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opening extract from

Missing, Believed Crazy

written by

Terence Blacker

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MISSING, BELIEVED CRAZY

Terence Blacker is the author of many novels for young readers, including *The Transfer*, *ParentSwap* and the award-winning *Boy2Girl*. He plays the guitar and writes songs, and lives in a house in the Norfolk countryside, which he converted from a goose hatchery.

Praise for Terence Blacker

Boy2Girl:

'This fast-paced story is a roller coaster of hilarious incidents' *Mail on Sunday*

'Hugely funny, then painfully affecting . . . offers genuine insights amongst the laughter' *Guardian*

The Transfer:

'*The Transfer* is in a league of its own . . . a compulsively readable story . . . fantasy football as it should be' *Sunday Telegraph*

'Sharp, funny and full of surprises' *Mail on Sunday*

The Angel Factory:

'A gripping and dramatic adventure involving high technology, deception, intrigue and even murder. Terence Blacker's direct style makes the sinister project at the heart of *The Angel Factory* seem disturbingly possible' *Guardian*

'Well-written and pacy, this is a story that just has to be finished' *Independent*



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William 'Wiki' Church

TJB.

Trix.

Trixie.

Beatrix.

Little Trixie.

Tragic Trixie.

The Trixter.

Erica Jane.

Sometimes it is difficult to remember who she was, the real Trix Johansson-Bell.

Late at night, when I can't get to sleep, I look through the mementoes of Trix that I keep in a suitcase beneath my bed. There is a catapult, some photographs, a torn T-shirt with 'Feed the World' on the front. There are newspaper cuttings with headlines like 'WHERE IS LITTLE TRIXIE?', 'TRIXIE'S CHATROOM SECRET', 'TRAGIC TRIXIE: SHE CARED THAT WE DIDN'T CARE' and 'WHO HAS GOT MY LITTLE ANGEL? PLEADS ACTRESS'.

They make me miss her, but the Trix I knew is nowhere there.

There are only four other people who know the truth about that summer. The gang. The group. The oddest bunch of teenagers who have ever come together to commit a crime. Take a look and see what you think.

JADE HART. American, tall, good-looking, a supermodel of the future (according to Jade Hart). Very popular with the boys and best friend of –

HOLLY DE VRIESS. Strong, badly dressed and always in a hurry. Ever since she took on one of the boys at arm-wrestling and won, they call her 'the Hulk' – but not to her face. Very popular with the teachers and one-time enemy of – MARK BLISS. Floppy-haired, sporty and with the kind of posh accent that makes you want throw something. Mark fancied himself as one of the cool guys. Very popular with virtually everyone in our year except –

Me. WILLIAM CHURCH, better known as 'Wiki', ever since someone decided that I knew so much about stuff that I was like a walking Wikipedia. Mark would call me 'brother' in a way that was not racist but wasn't exactly friendly either. In spite of the colour of my skin – I'm one of the few black kids at our private school, Cathcart College – I am Mr Unnoticed. If I have a talent, it is for being anonymous. In any group photograph, I am the one standing half-hidden at the back. I can walk into a room and no one will know I am there.

Yet there we were, the Trixter's gang: Trix, Jade, Holly, Mark and Wiki. For one summer, it was us against the world. Our lives revolved around an event – a crime, you could say – that we codenamed 'The Vanish'.

The date of The Vanish we called 'V Day'.

V Day – 87

WIKI

Take a deep breath. It is the first day of the Summer Term at Cathcart College. This is the place where parents who can afford it send their boys and girls to board between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. It is in sweeping grounds (a wood, a science block, a cricket pitch with a pavilion – the works) at the end of a long drive. As school returns, a great army of 4x4s trundle down the drive, kicking up dust. It is like a war, an invasion – The Invasion of the Rich and Anxious Parents.

Cathcart likes to pretend it has a history. It has a Latin motto, 'Vade in Victoria', which means something like 'Win Everything You Can', a lame school song, its own old-fashioned language (our class is called 'the Remove' for reasons no one has ever understood) and a headmaster Mr Griffiths – also know as 'Griffo', 'the Griffon' and a few other names you don't want to know about. When you first arrive at Cathcart, the Griffon gives you a little talk about how Cathcartians (sorry, that's what they call us) are special. 'Cathcart College will give you the engine to take you through life,' he says. 'If you were a car, a Cathcartian might be a Ferrari or a nippy little luxury BMW. Some of you might be a top-of-the-range Aston Martin. What you will not be – and I can promise you this, Cathcartians – is a Ford Mondeo.'

I had heard these words during my first week at

Cathcart and at that moment I wanted the earth to open and swallow me up. I was convinced that somehow the Head had seen me arriving at college for the first time and had discovered my terrible secret: my parents drive a Mondeo.

Mr NIGEL 'GRIFFO' GRIFFITHS

I regret that I am unable to comment on the events leading up to the disappearance of our former pupil Beatrix Johansson-Bell. I should point out however that the event occurred during the summer holidays and the college had no control over the behaviour of her and other Cathcart pupils at that time.

Cathcart has an excellent record of academic and sporting achievement and has risen steadily in the league of top independent schools. We pride ourselves on being a caring school. I will be making no further statements.

WIKI

At Cathcart, what your parents do – how famous they are, how much money they have, whether they're generally cool or not – is a sort of currency. My mother's a librarian, my father an accountant. No one has ever heard of them. At Cathcart, that makes me a pauper, invisible. Trix Johansson-Bell was in the millionaire class. Her mum was an actress and looked like she could be Trix's better-looking older sister. Her stepdad was a sports agent who hung out with footballers, tennis-players, motor-racing drivers and so on.

Trix was one of the cool crowd – she went around with bouncy, super-confident Holly de Vriess and pretty, look-at-me-everyone Jade Hart. Later, when I saw more of her, I realized that Trix was always slightly out of place at Cathcart. She had short dark hair and the face of someone you just knew was stronger than her skinny frame suggested.

She was like an angry pixie. A very angry pixie.

JADE

What made Trix angry? Most everything. When the sun was shining, and some great music was playing on the radio and the world seemed kind of all right for a few seconds, she would be the one to point out that the food we had just bought from the school shop could keep an African village going for a week, or ask whether we realized that 5.67 million children (or was 7.56?) went to bed hungry every night.

I mean, bring us down, why don't you?

I'm not saying these things aren't important but there's a time and a place, right? Trix was just *so* inappropriate sometimes.

HOLLY

I had no closer friend but, between you and me, the way Trix decorated her room that first day of term was borderline creepy. During the holidays, she had collected all these photographs and posters of starving children in

Africa, with swollen stomachs and flies around their big hungry eyes. Most of us put cheerful things on our walls – pictures of whales and film stars and (if you're Jade) boy bands – but not good old Trix. She had to transform her room into a mini-museum of world misery.

WIKI

During the Easter holidays, there had been one of those big TV charity appeals where newsreaders show off in tights and rich pop stars tell everyone that we should be giving our money away to charity. Trix's mum, the famous actress, had taken part in some fashion event, which had raised a whole load of cash.

It did something – sent Trix slightly mad. When she came back to Cathcart, she could talk of nothing else but how privileged we all were, how we were just a bunch of rich kids (speak for yourself, Trix), how we had to do something.

Make a difference, she said. It was up to us to make a difference.

V Day – 81

JADE

I blame Miss Fothergill. It was in her first citizenship class of that term that the summer's big bad idea first came up. A charity fashion show at school.

Charity? Fashion? Cathcart? Only Trix could believe that was going to work.

MISS FOTHERGILL

In the past, Cathcartians have not had the best reputation when it comes to responsible behaviour. Some of the older children were a little bit rough (bullying would be too strong a word) towards the new arrivals. A rather disastrous story about sixth-formers visiting pubs had appeared in the Sunday papers.

Morality is important – particularly for children who are lucky enough to be at a private school. I suggested to the headmaster that once a week, I would take the Remove for citizenship classes.

Trix Johansson-Bell loved those classes. She led the discussions, full of ideas and information. When it came to the ethical life, she was a model pupil.

I wanted a value-led project for that term. It was a time of exams and pressure. The children, I thought would benefit from giving something back to those less fortunate

than themselves. The idea that Trix came up with during citizenship class – a fashion show to raise money for Africa – seemed to me an excellent one.

Sadly I over-estimated the Cathcartian spirit of generosity.

MARK

Miss Fothergill and Trix – what a couple they made. A former nun and the class keenie. Together, they were an accident waiting to happen.

WIKI

Miss Fothergill was an oddity at Cathcart. She was beautiful enough, in a pale, shy way, for about sixty per cent of the boys at the school to be deeply in love with her, but she dressed as if her clothes came from charity shops and car boot sales. She never mentioned her family, and when someone asked her anything about her own life in class, she quickly changed the subject. Some of the most important words in the Cathcart dictionary – Nike, Lexus, iPhone, Rolex, Dior – meant nothing to her. She drove a small, tinny car and, on the rare occasions that she became slightly angry, she would say, 'Jiminy Crickets!' or 'Glory be, child!' or sometimes 'Phooey!'

She had once been a nun, or so the rumour went. There were a number of theories about why she had left a place where all was peaceful, holy and innocent (a convent) to

teach at a place where all was noisy, grabby and selfish (Cathcart College):

1. She had fallen madly in love with 'Boney' Spratt, the sports master, or possibly 'Dodgy' Davis, a geography master, or even Griffo himself. There was no evidence for any of these ideas, although someone once thought they saw the Griffon touching her back as she walked through a door.

2. She had a sacred mission to bring the word of God to a group of privileged kids at a lame boarding school.

3. While she was in the convent, she had become pregnant by a monk and had to leave in order to have their secret love child. One day that child would be educated at Cathcart. Miss Fothergill is in her thirties and so the word is that quite soon a boy or girl will arrive looking spookily like her. Every year, there are rumours that Miss Fothergill's secret love child has arrived at last but the general feeling is that he/she is not yet among us.

None of these theories quite explained why Miss Fothergill was at Cathcart College or why she was mad enough to try to teach the Remove how to be good citizens. We were at that dangerous stage, having been at Cathcart long enough to have lost the fear that we had in our first year, but not long enough to start worrying about exams or the future. We were ready to test our power over adults.

Trix must have talked to Miss Fothergill about the TV charity event because, in her first lesson, Miss Fothergill brought up the subject of raising money for good causes.

'Now,' she said in that breezy Mary Poppins way of hers. 'What could we, in our own little way, do to help the poor and under privileged – do our bit to save the world from starvation?'

There was the usual silence. Then up went a hand. It was Trix.

'We could put on our own event – a sponsored charity fashion show.'

'Very good, Trix,' said Miss Fothergill.

It was a set-up, if ever I saw one.

At first no one was keen. But Trix was on a roll. She went to the front of the class and talked about this village, Mwanduna, in Mali. If the Remove at Cathcart adopted it, they could have a well, books, food. 'I've worked out that, if we could just raise, say, three hundred pounds, we could feed twenty children for a year. We might even be able to buy a cow for a dairy farmer out there.'

There was nervous laughter in the class.

'No, but seriously, listen . . .'

And Trix started explaining how it could work, how we could have a good time and help feed starving African children. Gradually people began to pay attention.

We talked about the fashion show and suddenly it began to seem like fun. The girls could parade up and down in their best clothes. Jade and a few others began to look interested. A gang of boys at the back of

the class suddenly seemed to think it was a good idea too.

MARK

My mate Tom Parkinson put up his hand.

'Would you be one of the models, Miss Fothergill?' he asked in his best husky, tough-boy way. 'I'd really like to sponsor you.'

Miss Fothergill actually blushed.

'Don't be silly, Tom,' she said.

'But I thought you wanted to save the world,' said Tom. 'Make a difference, like. You could be a supermodel.'

And suddenly we're all joining in from the back. 'Go on, miss. Make a difference.'

Miss Fothergill was losing it. She didn't want to squash the idea and she sure as hell didn't want to be a model.

'The details of this event will be decided by its organizers. Trix, clearly you must be involved. Who will be helping you?'

Trix looked around. 'Holly,' she said. 'And Jade would be good.'

JADE

Oh, terrific. Thanks a bunch, Trix.

HOLLY

I'm all for charity but I really, really wasn't sure about this.

WIKI

'I think,' said Miss Fothergill, 'that there should be a male presence on the organizing committee. Don't you, boys?'

'They'll only mess it up,' said Holly.

The gang at the back were slipping down in their seats, taking care not to let the teacher catch their eye. The others didn't want to look stupid in front of the cool guys.

I looked at Trix, who was staring ahead, almost as if she was regretting it already. Miss Fothergill crossed her arms in a sort of disappointed-but-not-entirely-surprised way.

'What about Wiki, miss? I mean, William.' I turned to stare at Mark Bliss, whose idea of a joke this was.

'Why William, Mark?' Miss Fothergill asked.

'Because he's –' The class seemed to hold its breath.

'Because I'm black?' I spoke quietly.

'No, no.' The grin on Bliss's face looked strained now. Not even he could get away with racism in a citizenship class. 'I just thought he was really good at fashion.'

I turned towards Trix, my mind made up. The best way to fight prejudice is to face it head on. Without doubt, the boys would laugh at me but right then I didn't want to have anything to do with them anyway. 'I'll help you,' I said. 'It's worth doing.'

Trix smiled. 'Thanks, Wik,' she said.

Nightmare scenario. That was all we needed. It was a lame idea. It was going to be totally embarrassing. I was going to have to put up with being one of Miss Fothergill's favourites for the next few weeks.

And now the Remove's undisputed Nerd of the Year was going to be involved.

Fact: nothing cool and good will ever involve Wiki Church.

We gave him the look, Holly and I. He just blinked and smiled, his spots glowing gently.

V Day – 74

WIKI

That was the moment when we discovered just how determined Trix could be. Within a week of that fateful citizenship lesson, she had us all running around for an event that none of us in our hearts had wanted to happen.

Holly came up with the name the Cathcart Catwalk Charity Challenge and then started to work on a poster. She decided that a picture of a sad-looking African child was not, whatever Trix might have thought, going to sell tickets for an end-of-term event at Cathcart College. Instead, she asked me to look for a photograph of a supermodel and make her look as if she went to our school.

Easy, right?

I found a hot picture of Kate Moss and, with the help of a shot of my school tie, photo-edited her into the sexiest Cathcartian there has ever been.

Jade had been the most reluctant of us to become involved – school fashion shows were like the lamest things, she said – but she cheered up when Trix told her she could be the Catwalk Challenge's creative director. It was Jade who recruited the models from the Remove and who decided that the show would be 'a total history of fashion over the last fifty years'. She was the one who convinced those taking part in the show to raid their parents' wardrobes for historical items of fashion.

And me? I was on the sidelines, as usual. I found out

the school hall was available and convinced the school administrator that we should be allowed to hold a charity show there two days after the end of exams. I worked out how we were going to sell tickets. I came up with the idea for a raffle.

At the time, it all seemed to be going well.