

THE NEVER-ENDING CIRCLE.

'You don't know nothin'.

The boot went into the part of Adrian that hurt the most.

'That's 'cos you're posh.'

'We don't like posh.'

'You wanna make it in this world bro', you gotta learn the rules'.

Each comment had come from a different mouth, every one positioned at a different point on the circumference of the human circle that surrounded Adrian.

'What do you expect from a prat with a name like that? Adrian? You need to get a proper name, mate!'

The circle dispersed to leave the focus of their attention lying prone on the ground. Adrian could have felt a sense of injustice, but he couldn't think beyond the pain in his groin.

'Uuuuugh.'

Picking himself up, Adrian starting walking home. The boys who had surrounded him came from a different school. He had been targeted because of the uniform he was wearing. It announced that he was a pupil at St. Bartholomew's, the private school from the other side of town.

Adrian's usual silent demeanour was interrupted by the sound of spew hitting the pavement. Whatever happened, Adrian was not going to tell his mother. That would make things worse. She would demand to know which school the boys went to, and then want to see the headteacher.

Adrian put his key in the front door.

'Hello, darling. You're late today. You haven't been spending time with that Freya again, have you?'

'Mum! Why do you ask me the same question every time? And why do you keep going on about Freya? She's just a friend.'

'Not a 'special friend'?' came the voice from the kitchen.

'Very funny, Mum. Ha! Ha!' It was a teenager's job the make fun of his parents and not the other way round.

Stomping up the stairs, Adrian entered the world of his phone. He had ignored it on the way back because he had been in such pain. He read Freya's message. 'Love you to the moon

and... maybe we could go there together, babes?' Adrian smiled. Maybe she did love him after all.

The sun rose to signal the next school day.

Bang!

'This is the deal, right? This babe you reckon's got the hots for you is one of ours, right? We don't want no posh kid messin' with our BBs. You leave her alone. Stay with your own kind. You get me?'

'If you don't, my friend, you's gonna suffer.'

'And so is she.'

Adrian had not taken his usual route to school, but 'the boys' had still managed to track him down. But how?

'That babe is mine, you understand me? You're a posh dumb-ass. You don't know nothin'. You wanna get real and live in the modern world, my friend.'

At least this time Adrian had not been kicked 'where the sun don't shine'. His head throbbed with the blow from the outside and the thoughts from the inside.

Ping!

'I wasn't joking. To the moon and back. Now that's the truth! R u around after school today? Hair in a bun. Specially for you.'

Adrian didn't know what to do. Freya didn't have to name a place, because there was somewhere they always met. It was down an alleyway. Freya and 'the boys' went to the same school. Would they follow her? Adrian's fingers took control. Almost without him being aware, they sent a thumb back to Freya.

The thumb gave the response, but it was controlled by its masters, the fingers.

It was autumn, so the nights were drawing in. Adrian's feet slipped on the cobblestones and his heart raced. But was it out of anticipation or fear?

'I really do love you!' The voice of a teenage girl sounded from around the corner. It sounded different, but it had to be her. How could she see him through the wall?

Adrian turned the corner. Sophia's red hair caused his mouth to open. How? Who? Her face smiled, as she stared at the screen of her phone.

A voice came from behind Adrian's back. 'You need to get real. I told you that. Don't you know that we got stuff called phones? You never heard of 'em?'

Sophia burst out laughing, as she continued Freddie's explanation. 'Freddie pinged me a message to tell me you'd arrived!'

The laughter from Freddie's face gave way to a grin of superiority.

'You wanna know where Freya is? I ain't tellin' ya'. We know you broke the rules. And if you break the rules you pay the price. Don't you learn nothin' at the posh-boy place of yours?'

'And I know stuff about Freya that you don't,' said the smiling Sophia, who had suddenly adopted Freddie's tone. 'And if you don't do what you're told, she's gonna suffer, and I mean she's gonna suffer, like, now.'