

PRISM KID

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20/10/2021

We're going to do it tomorrow. I really hope so anyway. We're going to clean out the pipe. Or clog the pipe up. I can't remember which one we decided would happen. I can't remember if we even decided.

Anyway, I'm going to write everything down tonight so I can explain what I mean about the pipe. If there's time after, I'll write down what happens tomorrow. Like, after it's happened.

There should be time. We made sure there would be when we made the plan.

The best place to start is probably when I first met Alex, at primary school.

The primary school I went to was called Church Hill Primary School, and it was fine. It was nice, even. The same way I reckon most people would describe their primary school. When you're that young things are either nice or they're LIKE, really awful. Same as how, when you're that young, you're either happy or you're throwing a tantrum.

Nearly everyone in Church Hill had started there in Year 1, and then there'd be like, three or four new kids every year. Every time a new kid started they'd come in at the end of morning assembly, after Mr. Morgan finished telling us a story. He'd finish like any normal assembly, and then say that a new kid was starting, then he'd go out into the corridor and come back in with the new kid. He'd introduce them and we'd all sort of half sing, half say, "Hello, Whatever Their Name Is, welcome to Church Hill Primary."

Then, one assembly, Mr. Morgan said that there was someone starting at Church Hill but they wouldn't be coming in to meet us. We'd be going out to meet them. Then he went and opened the fire doors and held them open. All the Year 1s got up first, because they were at the front, and followed their teacher out. Then the Year 2s, since they were next back from the front, went out. Then the Year 3s, the Year 4s, and the Year 5s.

And then it was our turn. We all got up and followed Miss Bonoheim out. It was almost summer then. One of those days when the sky looks like a painting of it, with a few chalky clouds. There hadn't been any rain for ages, but there was a rainbow coming from somewhere round the corner. It was low down though, not in the sky. It looked like it was coming out of a projector. We heard all the Year 5s half-sing half-say "Hello, Alex. Welcome to Church Hill Primary."

When we went round the corner I saw where the rainbow was coming from. Everyone was standing in a horseshoe shape around the front of a massive glass prism. It was about the size of a double decker bus and almost too bright and too shiny to look at for long.

We all stood at the back of the crowd. Mr. Morgan was standing in front of the prism, but the glare coming from behind him was so bright that I had to look at the ground in front of him instead of actually at him. He said, "Year six, this is Alex. Please say hello to our new student."

We all half-said half-sang, all together, "Hello, Alex. Welcome to Church Hill Primary."

The prism said, "Hi. Thankyou."

After that, things weren't much different to when any [other] new kid [had] started. People fell out and made up like always. There'd be giggling and whispers about someone fancying someone else like always. There'd be people going out with each other but not really, just holding hands and kissing behind coats in the cloakroom.

There'd always be a different group of friends hanging round with Alex at break and at lunch, and everyone would say hello before school started and goodbye after it had finished. And because Alex started in Year 6, we were in the same class together, and Miss Bonoheim let us have all our classes outside on the playground or on the field. She had a portable blackboard that she'd set up, and we'd all sit in a horseshoe shape around her, with Alex in the middle like the keystone in a bridge.

There were only a few months between Alex arriving and our SATS, and then the summer holiday. On the last day of school, instead of classes we had a big party. There was cake and pop and a disco in the main hall and we could all bring in a toy. Loads of kids brought in their favourite doll or teddy bear or action figure. Some kids brought in board games and that. Everyone had a go with everyone's stuff, whether it was four of us playing a board game together, or playing with their action figures together or whatever. Alex's toy was probably the most popular. It was this voice controlled thing where you had to guide a person through a maze by saying out loud where they had to go, and avoiding traps and stuff.

And then it was the summer holidays.

And then, after the summer holidays, I started high school.

Even before I got there, the first day at Migley High was totally different from going to primary school. I had to wear a tie, and smart shoes that rubbed my little toe on both feet. I had to get on a bus that smelt like old people and cigarettes, and I had to pay the fare and sit down with kids from my new school and other schools and adults. Ash and Kim were already on the bus and I sat with them til we got there.

Migley High School is a massive, dark building. On one side the ground is flat concrete, the other side is a car park full of cars, and there's a field at the back with goalposts and rugby posts. There's a tall green fence going all the way round and then it's all woods behind that except for the road at the front, where

we got off the bus with everyone else from Migley High.

We went through the gates and all the way across the playground, round to the back of the school, where the fire doors to the theatre were and where that year's Year 7 had been told to go.

We all stood around in groups of threes and fours, while new groups arrived or a person arrived on their own and joined a group. Every now and then some older kids would come round the corner, have a look, and leave. Then both pairs of fire doors opened. A teacher in a suit came out of one and a teacher in like, a woman's version of a suit, came out the other.

They stood by the doors and we all filed past them and in to the theatre. Inside it's a huge hall with a really high ceiling, and there's a stage with the heavy red curtains and everything. There were rows and rows of fold-up chairs, and we all sat down here and there until there were no seats left and some people had to stand at the back. There was the weird sound of loads of people talking quietly in a big place, like "sha sha sha sha sha murr murr murr".

Then the two teachers shut the fire doors and told us to all be quiet and face the front. A man walked onto the stage, with a gown over his suit. He told us that his name was Doctor Hamlyn and that he was the headmaster of Migley High School, our new headmaster. He gave a big speech and told us all the rules and what was expecting of us and that, then he introduced all the form tutors as they walked onto the stage.

One by one all the form tutors went and stood next to Dr. Hamlyn and read out a list of names. Everyone whose name was called had to get up, fold up their chair, put it in the stack against the wall, and line up at the theatre's main door. Then the teacher who'd read out the names would join them and lead them out.

Ash and Kim were in the second form called. I sat there while the room got emptier and emptier until it was just me and like, thirty other kids each sitting on a chair on their own, and just one teacher on the stage with the headmaster.

She had a list, and she read out the name of every one of us that was left. Then, after we'd got up and put our chair away, she came over to where we were lined up at the door and we followed her out.

She took us on a tour of the school. We walked for ages, it was huge. And it was dark as well, all the walls were made out of stone or wood. There weren't any decorations or toys and all the chairs and desks were all grey. Everyone we passed on the way was really tall. The pupils were tall and then the teachers were even taller. We had to look up at everything.

It all made Church Hill feel like one of those toys for toddlers, like the little plastic oven with the plastic food compared to a real oven cooking real food. Like we'd been playing with it, pretending to go to school.

Every subject, like maths and geography, had its own floor or corridor, with its own classrooms. We walked down the geography corridor and up the stairs to the maths department. The stairs were huge.

And not just because there was more of them, but the actual steps were bigger than I was used to so by the time we got to the top my thighs were aching.

We went to the science block and saw classes going on through the windows. It looked more like scientists at work than a lesson. Everyone had goggles and a white coat on and were mixing chemicals in test tubes and holding them over big tall flames.

It was the same for the technology block. It just looked like a workshop. Everyone had goggles and an apron on and were sawing and drilling and hammering.

The whole time we were following Miss Foster around, everyone was with someone they'd been to primary school with and they were whispering and pointing things out to each other. I followed at the back. I was scared that I might get lost and I wanted to go to the front and hold Miss Foster's hand.

Eventually we ended up on the ground floor, in the English department, which is where our form room was. We all gathered round Miss Foster and she told us that there was one student who hadn't been in assembly and hadn't been able to join us on the tour, so we were going to go into our form room one by one to meet them and then pick a desk to sit at.

She read from the list she'd read from in the assembly, and whoever's name it was would go in and then a minute later she'd read out the next name. Except that she left out my name, so eventually it was just me and her in the corridor. She opened the door and told everyone to sit down at a desk, and then held the door open for me.

Every desk had been taken except for the one at the back that didn't have a chair. It was next to an open window, that Alex was at, outside looking in. Miss Foster went and got a chair from another classroom.

She gave it to me at the doorway so I dragged it to the desk and sat down and me and Alex said hi to each other.

Miss Foster went round the classroom giving everyone their school planner, like a diary for our classes and homework. Not the "Dear Diary" type of diary, the type that's like a calendar. She put two on my desk and told me that since I was sitting where I was, I'd be responsible for filling in Alex's planner too.

She went to her desk and was like, "English," then read out a load of names. "Mr. Evans, E6." Then she'd read out some more names and be like, "Mrs. Kite, E3."

I wasn't paying attention to what classes everyone else was in, but it was different for every subject. Like, if you were with three people in English you'd be with three different people in maths and three different people in geography and so on. Except that I was sharing every class with Alex. And every class that me and Alex had that would've been in an upstairs classroom would be in a different subject's room. Like, we would have to go to the geography block for maths or whatever.

When the bell went for the first class, we all went out into the corridor and like, stayed together as a group. I wanted to get there before everyone else, or at least before the last person, but none of us could remember how to get to the history block. So we all, like, followed the three people that had been paying the most attention.

All the other forms got there the same way that we did. Some were there when we arrived and some came after.

Our teacher was waiting for us, and he'd already assigned our desks. He told us that we were lucky we had a form tutor who let us pick our own desks. My desk was at the back, next to the open window that Alex was outside of, looking in.

The teacher went through all the rules and what we were going to be learning and all that. Just like the headmaster did in the assembly, and just like Miss Foster had done in form. Everyone had to write stuff down in their planners and their new exercise books. Except I had to do it twice because I had to do it for Alex as well. And then we started the lesson properly, like we'd been doing it all our lives. And I had to do twice of whatever it was. Copy out the long division equations twice. Colour in two maps of Europe. Underline the nouns, and then underline them all again.

It was the same in every single class except PE. Alex didn't have to do PE.

Ash was in one lesson with me and Kim was in another, but it didn't mean anything. It wasn't like at Church Hill where we could sort of, hang out in class. We were all sitting on our own, looking either forward or down. It was like we were in cubicles. When the teacher wasn't talking, all you could hear in class was the scratchy sound of people writing, someone clearing their throat now and then, and sometimes the pipes clanging in the walls.

I got to see them at break, when everyone emptied out of the school and filled up the playground that surrounded it. No-one played anything, though, except the people that played football on the field. It was just this big group made of little groups, with sort of pathways between. Everyone was so tall it was like being in corridors made of people. Then the bell for the next class would go and it was like everyone got sucked back inside.

At lunch all us Year 7s got to go to the canteen first. It looked like a canteen from a prison or the army. There was a row of counters where you slid your tray along and told the dinnerladies behind what you wanted from under the glass. Then you went and sat at one of the long metal picnic tables that had the benches attached. After we'd eaten we could leave, and if we were still there when the first bell went we had to leave. That's when the Year 8s came in and we all went to stand in the playground like at break.

Nearly anywhere we went, we could see the big glass prism, or at least the top or a corner of it, on its own somewhere away from everyone.

The next day it already felt like I'd been doing this my whole life. Church Hill was like a dream I'd had. Waiting at the bus stop wasn't scary or exciting like I thought it was going to be. Then I'd get on and sit with Ash and Kim and eventually we'd get off at Migley's gates and go in. To form. Then to classes. Break. Stand around in the crowd. Back to classes. Lunch. Stand around in the crowd. Back to classes. Final bell. End of school.

It was the same for everyone, except I was the only one in any class sitting by an open window with a big glass prism looking in, and writing everything twice.

So I don't know how long it was before I started noticing little prisms drawn on or scratched into stuff, like the tables at lunch and the back of seats on the bus and toilet cubicle walls. But it was just after I'd noticed a couple of them that we were in German, and I was writing the German names for animals under pictures of them on two worksheets, and Alex whispered, "Hey, do you want to hang out at lunch?"

I said that I couldn't, because I had to see the head of year about something, and then Herr Schmidt hissed at us and put his finger on his lips and hissed again.

At the start of the lesson after lunch, while I was going through my pencil case and everyone else was chatting because the teacher hadn't arrived yet, Alex went, "How did it go with the head of year?"

I was like, "Fine, thanks."

Alex went, "Max reckons you were in the canteen at lunch."

I looked over at Max, who was looking over at us until I looked and then they looked away and started doodling or something. I was like, "No. I was in the head of year's office."

Alex went, "Yeh. Hey, what's the head of year's name again?"

I had it written in my planner and I had my planner on the desk, but Alex was right there, obviously, so I could hardly open it up to look. I fake laughed and went, "You know what, I can't even remember."

Alex laughed too and went, "Alright then."

Then the teacher arrived and everyone shut up. I spent the whole lesson staring at the back of Max's head and pressing down so hard with my pencil that the point kept breaking off.

When the bell went I left without saying goodbye to Alex.

The next day, on the bus, I said to Ash and Kim that Alex knew I'd lied about where I was at lunch.

Ash was like, "So what?"

Kim was like, "How do you know?"

I told them about how Alex had fake laughed.

Ash went, "There's better things to worry about."

Then we talked about other stuff until we got to school, like the things we'd be better off worrying about.

Alex wasn't in form that morning. After Miss Foster had taken register, she told everyone to talk amongst themselves and then came over to me. She told me to go into the corridor and everyone's talking changed to muttering and they all turned around to watch me leave.

Miss Foster came into the corridor with me and when the door had shut she told me that since me and Alex were in all the same classes together, we should be together at lunch too.

I wanted to ask her why, but I felt like I was being held round the neck by my tie and pressed down on by the weight of the building. I felt like if I said something, my voice would be a tiny squeak. So I just looked at the floor.

Miss Foster told me to look at her when she was talking to me, and then told me, "It's part of your responsibility to Alex, to be together at lunch. And at break times too."

I just said, "Yes, Miss."

She told me that if I ever rolled my eyes at her again, I'd find myself in detention.

In class I tried to ignore Alex as much as possible. Like, I never looked over to the open window, I just kept my head down and kept both our books close to me.

I spent the whole of break in a toilet cubicle. There was a little prism carved in the back of the door, and one that was a bit bigger drawn just above the toilet roll holder. Then when the bell went, I went to PE.

We all had to get changed into our PE kits and boots while Coach watched, and then we went outside, into the fresh air and sunshine, and onto the field. Alex was at the sideline. The sunshine on the grass was blinding to look at and I could like, feel the glare on me when we got onto the pitch.

Coach got us all to line up, then picked two of us to be captains and to pick their team out of the rest of us. I wasn't picked last but it was close. Most of the team was bigger than me so I spent most of the game running up and down the wing, past Alex every time, with the glare in one side of my vision.

Someone near me caught the ball. I was running close behind and Mo on the other team was running right for us so I yelled, "I'm open."

I caught the pass and kept running. Mo was running at me like a bull. People around me were yelling, "I'm open, I'm open."

I kept hold of the ball and tensed up ready to be tackled. Mo lunged down and dived into my legs and swept them from under me so that I felt like I'd been picked up and thrown. I stayed on the ground where I'd landed, held my knee and rolled around. Coach blew a whistle, came over and was like, "What is it?"

I gritted my teeth and moaned and groaned and went, "My knee."

A couple of my team came over and a couple of people from the other team came over. Coach hoisted

me up by the armpits and went, "There's nothing wrong with you."

The people that had come over started laughing and shaking their heads. Then Coach blew the whistle and told us to stop messing about and get on with the game.

I pretended to hobble until Coach told me off for it.

I should have rolled my eyes when Miss Foster had told me not to, but I hadn't thought quick enough and being inside the school would have stopped me from being able to anyway. Running up and down the wing had given me time to think, and being outside gave me a bit of confidence. So when we'd finished and we were all walking back to the changing rooms, I muttered to myself, "Fucking nigger."

I looked around but no-one had heard. So I went right up behind coach. I got the same sort of tenseness I'd got waiting for Mo to tackle me and I was going to walk away, but I looked back at Alex, blinded myself on the sunlight glaring off the glass, caught back up to Coach and said, "Fucking nigger."

Coach stopped and span round. There was a second where nothing happened. Everyone kept walking past us. Mo and Sam slowed down and stared, until Coach yelled at them to get back to the changing room, took a breath, and yelled me at like, "Listen here, I heard what you said. Get changed, and go straight to your form room. Don't even go near the canteen. Tell your form tutor why I sent you."

When I got to my form room, Miss Foster apparently knew I was coming because there was a pile of maths worksheets on my desk. Miss Foster told me I had to spend the whole lunch hour doing it and then was like, "And what do you have to say for yourself?"

I went, "I was just telling someone what I'd heard someone else say."

Miss Foster went, "Say what?"

I looked at the floor and was like, "Sex and racist swearing. They said flipping negro but, like, the bad way."

Miss Foster told me to look at her when she was talking to me and went, "We do not use language like that in this school. Even if you are repeating what someone else said, we say, 'The eff word' and 'the enn word'."

I nodded and was like, "Yes Miss."

It was all just copying down multiplication tables, but I was glad I only had to do it once for each and that Alex wasn't there blocking up the window. Miss Foster sat at her desk doing marking or whatever, until she got up and left after a while. I stopped while she was gone and I was alone. My wrist felt like it had been run over. Miss Foster came back and put a plate of food on my desk for me to eat while I carried on with the worksheets.

When lunch was over and my detention was finished Miss Foster told me that, because of what I'd done, I'd be in detention after school for a month. I asked her if I could have them at dinner instead and said to her that my mum's diabetic.



She was like, "I know that's not true."

And I went, "It's like diabetes."

She told me to stop lying and that it was not negotiable, and then a teacher I didn't recognise came in. He told me his name was Mr. Green and that he was the head of year seven, then he pushed my plate and worksheets and pencil case across the desk and sat where they'd been.

He started telling me how he knew it was difficult starting high school, going, "You might not think it, but all your teachers had to start high school once. Even Miss Foster and myself. We've all been as scared and confused as you are, once."

Then he stood up and carried on, like, ""High school is where one must learn responsibility. And responsibilities are often not chosen, but thrust upon you. How one deals with that is the mark of a person."

Miss Foster came over and told me how friendships are important in this world, and the most solid friendships are the ones a person makes at high school. She told me, "If you and Alex, or you and anyone else, form a friendship at Migley High, it will endure your entire life."

Then Mr. Green put his hands on my desk and leaned down into my face and went, "Or your detentions will."

I was like, "Yes, Sir."

He gave me a sheet of paper and while I read it he told me it was a contract that meant I agreed to hang out with Alex every lunch break. He told me to sign it and I did.

From then on I was supposed to jump the lunch queue, get my food, and go sit on the field with Alex to eat it. Instead I spent most of every lunchtime in the queue with Ash and Kim like normal, or hanging around with them waiting for the queue to get shorter. Then I'd get my food and have to leave them, take my plate outside and sit with Alex. I ate as slow as I could, trying not to finish before the bell went, so I wouldn't have to talk. Alex just sat there saying nothing, watching me eat.

Then the bell would go and I'd get up and be like, "See you in class."

And Alex would be like, "Yeh. See ya."

Then I'd take my plate back to the canteen and go to whatever class I had next, where Alex would be waiting at an open window at the back.

One day, after we'd got off the bus and gone through the gates and were just waiting around for the bell to go, Ash and Kim said they had something cool to show me. They both turned round and told me to look in their backpacks. I unzipped Ash's bag and as soon as I had the stink of KFC came out. Same when I unzipped Kims. Inside both their backpacks, on top of their books, there were KFC boxes with steam coming out of them.

I zipped their bags back up and they turned around. Ash was like, "We're gonna go round the back of the

Tech block at lunch. You wanna come with?"

I went, "What, and eat cold KFC?"

Ash said that cold KFC is better than anything from the canteen and I was like, "What are you talking about? Today's stew day."

Kim went, "Tuesday Stew Day."

Ash was like, "Everyone in this school's an idiot. They all only think the stew's good because of all the Tuesday Stew Day crap."

I went, "It is good. Kim likes it too."

We both looked at Kim and Kim shrugged. Ash went, "Whatever. You enjoy your stew. Me and Kim'll be eating KFC."

I was like, "Cold KFC."

And then Ash went, "Alright. We know, we know. Do you have it in your bag, Kim?"

Kim was like, "Yeh, in the front pocket. The velcro one."

Ash opened the pocket on Kim's bag and took out a little glass prism. Kim was already sniggering, and then Ash held up the prism and started talking to it in baby talk, going, "I can't have KFC wiv my fwiends cos I wuv you Awex. I wuv you soooo much."

I just walked off. I heard Ash behind me go, "Aw come on."

I stuck two fingers up over my shoulder at them.

At lunch I hung around on my own, watching the queue for the canteen. After a bit I decided to jump it like I was supposed to. Everyone I walked past stopped talking when I got close and looked at me, and then started talking again when they were behind me. I didn't make it halfway up the queue before I turned around and went round the back of the Tech block.

Ash and Kim were sitting against the wall, with their bags on their laps, eating out of the KFC boxes that were on top. I sat down with them and they put bits from all the boxes into one box for me.

We sat there having a laugh and eating the KFC. It was alright, even if it was cold. When we'd finished we threw all the boxes full of bones into a bin.

When I got to class after lunch, Alex wasn't there. I sat by the open window like always and got out my books and pencil case and that. The teacher took the register but left out Alex's name. Then she started walking around the class, putting worksheets on everyone's desk. While she was doing that, Mr. Green came in. He held the door open and pointed at me, then did that beckoning thing with his finger. I looked at the teacher. She nodded. Everyone turned around to watch me get up and go into the corridor with Mr. Green.

When the door had closed behind us he put his hands on his hips and looked at me. Then he went, "Come on."

He walked off down the corridor so fast I almost tripped over myself trying to keep up.

He led me all the way to the staffroom. He opened the door a little bit and told me to wait, then he opened the door a little bit more, just enough that he could fit through sideways. I could hear muttering and clinking coming from the other side, and then Mr. Green went in and shut the door behind him.

I stood there by the door, sort of panicking but not knowing what to panic about. I was like, hot and cold at the same time, and my stomach felt like it was rolling around inside me. My feet hurt from walking fast in my tight shoes and my neck was sweating, but I didn't dare lean against the wall or loosen my tie.

Then the door opened a bit, but no sound came out this time except for Mr. Green telling me to go in. So I did, and let the door shut behind me.

Inside the staff room smelt like washing-up liquid and microwaved rice. There were teachers sitting on sofas and armchairs, and a TV with the tennis on in the corner. And outside, at an open window, was Alex.

Mr. Green stood in front of me, so close that he was almost pinning me against the wall. I could smell his breath when he told me I had to apologise to Alex. Then he held my shoulder and walked me over to the window where Alex was.

I looked at the windowsil. I looked at the bubbles and blobs in the paint, and looked at where the paint was peeling off. Mr. Green was standing next to me. He went, "Well?"

I kept looking at the windowsil and was like, "I'm sorry Alex."

Alex went, "It's alright."

Then Mr. Green grabbed me by my shoulder again and walked me out of the staffroom. He told me that from now on I'd have to leave class five minutes before lunch every day, so I could get to the canteen before the rest of the school, get my dinner, and spend the whole of lunch with Alex. Then he told me to get to class.

Alex was already there when I arrived, at the open window at the back. We didn't say anything to each other when I sat down, or for the whole of the lesson. Then when the bell rang and I was putting my stuff away Alex went, "I didn't grass you up. In case you think I did."

I didn't say anything, I just kept packing my stuff away.

Alex went, "The head of year came looking for you. He asked me where you were and I said I didn't know."

I was like, "Mr. Green was looking for me?"

Alex went, "Yeh. The head of year, Mr. Green."

From then on I did what Mr. Green had told me to do. Five minutes before lunch, whatever teacher I

had would tell me it was time to go and tell everyone that that wasn't an excuse to start talking and to get on with their work.

I'd walk down the empty corridors that were like old tunnels. The walls were made of stone and the floor was all tiles, so everything squeaked and clicked louder than it was meant to, and echoed around. When I'd get to the canteen, the dinnerladies would be just finishing setting everything up and there'd be a plate of food waiting for me. I'd take it and walk as slow as I could to wherever Alex was that day.

Ash and Kim would come over at some point, but they didn't stay long and after they'd said hi to me and Alex they'd just stand around nervously, not talking or anything, and then they'd go. Everyone else stayed away. If we were on the field and a ball came rolling towards us, someone would sprint after it before it got close, or everyone playing the game would wait until it got to me and I'd lobbed it back and they'd yell, "Thanks Prism Kid."

There was no way I could eat slow enough that my food would last the whole lunch break so I ended up having to talk with Alex. At first we just talked about what we'd been doing in class. I'd get a textbook out and read questions and Alex would answer, like a quiz.

After a while though, like a couple of months, it got to where I'd take a textbook out and start asking questions but Alex would talk about something else, like someone doing something on the playground or some birds in a tree. This was around the same time that Ash and Kim stopped coming over, too. I'd still see them on the bus, and we still hung out before the first bell rang, but it was getting annoying how much they messed about with the little prism. Ash had started kissing it and sucking it, like in porn, while still doing baby talk to it. They'd both laugh their head off, but if I made a joke about either of them too then Kim would sulk and Ash would laugh it off and tell me to shut up.

When I went to the toilets to get away from them one time, I saw that all the prisms graffitied on the cubicle wall had a little stick figure next to them. And everywhere else in the school that there was a prism graffitied, and on the backs of the seats on the bus, there was a little stick figure there too.

When the weather changed and it started raining every day, Alex was covered by a big blue tarpaulin.

We couldn't go outside at lunch anymore but I still had to go to the canteen five minutes early. When I got there, Alex would be outside, at a fire door at the back that was propped open with one of the tables. When the rain was heavy it would be hitting the tarpaulin so hard that while the canteen was still empty it sounded like a rainforest in a storm.

I'd take the plate that had been made for me like always, then go sit on the bench where Alex was. The dinnerladies would make sure I sat right next to Alex, even when the rain was coming in onto the table.

I'd get a textbook out like I had before, and an exercise book, and do work or just doodle while Alex talked about people coming into the canteen or the dinnerladies, stuff like that. By the time the canteen was full of all of Year 7, there'd be a sort of space around us where nobody sat. People only sat on our table if the canteen was really full, and they'd sit at the other end and be facing away, using the table like a backrest so they could talk to their mates who would have been behind them if they were sitting like, properly.

Ash and Kim came over sometimes, if they got in early before it was full, but they never sat down and they were always looking behind themselves and around the rest of the canteen. They were messing

about with the prism every day by then, but they never got it out while Alex was around.

One morning, though, they didn't get it out. I thought they must have been feeling like, guilty when they invited me to go play CoD with them after school, in the computer room. Ash was part of a team and apparently they were really good, and Kim would sit and watch and like, offer moral support. Apparently they'd been doing it for a while, and that's why they were always left at the same time as I did. I thought they'd been waiting for me.

I was like, "Why?"

Ash went, "To celebrate your detentions being over."

It was better than leaving on my own, so I met them after the last bell and we went to the computer room.

We sat down and Ash loaded the game and logged into a server. The team all said hi through the computer speakers, and Ash said hi to the team and then took the headset off so me and Kim could both say hi into the mic. We could hear them all say hi through the telly and Ash put the headset back on and a game started. Then I sat there with Kim not saying anything, while Ash just said stuff like, "Take point, left flank."

When the battle had ended and the screen had changed to a scoreboard, one of Ash's team went, "Hey, Ash, is your mate with the prism there?"

Ash went, "Yeh, do you want to talk?"

Loads of voices said they did, so Ash gave me the headset. I put it on and was like, "Hi?"

They all said hi and then one of them went, "So, you're Prism Kid?"

I was like, "Yeh."

The same person went, "What's up with that?"

I was like, "What do you mean?"

Someone else went, "What's the prism's name?"

I said it was Alex and then they all started asking questions like, "What's Alex's last name?"

"Does Alex have a Twitter or Facebook?"

"Does Alex believe in God?"

I was just like, over and over again, "I don't know. I don't know."

They kept on asking questions until another battle started, and then they went, "See you later, Prism Kid."

I stood up, threw the headset at Ash, and walked out. I tried to slam the door but it had a thing at the top to stop it from slamming, so I ripped a Tuesday Stew Day poster off the wall. I was tearing it up while I walked down the corridor, and Kim came running up behind me, going, "Are you ok? What's up?"

I scrunched up the torn bits of paper into a ball and was going to throw it at Kim, but I threw it onto the floor. Then Ash came into the corridor, going, "What's up? Why are you having a tantrum?"

I went to Kim, "Where's that little prism? Give me it."

Kim got the prism out. Ash was walking towards us and was like, "Here, that's mine."

I snatched it off of Kim then held it in front of me like it was a knife while I walked backwards. I kept telling them to get lost but they kept coming towards me, so I turned around and legged it.

They chased me all the way to the woodwork shop. I was going to go in and get a hammer and smash the little prism to pieces, but there were loads of people in there with aprons and goggles on, making stuff. Ash and Kim came running round the corner so I went out the fire door and into the playground.

I ran over to the fence. There were bushes about as tall as me on the school side, and thick brambles and nettles on the other side. Ash and Kim had come out of the fire door and were walking towards me. I threw the prism as far as I could over the fence.

When they got close to me, Ash went, "Go get it."

I looked at Kim and Kim shrugged. I was like, "How?"

Ash went closer to the bushes and looked through the fence and was like, "Look, it's right there. Just climb over and get it."

I was like, "That's just a piece of glass."

Ash didn't listen, and neither of them would listen to me saying that there was no way I could climb over the fence. Ash kept just saying that I'd be able to get over the fence and I was like, "No I won't, that's why the fence is there."

They both stood there, not saying anything except Ash telling me to go get it over and over. So I dropped my backpack off and pushed my way into the bushes.

I managed to squeeze one foot like, diagonally in one of the gaps in the fence. I sort of hopped up and grabbed the fence and held on, even though it was really wet. I got my other foot in the fence and got a bit higher, but when I tried to pull my first foot out it was stuck, so I wriggled it and tried to get it out, but when I did my shoe fell off. I turned to look at it and my fingers slipped and I fell, landed on the springy bushes and bounced off onto the playground.

I stayed on the ground, gritting my teeth and holding my knee to my chest for a bit. Ash was laughing. Kim brought my shoe over. I put it on and got up. Ash went, "You nearly made it. Try again."

I turned around and limped away and made sure they could see I was limping.

The next day I rang up the school and told them I couldn't come in because I'd hurt my leg. I told them that Kim was there when it happened and would vouch for me. Then I skyved off for the rest of the week.

It started snowing while I was away and it didn't stop. When I got on the bus and Ash and Kim weren't

on it I thought it might have been a snow day and all the other kids on the bus just didn't know, but it wasn't.

They weren't where we'd usually hang out before school started either, so I just hung around on my own. When I got to form, Alex was at the open window, covered in so much snow that all of the tarp you could see were the edges, hanging down like a fringe at either end. Everyone else was wearing their coats and gloves, even Miss Foster, and when I came in she said I could keep my coat and gloves on too, on account of the window being open. I went over to the desk and sat down and me and Alex said hi.

Miss Foster did the register and announcements and everything, then she came over and told me that from now on, instead of doing homework or whatever in form, I had to go out and shovel the snow off Alex. I was like, "You mean now?"

Miss Foster told me, "Yes, now please."

Outside it was a blizzard. The snow was blowing in through the open window onto my desk. I said that there was no point in me shovelling it off now just for more snow to be piling on while I'm doing it.

Miss Foster looked at me like I'd said the enn word again. Everyone else in form stopped what they were doing and turned around in their chairs to look over. It went so quiet that all you could hear was the wind out side and the edges of Alex's tarp flapping.

Miss Foster told me that if I looked at it a different way, I'd see that I'd be helping myself in the long run.

I was like, "My leg is really hurting me."

She looked at Alex, or maybe she just looked out of the window, and she told me that if I'd like to discuss the matter, she could send someone to get Mr. Green.

All at once there was the sound of everyone quietly saying stuff to each other. I got up and threw my planner and pencil case into my backpack. Miss Foster went to her desk and I went out of the classroom, down the corridor to outside, put my hood up and walked through the snowstorm to just outside my form room, where Alex was.

Miss Foster leaned out of the open window and gave me a thing you'd use to get snow off a car windscreen. Then she like, ducked herself back inside and shut the window.

I didn't have a ladder or anything, so I couldn't reach the top. I couldn't even reach half way up. I had to scrape the snow off the bottom, so the snow at the top fell down and clear it that way. When the pile at the bottom got too big, I'd roll it away like making a snowman. By the time I'd done half of one side there were loads of small snowman bodies scattered around where I'd left them. I was going to go sit on one and have a break but Alex went, "I'm glad you're back."

I was like, "Was it bad having snow on you all this time?"

Alex went, "This is just from yesterday, and this morning. Sam did it when you weren't here."

I was like, "Sam from Chris's gang?"

Alex went, "Yeh."

I was about to go sit down so I was just like, "Oh, ok."

But then Alex was like, "They'd all come over too, all of Chris's gang, at lunch and at break and you know Jamie? When Jamie wasn't here they'd all be like, 'Jamie fancies you, Alex,' and they'd say how cute we'd look together and stuff like that, you know?"

I was like, "Right."

Inside, everyone had taken their coats and gloves off. My face was stinging and I was like, hugging myself with my hands in my sleeves, trying to stop shivering.

Alex went, "Yeh and so they said that they were all going to go hang out that Saturday in a clearing in the woods and Jamie would be there and I should go hang out with them too. So I did. And yeh it was in this clearing with a metal barrel full of wood and logs lying down for benches all around it, you know? So I got there first and then they all turned up and Mo lit the wood in the barrel on fire and they all sat around drinking vodka and doing balloons and smoking weed, and they kept trying to get me to join in but, you know, I can't do anything like that."

I went, "Would you have if you could?"

Alex just carried on talking, going, "So then they were going to go get some more vodka from the shop and they were all going to go but Chris said that someone should stay with me and that that someone should be Jamie. Jamie was the most wasted out of all of them and came and sat down on a log next to me and they all went off into the woods, because I was blocking the path."

I used the scraper to make a dry patch on the ground, then sat down and leant against the wall and was like, "Right? Go on."

Alex went, "Yeh so you know when Sam was cleaning my tarp and everyone was here except Jamie? They'd all tell me what I should say if me and Jamie were ever alone together. So I said what they'd told me, I said, 'You can touch me if you want,' but Jamie just sat there looking at me, so I said, 'Or maybe even kiss me.' Then we both sat there really quiet and a robin was on a branch and I pointed it out and Jamie was like, 'Oh it's so cute,' but then it flew away and so we just sat there quietly, and I thought that Chris and the rest would be back soon so I said, 'Do you want to kiss me or not?'"

I was like, "What, aggressively?"

Alex went, "Sort of. Then Jamie burst out laughing and going, 'No, Alex, no I don't. No need to have a tantrum about it,' and then there was laughing coming from all around and then Chris and all of them came out of the woods all around us laughing their heads off and doing impressions of me in a stupid voice, stamping their feet and shouting at each other 'Do you want to kiss me or not?' and laughing and laughing and then they all just went off with Jamie and left me there."

I stood up and was like, "They're dickheads, Alex."

Then as I was going round to carry on scraping the tarp Alex went, "Yeh and so am I for believing them and going along with them."

I wanted to say that everyone in the school was, but then the bell went and I had to go to class.

We didn't talk about it in any lesson except for the first one, when Alex said that we should be glad that



none of Chris's gang were in any of our classes.

When I got to the classroom, Alex was already there outside the window. I said down and we said hi to each other. Mr. Ward told us all to copy down what he was writing on the board. Everyone had to write fast because Mr. Ward always rubbed off the board too soon, so I had to write twice as fast, and while I was doing it Alex was talking really quietly, going on about how we should be glad we didn't have any of Chris's gang in any of our lessons.

At break, when the snow wasn't really heavy, everyone could choose whether they wanted to be inside or outside, except me. Alex couldn't choose, so I couldn't choose.

The snow that I'd shovelled off at form was back by break. I kept the windscreen scraper in a carrier bag in my backpack, and I had to scrape all the snow off again.

While I was doing it, Alex watched whoever had come out and like, commentated on what they were doing. Not many people had come out, just a few kids kicking a football around in the dry space where Alex had been, using the wall under the form room window as a goal. There were other little groups standing around the balls of snow I'd made. And Chris's gang was outside too. They were messing about and shouting, throwing snowballs at each other and at other kids.

At lunch, when I'd finished eating, I had to go out of the canteen by the main door and walk all the way round to where Alex was because the table blocked the fire door. Then I had to scrape off the snow again. It was totally pointless, but it was better than just standing around not doing anything.

Some people came out. Most people stayed inside. I wondered if Ash and Kim would come out, because they hadn't come over in the canteen. Chris's gang stood around in a doorway and kept looking over in our direction. After a bit they went inside, and Alex told me about a kid who they'd been picking on before we started, and eventually had said to Chris's gang that they'd fight any one of them if it was one on one. Chris agreed, but this kid was a black belt in Karate, and got jumped by the whole gang on the way to the fight. Then Chris went around school claiming to have won.

I was like, "Where did you hear that?"

Alex went, "I've heard a few people talk about it."

Then Alex said that we should stand up to them like Karate Kid did, but do it in a way that we wouldn't get jumped.

I was like, "We?"

Alex went, "Well, I can't do it myself."

I was like, "I wouldn't be able to fight any of them, even one on one."

Alex said it would be easy if we had some guns, and I was like, "Yeh, that's true."

I held the snow scraper like a gun and made gun noises with my mouth. Alex was like, "Mo, behind you."

I spand round and went, "Duhduhduhduhduh."

Alex went, "Urghghg. Look out. Max, to your left."

I aimed left and went, "Duhudhduhduhduh."

We kept doing it and laughing until the bell went and we had to go to class.

I didn't see Ash and Kim leaving after school. They weren't on the bus the next morning, either. I didn't see them all day. I went to the computer room after school and they weren't there.

The morning after, I went to the bus stop an hour before I normally would have. A bus came and I got on and looked around but didn't see them. It was a single decker, so when the driver told me to either pay or get off, I got off.

The next one was the bus I'd normally have gotten on and I let it go past, then waited for the one after. When it arrived it was a double decker, and Ash and Kim weren't on downstairs. If I didn't get this bus, though, I'd be late, so I paid the driver and went up the stairs.

All the kids from Migley and the other schools all watched me get on and go upstairs, nudging each other and whispering things. The same thing happened with everyone on the top deck. I saw Ash and Kim sitting near the back, and when they saw me looking they looked away. I went and sat on the seat behind them and they didn't even look up when I passed. I leaned forward and was like, "Hi."

They like, half turned round and said hi, then turned back around and started talking to each other quietly.

I was like, "What's going on?"

Neither of them said anything. They didn't even turn around. I was talking to the back of their heads. I went, "Is this because I threw your little prism over the fence?"

Ash turned around all the way, so we were looking at each other, and went, "Why are you still hanging round with Alex?"

I was like, "Why wouldn't I be?"

Ash went, "Alex tried to get off with Jamie."

Without turning around, Kim went, "Fucking perv."

I was like, "What?"

Ash went, "That's what Jamie's been saying."

Then Ash turned back around and Kim got some homework out and they both started working on it.

There was a prism and a stick person on the back of Kim's seat. The prism had been coloured in with a load of scribbles. I looked out of the window and watched snowflakes landing on the other side of it.

At every stop, when people came up the stairs, they'd look around for somewhere to sit. There was

nowhere to sit except next to me, so they all stood, holding on to the backs of chairs.

Just after the stop before school, Ash and Kim got up and went down the stairs. When we got to school I saw them get off first and hurry through the gates. When everyone else had got up and gone down the stairs, I watched them all go through the gates, then I rushed down and followed them, off the bus and through the gates.

Instead of going to form I went and sat in a toilet cubicle. All the prisms on the back of the door and on the cubicle walls were scribbled out too, except when I looked closer at them I saw that it wasn't just like, random scribbles. It was the word 'PERV'.

My first lesson was PE, so I didn't have to even say hello to Alex. I just stayed at the other side of the field, where no-one even really hit the ball.

Then at break I went my form room. Miss Foster was like, "What are you doing here? You should be outside with Alex."

I was like, "I don't want to keep hanging round with Alex anymore."

Miss Foster told me that if that was the case, then I'd have to bring it up with Mr. Green. I went, "Fine."

She looked at me with her mouth open and I'd have laughed if I wasn't so like, serious. Then she told me that I couldn't just go and see Mr. Green any time I liked and I was like, "When can I see him then?"

She told me that if I must, I could come back to the form room at lunch and she'd take me to his office. She said it like it was a threat. I spent the next lessons avoiding talking to Alex as much as I could, then left five minutes before lunch like always and went straight to my form room. I waited outside the double doors to the English block and waited for the bell to go and all the classes to leave the other way.

Miss Foster looked annoyed that I'd come back, but she didn't say anything about it except to tell me to follow her to Mr. Green's office.

When we got there she told me to wait outside, then she knocked on the door and went in. I'd been like, ready to talk when I got to the form room, but Mr. Green's office was so far away and up so many stairs that by the time we got there I was knackered and my feet hurt.

The door opened again and Miss Foster came out, holding it open. She told me to go in, so I did and she followed me and let the door shut behind us.

Mr. Green was sitting at his desk, writing report cards or something. I stood there for a bit, looking at the floor. Then Mr. Green put his pen down and went, "Miss Foster has informed me that you wish to opt out of our contract."

I was like, "Yes please, Sir."

He looked at me like I hadn't answered him yet. I went, "My mum's diabetes is getting worse."

He looked at Miss Foster and I could hear her shaking her head because of her earrings rattling. Mr. Green put his elbows on the desk and like, held his hands together and rested his chin on them. He went, "I can't see any way by which that could be a possibility."

Then he just kept staring at me like he was still talking, but he wasn't saying anything, just staring. Like, I couldn't say anything because I'd interrupt him even though he wasn't talking, so I just kept looking at the floor. Then he went, "Can you?"

I shook my head and was like, "No, Sir."

Then he put his glasses on and picked his pen up. Miss Foster opened the door and held it open for me. I went out into the corridor and she told me to get out of her sight.

So every day I had to leave form after register, go outside and scrape snow off of Alex. I had to scrape the snow off at break. When I finished my lunch I had to go outside and scrape the snow off of Alex.

Sometimes I didn't really bother and we'd just sit there watching anyone who'd come out. When the weather wasn't too bad there'd be a lot of people, running around throwing snowballs at each other, or making snowmen with the balls of snow I'd left here and there, or just hanging out in the dry patches that Alex had left in front of classroom windows.

Chris's gang would cover stones with snow and throw them at each other and at other kids, until Tyler ended up splitting someone's head open. Then throwing snowballs was banned, and there was always an extra teacher on duty.

When it happened, Alex was like, "They could just throw rocks at people if they wanted to, but they had to wait for it to snow."

I was like, "If they really wanted they could come in with a bag of rocks each and just like, rampage through the school throwing rocks at people."

Alex went, "That would be ace but I bet they'd never even think of that and even if they did I bet they wouldn't have the guts to do it."

I picked up some rocks from next to where I was sitting and started throwing them at the goalposts near us, going, "Take that, Chris. Take that, Sam. Take that, Miss Foster. And you too Mr. Green."

When the rocks hit the goalposts it sounded like an old church bell. Then the teacher on duty started yelling at me to stop, and I did.

When the weather got warmer and the snow started melting, Miss Foster told me that I still had to keep Alex's tarp maintained. She gave me a sponge and a spray bottle, like the kind that window cleaner comes in. I said to Miss Foster that I couldn't reach even halfway up, and she told me to just do what I could.

It was just like when it had been snowing, except now I had to spray this stuff on the tarpaulin and scrub it with the sponge. Miss Foster gave me a new sponge every morning in form, and a new bottle when mine got empty.

Alex always stayed with one side away from the school, so I only had to do the other side. When it was clean there was a big blue stripe and then it was all green like, algae where I couldn't reach. I used to lie on my back and look at it upside down. It looked like when we used to do paintings at Church Hill, when

we'd done the sky and the ground but before we put the clouds in and the tress on.

On school picture day everyone had polished their shoes and had their ties up, except for Chris's gang. They were playing football on the field, wearing trainers and not even wearing their ties.

I spotted Ash and Kim on the way to Alex, but I'd have had to have pushed through a whole crowd of people to get to them so I just kept walking. I kept my head down and followed the sort of path between crowds of people until I found my way out into the open and went over to Alex.

I dropped my bag and Alex went, "You look good. I like what you've done with your hair."

I was like, "Thanks."

Then I went over to one of the tent pegs that held the tarp down and knelt down and put my finger through the hole. I pulled it out in one go and Alex yelled at me like, "What the fuck are you doing! Leave that alone!"

I was like, "I thought you'd want to look your best for the photo."

Alex just kept yelling at me to put the peg back in, and then a gust of wind blew the tarp back a bit. I made sure Alex would see that I was looking away, and then when the wind had stopped I grabbed the corner of the tarp, put the peg through the hole, and jammed it into the ground. I kept on saying how sorry I was, over and over, until the teacher on duty blew a whistle and I had to go to the theatre.

I went and queued up in the corridor outside the theatre with everyone else in my form. There was a queue of about half of us, and the rest were like, drifting towards it. I ended up standing behind Pat, the only one out of Chris's gang that was in my form.

We were the last form in the whole school to have our photo done, so everyone else was in the crowds on the playground or in the library or on the field. Cameron and Sam came over to hang around in the queue with Pat. They were talking loud like they wanted me to hear them.

Cameron was going, "If I'd been there when that prism had tried to get off with Jamie I'd have hit the cunt, or done something. Set that fucking tarpaulin on fire. And Alex's little mate, I'd deck that cunt as well."

Pat went, "What's stopping you?"

Cameron span round, holding a fist up ready to hit me in the face. I flinched, and Sam dug me in the ribs and winded me, then Cameron thumped me right under my shoulder and deadened my arm. They all fistbumped while I held my arm and tried to get my breath back. Pat asked them if they'd seen Jamie around and they were both like, no, and said they hadn't seen Jamie for ages.

Miss Foster came out of the theatre and into the corridor and told us that we wouldn't be having our photo taken on the stage, like every other form. We were going to have our photos done outside, with Alex.

Everyone groaned. Sam and Cameron wandered off and we were all led through the theatre, out of one of the set of fire doors at the back, and round to the field where Alex was. We all went and stood around with Alex in the middle, then the photographer came out and told us all to move around until he was

happy with where we were all standing. Miss Foster kept telling us all to do up our ties and stand more upright while the photographer kept telling us to smile and say cheese.

When the photos came back, Miss Foster told me that Alex's tarp was a disgrace. I said that I couldn't reach that high and said to her that at least both sides were clean up to where I could reach.

They organised a company to come in with a power washer thing, like a really strong hose, to blast all the crap off of the tarp after school one day. When I got back it looked brand new and there was a stepladder there next to Alex. That meant that I had to clean the whole thing now, and had to go and fetch the stepladder from wherever we'd been to where Alex was now.

The day before a new kid started, the tutor of the form they were going to be in would tell that form, then everyone from that form would tell everyone else in their classes. By break the whole year would know and by lunch most of the school would.

At lunch the day before Drew started, people were talking about how the new kid was Chris's cousin, or cousins with one of Chris's gang.

The next day, when I got off the bus, I saw the new kid was with Chris's gang. They were hanging around at the gates, laughing and having a go at people that walked past. I thought they were going to say something to me, but they didn't.

In geography at the end of the day, Mrs. Clough told us all that there was a new kid starting in the class, then went out of the room and came back in with Drew. They both walked from desk to desk so Drew could say hi and the kid at the desk could say hi and then they'd both say what their favourite subject was or what their hobby was.

They came over to my desk and I introduced myself I introduced Alex. Alex went, "I can introduce myself. Hi, I'm Alex."

Drew was like, "Hi. I'm Drew."

I started getting my stuff out of my bag, Drew went and sat down and Mrs. Clough went to the front and started the class.

It was like Drew had always been a part of Chris's gang, like they'd been hanging out together outside of school, except now they were taking things further. Like, they used to throw bits of paper and rubber in people's hair, but they started spitting on people. And they used to just take the mick out of people walking past them, but they started following people and trying to get into a fight.

No-one ever fought back, and no-one ever like, stepped in. The teacher on duty was always at the other side of the playground or looking the other way.

Me and Alex were always too far away from everybody for them to bother with us, except when they were playing football and they'd kick the ball over to us on purpose and yell for me to kick it back. I know it was on purpose because the ball only ever came over when I was up on the stepladder.

They only ever went after anyone that was alone and near them, and I never was except for a time

when I was in the toilets and Drew and Mo came in. I was at the sink, about to wash my hands, and they were like, "Oh hi, Prism Kid."

I didn't look at them or say anything. I just turned the tap on. They came over, going, "You're not gonna say hi, Prism Kid?"

I looked at them and said hi, and then felt a shock in my crotch. Drew had leaned over, turned the tap to full, and held it so the water sprayed all over the front of my trousers. I stood there like, in shock because of the cold, and they went over to the door, laughing their heads off. I put my hands on both sides of the sink. I wanted to pull it off the wall and throw it at them.

They stood at the door, blocking it so I couldn't leave. I let go of the sink and turned the tap off. I made my hands into fists so tight that my elbows ached, took a breath, and walked towards them.

They legged it out the door and I followed them, but when I went into the corridor I couldn't see them. Then Drew grabbed me from behind, twisted my arm up my back and went, "I know what your perv mate did."

Mo came from behind us and opened the main door. Drew pushed me into the playground and then they both came out and were yelling, "Everyone, everyone, Prism Kid's had an accident, come have a look."

Nearly everyone on the playground came over. The whole big group of people all moved like it was one thing and then stood staring at me. I felt hot but like, on the inside first and then my skin and my eyes got prickly. I was looking around for some way to leave, but the crowd was surrounding me and behind me Mo and Drew were blocking the door. Even if there had been somewhere to go, I felt like I couldn't move, like them staring at me was holding me there. I wanted to fall onto the ground and curl into a ball. I just stood there, looking down at the wet patch on the front of my trousers, while the crowd chanted, "Piss Pants Prism Kid, Piss Pants Prism Kid."

The chanting got quieter and then stopped by the time the Mr. Conway pushed through the crowd, going, "Everyone, get out of here. Now."

The group moved away, everyone went back to where they were before. I was about to go, leave school and maybe never come back, but Mr. Conway went, "Not you."

He came and stood over and me told me to stand up straight. He put his hands on his hips and looked me up and down. I was about to say that it was just water, but when I opened my mouth he held a finger up so I shut it. He stood there shaking his head and then put his hands on his hips again and went, "Well?"

Now he wanted me to talk. It was like he was waiting for me to say that I'd wet myself. Like, admit it. I didn't say anything. He told me to follow him.

We walked through the school. Mr. Conway told all the little groups of people we passed to get out of the corridor. They all whispered and giggled and anyone that hadn't been in the playground was told by anyone that was about what had happened. Or like, what Drew had said had happened.

We went all the way to reception, where the receptionist was sitting there behind a little window. Mr. Conway said something to her and she leaned down and went through the lost property box. Then she came back up and slid a pair of PE shorts through the slot under the glass. Mr. Conway gave me them

and told me to go to the toilets and get changed.

I took my trousers off in a cubicle. Even my underwear was wet, so I took them off and scrunched them up over the toilet bowl, trying to get all the water out. When I finished they were still damp, so I just put the PE shorts on. I walked out of the toilets wearing the shorts, with my smart shoes on and no underwear, and a shirt and tie and the school jumper. Mr. Conway was telling a group of kids to leave, and I wanted to go back into the toilets, but then one of the group saw that I was standing there and the whole group turned round and then ran off laughing.

Mr. Conway came over to me and held a plastic bag open in front of him. I wanted to give him my underwear and make him smell them, but I just dropped the trousers and underwear into the bag. Mr. Conway told me, "You can get these back at the end of the day."

The bell went and I was going to leave school and definitely never come back, but Mr. Conway followed me all the way to my class like he was supposed to be going the same way as me.

I was the last to class and I stood in the corridor near the door. I could hear everyone in the classroom chatting. I looked down at my bare legs, my smart shoes and socks, and the borrowed PE shorts. The idea of going into the room was making me feel sick and cold. Mr. Conway was at the end of the corridor with his arms folded, watching me. I felt like I was trapped, like a spider with a glass put over it. There was nothing I could do except go into the classroom, and there was nothing I wanted to do less than go into the classroom. I looked at Mr. Conway. He tapped his wrist. I just wanted to lie down in the corridor and shut my eyes. Then Mr. Conway came over and opened the door.

Everyone in the classroom turned round in their chairs and watched me walk in. They were all muttering to each other and giggling until Mr. Spencer told everyone to be quiet and face the front and I went and sat down. Even though everyone was looking away from me, it still felt like I was being stared at.

When I sat down, Alex went, "I heard what happened."

I was about to say that it was just water, but Mr. Spencer went, "Shh!"

For the whole lesson people kept giggling quietly and turning around, then turning back around when I looked up at them. I took my pencil sharpener out of my pencil case and tried using my fingernail to unscrew the screw that held the blade on, but the screw was too small and too tight. I got a pencil out and sharpened it and kept sharpening it until the shavings were all over my desk and it was just lead coming out. I wanted to put my hands under the desk and stab my wrists with the pencil, then just waiting with my head on the desk without anyone noticing I was bleeding to death. They'd probably think the dripping sound was me wetting myself and laugh their heads off.

When I tested how sharp my pencil was, the point broke off. It didn't even leave a mark.

By the end of the lesson, I'd got used to it I suppose. Like when you're in cold water for long enough. It was the same in every class I had, and even in the corridors if I passed some people. By the end of the day, when the bell went, I was sort of relieved to be leaving, but disappointed as well, because I knew that I'd have to go back.

When I got on the bus the next day, everyone from Migley that was sitting downstairs started laughing amongst themselves and nudging the kids from other schools and pointing at me. I went up to the top



deck and when I'd got up the stairs the same thing happened. A few of Chris's gang were at the back, and they stopped what they were doing and shouted something about nappies.

I sat down at the front, above where the driver sits, and as we went along I got that feeling you get when you think someone's following you. Like, a weird uncomfortable feeling in the back of my head, behind my brain, and my mouth going dry, and feeling like I should duck down. I put my backpack on my knees and hugged it. I wanted to climb inside it. Every time the bus stopped and I heard people coming up the stairs my throat twitched, the backs of my eyes stung and ached, and I hugged my backpack tighter. I wish I could have stopped being able to hear everyone talking, even if they weren't talking about me.

When we got to the stop before school I went down the stairs and stood at the front of the bus so I could get off first. As soon as we got to school and the doors opened I walked as fast as I could off the bus and through the gates. Then I didn't know where to go or what to do. I was on my way to go and sit with Alex, but I couldn't help thinking that when I went round the corner, Alex would be there in the middle of a crowd of people, and they'd all laugh at me when they saw me and yell "Piss Pants Prism Kid!"

Then Chris and Sam came round the corner. They stopped in front of me and smiled. I turned round and all of Chris's gang that were on the bus were standing behind me. Everyone in the playground came over. Then all of Chris's gang took their backpacks off of one shoulder and unzipped them. They all had nappies in their bags, wrapped up the way they come in a packet, and they threw all them at me. I stood there with my eyes shut as all the nappies bounced off me. Some of them hit me in the face and it was like being hit with snowballs, except that instead of making my face sting from the cold, it was a different kind of stinging. Like, on the inside.

Everyone was laughing. I opened my eyes and looked at all the nappies on the ground. I turned round. Chris and Sam were both bent over from laughing. I took my backpack off and dropped it. Someone behind me went, "Prism Kid's gonna have a tantrum."

I ran forward and kicked Sam right in the face. As soon as I had, I felt like, a big wave hit me from behind. I fell forward and all of Chris's gang piled on top of me and everyone started chanting, "Fight! Fight! Fight!"

They got off me and I curled up into a ball and covered my face while they all stood around kicking me. From between my fingers and between their legs I could see all the crowd, and Ash and Kim were part of it. Then it felt like the back of my head just like, exploded.

All the chanting and cheering died down. They stopped kicking me but it felt like they hadn't. I stayed curled up on the ground, wishing and hoping that they'd start again and carry on until they'd knocked me unconscious or into a coma, or dead. When it stopped feeling like they were still kicking me, everywhere that they had been started to hurt and throb and go stiff. I felt sick. There was like, darkness at the sides of my eyes, like I was still holding my hands up, so I could only see in front of me, and my body was getting stiff. It was like being stuck in a pipe.

I heard Mr. Evans yelling at everyone to go to their form rooms. I saw all Chris's gang running off and could like, feel the crowd moving away. Mr. Evans came and stood over me. He told me to get up and I tried to but couldn't. He held me under my armpits and yanked me up, but when he let go I almost fell and he grabbed me again. My legs were like two weights underneath me that I couldn't lift so I sort of shuffled as he carried me over to the wall and leant me against it. He gave me some tissues and told me

to tell him what was going on.

My face was numb and I couldn't feel the tissue touching my nose or mouth when I dabbed the blood coming out of my nostrils and split lip, like I was dabbing someone else's face. It felt like there was a shotput in my head and a helium balloon in my stomach. I felt like I was going to be sick so I slid down the wall and sat with my head between my legs.

Mr. Evans went out to the middle of the empty playground to where my bag was. He shouted at some people to go and I looked over. It was Ash and Kim. I watched them go into the school and it was like I was squinting but like, sideways.

Mr. Evans brought my bag over and dropped it next to me, then he knelt down and told me to say who started it. I said that I did.

He told me not to be a smart-arse, then stood up and told me to stand up. I pushed myself up a bit and leant against the wall and pushed myself up a bit at a time like that until I was standing up, but still having to lean against the wall. The feeling was coming back in my legs and it felt like there were bulldog clips attached to them except like, on the inside.

He told me that I wouldn't get in trouble if I hadn't started it, but I would get in trouble if I didn't tell him who had. I went, "Alex did."

He looked at me and I looked at the ground, trying to keep my eyes open. Then he told me to clean myself up and get to form.

I went to the toilets and took a roll of toilet paper off of its holder in a cubicle and took it over to the sink. I looked at myself in the mirror. There was blood all over my top lip and my mouth was all bloody but it didn't look as bad as it felt. I could still only see in front of me. It was just dark in the corners of my eyes. I thought about it like being stuck in a pipe again, and when I turned the tap on all the water rushing out made me think of a sewage pipe pouring sludge into the sea.

That's what it felt like being at Migley. Like being in a sewage pipe.

The bell for form went but I just stayed in the toilets, wiping my face and then throwing the wet wads into one of the cubicles, thinking about clogging the pipe up. Some of the wads went in the toilet, but most of them splatted on the wall behind it and on the floor.

I stayed in the toilets the whole time I should have been in form and left when the bell rang for the first class. When I got there and sat down, Alex was like, "You weren't in form."

I went, "The bus was late."

Alex went, "Was it late because it hit you?"

I didn't say anything, I just got my pencil case and book out and started copying down what was on the board. My skin felt dry and tight and like, dirty. It was really tight on one side of my face. I was starting to be able to see properly out of one eye, but it was like my skin was being stretched over the other so I had to squint so much it might as well have been shut.

People were still pointing and talking quietly when they saw me, but not giggling so much anymore. I felt

like when you get lost and you get that feeling that whichever way you go, you'll just get more lost. I felt like I was stuck and there was nowhere to go.

At break I sat with Alex, messing about with the spray bottle. There was a skull and crossbones on it, and as soon as I noticed it a ladybird flew down and landed on a blade of grass in front of me. I sprayed it until it fell off, then I plucked away all the grass around where it was lying on its back and sprayed it some more until its legs stopped moving.

I unscrewed the nozzle and looked in the bottle. When I sprayed it, it came out clear but inside the bottle it was bright green. I went, "Do you dare me to drink this?"

Alex was like, "Did Chris and that lot beat you up?"

I went, "I kicked Sam in the face and they all jumped me."

Alex was like, "No offence or anything but if we're going to get back at them then we need to do something smarter than just kicking them in the face."

I didn't want to talk anymore, but I didn't want to get into an argument if I told Alex to shut up. I just went, "Like what?"

Alex went, "Like getting them to drink that stuff instead of you drinking it."

I looked at the bottle with the top off and thought about emptying it down people's throats. I thought of it like adverts for drain cleaner on TV, when it shows like, an x-ray of the liquid cleaning all the gunk out of the pipe. Not just Chris's gang. Everyone in the school. The teachers, the people that giggled and talked about me, even people that didn't. Then I'd drink the last of it.

I was like, "There's not enough."

Alex went, "There's not even enough to make them sick or something?"

My swollen eye was itchy and annoying, I felt sick and I wanted to leave. I wanted to smash Alex to pieces like I'd wanted to do with Ash's little prism. I wanted to drink what was in the bottle but I imagined teachers running over, and everyone watching while an ambulance comes and they put me in the back of it. Then I'd have to come back after having my stomach pumped and nothing would be different. People would probably think I just did it for attention.

I poured all the green liquid onto the grass, dropped the bottle and kicked it away. The last thing I needed was people thinking I wanted attention.

I kept thinking about it, though. Sometimes I thought about poisoning everyone. Sometimes I thought about poisoning myself. When I was going to the canteen, or whenever else the corridors were empty, I felt like I was walking through an old sewer, like from Roman times. Like a piece of crap with no choice of where to go. When the corridors were full, it was like they were full of crap and needed cleaning out.

One day I was sitting at the edge of the playground, eating my lunch, and Alex went, "If we can get proper poison we could put it in the stew and like you say everyone eats the stew."

I wondered how I hadn't thought of that. There were posters for Tuesday Stew Day all over. I went, "I

was thinking about that too. That would be ace."

Alex was like, "Would you be up for it then?"

I went, "Would it kill people or just like, make them ill?"

Alex was like, "I don't know but I suppose it would probably depend on how much we put in."

Then, at the other side of the playground, the a door burst open and a kid came out with trousers all wet down the front. Drew and a couple of Chris's gang came out and started yelling for everyone to come over and look at the kid who pissed their pants. Everyone gathered round until I couldn't see for the crowd.

I thought that after that happening, everyone would be reminded of when it had happened to me. But it was more like a reset button had been pressed and now there was a different Piss Pants Kid.

By the time my face was back to normal, hardly anyone even looked at me anymore.

When Piss Pants Kid stopped coming to school, a rumour went round that the kid had taken loads of pills and died. I could remember when I wanted to do that, and I kind of understood I think, but I thought that it was kind of a waste. I thought it was a shame that they'd kill themselves and no-one else. Like, a waste of a chance. Like dying with a full bank account.

One break when we were talking about Piss Pants Kid, Alex asked me if I was being serious. I said I was being deadly serious and we both laughed. Then Alex was like, "Seriously though are you serious about this or are we just messing around?"

I went, "I'm serious. Are you?"

Alex was like, "Yeh."

We didn't talk about our feelings or why we wanted to do it, we just both agreed that we were serious. Neither of us had to be like, convinced or persuaded. After we'd both said we were serious we didn't even joke about it, like we had when I'd been pretending to shoot all of Chris's gang. We just started talking about what we were going to do, planning it like we were spies.

There was no way I could just sneak into the canteen, so one break I went to my form room to see Miss Foster. I asked her if I could volunteer to work in the kitchen. She looked at me like I'd started to tell a joke and she was waiting for the punchline. I said that I'd been watching a programme on TV about chefs and that I wanted to be a chef. She told me how great it was that I had some sort of ambition, but working in the kitchen would mean I'd be leaving Alex all alone. I was like, "Alex can come help me."

She told me that pupils weren't allowed in areas that were staff only and I was like, "I've been in the staffroom before."

She went, "Unfortunately the answer is no."

Then she turned round and started writing stuff on the board for her next class. I stood there with my hands in my pockets, holding my lighter and rolling the wheel, thinking about setting fire to her skirt. Without turning round to look at me, Miss Foster told me that if it was what I really wanted, then I'd

have to talk to Mr. Green.

I let go of the lighter and took my hand out of my pocket and pointed at her with my hand like a gun. I pretended to shoot her and then was like, "Thanks anyway, Miss."

When I went back to Alex, there was a backpack on the ground. It wasn't there the last time I'd seen Alex. I wanted to turn round and go away but there was nowhere to go away to. I kept walking and when I got to Alex I was like, "I tried but Miss Foster said no. I even went and asked Mr. Green and he said no."

Alex went, "That's alright, I couldn't get the poison either but look in the bag."

I thought to myself that I should have known Alex had been messing with me the whole time. Like, leading me on as a joke. I was sure that whatever was in the bag would be something to make me feel more stupid than I already did. I thought Chris's gang would probably be hiding in the bushes.

I was like, "No. Have you been hanging round with Chris and that lot again?"

Alex went, "Just look in the bag."

I looked around at the playground and the big group of people, made out of smaller groups. There was a game of football going on at the other end of the field to us. All of Chris's gang were in a doorway, pestering anyone that walked past. No-one was paying any attention to us.

I unzipped the bag and reached inside. My fingertips touched something metal. I took it out and it was a gun. A little black gun.

Alex went, "It's the same that James Bond uses."

I held it properly, with my finger on the trigger, and pointed it into the big crowd. I was like, "Is it real?"

Alex went, "Yeh it is, stop waving it around."

I held it close to me and looked down at it in my hand. I wanted to go over to Chris's gang in the doorway and tell them to put their hands up and get on the ground and then shoot every single one of them. I wanted to go my form room where Miss Foster would still be writing on the board and blow her brains out from behind. I wanted to go to the toilets, sit in a cubicle and blow my brains out. I thought about people coming in and finding me. I was like, "It's not like, a BB gun?"

Alex went, "It's real and there are bullets for it too, in the front pocket of the bag."

I looked and there was one of those like, metal bars full of bullets. I slid it into the gun's handle and felt it click.

Alex was like, "be careful because it's safe until you pull the top back. Then it'll load a bullet."

I pulled the top of the gun back as far as it would go, then when I let go of it it sprang forward and the gun flew out of my hand.

Alex laughed and was like, "If you can't keep hold of it when you load it you'll have no chance of keeping hold of it when you shoot it."

I untucked my shirt, then picked the gun up and tucked it into my waistband like they do in movies. It was really cold and it made me shiver. I let my shirt hang over it and stood there.

Alex went, "Looks good."

I was like, "Can you see it though? Can you tell?"

Alex said that no-one would suspect a thing. I didn't know where to start. Chris's gang, Miss Foster, the toilets. Anyone. The big group of everyone. Just sit on the grass and shoot randomly at the group. I decided I'd just go walk around with it for a bit and see if anything happened, like someone starting on me or Chris's gang beating someone up or a teacher telling someone off for a stupid reason. So I just started walking off, but Alex shouted at me, like, "Woah, what are you doing?"

I went, "I don't know yet."

Alex was like, "Look, come back and we can think it through and work out a plan or something."

I thought to myself that we'd already worked out a plan, and we didn't even manage to do the first bit of it so what would be the point in coming up with a new one? I thought that if I was going to go around shooting people, I should start with Alex.

Then Alex went, "I want to show you what's under my tarp."

I wondered if that's where the poison was, and Alex was just joking about not being able to get it. Then I thought that maybe it was a fake gun after all and Alex was feeling guilty about the idea of me like, sitting in a toilet cubicle about to blow my brains out and just squirting water into my hair.

Alex went, "Please. I need to show you."

The tarp was held down with pegs through holes in the corners, like a tent. I went over to take one of the pegs out and Alex was like, "No, go round the other side, I don't want anyone else to see."

I said, like to myself, that I'd just been waving a gun around and no-one noticed. Alex didn't hear me, or pretended not to. I went round to the other side, knelt down and put my finger through the loop at the top of the peg. I had to wobble it while I pulled but eventually it slid out. Then I grabbed the corner off the tarp and dragged it back like a curtain.

I walked a few steps back and then just stood there, looking at Alex's side. It was all scuffed up and there were long straight lines, like cracks. They were all different lengths, and wide and deep enough that I could have fit my fingertip in. I touched my arm and felt all the raised lines under my sleeve.

A load of cheering came from the football pitch. I went back round to the other side of Alex to see what was happening. Half of everyone there was running towards someone and high-fiving them, and the other half were all helping someone off the ground. Then Mr. Green came out and stood in the middle of the two groups, stopping them from rushing at each other and trying to stop them from yelling at each other. No-one in the playground was paying any attention, everyone was doing their own thing.

I thought about going over and showing Mr. Green how to get them to shut up, and then shutting him up too. It made me laugh and I was going to say it and then go do it, but Alex went, "Could you put the tarp back please?"

I was like, "Yeh let me just go and sort that out for Mr. Green."

Alex went, "What do you mean? Could you put the tarp back please."

I tapped my shirt where the gun was and went, "I'll only be two minutes."

Alex made a noise like someone makes before they start crying and I went, "I'm only joking."

I hurried round and pulled the tarp back over the scuffed and cracked glass, and put the peg through the hole and into the ground. I stood on it and pushed it as deep into the ground as I could. Then I took the gun out of my trousers and put it back in the bag.

Alex went, "Were you really joking?"

I was like, "Yeh."

Alex went, "Because I can get more guns."

And I went, "Like you could get poison?"

And Alex went, "No, like I got that gun. I can get more."

I sat down and crossed my legs. I couldn't even imagine rolling up my sleeve and showing anyone what my arm looked like. I thought about going over and shooting someone. Alex said there were nine bullets in the gun. I reckoned I could probably shoot a couple of people before I got tackled. And Alex was probably right about me not being able to hold onto the gun when I fired it. Maybe I could shoot Mr. Green, but then I'd get jumped by everyone he was yelling at and they'd all sit on me until the police got here. And then it'd be like, so what? A kid shoots a teacher, so what? It'd be forgotten by next week. I wanted to do something that the whole school would be ashamed of. Something that would get the school shut down or even demolished. Something to put a big hole in the pipe. Something that would be a higher result than the school's official page when you googled Migley High.

I went, "How long would it take?"

Alex didn't know but said that while we waited we should make a plan so that I wouldn't just be wandering round with loads of guns and no-one to shoot. And also that I should get a couple of tennis balls and do like, exercise with squeezing them to strengthen my grip.

There were always a few loose in the sports hall and we decided I should go and get some right then, while it was empty.

The quickest way was through the quad, where the pond was. When I got to the doorway I could hear a load of noise and I could tell it was Chris's gang. They were laughing and shouting like monkeys and I reckoned that as soon as I went through the door they'd all rush at me like monkeys do to cars in safari parks.

If I went another way I wouldn't get there in time, so I took a deep breath and went through the door.

None of them even noticed me. They were all crowded together in a corner with their backs to me. Then they all moved back and I saw that Drew was holding Ash against the wall. Cameron unzipped Ash's

backpacks and started throwing stuff out. Books went flying and a ham sandwich came apart in the air, then they started playing football with Ash's pencil case.

They passed it between them and I saw Kim there, going, "I'm open, I'm open."

Sam volleyed it to Chris and Chris lobbed it to Kim. Kim played keepy-uppy and did a couple of tricks, then curled it into the middle of the pond. That last kick must have broken it open, because while it bobbed there in the middle of the pond all the pens and pencils came floating out.

They kicked a few books into the pond, then Sam kicked a book into Chris's face and Chris ran at Sam. Everyone was laughing and yelling and they all followed Chris chasing after Sam through the door at the other side of the quad to where I was. Drew and Kim were the last to get to the door, and they stopped for a second to look at Ash over in the corner, and then Drew dragged Kim through the door.

Ash walked over to the pond and knelt down and started fishing out the pens and pencils that had drifted close to the edge, and then noticed me and looked at me. I shrugged and walked past and went to the sports hall.

We never talked about our idea in lessons, but at break and lunch it was all we talked about. I'd be squeezing two tennis balls over and over while we tried to come up with a good plan. Except we didn't really plan anything, we just talked about how good it would be to do it, not like, how we were going to do it.

Alex said it would be good to have a map of the school, so I printed one off, but every time we got halfway through planning one of us would change our mind about where it was best to start or where it was best to finish, so I'd have to rub out all the lines and marks that I'd made and draw new ones until the map was all ragged and covered in rubbed out lines and holes where the rubber had worn through the paper.

Eventually I was just like, "We'll never figure it out. And even if we do, I won't remember. And it's not like I'm gonna be able to check the map every five seconds like it's a video game."

Alex went, "We need to have a plan because we can't afford to waste time with you going back on yourself or something."

I was like, "I'm not going to waste time doing anything. I'm not gonna waste any time."

We decided that not going back on myself was a good idea, though, so I wrote it down on the back of the map and went, "What else?"

After about a week we had a list of what we should do and what we shouldn't. Like not going back on myself, and not chasing anyone. Not singling anyone out. Not going near the staffroom, or the library.



Not going into any room when I could just stand in the doorway. Stuff like that.

We figured out when to start and where, and we decided that we should end in the theatre.

When we were all done, Alex was like, "I can get everything whenever we need it."

I was like, "Cool."

Alex went, "You should write everything down too, you know, everything about the pipe you keep going on about so that people will know we didn't just do it for attention."

I went, "I'll do it after I've done my maths homework."

We both laughed and then Alex went, "I need to ask you a favour though because there's something I can't get and they have loads of it in the science block."

It was some chemical that I couldn't remember the name of. Alex had to spell it out so I could write it down.

There was always at least one teacher in the science block all the time, in one of the classrooms. I got there a couple of minutes after the bell for lunch had gone and walked down the corridor looking through all the windows. Dr. Fairbrush was the only teacher in any of them, eating a sandwich and setting up test tubes and stuff for his next class.

I knocked on his door and when he opened it he asked me what I thought I was doing in the science block at lunch.

I said that Mrs. Howard had sent me for a detention in one of the science rooms.

Dr. Fairbrush told me that I was a bad liar and to tell him what I was really there for.

My hands were shaking and my heart was going like a drumroll. I went, "I need to show someone."

Dr. Fairbrush went, "Show someone what?"

My eyes started to sting and I felt like I had a marble stuck in my throat. I pushed the sleeve of my jumper up to my elbow. There was a little red blob on my shirt sleeve where I must have knocked a scab off.

Dr. Fairbrush was like, "Actually, let's go in here. You can show me in here."

He held the door open and followed me in, then he wheeled his chair round to the front of his desk and told me to sit down. He dragged a big curtain over the windows and then came and sat on his desk and went, "In your own time."

I unbuttoned my cuff and rolled up my sleeve. Dr. Fairbrush's eyes went wide and he put his hand to his

mouth and it made like, a clap sound. He went, "Oh my god."

I felt like I was sitting there naked. Dr. Fairbrush was sitting there looking anywhere except my arm now. I thought he'd have gone to get someone else, like someone more qualified. I was just looking at the floor. I went, "I just needed someone to know."

He gave me a tissue and a plaster for where the scab had come off. He told me I could talk about it, or about anything I wanted. I was like, "Could I have a glass of water please?"

He told me that of course I could, and that he'd be right back.

As soon as the door had shut behind him I got up and went into the store cupboard. There was a shelf with like, fat picture frames with dead bugs and frogs trapped inside. There were boxes full of rubber tubes and boxes full of glass. Then I opened a cupboard and found all the chemicals. They were all kept in like, old tupperware boxes, with the name of what was in them written on ancient sticky labels. I found the one Alex had asked for. I took the whole tub, put it in my bag and legged it out of the classroom.

I slowed down in the corridors and tried to act normal. I rolled my sleeve back down before anyone else could see. I went through the playground and when I got to the edge of the field I sprinted to Alex, threw my bag on the ground, and doubled over to get my breath back.

I went, "It has to be tomorrow."

Alex went, "You'll have to write the whole thing tonight then. Is that Fairbrush coming over?"

Dr. Fairbrush was at the edge of the pitch, carrying a glass of water and walking as fast as he could without spilling any. He held up his hand over his head like he was waving to a boat.

Alex went, "Just leave the bag."

I legged it to the back gate.

This morning, the bus couldn't get to my stop quick enough. When I got on I saw Ash sitting near the front, so I went upstairs. Mo and Kim were on the back seats messing about with a lighter. I sat right at the front, like that would get me there quicker. My legs wouldn't stop moving the whole way.

As soon as we got there I rushed off the bus and went to see Alex. I was like, "Is everything sorted?"

Alex said it was and we just sat there waiting for the bell to go, not saying anything, except that every now and then one of us would burst out laughing.

We went to form like normal. Time seemed like it was stretched out, like in a detention. Everything seemed to be taking longer than usual.

After Miss Foster had finally taken the register she came over to me and told me that Dr. Fairbrush would like to see me at break and to tell me to explain why I was wearing trainers. I said to her that I'd stood in dog shit on the way to school.

In the first lesson I could hardly sit still. I crossed my legs but that didn't stop my heel from bouncing up and down. The teacher told me that if I needed to go to the toilet, I'd have to wait till the end of class. Everyone laughed until he told them all to shut up and get on with their work. People were muttering to each other about me pissing myself again. I pressed my pen down so hard I tore the page I was writing on. I bit my lip so hard I could suck blood out of it.

It was even harder to concentrate on staying calm. I was grinding my teeth and holding onto my chair. The teacher kept telling me to stop messing about while she was trying to talk, and that if I kept on distracting her I'd be sent out of the room.

After she'd sent me out I walked up and down the corridor until break. Teachers kept coming out and telling me to stand where Miss Jennings had told me to stand, then they stopped coming out and I kept hearing them telling their classes to ignore me when I walked past.

I left the corridor as soon as the bell went so Miss Jennings wouldn't have time to come out and get me. When I got to the edge of the field and saw Alex with a duffel bag, I had to shiver to get rid of the urge to sprint across the grass. I walked over like any other break.

I tried to pick the bag up but it was as heavy as a golf bag full of clubs. I dragged it round to the side of Alex that no-one could see and unzipped it. Inside there were more guns than I even knew there were types of guns.

Alex went, "It's a lot, isn't it."

I was like, "Yeh. There's no way I can carry all this around with me."

There were some bike chains and a parcel that looked like a brick wrapped in brown paper and my empty backpack inside too. I took my backpack out and started rooting around in the guns like it was a box of Lego. There was one that was an Uzi. It was like a small machine-gun. I put it in my backpack. There was another one just like it but a bit smaller. I put that in my backpack too. Alex said that they were all loaded, so when one ran out of bullets I could just throw it away and get another out. I took out a shotgun and tried pulling back the grip but it was really stiff, so I took out a different shotgun, the type that farmers use, and put that in my bag. The handle stuck out the top, so I wrapped a plastic bag around it.

I put the bag on. It was ok. I knelt down and took the James Bond gun out of the duffel bag, put it in my waistband and let my shirt hang over it. I stood with Alex and we watched everyone doing what they did before school. The big group of groups outside the school. Then the bell went, doors opened, and the group was sucked inside.

I went in too, and stood at the end of the main hallway. Everyone was standing around, waiting for their teachers to come and open their classrooms for the next lessons. We were supposed to all line up against the wall while we waited, but no-one ever did, so the corridor was just full of people all carrying on doing what they were doing outside.

No-one noticed me put my backpack down and taking one of the Uzi guns out of it. I held it with both hands and pulled the trigger.

I went blind. The noise was so loud it was like, the opposite of being deaf. My hands and arms and my whole chest rattled.

When the ringing in my ears got quiet I could hear screaming and shoes squeaking on the floor and doors slamming.

When I opened my eyes the corridor was completely different. There was no-one standing around. The only people in the corridor now were on the floor, not moving or only just moving, and you couldn't see the floor tiles for all the blood.

Loads of people had gone into the classrooms. I could see them through the windows, trying to hide and trying to see what was going on at the same time. I opened the door to the nearest one. Everyone inside shrieked and ran to the back of the room, falling over and huddling together. Alex was at the window where my desk was, looking in and laughing. I fired into the huddle of people and it wasn't nearly as bad as the first time, so I shot again and that time was even less bad.

I put my backpack back on and walked down the corridor, shooting through the classroom windows. By the time I got to the end of the corridor, the gun was empty.

The fire doors were open. While I took the other Uzi out of my bag I looked across the empty playground, to the back of the library. There were loads of people at the windows and when I looked over they all ducked down.

We'd decided I shouldn't go to the library, because the entrance was right by the staffroom and if enough teachers came in all at once they would have got me. But when I saw that Chris and some of the others from the gang were in there, I changed the plan. When everyone in the library saw me coming across the playground they all legged it from the window. I ran the rest of the way.

When I got there, they were all pushing each other trying to get out the door. I hammered on the window with the gun's handle. Chris and Kim and the rest of that lot were punching people in the crowd and dragging them out of it.

The window smashed and I shot at the crowd, then climbed into the library. Cameron and Drew were the only ones from Chris's gang that hadn't escaped. I made them and everyone else left in the library get down on their knees, then I took the James Bond gun out and I executed them all.

Then the door burst open and coach came in, walking like a wrestler on their way to the ring, pointing at me and telling me to stop what I was doing. I put the James Bond gun back into my waistband, shot Coach a couple of times with the Uzi, then went back out the window to carry on the way we'd planned.

I walked down the corridors, shooting randomly through classroom windows and shooting at anyone I saw trying to get away or huddled in a corner. I got to a set of stairs that a load of kids were running down, until they saw me, then they all started running back up and tripping on the steps and falling over each other. I stood at the bottom, shooting up at them. Whenever I hit one of them they came tumbling down the stairs like it was a big vending machine.

When the Uzi was empty I dropped it and got the James Bond gun back out, then went into a corridor that was weirdly quiet. I could hear clattering and screaming coming from the other end of it, like how you can hear the motorway from the other end of an underpass. A pair of hands came round the far corner and I heard Dr. Fairbrush shout, "It's me. It's Doctor Fairbrush. Don't shoot. Ash is here with me too, aren't you, Ash?"

Ash shouted, "Yeh. I'm here too."

I went, "Is Kim not with you?"

Dr. Fairbrush shouted, "No, Kim is..."

Before he could finish I yelled back, "I wasn't talking to you."

Dr. Fairbrush was like, "We're going to come round the corner now, and talk. Ok?"

I aimed at Tuesday Stew Day poster at the end of the corridor and kept shooting at it until the gun was empty, then I slid the gun across the floor and it hit the skirting board underneath the poster. I shouted, "No more bullets."

Dr. Fairbrush told me that they were going to come out slowly, and they did, with their hands up by the heads. I didn't know what to do with my hands. I folded my arms and then unfolded them and just my hands hang by my sides. Dr. Fairbrush was talking but I wasn't listening to what he was saying. I wasn't even looking at them as I walked over, I kept my focus on the bulletholes in the poster behind them.

I went, "Can I talk to Ash alone?"

Dr. Fairbrush stopped talking and looked at Ash. Ash looked terrified. Dr. Fairbrush told us that he'd leave us for a minute, but he'd only be round the corner.

When he'd gone, Ash was like, "Are you going to let me go?"

I pointed behind me, the way I'd come from, and went, "Go that way. Run."

As Ash ran past me I span around, reached behind me for the shotgun, and pulled it out of my backpack. I ripped then carrier bag off and fired down the corridor. Ash dropped against the double doors I'd come in through. Then I span back around and shot at Dr. Fairbrush as he came round the corner. Dust and chunks of wall and blood and chunks of Dr. Fairbrush blasted into the air. He stood there for a bit, swaying with his mouth open, and then collapsed.

I kept hold of the shotgun and went to the art department. Everything was quiet now and the school felt empty. Everywhere in the art room were people's unfinished projects. I kicked over a table with a load of clay sculptures on it and set fire to a load of paintings pegged to like, a washing line.

I went down the corridor that went through the drama department. There were two kids sitting on the floor against a dressing room door and crying. I pointed the shotgun at them and one of them started to piss themselves, literally, and the other one started begging me not to shoot them. When I walked off I heard the one that had been pleading go, "Thankyou."

That made me laugh and I laughed to myself the whole way down the corridor and through the backstage bit, like, the wings. Then I walked out to the middle of the stage and stood there in the dark, behind the big heavy curtains. Everything was so quiet. All I could hear was the ringing in my ears. I just stood there for a bit until it had gone. Then I went through the curtains, to the front of the stage.

All the chairs were folded up and stacked against the wall. In the middle of the empty floor, where they would have been, if there was a play or an assembly, was Alex with the duffel bag. I dropped the shotgun and my backpack and like, took a bow.

I jumped off the stage and Alex went, "That took longer than we'd planned."

I was like, "Yeh. I got into a big fight. I got jumped."

Alex went, "A load of people came running through. They went right past me. They left the doors wide open."

At the back of the theatre one of the sets of fire doors was open. I unzipped the duffel bag and got two bike chains out then legged it over. Outside, in the car park, a group of teachers were talking to some policemen. One of the policemen must have seen me because he pointed at me and everyone looked, and then all the policemen came running over. I pulled the doors shut as quick as I could. I wrapped one of the bike chains round the handles while a policeman on the other side kept kicking and shoulder-barging the doors.

I went over to the other doors, shouting over the banging, going, "Sorry. I took a detour. Sorry but I had to."

Alex was like, "Where did you go?"

I wrapped the other chain round the doors' handles and shouted over the banging, "The library."

Alex went, "That was my idea in the first place, to go to the library."

I locked the bike chain and went over to Alex so we were close enough to talk without having to yell and was like, "It turned out to be a good idea."

Alex went, "Thanks."

I grabbed the bottom of Alex's tarp and ran backwards. The pegs were still in the holes and they clattered up the glass and then across the wooden floor. I dragged it a to the side of the room and left it there, then pulled a chair out of the stacks of them and went back to Alex.

I took the parcel and a roll of gaffa tape out of the duffel bag. I pulled the pin out and put the parcel to my ear. I could only just hear it ticking over all the banging and the ringing in my ears. I stood on the chair and taped it high up on Alex's side, then climbed down and sat on the chair facing the back wall, where the fire doors were with the policemen on the other side, banging and trying to get in. I got a machine gun out of the duffel bag and leant it against Alex's side.

I took out a notebook and a pen from my pocket and read about running to the back gate. I scribbled a load out and then started writing about this morning at the bus stop.

When I'd finished I scribbled a load out.