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The Real Rebecca

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MONDAY

Ugh. I hate my school. I spent the entire day wishing I was practising my lovely drums instead of sitting in that stupid place. Apparently my mother doesn't even bother telling me when she's going to humiliate me now. It seems there was an article yesterday in some newspaper we don't get at home all about Mum and her stupid new book. And as well as a ginormous picture of Mum (which, sadly, is the sort of thing I'm used to by now), there were photos of me and Rachel as small kids! Dancing around on a beach in stupid pink shorts! I remember that photo being taken – it was when we were on holiday in Kerry when we were little. We were working out a dance routine to a Destiny's Child song. One of these photos was on the noticeboard in our classroom when I got into school today.

No prizes for guessing who was sniggering away next to it.

'Hey, Rafferty,' said Karen. 'I see you were in the paper again. Looking good!'

'Oh, thanks,' I said. 'I'll lend you my lovely shorts if you like.'

And I just sat down at my desk. Luckily that was when Miss Kelly came in and started talking about polar bears dying horribly. I've never been so glad to be terrified. After the class Ellie pulled down the picture and tore it up. Thank God she did, because our next class was in the same room and it was Mrs Harrington. Imagine if she'd been going on about those shorts! She was awful as it was. We are meant to be doing *Romeo and Juliet*, but Mrs Harrington keeps going on about the importance of romantic love. The thought of her getting romantic with anyone is too much.

Then after the class was over, Vanessa Finn proved she really has lost her mind by saying 'Hey, Rebecca, I thought you looked really cool in that photo' as she passed by me and Cass. She is definitely insane. There is no way on earth she can possibly think that is true.

Anyway, at lunchtime I went to find Rachel to warn her about Mum's latest betrayal. I never usually look for her at school, as we generally pretend we don't know each other while on school grounds, but recent events have made us

realise we need to stick together. I stuck my head in the door of her form room and one of her classmates said, 'Oh God, Rache, is that your sister? I didn't recognise her without her lovely shorts.'

So obviously Rachel already knew about the disaster. But she came out to me anyway. She was all red and cross-looking.

'What is it?' she said snappishly.

'Oh, charming,' I said. 'I came over here to warn you about that stupid article and this is the thanks I get.'

Rachel looked slightly ashamed of herself, for once.

'Sorry,' she said. 'Oh God, I can't believe she gave them that photo.'

'Rafferty!' came a voice from inside Rachel's classroom. 'Are you and Rebecca practising your dance routine again?' It was her friend Jenny, so I knew she was only joking, but Rachel looked like she was going to explode.

'This,' she said, 'is the final straw.'

'We hope it is,' I said. 'Who knows what Mum has planned next?'

Who indeed? When I got home I politely asked Mum about that terrible article.

'Where did they get that horrible, horrible photo of me and Rachel?' I bellowed.

Mum looked uncomfortable.

'I gave it to them, of course. And before you start shouting and roaring, it was a few weeks ago, before I realised how upset you'd be about the whole thing. I thought you'd think it was funny.'

'FUNNY?' I shrieked. Then Rachel came in and started shouting too. Eventually Mum stopped looking apologetic and started looking cross.

'Look girls,' she said. 'I have to give interviews to promote the book. I do this for all my books. It's part of my job, which is selling books, so that your dad and I can pay the mortgage and look after you two. We need this money and this is part of how I earn it. So unless you'd like to have no new clothes or nice holidays in France or dancing classes ...'

'We haven't gone to dancing classes since I was ten,' said Rachel grumpily.

'Oh for God's sake! Well, no pocket money or new shoes or iPods or new music. That is what my job and your dad's job pays for, as well as the food on the table and the

clothes on your backs and the roof over your head, and it would be nice if you ever appreciated it!' And she looked very cross and walked out of the room.

Rachel and I looked at each other.

'She has a point,' said Rachel.

'Well, she would if she hadn't given them that photo. I mean, no one made her do it,' I said.

'True,' said Rachel. We tried not to speak to Mum for the rest of the evening, but I don't think she even noticed. Some mother she is.

Dad is, of course, on her side. 'I know it was embarrassing,' he said. 'But your mother really did think you'd find it funny. So did I. I mean, it's a lovely photo of the two of you.'

'It might be lovely in a family photo album,' said Rachel. 'Although that's a matter of opinion. It's not lovely in a newspaper that somehow everyone in school managed to see. I don't even know how they did it. It's not like that paper puts every article online.'

'Well, if it's any consolation, all this publicity stuff will be over soon,' said Dad. 'And then everyone will forget about it.'

He seemed very confident about this, but I bet they won't. I'm going to get compared to that awful Ruthie O'Reilly for the rest of my life. I know I will.

TUESDAY 

We can't decide what to call the band. We spent most of lunchtime hiding under the coats in the cloakroom having a discussion about it. I think some of the others wondered what on earth we were being so secretive about. Anyway, we all had lots of ideas but none of them seemed quite right.

'Should it be a "The" name?' said Cass. 'You know, like The Beatles.'

'The Girls with Evil Mothers,' I said.

'My mother's okay,' said Alice.

'Mine's about a medium,' said Cass. 'Not perfect but not totally evil either. So no.'

'Okay, okay,' I said. 'I didn't mean it really. Ummm ... the Does.'

'The what?' said Cass.

'The Does,' I said. 'Like the dear. Doe, a dear, a female deer ...'

'We'd have to explain it to everyone,' said Alice. 'Otherwise they'd think it was d'oh, like Homer Simpson.'

'Oh yeah, good point,' I said.

'Maybe it should be a Someone and the Somethings name,' said Alice. 'Like Florence and the Machine.'

'But then whose name would we use?' I said. 'You, me or Cass?'

'Alice and the ... Antidotes,' said Alice, dreamily.

'We're not your backing band, Alice,' said Cass.

'And all of us sing anyway,' I said.

'Okay, okay,' said Alice. 'It was only an idea.'

We lay on the ground of the cloakroom and thought. We came up with a few more names (Daisychain, Kitten Attack, The Antidote), but they just weren't very good. None of them seemed right. I never realised finding the right band name could be so difficult.

'We'll know the right one when we see it,' said sage-like Alice.

'But what if we don't see it?' said Cass. 'We've got to pick a name at some stage. Imagine if you had a baby and

let it go this long without a name. Everyone would say it was child abuse.'

'I'm not sure our band is quite as important as a baby,' said Alice.

She's probably right. I suppose. It's quite important to us, though. So we really have to come up with a name.

WEDNESDAY

Well, we've come up with a name now, but I wish we hadn't. Not because of the name, but how it happened.

Today was awful. First of all, everyone in the class knows about the band now. We didn't really plan on telling anyone until we were actually, you know, able to play properly, but I couldn't help it. It happened at lunchtime. We'd just sat through Mrs O'Reilly blathering on about Christopher Columbus and his ridiculously-named ships for forty-five minutes and another Miss Kelly geography class (she spent about twenty minutes telling us about what we'll have to do to survive once all the water runs out. I will have nightmares for weeks). This was all traumatic

enough, and I was not in the mood for Karen Rodgers and her nonsense. But Karen has somehow managed to get her paws on Mum's book AND she's read it. I can't believe she got through it so quickly. I didn't even know she could read.

Anyway, I knew someone would read the book eventually, and I knew it would probably be someone like Karen who doesn't like me, but it didn't make it any more fun. We had a free class in the library and when we arrived the librarian wasn't there and there were no teachers around. Alice and I were having a look at the fiction shelves when Karen suddenly produced a copy of *May the Best Girl Win* from God knows where (probably her pants).

'Hey, everyone!' she cried. 'Look what I've got!'

And of course everyone laughed. Not Cass or Alice or even Ellie, of course, but other people who I thought were my friends or at least liked me. This whole experience is making me lose my faith in human nature.

'Listen to this,' said Karen. She turned to me. 'I bet your mum didn't even have to make any of this up. She just had to steal your diary.' And she started to read from the book.

'"Dear Diary,' she said, in a stupid squeaky voice. 'The competition is hotting up! I've got to work harder. Today Caoimhe chose her victim –- I mean, future boyfriend. At least, that what she hopes! He's a guy who goes to St Joseph's and I've got to admit, he's not bad. In fact, I wish I'd seen him first! But I'm still determined to find the perfect boy for me."'

Karen put down the book for a moment and flicked through the pages, while everyone sniggered along. 'It gets better, everyone. Listen to this. "I know this sounds crazy, but I have a funny feeling about ..." She paused dramatically. '"Wildfire. I really think our group is going to be famous someday. I know I'm not the prettiest girl in the world. I'm not very tall and my eyes are a boring grey colour and my hair's a kind of ordinary wavy brown."' Karen paused again and gestured towards me. And PEOPLE LAUGHED. I hate my class. And my mother. Why couldn't stupid Ruthie have been 5 foot 11 and had black or blonde or red hair? Anything but a wavy brown-haired midget! Anyway, Karen wasn't finished reading aloud. '"But when we're all together and we're all dressed up, I feel gorgeous! I know I can sing too. It's not boasting;

it's just something I've always known. And when we're singing and dancing together, I feel like there's nothing stopping us being pop stars. We just need to get discovered. I wonder if we should enter one of those TV talent shows? After all, it worked for Girls Aloud."'

Karen laughed again. She is very easily amused. 'So, Rebecca,' she sniggered. 'You think you're going to be the next Cheryl Cole, do you?'

I gritted my teeth. 'I know you find this hard to believe, Karen,' I said. 'But that book is actually MADE UP. It's not true.'

'Huh,' said Karen. 'Well, I can't wait to see you and your little chums singing and dancing with, heh heh, Wildfire. Do you get to do a solo?'

'Oh my God, Karen!' I shrieked. 'I am not Ruthie Whatserface!'

Karen looked at me and smirked. I've never hated anyone so much in my life. Not even Mum. Not even Rachel when she read my diary when I was twelve (there wasn't anything particularly scandalous in it, but it was the thought that counts). 'Well, yeah,' she said. 'I suppose I can't imagine you actually doing anything as cool as

starting a band. Even a sad girl band.'

And I was so angry that I spoke without thinking properly. Or thinking at all, really.

'Actually,' I said, 'I *am* in a band. And it's nothing like the ridiculous one in the book. We're an indie band. And I'm the drummer.'

Next to me, Alice and Cass froze. I could almost hear them thinking 'oh no ...'

'Yeah, right,' said Karen Rodgers. 'You're the drummer in an indie band. Of course you are. God, you're sad.'

'I'm sad?' I said. 'You're the one who went to the trouble of getting my mum's book and reading it just to annoy me. That's the saddest thing I've ever heard. And yes, I am in a band. With Alice and Cass.'

Karen gave a fake sort of laugh.

'Oh yeah?' she said. 'So what are you called?'

Of course, I didn't know what to say, so I stared at the shelf next to me. And the first thing that caught my eye was a battered old paperback by an author called Deborah something or other called *Hey, Dollface*.

'Hey Dollface!' I said suddenly.

'What?' said Karen.

'What?' said Alice and Cass, but luckily no one seemed to notice that they'd said anything because Karen was doing another stupid loud fake laugh which probably drowned out any other sound in a five-mile radius.

'Yes,' I said. 'That's the name of our band. Not,' I forced a laugh which sounded almost as fake as Karen's, 'Wildfire. I'm sure you'll get to see us at some stage. We'll be playing some gigs eventually.'

I could almost feel Alice and Cass glaring at me. Karen opened her mouth to say something, but then the librarian came in so we all had to hurry into our seats. As I was passing Karen I whispered, 'Thanks for buying Mum's book, by the way. That money will buy me a new set of drumsticks!'

It won't, of course, because writers only get a tiny amount of money for every book they sell, but Karen doesn't know that. And she looked as sick as a pig. Ha!

My triumph was shortlived, of course, because at lunchtime everyone started asking about the band. We sort of acted like we'd been doing it for ages, because we didn't want to admit we've only had one practice.

'Yeah, I got the drums a while ago,' I said, taking my

lunch out of my bag. 'And Alice and Cass have been playing the guitar and the piano for ages.' Well, that's all technically true.

'I can't believe you didn't tell me!' said Ellie.

'Well, we were going to keep it quiet for a while,' said Cass, giving me a meaningful look. Cass is very good at giving meaningful looks. Maybe it's because they are intensified by her glasses. 'We wanted to wait until we were ready to play gigs.'

'So who do you sound like?' asked Jessie McCabe.

Of course, we don't really sound like anyone yet. We've only really played one song, and that was by the Kinks.

'Um, we're still working on our general sound,' I said. Then, of course, Karen, who was sitting at the next desk, had to stick her oar in.

'Well, at least we know you can sing,' she said. 'At least, your alter-ego can. She was boasting about it in this ridiculous book.'

I ignored her and started eating my sandwich.

'Are you going to play any concerts?' asked Ellie. 'You have to tell us if you do.'

'Well, we really want to play gigs,' said Alice, although

to be honest I'm not sure Cass actually does. 'But, um, we're not sure how. I think we're too young to play most places.'

'You should ask Rebecca,' said Karen. 'After all, Wildfire played a concert.'

I rolled my eyes as if I was just mildly amused by Karen's ravings, as opposed to wanting to kill her. This seemed to annoy her because she shut up for a while. And then we went out to sit in the playing field and eat crisps, and I managed to avoid her for the rest of the day.

Alice doesn't really care all that much about everyone knowing about the band, but Cass does. She says she didn't want anyone to know about it until we were amazing musicians and had written loads of songs, rather than three girls who had only had one practice. 'And only two of us can play our instruments properly,' she said. 'No offence.'

'I'm not that bad,' I said.

'Sorry,' said Cass. 'But you know what I mean. It's not that you're bad, you just haven't had much chance to practise.'

'Hmm,' I said. 'Fair enough.'

Anyway, it's done now, and there's nothing we can do to change it, as Alice very sensibly pointed out. She also

said everyone will forget about it soon, although that wasn't quite as sensible. No one in our class seems to forget anything. They're like elephants in hideous wine-coloured uniforms. Some of them still go on about the time Jessie accidentally called Frau O'Hara 'Mum' in class and that happened nearly a year ago.

THURSDAY

Have been practising the drums on the sofa cushions. I think I am getting better. In fact, I know I'm getting better. You just have to learn to relax your wrists. Of course, the pedal thing still freaks me out a bit, but I'll figure it out. And I don't really need to play a big bass drum very often (I hope). I'm kind of avoiding playing the cymbals for the same reason. Also, it turns out that playing the drums (or cushions) is very good way of letting out your rage. Obviously I have had lots of things to be angry about recently (Mum, Mrs Harrington, Karen Rodgers, Vanessa Finn) and after a good bash I do feel much better.

To my amazement, I am not the only person who thinks I am getting better. Dad came in today while I was drumming away on the sofa and said, 'Wow, Bex, you sound like a real drummer!'

Maybe I really have found my calling.

After reading *Pride and Prejudice* (which was very good. Especially as Elizabeth escaped her embarrassing mother in the end), I am in the mood for more old-fashioned books about people with horrible parents. Rachel gave me *Jane Eyre*, which was also written in the olden days. It is okay so far. Jane Eyre is an orphan which frankly doesn't sound so bad to me right now. Although I suppose Dad isn't that bad. Some of the time.

FRIDAY ✡

Vanessa Finn is being so nice to me I'm starting to feel a bit sorry for her friend Caroline. Today she asked me if I wanted to sit with her for lunch, ignoring poor old Caroline. In our class we don't go around asking people to join us for lunch, and I was already eating my sandwiches

(wholemeal bread, cheese, ham and lettuce) and drinking a carton of juice (apple) with Cass and Alice, as usual. So that was weird anyway. Caroline just sat there, looking hurt. I politely said that I was having lunch with Cass and Alice, and Vanessa gave me a sugary smile and offered me some of her chocolate brownie. But I didn't want to take any of it. I'm afraid she has ulterior motives. I just wish I knew what they were.

And I had another conversation with Paperboy this evening. But I'm not sure if that was a good thing or not. I was at home practising the drums, as is my wont these days, and when the door rang I shouted 'I'll get it!' and walked very calmly into the kitchen, got the paper money from the counter, and walked slowly out to the door (I ignored Rachel sniggering and saying, 'Oh, Bex is answering the door at this time on a Friday, what a surprise'). Then I took a deep breath, smiled, and opened the door. And there he was, looking as lovely as ever. Oh, he's so tall. I have to lean my head back to look up at him, even when he's standing a step lower than me.

'Hi,' I said. I held out the cash. 'Here you go.'

'Thanks,' he said, in a friendly way. 'Did you manage to

stay out of the papers this week?'

Without thinking, I said, 'Well, no, not exactly.' As soon as I said it I wished I'd kept my mouth shut. Or rather, lied. If he hadn't seen the shorts photo, what on earth was I doing telling him about it? It was better if he never knew anything about it But it was too late now. And then it was like I was possessed. I couldn't stop talking. 'My mother did an interview with a newspaper and gave them a photo of me and my sister when we were little,' I said. 'We were wearing ridiculous shorts. It was pretty embarrassing.' Which is why, of course, I am telling you. WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?

But Paperboy laughed in quite a nice way. 'Wow, you really are famous,' he said. 'I'm not sure that I, a humble paperboy, should be allowed talk to you.'

I should have thought of something clever or funny to say to that, but of course I didn't, so I just laughed like a crazy person and he grinned and went off.

I wonder if he thinks I actually am a crazy person? Or at least a sad idiot who appears in the paper by accident all the time.

He was quite friendly though. And he was joking with

me in a nice way, not a sniggering way. That was pretty cool.

Hmmm.

SATURDAY ★

I don't want to write about this but I suppose I have to. Something horrible happened today. We had an early band practice because Alice had to go and visit some relatives, and afterwards Cass and I went into town on the bus. Cass had to buy a birthday present for her brother in some stupid sports shop and she said she knew it wasn't fair to make me go there, so we split up and said we'd meet in half an hour. I went off to potter around the shops, even though I couldn't really afford to buy anything, and when I was coming out of Tower Records, Paperboy was coming in. We almost walked into each other in the doorway and when I realized it was him my stomach turned over with excitement and happiness. We just stared at each other and I was starting to say hello when I realised there was someone with him. A girl. She was tall-ish (taller than me,

anyway) with brown hair and she was wearing a really nice coat and had a cool bag. She was quite pretty, I suppose.

I froze for a split second and then said, 'Oh, hi!' I hope I sounded casual. I have a horrible feeling I didn't. He looked a bit awkward and said smiled and said, 'Hey.' And the girl sort of looked at me funny. If we'd been in the street, I'd have just kept walking but we were still in the doorway so there was a stupid awkward bit where we all moved out of each other's way in the same direction until finally I broke free and sort of bounded out into Wicklow Street. I said, 'Um, bye then,' and he waved and said, 'See ya,' and the girl just looked at me blankly, and then I walked down the street as fast as I could and I wanted to die. I wished I didn't have to meet Cass at all because I just wanted to be on my own. I sort of wandered around the streets near the George's Street Arcade until it was time to meet her, trying not to cry. We went for a hot chocolate and I told her what had happened. I tried not to show how awful I felt. Cass was all 'oh no, he's taken!' but she didn't seem to really care. And I do care. And I feel really embarrassed for caring.

I keep running it over and over in my head. I wish I

knew whether they were holding hands or not. I mean I wish I knew that they weren't – right now I think they weren't but I can't be sure. Not that it makes any difference. I'm clutching at straws. I wish I could tell myself that she was his sister or his cousin or just his friend but I don't want to give myself false hope. I feel so, so, so stupid. I've spent the last few weeks thinking about him so much, I really thought there was at least a possibility that there was something in it. I can't believe I was all happy and hopeful about him last night. I can't believe we were practically engaged in my dreams. I wish he liked me. I wish I knew him.

SUNDAY

Here's something really shameful – I keep wondering whether Paperboy looked awkward when we met because he didn't want me to know that he had a girlfriend. Because he likes me. But probably he just looked awkward because he thinks I'm just a silly little girl he bumps into every week when he's doing his job and he doesn't want to

have to see me in public. I hope he doesn't know I like him. If he did and felt sorry for me I would die. It's the worst thing I can possibly imagine. Although he probably feels sorry for me anyway, with my unwanted fame. God, I'm so pathetic.

LATER

I rang Alice and told her everything, including how crappy I felt (I didn't tell her about my shameful hope that Paperboy secretly loves me). I don't know why it was easier than talking to Cass. I suppose it was partly because, after the first excitement, I don't think Alice really cared about Paperboy. She preferred the boy who (still) goes past us on his bike on Calderwood Road. He actually sort of smiled at us the other day so perhaps she's on the right track. But also it was because we have been friends for much longer than me and Cass, and although I do get on really well with Cass and she is very funny and I probably have more in common with her than I do with Alice, sometimes I feel that perhaps Alice understands me better, in a more serious way, not just about liking the same books and music and

TV programmes and stuff like that. So yeah, I told her, and she was really nice about it, and said she understood, and told me about how once she saw Bike Boy exchanging waves with a girl in a St Mary's uniform when we were on our way into school, and I hadn't seen anything so she acted normally until we got there and then she went into the toilets and cried. Anyway, I felt a bit better after I talked to her.

MONDAY

I keep forgetting about Paperboy and his stupid girlfriend (it actually gives me a horrible pain in my stomach to write that) and then I remember and feel sick in my tummy. School is so boring, I have plenty of time to think about it. I was in such a daze in maths that I didn't even notice that Ellie and Jessie were having a competition to see who could tip their seat back the furthest without falling over until Jessie actually did fall over and Mrs Condren spent the rest of the class telling us how we were meant to be grown-up now and it was disgraceful to see

fourteen-year-old girls acting like babies.

TUESDAY 

As if I didn't have enough to annoy me at the moment, Vanessa Finn kept going on at me again today. What is up with her recently? I ended up having to sit next to her in German because Cass and I were late for class and there weren't two free seats beside each other so Frau O'Hara ordered me to sit next to Vanessa. Anyway, we were meant to be practising talking about our favourite TV programmes 'auf Deutsch' but Vanessa kept talking about this ginormous birthday party she's planning and asking me what I thought about it.

'I haven't decided whether to arrive on a big pink tank or a pink horse. What do you think?'

What I thought was that she was a total lunatic but I just said, 'Um, where are you going to get a pink horse?'

'Oh, we're just going to dye a white one,' she said, as if this was a perfectly normal thing to do. Perhaps it is, for her. Perhaps she has a whole stable of horses of every colour.

'And, well, where are you going to get a tank? Isn't that, like, illegal?'

'Dad has a friend who's an army officer,' said Vanessa. 'He said we could just borrow one for the day.'

'Really?' I said.

'Yah. And we can paint it pink as long as we paint it grey or green or whatever boring colour it's meant to be afterwards.'

It was so mad I have to admit I was kind of fascinated.

'Are you going to, like, ride through the streets in it? In a tank?' I asked.

'Yeah,' she said. 'I'll be, you know, looking out in the top in my new outfit. Waving at people.'

I always knew Vanessa was a bit peculiar and annoying, but I thought she was basically harmless. Now it sounds like she wants to be Hitler. Only more pink. Anyway, Frau O'Hara came along then so she had to shut up (in English at least). But she kept going in German. She was of course meant to be talking about telly programmes but I'm pretty sure she was still talking about the party (it is hard to tell as her German is even worse than mine). I heard the word 'Pferd' which means horse so maybe she is just obsessed with

horses in general? Although she also said something about a 'Fest'. As soon as the class ended she started talking about the tank as well (or Panzer, as I believe they are called 'auf Deutsch'), but I said I had to go to the loo urgently and ran away (it was the only excuse I could think of). To be honest Vanessa's mad party should be a distraction, but at the moment I can't think about anything but Paperboy and that horrible girl. Why did I go in to Tower on Saturday? If I hadn't seen them I wouldn't feel so awful now. I mean, I know that it doesn't change the fact that he's going out with her (IF he is) but at least then I wouldn't know about it. Every time I think about it I feel sick. And very, very sad.

THURSDAY

We had an extra band practice after school today. Alice asked her mum to let us do it, to cheer me up, which was very kind of her. I'm not sure it actually worked, because now I'm back home again and I feel miserable, but I have to admit that when we were actually practising it did distract me from my misery for a while.

Maybe I should start writing poetry. I could turn my sadness into great literature.

LATER

Nothing rhymes with Paperboy.

EVEN LATER

If only I knew his real name. Although it's probably something unrhymable, like Jonathan. Not that he looks like a Jonathan. I actually can't imagine what his name might be. He doesn't look like an anything, if you know what I mean. I mean, you wouldn't look at him and think, 'There's a Dave,' or 'There's a Rory.'

Anyway, there isn't any point in finding out what his name is. I'll probably never talk to him about anything but newspapers. And I'm not sure I even want to do that anymore.