KERB STAIN BOYS

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Barrington Stoke

To those who were told they'd
never amount to much

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CHAPTER ONE

Detention

It was almost home time. Sixty seconds to go before we went missing for the weekend. Then, *boof*. A bottle of water slapped the back of my head.

I spun around. I felt water dripping down my back. I heard mad giggles. I could feel the heat of Caldonia Lake's eyes burning gas-rings into me. Her tongue was ripe for a cuss attack.

"Don't you *ever* make jokes about my eyebrows, Capleton!" Caldonia spat.

So I had just branded her the blue forehead smurf queen, but she had called me a skinny runner bean first.

I shot out of my chair and hyper-footed over to her.

She stood up. "What?" she challenged. Her gob spray polluted my cheeks. "You wanna fist-off now? Some man you are, wanting to war with a girl."

"I'll quit yabbering on about your brows if you stop going on about my height."

Terror shot out of his seat as if it had an eject button. He rushed up to me, chin in the air. "Lay one thumb on my queen and your lips are gonna be separated," Terror warned.

I body-barged Terror out of my way. "Get out of my space!" I said to him. "This has got shit all to do with you."

"*Fight, fight, fight*," the classroom chanted.

"Stop!" Mr Wyatt intervened. He snapped a textbook shut and marched towards us. "Caldonia, Terry and Capleton, you're staying. The rest of you can go."

Table legs and chairs screeched and scraped. The buzzer sounded. My year ten Maths class barged out of the classroom. Terror, his green eyes sizzling, looked at me like he wanted the bell to clang to start round two. I wasn't sure if I was up to it. He was shorter than me but ripped and crusty. His fists weren't small. Caldonia sat back down and took out a small make-up mirror from her rucksack. She checked her eyebrows – tattooed blue. They dipped and curled like micro roller-coasters.

"I'm warning you, Briggy," Terror said as he pointed a finger at me. "*Don't* trouble my queen."

"I'm not your freaking queen," Caldonia cut in. "And I don't need you to do my warring for me. I can look after myself."

"Stop," Wyatt barked.

"But ..." Terror began, and tailed off. He returned to his seat.

"What's a matter with you three?" asked Wyatt. "I thought you were friends?"

Terror and me had been bredrens since we were both wrapped in nappies. But ever since Terror had locked on his lust for Caldonia Lake, issues had short-circuited between us.

Wyatt glared at me. "Capleton, can you apologise to Caldonia? And Caldonia, say sorry to Capleton."

I looked away. *Why should I be the one to apologise first? Caldonia started this shit. I just wanna get out of her cussing range.*

"OK," I said, facing up to her. "Sorry for branding you the blue forehead smurf queen."

Caldonia grinned an *I got the better of you* grin.

"Caldonia?" said Wyatt. "Apologise."

Caldonia gave me an evil eye-pass, scoping me from my baby toe to eyebrow corner. She

then kissed her teeth for ten seconds and shook her head. Finally, she said, "Sorry." I could barely hear her. "Sorry for calling you a long skinny runner bean with a crusty bread forehead."

Did she have to repeat the full cuss?

Wyatt scoped Terror hard. "Terry," Wyatt said. "You owe me an apology too."

Terror stared at the floor. "Sorry."

Wyatt returned to his seat. "You all still have detention," he said. He tip-tapped his fingers on his desk. There was an uneasy silence. Terror broke it.

"Why it's only us three doing time?" Terror asked. "Early B and Flabba Holt were raging at each other."

"A bottle was thrown," said Mr Wyatt. "You have to have boundaries."

"I didn't fling any bottle," I said.

Wyatt looked at me like I ate his logarithm charts. To avoid his spotlight, I looked out the window. Two teachers in Day-glo yellow were on patrol at the school gates. A male fed stood on the other side of the road – there had been a shanking outside school a few weeks ago. The kids of South Crongton High streamed out. A 250 bus pulled up and there was a mad rush to get on it.

I sensed Terror's temper brewing behind me. I glanced past him. Caldonia sat cross-legged, examining her nails. I couldn't lie. She was the coolest chick in our year. And the prettiest. Long black curls topped her off neatly. Thick mascara glammed up her eyes. Chocolate-brown lipstick sexed up her lips. Even year eleven bruvs peeked a second glance at her curves. Chicks wanted to look like her and Terror wanted to star on *Love Island* with her.

"I'll be back in a minute," said Wyatt. "I suggest that if you have any homework – start it."

Terror kissed his teeth and turned his back. Caldonia didn't look up from her nails.

Wyatt scoped us hard again. "At least take out a book and read."

I considered grabbing the book I'm reading – *Noughts & Crosses* – from my rucksack but thought better of it. Didn't want Terror and Caldonia to think I was a slave to the page.

"Stay here!" Wyatt warned. "If any of you so much as put a toe outside this classroom, then you can say hello to detentions for the next week."

He closed the door behind him.

Terror stood up. "You know what?" he said. "Bomb this! Mum gave me two ten notes to put on the gas and electric on the way home. We only had a few pence on it when I left this

morning. She's gonna cuss me hard if I land back at my ends late and the electric has run out."

Caldonia looked up and said, "Then wheel back to your slab right now. What's stopping you?"

"He's on his last warning," I said. "If he goes all ghost on his detention again, he's getting—"

"*He* can speak for himself." Terror cut my flow. "You wanna lock-down your tongue, Briggy, or it's gonna find your long ass in tribulation one day."

"You know what?" I told Terror. "Just bring it any time!"

Terror crackled back into his seat, but he didn't respond.

I didn't love being tall. There was almost six foot of my long runner-bean ass. When shit happened behind teachers' backs, they'd turn around and point their fingers at me. Even when I wasn't being aggressive, some peeps thought I

was. I didn't really wanna maul Terror, my best bredren.

Caldonia studied her nails again. "They can give me detention till dawn o'clock," she said. "I don't give a flying squiddly."

"Don't you wanna step home?" I asked.

"Nothing to step home for," she said. "Apart from Mum sploshing dinner on my plate that's been in the fridge for four days. Dad's still on unemployment island. Can't watch zero squat on TV cos we haven't got a dish and the nearest I'm gonna get to a tablet is if I jack some brain-ache pills from Dagthorn's shop."

I glanced at Caldonia's raggedy trousers and nibbled shoes.

"You can watch shit on your phone," I suggested.

Caldonia zipped open her bag and took out a mobile phone that was as thick as the Bible.

"I hear you," I said.

"I don't love school and I don't love home," Caldonia said. "The only joy I get is when I glam up my face with a liccle make-up to make me feel on point in the morning. But, oh no! *You* have to stomp all over that, don't you, Capleton?"

"What d'you expect if you're branding me the *skinny shard to rule 'em all*," I said to defend myself. "I'm not gonna let that pass."

Caldonia kissed her teeth for even longer than ten seconds. Her eyes narrowed like she was thinking of a most devious plan. She took a half-smoked rocket from her purse and straightened it out. She fired it up with a lighter, sucked on it hard, then blew perfect smoke rings towards the ceiling. I didn't love her ways but she was as cool as a penguin sliding on one foot down an iceberg.

"So you're not satisfied with getting us

detention," I said. "You wanna get us expelled too."

Caldonia side-eyed me. "Capleton, lock-tight your lips, man, and leave me alone."

"Can I have a sample?" asked Terror.

"Don't flood the butt," she said. She passed the rocket on to Terror. Weed smoke filled the room. The sweet smell tunnelled up my nostrils. My gaze locked on to the classroom door. *Oh my days. If Wyatt comes back now, we'll be terminated. My mum will go psycho on me. It won't be pretty.*

Terror had taken three pulls from the rocket. He scoped Caldonia like he wanted to make babies. "So what d'you say, Caldonia?" Terror said. "Can I slide over to your slab later on?"

Caldonia snatched the rocket from Terror's grasp. She took one last drag before she killed it. "What did I tell you?" she raised her voice. "My

paps don't like me bringing any kerb stains to our gates."

"I'm not a kerb stain," Terror protested.

"*Yes*, you are," Caldonia argued. "You live in the south ends of the estate, so you're one hundred per cent, original, grimy, stainy side of the kerb."

"That's cold," Terror said.

I covered my mouth to block my giggles. Terror side-eyed me and spotted my laughing eyes. Then he switched his attention back to Caldonia. He was still as high as a hot-air balloon. "So, as you're my queen now," Terror said, "what d'you say we go out – grooving over the ice rink or licking down some skittles or something?"

Caldonia bored her eyes into Terror like she wanted to toast him with a hot coal. "Listen me good, Terror," she said. "I'm not gonna press the replay on this one. You have a bit of cuteness

going on and your muscles are hard in all the right places. You're a bit dense in the brain section but you can get away with that cos you have a liccle funny side that I like. But I'm *not* your freaking queen. Nobody owns me. *Nobody!* Not even my dad."

"But ..." Terror replied. "But we meshed tongues the other day—"

"Yeah! And?" Caldonia fired back. "Just cos we tickled tonsils it doesn't mean you've got a receipt to claim my ass. Do I have an Amazon label on my butt?"

I studied Caldonia's bumper – I gave it eleven outta ten.

"So what did it mean?" Terror wanted to know.

"It meant that in that moment I wanted to bend tongues with you," Caldonia said. She leaned forward to press home her point.

I was feeling it for Terror. His ego was getting smashed.

Caldonia wasn't finished. "It doesn't mean I wanna glam up in all white and make promises to a preacher. Are you comprehending me?"

Terror nodded. What else could he do? There was an awkward silence for the next two minutes. I think we all wanted Wyatt to return but no one would admit it. I decided to rest my gaze on the clock fixed to the classroom wall.

"Being someone's partner is not on my agenda," Terror said to Caldonia. "I'm only fifteen for fruck's sake. Even when I reach the mad old age of *thirty*, I'm not on that programme. But I was just thinking that we could flex – you know, kinda friends with benefits. Maybe after that, switch it to a long-term thing."

Caldonia stood up and bit her top lip. I waited for the cuss attack. She hot-stepped over to

Terror like she was an assassin with a deadline. He leaned back as she fired up her tongue.

"Listen me proper," Caldonia said. "Maybe me and you can have laughs and jokes and make out when I feel like it, but you and me will *never* be a long-term thing. Are you comprehending?"

"Why not?" Terror wanted to know.

"*Why not?*" Caldonia repeated. "I'm gonna clarify this situation, so don't get offended."

Man. I didn't love the sound of that. I was glad I wasn't in Terror's socks.

Caldonia went on, "For your information, you haven't got shit-all going for you. Your Maths is even sadder than mine. The refugees in this school write better English than you and there are seven-year-old kids in the Congo who are handier with a laptop. You know I'm not wrong."

Ouch! It was hard to watch. This wasn't a car smash, it was a train wreck.

Caldonia placed her hands on Terror's desk. She leaned in even closer to him. Her nose was an inch away from his. It wasn't jokes any more. A referee woulda blown mighty hard on a whistle to stop it.

"So in a few years' time, what can you offer me?" she said. "You'll probably end up working in a 99p store wearing some sad apron with a cheapo hat to match."

Terror tried to bluster away his shame. His lips moved but nothing came out for five seconds. "I've got plans," he said at last. "Serious plans."

Caldonia smiled like she was thinking up something devious. She then stood up and glanced at me. I didn't wanna get my ego beaten too, so I stared at the floor.

"And the same goes for you, Capleton," Caldonia said. "What are you good at?"

I thought about it. My Drama was on point. My History wasn't too tragic. I didn't wanna

think about my English or Maths. I only used IT for Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. "I was in the table tennis team last year," I managed. "We got to the semi-finals."

Caldonia stepped towards me. She shook her head like I was a cute Labrador that had to be put down. "The school hasn't had a table tennis team since Mr Madeley left," she said. "We haven't even got a netball team for our year after Lisa Dempsey started that brawl with the Joan Benson Academy chicks. That fight was the last straw."

"But ..." Terror said.

"But what?" Caldonia said, and wheeled around to confront Terror again. "I'm gonna give you a dose of realness. Apart from busting jokes in class, you two aren't shit-hot at anything. Not that I can see anyhow. Squiddly-squat. Nothing."

That stung like a mega-size wasp. Terror dropped his head. I didn't know where to look.

Another awkward silence. Caldonia parked her curvy self down and examined her nails some more. What could we say? She was in a higher group than us in almost everything. I'd heard her speak French and Spanish. She could be even more top ranking if she bothered to do the work. I willed for Wyatt to come back.

"We've got plans," Terror said, after a while.

"What plans?" Caldonia wanted to know.

Terror glanced at me. He didn't tell me about any plans. *What's he on?*

"We're gonna ... we're gonna rob a post office," Terror said. "That's been our mission for weeks. Nuff plans have been made. We're on it."

My heart stopped to have a convo with my ears. It took a long second to pump a beat again. *Did he just spill that?* I thought. *Is he that charged? He only had three puffs*. I opened my mouth but nothing came out.

Meanwhile, Caldonia collapsed into a heap of giggleness. "You two?" she stuttered. "Rob a—? Ha ha ha! Oh my days, this is too much! Too funny. A post office!"

I was offended to the core. It was madness and it wasn't happening, but she didn't have to chuckle her ribs out like that.

I looked at Terror and his eyebrows had hardened. "I'm serious," Terror said. "No jokes!"

Caldonia held her belly to keep her guts in place. "Slap my dragons," she chuckled. "I get some jokes today. You two rob—"

Wyatt returned. He was carrying folders and textbooks and he placed them on his desk. He sniffed at the air but didn't say anything. He didn't look too happy.

"Can we step now?" asked Terror.

Wyatt sat down. I scoped him hard. Wyatt hadn't shaved for a couple of days. His tie was

off-key. Stress lines shot off the corners of his eyes. His guts spilled over his belt. He had let himself go since I started in year seven. He meshed his fingers together. "Why can't you three understand?" Wyatt said. "You can't carry on like this. This is a vital time of year for you all. In just a few months you'll be taking your GCSEs."

Caldonia covered her mouth as she kept trying to block her chuckles. The post office mission was probably still giving her jokes.

"Something funny?" Wyatt asked.

"No, sir," Caldonia replied. "I'm not busting chuckles about you. Honest."

Wyatt took in a breath. "You'll be out there in the big wide world before you know it," Wyatt said. "It's time to *grow* up and act like year tens, *not* year sevens."

"Can we step now?" Terror repeated.

Wyatt thought about it. He looked like he wanted to step home too. "Go on, get out of my classroom. I expect better behaviour next lesson."