

A Difficult Decision for Daniel

(Target audience age: about thirteen)

‘Alright Dan?’

Daniel fidgeted with his i-phone, quickly leaving the maths game he’d been struggling with all break.

‘What y’doing?’

‘Just – well, y’know, Lee – just chilling.’

‘*Chillin’*, eh?’ Lee smirked and threw the others a knowing look. ‘Going to show us your phone, are you. What you been lookin’ at?’

‘Er...’

A loud bell signified the end of break.

‘No, sorry. I need to get on – got to get to Physics!’

Daniel moved off quickly, tucking his mobile into his blazer pocket, then hurried towards the Science Block.

‘Saved by the bell, Danny boy! See ya later!’ Lee shouted and made off with the others, pushing, shoving, and swinging their bags, Mr Daley bellowing at them to be quiet, and to get to lessons, ‘*Now!*’

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Three-thirty and school was over for the weekend. Daniel, and a thousand others, were streaming for the entrance. It was the end of a cold, Friday and Daniel buttoned his long raincoat and tucked in his scarf.

‘Oooh! Nice coat Danny. What d’ya call it. A mac? An overcoat? What d’you think, guys?’

‘Definitely a mac, Lee.’

‘Yeah. Never an overcoat.’

The three boys sniggered and felt Daniel’s raincoat. ‘Must’ve cost a bomb, Danny!’ said Tommy. ‘Give us a look at the lining.’

Daniel stopped walking and reluctantly opened his coat.

Lee held it open wide, like a bird’s wing or Dracula’s cloak. ‘What d’you think, Kyle? Any good?’

Kyle stuck his nose in closer to have a better look. ‘Just the job, Lee. Got a big pocket, just here.’ His hand disappeared. ‘Real deep too! Get a load of stuff in there!’

Daniel whipped his coat away and turned to Lee. ‘What are you all talking about?! Why don’t you just leave me alone?!’

Lee stepped forward and held Daniel by the shoulders - his face uncomfortably close. Daniel smelt the whiff of cigarettes – or vape. He couldn’t be sure.

‘Got a little business proposition for you, Danny.’

'Good word, Lee!' It was Kyle.

Lee turned to Kyle without a word, then back to Daniel. 'You like crisps? Chocolate? How about them Haribo things?'

Daniel pushed his glasses up his nose, bringing Lee's face back into focus. 'A bit. Not much. Why?'

'*Everyone* loves chocolate and crisps, you *weirdo*! *Everyone*! And *everyone* is willing to pay to get some at breaktimes. You know, a quid for cheese and onion, two quid for Dairy Milk.'

'Don't forget the Hariboes, Lee.'

Lee gave Kyle a tired look. 'Yeah. And the Hariboes.'

'What's that got to do with *me*?' Daniel said, his eyes getting wider.

'It's the *pocket* we're interested in, you geek,' said Tommy, 'The *pocket*!'

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Monday morning came round quickly – another rainy day. Daniel got off the school bus, the one that ran past the side of their tennis court on the private Montadale Estate, then started the short walk to the school gates. His head was down, to avoid looking at the buses that poured in from the tower-blocks and terraces on the other side of town. He'd almost made it when a hand gripped his arm.

'Mornin', Danny Boy... Glad you're wearing your old coat again. Wet day. Why wouldn't a boy wear a big, old coat to do a bit of shoppin' on a day like today?' Lee waited a few seconds, then carried on: 'So... I expect you've been thinking hard about what we said on Friday? Like I said, we're fair, and we'd cut you in. Ten percent: so that's 10p for a pound, 20p for two quid, 30p for-'

'I *know* what ten percent means, Lee!' Danny said angrily, then pulled his arm away.

Lee stopped, looked him up and down. 'Good, Danny. I like a bit of fight! Shows you've got guts! So, you going to come shopping with us, after school? The mini-mart, where the cameras don't work?' Daniel shrugged; said nothing. Eventually, they reached the front door and stopped – Daniel's form-room to the right, Lee's to the left.

'Look, Danny, y'know that everyone thinks you're a geek, right?'

Daniel nodded mutely.

'Well, thing is - keep it quiet - but I quite like you really. Wouldn't mind having you as a mate, sort of the brains part of the gang. Just think, Danny! People wouldn't dare come near you! They'd get out your way in the corridor! Some of the girls might even... you know? That'd be good, wouldn't it?'

Daniel shuffled his feet. 'Yeah. It would.'

'Well, Danny, you got to *earn* it, mate! Nothing comes for free these days, *eh*?'

Danny nodded.

'So then, what d'you say? Corner shop at four?'

'Well... um... I...'

'Right, you two! Get to class, *now*!' It was Mr Daley. The two boys walked off quickly: Daniel with a frown on his face; Lee with a thin smile...

800 words