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I didn't mean to catch the kid's eye at first. He was hopping around the edge of the group pushing hair out of his face when I noticed him. But once you know you're being watched you can't help but keep looking back. He was staring hard and sucking his lip. I guessed he had some hero worship thing going, this being my first day back after the stabbing.

He had a scrunched face and shiny red hair and looked younger than the others, smaller. And he was all tucked in.

The first thing he said was, 'what's it like, the food and cleanliness and stuff?' And I was like, huh? Most kids here are weird, true. But they know about subject hierarchy in conversation. You ask about what put you there, not how many fucking beans you got on your dinner tray.

Before I could suck the air through my teeth in that way that says, fuck off, he said, 'I always wanted to go. From being a baby.' And that took the cake. First, how did he know what he wanted as a baby? No one remembers that shit. Second, and I said this, I said 'You were there as a baby, stupid. You were born there.'

'I weren't,' he said. 'After I were born in the bus we got off and went back home. I never been, ever. Dad didn't believe in 'em, didn't even take me when the house blew with mum inside.'

Great, another pyro, I thought. My stitches were itching but I didn't want to rip them, so I scratched my nuts instead. He was telling me how he'd only seen the doctor at the centre once, four years ago, for his entrance assessment.

'I never get sick or nuthin,' he said, real glum.

So I told him, 'It was real clean.' Because it was.

Then he said, 'I bet they have toilets where you don't have to touch the seat when you take a dump, like germ free toilets.'

I stared at him, shaking my head real slow, my eyebrows pushed up high.

But he kept going: 'And people visit, even if it's just nurses or whatever, at least someone every hour. And they bring food. And all you need to do is lie there in really, really clean sheets, right?'

And I was shocked, truly shocked, that a kid with this kind of brain faculty living in a facility like ours with so many other mental kids hasn't once been hospitalised as a result of his own annoying stupidity. I started feeling sorry for him.

'Look,' I said, 'I don't know what your problem is, but if you keep thinking like that you're gonna be real disappointed. 'Cos most likely when you finally get there, you'll be unconscious and shittin' in a tray, so all that stuff will be lost on you, okay?'

His chin crinkled and he shook his head. 'I could live there,' he mumbled. The kid didn't want to know.

He nodded at my shoulder where you could still see blood through the bandages. 'How'd you get that?'

I shrugged, like it meant nothing. 'Fight,' I said.

If he were like the others he'd have asked, did you get him back?—even though they already knew from the papers. But this kid just looked bored. 'Later,' he said, and walked off.

I was shaking my head thinking, what sort of freak is this? Plus I was a bit confused being that I was mentally prepared to tell the story again about the guy that died.

Some kids are so nuts you leave them alone. Like Large, who slammed his sister's head against a wall during visitation because she wouldn't be sad for him. Before the guard jumped the tables, Large got her head on the corner bit like six times. You could see a proper dent in her skull.

When I walked into my shared room, Squirrel said, 'that kid you were talking to uses the girls toilets.' Then he rolled on his side.

I lay on my bed too but couldn't get comfortable. Compared to the hospital, the sheets were shit; so thin you could feel bumps in the mattress. Plus the hospital blankets were white and soft, not grey and scratchy. And the pillows weren't thin and lumpy. I thought, how is that? How can they get this one so thin but still full of lumps?

Then I thought, what the fuck? That stupid kid has got me mental over bed sheets. I was gonna get up and give him what he wanted, crazy or not, when I heard a door slam in the hall. There was running and shouting. 'He's gonna jump!'

I was up fast even though my shoulder was killing. I wasn't missing a jumper, that was for sure, and I reckoned I knew exactly who it was. I thought he'd go too high, being such a dumb ass, miss emergency altogether and go straight to the morgue.

I could see someone down in the courtyard squatting on the basketball hoop. The guards were shouting at him. I took the stairs three at a time, my good hand sliding down the rail, then pushed open the exit door. The sun hit my eyes so I put my hand up while I shoved through the boys. When my eyes adjusted I could see enough black hair to know it wasn't my kid up there. The others cheered as this one stood, crying, and stretched out, like a bird taking off, then he started falling.

That was when I saw the kid again, pushing through the guards. He made a run for it. Smiffy tried to catch his red hair but the old man was too fat and slow.

The kid got there just in time, so he was right underneath when the other boy came to land. Last I saw he was in the ambulance, lying back, bloody and smiling. What a fruit loop, eh?

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jessie Lilley.