THE LONG WEEKEND

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That Asian Kid
The Girl in the Broken Mirror

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For Taghreed,
without whom it would never have started.

And for Hish and Jad,
without whom it would never have continued.

1

It's tough being the new kid, but when you're not the only one it's not so bad. The problem was Sam was always the new kid and always the only one. He'd moved schools four times and moved countries three times – and he was only eleven. That had to be a bit of a record. He should write to the *Guinness Book of Records* and get them to enter it as a new category. He'd be famous. Not that he wanted to be famous, but it would have been a pretty cool thing to tell people.

Sam slumped into his chair, and unloaded his brand-new school regulation rucksack. He wondered why they had to carry the great hulking thing when it only contained a couple of books and some worksheets at any one time. Still, at least it was Friday and he had the whole weekend in front of him, and better still, he was going over to Lloyd's. Yes, Sam had made a friend – Lloyd, who just happened to be the coolest kid in the class. He was into everything Sam was into – football, tennis,

swimming, running. Oh, apart from rugby that is, which Sam couldn't get his head around, yet.

The morning passed in a blur, much like the rest of the week had, except that he'd only got lost once, which was a new personal best as he had been averaging five times – ten if you counted afternoons too! Although the credit had to go to Lloyd, who had stuck around with him and who had a much better sense of direction than he had!

He followed Lloyd into Mandela Hall and checked out the lunch menu. It was the usual stuff that every school Sam had ever been to served up on a Friday: fish in some shape or form (and this must have been a good school because the fish was battered fillets and not star shaped, or fish shaped, or finger shaped, or guess-the-shape!), and chips and beans, or the 'healthy option' of baked potato and salad. Sam guessed that maybe some trendy celebrity chef had been in and done his thing. Lloyd scoffed the lot without wasting any time and he was on to seconds before Sam had got through his first helping.

'Get a move on, Sam. We've got a game lined up,' Lloyd said through a mouthful of treacle pudding. 'If it tips it down, we'll get told to come in.'

Flecks of custard spattered the general area as he spoke, but the largest blob hit Sam's tie and dribbled down onto his shirt. Sam didn't really care, although he knew his mum might be a bit annoyed. Lloyd wasn't

the neatest or tidiest person in the class, but he was his friend, and Sam liked him.

The first few days at school had been tough – especially the break times. Sam had kicked a stone around the playground, watching the other Year Sevens playing football and pretending he wasn't interested when really all he wanted was to be one of them. He hadn't managed to summon up the courage to ask if he could join them in case they'd said no. Then he'd got to know Lloyd and within the space of a day he was in the game. So the choice between football and sitting in the dining hall eating treacle pudding was a non-starter. He grabbed a muffin and a banana and stuffed them into his pocket for later.

'Ready?' Lloyd asked, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

'Yeah, let's go and show 'em how it's done!' Sam replied with gusto.

Ten minutes into the game the ball went over the three-metre-high school fence, and with the Deputy Head on playground duty no one was about to risk detention by scaling it. Then the rain came down and the kids scattered back to their classrooms.

'I'll let you have a go on my new PlayStation when you come over to me next time,' Lloyd said on the way in. 'I've got tons of cool games for it too.'

'You've got the new PlayStation! Wow!' Sam exclaimed. He'd already been told he'd never get one,

never mind that *everyone* had by the time they were in Year One! 'Waste of time and good money,' his dad had said grumpily the last time Sam had asked – and every other time Sam had asked. He hadn't given up trying though. He'd probably ask his dad again at the weekend. There was still the outside chance the answer might be a yes.

Lloyd had everything; it didn't seem like it was a big deal in his house. He was getting a brand-new top-of-the-range mobile phone for his next birthday. As soon as he got it he said Sam could have his old one as he wouldn't need it any more. He'd already invited Sam to his birthday even though it wasn't until some time in February.

'Can't wait,' Sam gushed, and he really couldn't. 'But hang on a minute, I thought we were going to yours today.'

'I thought it was yours today.'

'So which one is it?'

'We'll find out when one or both sets of parents pick us up, won't we?' Lloyd laughed.

Nothing seemed to faze Lloyd. He took everything in his stride and he was good at everything. Not that Sam wasn't clever. His reports always said he was a bright kid, and he usually did pretty well in most subjects. But just not with the style and ease that Lloyd had.

Double Science, followed by PE, double English, and Reading took up the rest of the afternoon and when the

bell blared at 3.55, waking him and the rest of the class up from their silent reading, or silent sleeping, as Sam called it, he threw his homework, his reading book and his pencil case into his rucksack and headed over to Lloyd's desk.

'Ready?' he asked him.

Lloyd looked up through his unruly mop of red hair. 'You bet! Let's get outta here.'

'Wish they'd hurry up. It's almost half past four,' Lloyd muttered. 'They're late and it won't be funny soon!'

'Yeah, it's freezing,' Sam added. He was shivering, but trying hard not to show it as Lloyd wasn't even wearing a coat – it was stuffed in his school bag as usual. Sam turned his collar up at the wind, and then gave it his back, but the wind cut through him anyway.

Lloyd had pulled his mobile phone out and was staring at it angrily. 'Useless piece of junk! Battery's always dead or dying! Where's your phone, Sam?'

That was the thing about mobile phones – they were useless if you didn't charge them up and it didn't matter if they were your basic model or the top of the range and able to perform every function you might possibly want and hundreds you definitely didn't need or even know were there. Lloyd probably only remembered to charge his phone when it was completely dead.

'Left it behind,' Sam said. He didn't feel like admitting that there was no way his dad was going to let him have one just yet. Sam had already been working on

his mum though, and there was the slim possibility that he might get one in the summer. That was ages away, but in the meantime he might have got Lloyd's old one, and if that happened then Sam would have to work out how to tell his dad.

The sky was overcast, with angry black clouds that seemed to be warning them that a drenching was not too far away. The school bus had gone, taking half the kids home, and the others had run for waiting cars, engines idling, as soon as they were let out. Others, who lived locally, had legged it as soon as the bell rang. No one wanted to be left hanging around outside an empty school on a Friday afternoon.

Soon, apart from Sam and Lloyd, there were only a few other kids waiting by the side of the road. One by one they were picked up until only Sam and Lloyd and one other kid were left. The clouds decided at that moment to open up and add to the boys' already dampened spirits by drenching them as they ran for cover under a tree. Just then a car slowed down next to them and the back passenger door flew open.

'Get in quick!' the driver called out.

Sam was impressed. The car was huge, like one of those big flash Mercs you see ferrying celebrities and rock stars around. Sam knew Lloyd was pretty wealthy, but he hadn't realised his family was *that* rich. He knew Lloyd's dad was big in music, but he wasn't sure exactly what he did. Maybe he was a famous singer, or a producer,

like Simon Cowell, or someone like that. There was a lot he didn't know about Lloyd, but that was okay as he was going to be in this school for a very long time. His parents had promised him and Tab – that was his older sister – that they had settled and wouldn't be moving for at least a few years. Sam believed them because they had never actually said that before, and because his mum had finally planted asparagus in the garden. Sam had looked it up in the *Grow Your Own Vegetables* book that was always sitting on the kitchen table. Asparagus takes a few years to grow, so that meant they would have to stay there for at least three years.

The car gleamed brilliant white against the darkening sky like a beacon calling 'come inside where it's warm and dry' – and that's what Sam did. He followed Lloyd in and slammed the door shut quickly to keep the rain out.

He sank back into the shiny, dark leather upholstery, and the car moved off with a soft purr and the barely audible click of the central locking. The rain rattled on the roof, but Sam didn't notice it – the inside of the car took all his attention. It was like being in some kind of spaceship – everything was sleek and expensive looking, even the door handles had a polished wood trim around them which matched the trim around the seats. There were hundreds of other buttons, too, and Sam found it hard to resist pressing them all.

'You'll warm up soon,' Lloyd's dad said. 'Had a good day, boys?'

'Yes, sir,' Lloyd replied, buckling his seat belt.

Sam couldn't imagine calling his dad anything other than Dad. Sir seemed so formal, but he followed Lloyd's lead and said, 'Yes, sir,' and added, 'Thank you. Sir.'

An elbow in his side made him look at Lloyd, who was laughing silently at him. 'What?' he whispered with palms upraised, but he'd gone red with embarrassment, which made Lloyd double up with a fit of giggling.

'What's so funny? Do you want to share the joke?' Lloyd's dad asked.

Lloyd straightened up in his seat and pulled a poker face. 'Oh, it's nothing, sir. Boring for grown-ups. Kids' stuff, you know.'

'Well, here's something to keep you going. Help yourselves,' he said, tossing a bag into the back seat, 'and I'll put the window up, so you don't have to whisper all that "kid stuff". There's CDs and DVDs you can play back there if you get bored. I'm sure you can figure out how they work,' he laughed. 'Just choose one and stick it in the player. Pass your phones over to me – I'll charge them for you. No charger in the back in these vintage limos.'

'Thanks! Mine's dead.' Lloyd leaned forwards and gave the man his phone.

'And yours too.' The man gestured at Sam.

'He left his at home,' Lloyd replied.

The window that divided the back section of the car from the front whooshed up, enclosing them in their own private den. Sam wished his dad was like this, and

had a car like this that had everything in the back plus enough room to lie down. You could practically *live* in a car like this.

The contents of the bag were another surprise. It was full of crisps, chocolates, sweets, fizzy drinks, and tons of other bad stuff. But the boys were in heaven. They gaped at each other, boggle-eyed in amazement, before diving into the junk food paradise.

Twenty minutes later, they'd eaten as much as they could manage without throwing up, which was a fair amount, and there was still enough stuff left in there for their whole class. Lloyd pressed play on the CD player and Pharrell Williams's 'Happy' blared out. For some reason he still knew all the lyrics, which was probably a bit sad, but he never admitted to it to anyone. It wouldn't have been cool.

Sam thought it might be okay to press some of those hundreds of buttons that he'd been resisting. He didn't think Lloyd's dad would mind. There was a whole panel that controlled the DVD and CD player, one that adjusted each of the seats individually, temperature controls for each section of the back, seat warmers, Sat Nav system, the list was endless. It was a state-of-the-art car and Sam was sure there wasn't another one like it in the whole world. He shook his head in awe.

'Totally wicked!' he shouted, above the blaring music.

'Yeah,' Lloyd yelled back between singing, or rather shouting, the lyrics of 'Happy'.

Sam smiled: someone else, someone much cooler than him, knew all the lyrics too. He pulled open the drawer beneath the DVD player and discovered a whole collection of films, some he'd seen, and some that he'd wanted to see forever but that his parents had said he was too young for.

'Do you want to watch one of these?' he yelled to Lloyd.

Lloyd turned the music off and checked out the titles. He ignored all the animated stuff and went straight for anything that had a rating of eighteen. He selected one and said, 'What do you think? It's supposed to be a bit scary. Can you handle that?'

''Course I can!' Sam said indignantly.

Sam wasn't about to admit that he scared easily. When his parents went out and left him at home with Tab, she *always* found the scariest thing to watch on TV, and he always had to hide behind the sofa. Tab didn't find anything scary and Sam wished he'd inherited that gene instead of the blond hair one, which he knew Tab would have died for.

Lloyd pressed play and slumped back with a bag of crisps in one hand and a Coke in the other. Sam followed his lead. If there was a really bad bit in the film at least he could pretend he was taking a long sip of Coke and that way he wouldn't have to see the screen, although he'd probably still hear the screams.

The film started with a phone ringing and a babysitter

answering it, and Sam's heart sank. He'd seen clips of this film and knew he was going to hate every minute of it. He sneaked a glance at Lloyd, who was totally engrossed in it. Within ten minutes, the babysitter had been killed in the most gruesome way – and Lloyd had spilt half his Coke down his shirt. Sam had only narrowly managed to avoid the same fate by clamping the can to his mouth just before the killer jumped out of the shadows.

'Crap!' Lloyd muttered, rubbing at the brown stain with a soggy tissue.

Outside it was gloomy and the rain drummed steadily on the roof of the car. Sam wondered how far away from school Lloyd lived, and how much more of this film he could take. Not much, he decided.

'Wanna go back to playing music?' he asked.

'Yeah, all right. I've seen this film a thousand times anyway. They all die in the end!' he said, laughing.

Sam wasn't sure Lloyd had ever really seen the film, but he wasn't going to say anything, and Lloyd was probably right about the ending. Although Tab always said there was usually one survivor and that the killer never really got caught, or killed at the end, because then the director could make another film without having to find a new idea.

They put on Drake's new album, and messed around with the Sat Nav system, typing in all the addresses they knew, and several they made up, and getting the system to come up with a route.

'Do you live quite far?' Sam asked.

'Not really. Usually home in half an hour,' Lloyd said. 'I'll put my address in and the school's, and then you can see.'

Lloyd typed in his home address and the name of the road their school was on. 'See?'

'But that's nowhere near any countryside,' Sam said, glancing out of the window at the empty fields and woods beyond.

'I know that, goofball. Your turn.'

Sam typed in his address and waited for the screen to come up with a route. It usually took about twenty minutes for him to get home from school, and more like half an hour to get to school in the mornings. His house was on the edge of a little town just outside London. 'Best of both worlds,' his dad had said. 'We get a bit of fresh air, but the big smoke's not too far.' His dad was a senior partner in a very big international property development company and the head office was in central London, so he had to get the train every day, and he complained about it every day, too.

'So where are we?' Lloyd said, peering at the map.

'What?' Sam asked, baffled by the question.

'Where are we on the map? Don't worry if you can't find it,' Lloyd said. 'Keep forgetting you're new to the area. I'll show you some brilliant cycle runs. I go out with my dad on Sunday afternoons and we could arrange it so you can come with us. If you want to.'

'That'd be great,' Sam said. He looked out of the window at the countryside rushing past. His watch said half past five, which didn't sound right. He couldn't remember what time they were picked up, but it had been late. Very late. It was definitely way after half past four, but Sam couldn't remember exactly what time it was, or why that was important now.

'We go camping,' he said. 'We're going for the weekend during half-term. Do you think you'd be allowed to go?'

'Might be. I'll have to ask Mum and Dad,' Lloyd replied. He leaned forwards and pressed eject on the CD player. 'Bored of this album. What do you want next?'

'Ask him now,' Sam said.

'Um, never heard of that one,' Lloyd said, flicking through the pages of the compact disc holder. 'Who's it by?'

'No, I mean, ask your dad now,' Sam said. Maybe he'd spoken too quietly because Lloyd wasn't listening to a word. His head was still buried in the CD holder and he was singing song titles as he flipped through them.

'Right, this one's good.' He put the new CD in and pressed play, his head bobbing from side to side in time with the music.

'Ask him now.'

There was an edge to Sam's voice, a slight tremor that made Lloyd stop and look at him. 'My phone's dead, stupid. Remember? Anyway, what's up with you?'

Sam swallowed hard. His mouth had gone dry. He

reached for his Coke and realised that his hands were shaking too much to pick the can up.

Outside it was practically dark. The rain beat down incessantly, but Sam's heart was beating faster, and louder.

'Sam?'