

Highlighter.

‘Arthur, quick, come here, I’ve got something to show.’

Arthur scurried across the corridor and dived in behind his best friend into the empty classroom.

‘Wot you got? Come on spill.’

‘This!’

‘Adam, WTF, a highlighter. Going to colour something in?’

‘No stupid, it’s a vape. I nicked it off my sister. Sat in her pencil case in full sight and none of the teachers know better.’

‘You pinched it from your sister? The one that’s in the sixth form? Same class as my brother?’

‘You bet.’

‘Why?’

‘She has loads lying around. She’s vaped for years. Always getting in trouble with mum and dad, they hate it but she just gives them grief. Winds them up about their prosecco habit. It’s so funny, better than watching tv.’ Adam went to put the vape to his lips.

‘Has your sister used that?’

Adam nodded.

‘Ouch, if you puff on that, it will be like snogging your sister. That counts as incest.’

Adam glowered, but offered the vape. Pushed it towards Arthur. ‘Want a hit?’

‘Are you stupid? You know I have my life-limiting condition. If I hit on that, my lungs are going to get trashed. The Brompton will be able to tell. My MRI scans show everything! Anyway, I’m not touching anything your sister has sucked on first. That’s gross.’

Arthur dodged Adam’s fist and laughed. ‘Where did she get it from. Don’t you have to be eighteen to purchase stuff like that, it’s the law, like alcohol.’

‘Never been a problem, the corner shop sells them to anyone, turns a blind eye, they are only interested in your cash.’

Arthur pulled out his pockets and looked at his best friend with an incredulity that screwed up his face. ‘Cash? What is that? Isn’t everything cashless these days? Mum says I’ve got a savings thing, but I’m not allowed to touch it till I’m eighteen.’

He flexed. ‘All I can splash is some of my brother’s Joe Malone. Nicked from his room of course.’

Adam laughed. 'That's the point. My sister has tons of cash, works at Harry Potter world. Mum moans that she is always spending. Make up, bras and sweets; ha if she only knew the truth. Now the Haribo's I don't mind cos she always gives some to me and then I tell her when Dad is on the war path and it's time to hide all her contraband and ill-gotten gains under her bed.'

'Contraband?'

'Yeah, all the vodka and vapes. Her secret purchases. I'd once said I'd bubble her; she just punched me and threatened much worse if I did.'

'I punch my brother all the time.'

'Yeah, then run away before he sits on you, I've seen. Anyway, her punch is so girly. Wouldn't hurt a fly. She's really quite nice. Comes into my room sometimes and sits on my bed to talk. She smells nice, all Daisy, with a hint of bubble gum.'

'That's the vape you twonk. Bubble gum or sweet cherry, so saccharine... all chemical. The same smell that fills the bogs when the muppets from our class are in town. They stink. Piss on a cloud of vape juice. Hey, does your sister stink of piss and vape juice, because you will, if you hit on that.'

Before they could start the scrap that was brewing, a teacher put her head around the door and politely asked them if they had a lesson to be in? Adam ducked his head and exited surreptitiously and quickly strode away. Arthur followed, no running, they sidled up the corridor, obeying the strict one-way system that worked throughout the school.

Arthur quivered, the back of his neck and shoulders involuntarily tightened. The teacher might have seen the vape. Even though it was Adam's sisters.

'Arthur! Come back here, now.'

'Yes Miss.'

'Show me your rucksack.'

Arthur frowned.

'Why Miss.'

'Just do it please.'

Athur slung it from his shoulder and passed it over. Miss intentionally opened the top zip and removed the vape. 'What is this.?'

'Don't know miss. Never seen it before. Er, a highlighter Miss.'

'Don't mess. Why do you have a vape in your bag. This is a suspension issue.'

Arthur's face reddened; his stomach churned. 'Miss, I promise it's not mine, I've never seen one before. I have my lung condition Miss... remember... I have cystic fibrosis; I could never vape. Someone's planted it...'

Arthur flinched as Miss looked right into his eyes. 'Whose is it? Tell me and it will be better for you.'

'I don't know Miss. Arthur looked down at his shoes. He hoped the floor would open and swallow him whole.

'Who was that with you? I didn't catch their face. Arthur, look at me. Who was it?'

'Er, um Miss... Please...'