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Tuesday 13 May, 9.15 a.m.

Hanbridge High School playing field

I knew Mr Baynton was dead as soon as Daniel opened the trunk in the sports equipment shed. We were only in there looking for a football to play with while we waited for the PE teacher.

And there he was.

Dead.

Kids aren't supposed to find bodies. Bodies are just for Sunday evening murder-mystery TV shows, and bedtime reading (as long as Mum doesn't catch me nicking one of Dad's blood-and-guts thrillers).

So all in all, my second week at Hanbridge High was a memorable one. Just not in a good way. But

I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me explain how I got in this mess in the first place.

When Mum dropped the bombshell, that Sunday in January, I'd been sitting at the kitchen table surrounded by my homework and moaning about my DT project getting squashed on the Grensham school bus.

'Well, Jonathan,' she'd said. 'You won't much longer have to put up with all this inconvenience.' Mum's native language is Swiss German, so she sometimes says things in English in a confusing order (she speaks Italian, Spanish and Hungarian too, meaning she can tell me off in *many* different ways). 'Soon you'll be beginning a new school, because we're moving to Nanna Rosie's old house in Hanbridge.'

Well, obviously I didn't believe her. Not until she laid it all out.

'Last week your father applied for a promotion at the Bristol branch of the undertaker's.' (Yes, my Dad's a mortician. Yes, it's a bit weird, but I also think it's kind of cool.) 'And if he gets it, then you will start at a new school in May, and we will be moving finally into our own home!' She leaned over

the table and touched my hand. 'You always loved staying in Nanna Rosie's old house. You and Maximilian will finally have a garden to play in, and you shall feel like you are on holiday all the time! Nanna and you would always be talking about her murder-mystery books – they will all be there too.'

I thumped my hands down on the table, either side of my half-eaten cinnamon roll. 'That's ridiculous! Cos Nanna's not around any more, is she? I've only been in Year Seven at Grensham for a term, and *all* my friends are here, the basketball team, the band . . . moving is just not an option, Mum. No way.'

Mum folded her arms in that terrifying way that she does. 'Jonathan. You must try and think about someone other than yourself for one minute! Nanna wanted us to inherit her house. There'll be no rent to pay, and no horrible landlord like Mr Franklin making all of the decisions. We are very, very grateful to Nanna for her kindness to us.'

'Holy . . . crud, Mum. You actually mean it.'

Mum covered Max's ears as he sat squidging Play-Doh on his highchair. '*Tsk*, *tsk*, *tsk*. You must not say these words, Jonathan! You must think about the impression you will be making at your

new school. No one will want to be friends with such a potty-mouth.'

I spent the rest of the day in a daze. I kept thinking, *When Dad gets back from work, he'll see sense and blow the whole plan apart*. But when he got home, he was all flushed. He picked Mum up and swung her around and kissed her like I wasn't even looking.

'I got it!' he shouted, and they both did a weird jumpy dance around the kitchen.

'So what?' I said.

Mum looked at Dad and shrugged. 'He is not so happy with this plan as we hoped.' She squeezed my cheek. 'Can you not see that your father is pleased to be going back home where he grew up, Jonathan? You are spoiling the excitement of all of us.'

That was the point. And as far as I was concerned, their excitement could stay spoiled.

Mum and Dad might move us to Hanbridge, but there was no way we were going to stay there long.

Looking down at Mr Baynton in that big plastic box felt like the next disaster in a recent string of

catastrophes in my life. I grabbed the lid off Daniel and shut the trunk again, quick.

I turned away but I could still see the image when I shut my eyes. Sometimes I wish I didn't notice everything all the time.

Daniel gagged and staggered out of the shed to be sick in the hedge, just missing Tyler Jenkins's Adidas trainers. Tyler was not pleased.

'Oi! W-what do you think you're doing? You'll be a deader if you've got even *one* spot of spew on my new shoes!'

Lydia Strong came running when she heard Tyler's howl of fury.

'Why's Daniel puking? What's in the shed?'

The other students smelled trouble, literally. They started crowding round Daniel, making me feel a bit small and lonely.

I decided to make myself useful by standing in front of the shed door, to preserve the crime scene until the police turned up. I'd read enough murder mysteries and seen enough crime dramas to know how important it was to protect the evidence. I was sweating and feeling a bit sick myself, but it helped ease the quease to concentrate on keeping the rest of the class out of the way. And most importantly to

consider the facts of the case: why, what, where, when and who.

Tyler turned away from the crowd and got right up into my face.

'C'mon, new boy, t-tell us what's going on,' he growled. At the sniff of a potential fight, the others left Daniel's side and jostled towards me.

Tyler Jenkins was trouble. I knew that after only one week at Hanbridge High. He was scarily huge for a Year Seven, with an Adam's apple and razor burn – he made the rest of us look like toddlers. And no one ever mentioned his stammer. I suspected the last person who'd made fun of Tyler had ended upside down in a dumpster. I groaned inside, but I stayed where I was and tried to look like I knew what I was doing.

Meanwhile Lydia, stuck behind the group, had started jumping up and down to try and see through the window instead. It didn't work.

'Daniel only chucks up at icky stuff, so there's got to be a reason,' she called over. 'Come on. Spill the tea.'

She squirmed her way through the pack and leaned hopefully against the open door right next to me. Tyler loomed, Lydia stared, everyone else shoved.

I didn't cave in. You don't see Inspector Morse[2] giving a tour of the crime scene to passers-by. I gave the lot of them my best scowl, and kept the door blocked when Lydia tried her best to slip past me.

'Someone go and tell a teacher – get them to ring nine-nine-nine!' I shouted over the noise.

No one moved.

Daniel finally stopped spewing and stood on the edge of the crowd, looking at me all wide-eyed, pasty and confused. He wasn't my idea of back-up, but he'd have to do.

'Daniel! Call the police!' I yelled again, over the horde. He nodded weakly and set off shakily towards the office.

It took ages for anyone to come.

I was barely holding out against the crush when Mr Scouter, the headteacher, finally came puffing across the field, red-faced and breathless.

'Get away from there!' he roared at the mob. 'Yes, you lot! What on earth do you think you're playing at?'

2 Inspector Morse is a TV legend, a fictional god of detection. He's Detective Chief Inspector for the Oxford police and solves stuff practically in his sleep, with his trusty assistant Lewis. Nanna Rosie used to record every episode because she *definitely* had a crush on him.

As they backed off, he marched up to me and grasped me by the shoulder.

'Good grief, boy, are you all right?' His face was round and worried, with the size of moustache I've only ever seen on *Magnum PI*.[3] 'Go and sit down over there until the police arrive; they might want to question you.' He turned round. 'The rest of you, get to the hall and wait for Mr Frantock. He'll give you some work to do until next period.'

The rest of the class groaned and moped off, Lydia and Tyler shooting me looks as they passed. I could tell Mr Scouter wanted to look at the crime scene without me there, so I walked a few metres away from the shed and flopped down on to the ground, steering well clear of Daniel's sick spot.

For the millionth time I wished I was back in Grensham with my old mates – Jayden, Kinsey and the rest of the gang – having a *normal* sort of morning. All we did was hang out and play basketball and practise epic rock riffs on our guitars, but it was great fun. Our band, The Boomerangs, was really starting to get noticed.

3 Nanna Rosie fancied Magnum too. He was brilliant, a mega-glam 1980s American TV detective, who solved crimes in Hawaii.

They'd probably be looking for a new lead guitarist by now.

As I carried on sitting there, I started thinking about poor Mr Baynton, and what could have happened for him to end up like that. After a few minutes Daniel came back from the school office, and Mr Scouter made him sit down next to me. I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye. His eyelids were pink and he was lightly quivering. I kept my face steady, ready to answer any questions.

I didn't really know Daniel, or anyone else around here for that matter. He was in a couple of my classes; a bit of a brain but not Mr Perfect. He was late for tutor group sometimes in the mornings, and I'd seen him get told off for looking at his phone in the corridors. I was glad Tyler had already gone in. He saw solitary types like Daniel as easy meat, and I didn't want to be labelled as prey by association.

The police finally arrived, along with an ambulance and a white van with 'Forensic Services' on the side. A tall, plain-clothed policeman cornered Mr Scouter at once.

'You're the headteacher? I'm DS Norman, Avon and Somerset Police. Do you mind answering a few questions?' As he flipped open his notepad, I casually

leaned forward from my seated position, pretending to pick at the grass, so I could listen in.[4]

'Can you confirm the identity of the deceased, Sir?'

'Oh, yes. It's Ollie Baynton, one of our PE teachers.' Mr Scouter paused solemnly. 'A horrible shock.'

'I see. And what time was the school locked up last night?'

'Hmm. The governors' meeting yesterday evening lasted until around eight thirty. There were a couple of stragglers – the vicar wanted a somewhat premature chat about Harvest Festival – but I made sure everyone was off the premises by around nine p.m.' Mr Scouter rubbed his moustache, leaving it all rumpled.

I wondered if I should be taking notes. Columbo[5] definitely would.

'So would Mr Baynton have been in school until then?'

4 Don't judge me, you'd have listened too. Anyone who likes to solve a good mystery would.

5 Another of Nanna's favourite TV detectives from the 70s. Famous for his cigar and pulled-through-a-hedge-backwards appearance. Solved crimes by basically pestering suspects until they confessed. Mum seems to like using this technique on me.

‘Let’s check you over, boys,’ one of the medics said, blocking my view of this interesting conversation. Mr Scouter and the police officer moved into the shed, and out of earshot. The medic took our blood pressure and made Daniel put his head between his knees for a bit, wrapping him in a crinkly silver blanket.

Daniel and I sat quietly for ages. I didn’t wonder at the time what he was thinking about, but as it turned out he had plenty to mull over.