at the door. »Are you going to get into loads of trouble?« the driver asked us.



»You bet«, I replied, »trouble has a habit of finding us wherever we go and we haven't had any for at least two hours.«

Danny thanked him and we went into the house, with my lawyer following closely behind us. We sat down in the living room. It was a lot easier to take a bollocking sitting down.

»Where have you been?« His voice sounded threatening.

»There's no need to get worked up «, said Danny, »we can explain everything.«

»No need to get worked up!« he said, already sounding pretty worked up. »Listen, are you out of your tiny mind! Andreas' uncle and Fässi have been making my life hell for hours on end. If you hadn't turned up here in the next half hour they would have called the police, and I hardly need to tell you «, he said with a sidelong glance at me, »what that would mean for you.«

He was interrupted by the phone ringing.

»That was Fässi«, my lawyer said when he came back. He placed an icepack on my swollen eye. »I told him you'd missed the last train and had to walk back, and that it just didn't occur to you that we might be worried about you. He's agreed to let you stay here tonight. He'll call your uncle, Andreas, and let him know what's going on.«

Andreas thanked him and so did Tommy, who was relieved not to have to face his mother in his present state. »Okay, I lied for you, but now I want to know the truth, so, come on, spit it out!« Fortunately he didn't sound angry any longer. He'd sat down in the armchair with a glass of whiskey in one hand and a pipe in the other. Danny told him the whole story, which was a good idea, I think. Grown-ups nearly always believe her, besides which I don't like having to talk about fights where I've come out the loser.

»It really wasn't our fault«, Andreas protested. You couldn't help but believe such earnest protestations of innocence.

»In that case, why didn't you call anyone?« my lawyer asked us, while I sheepishly sipped my beer.

»Fässi would have been sure to throw a fit and my uncle had lent someone his car.«

»And why didn't you call me?« my lawyer asked me.

»I suppose it didn't occur to me.«

»Which is one of the main problems with you. Your life is like a tornado, everything is always happening in a whirl around you«, he said fretfully.

...

The lawyer's petition to become the girl's foster parent is dismissed. Yet another legal guardian is appointed, who puts her in yet another home.

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A guy came up to me, and offered me his hand, which I ignored.

»Do take a seat. I'm sure you must be interested in some of the things that go on here.«

If he only knew what definitely didn't interest me! I sat down in an armchair and lit a cigarette.

»You're going to like it here, you really will.« I looked at the guy who was talking to me.

»Honestly, even if you don't believe me now, it's going to be a whole new chance for you to start all over. I realise it's a big change and it'll take some getting used to, but we're going to take really good care of you and you'll soon feel at home.«

I studied the toes of my shoes, took a last drag on my cigarette and stubbed it out on the table.

I was fifteen years old and had seen a hell of a lot and all this seemed somehow familiar.