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Here they were stuck in a tent in the middle of nowhere and could any group of people be weirder than these bloody Home-Educated Children? There was that much organic cotton and natural dye-stuffs and that many curly-headed precocious little twits –

She scowled. Not one of them worth taking into the long grass with a spliff and a couple of cans of beer.

At first it had been promising. Their tutor had been keen, never mind that the camp was in the very depths of Cornwall and would take a whole day, at least, to get to. Gill had said ‘It’s something you can all put on your CVs. The more gigs you can play in college, the more professional you’re going to look. Come on, people!’

She got the little scrap of mirror out of her wash-bag. The tent-flap was open, and green dappled shadows played across the opening, shirring and shifting like curtains in the sighing breeze that smelt of fresh rain. Beyond shadow, glorious day. She took out her war paint and laid it across the scarf on the ground. Foundation, concealer, mascara, frosted lip-gloss, blusher. Body glitter. Eye shadow. Cottonwool balls, Q-tips and perfumed facial cleansing wipes. Moisturiser. The spangles woven into the twisted burnt-orange fabric of her scarf glittered just about as bright as the contents of the little sticky pots of paste, and there was just about enough light in the tent to see by. She could probably do this in the dark anyway.

Tom with his two-weeks new license had driven them down in his mother’s old station-wagon and there was no question but that they could all look after themselves. The Home-Educated—the hecks, as they began to call them—had been mightily impressed by their stilt-walking and somersaults and acro doubles and after the performance the first day of workshops had gone well. She’d sat in the chill-out space to write up her coursework that evening:

‘What I’ve learned from gigs. By Laura Taylor

‘Well I learnt some odd things, I turned up in a dress with high heel shoes and had to perform up a tree as a cat. So we had to improvise I have size three feet and had to wear size eight up a tree. We also learnt how to chuck together great outfits in a car park and transform our selves with furry cloth.

‘I would say the hardest thing about this gig, was performing in the heat. So I would suggest hydrating your body by drinking loads of water. Sit in the shade when you can. Also don’t get drunk and go wild before a show or even the day before, not just will you have a hangover you will be extra extra dehydrate which is dangerous for performer. Also don’t wear loads of make up because it sweats off.’

That evening she’d looked out for the talent: one of the hecks was a tall blond boy about her own age and she was prepared to break him in gently. That night they

broke out the beer they’d brought with them, and Jenny turned out to have a quarter bottle of vodka in her purse, the little sneak, butter wouldn’t melt—

The little gang of them had roasted marshmallows and danced with each other in their swimsuits and gossiped raucously; and Blondie had sat on the grass, eyes gleaming in the firelight, staring at her. Later they’d cuddled. Not what she’d call a proper snog though.

But the next day was cold and wet and he hadn’t turned up to any of the workshops. Gill called that evening saying one of the parents had phoned him complaining that her son had been sick all day and she had her suspicions why. They were put on warning to be on best behaviour, and, worse, the good name of the school was defined as being in their careless keeping. They all got a bit cowed—hangovers didn’t help—and even she’d been chastened and contrite for a while.

But later Jenny of all people had decided to have a go at her, jealous cow, and ever since then her and Gemma had been huddling together flashing her dirty looks, dogging her right up. And then Tom—Tom! Gill must have been at him from Bristol—had had the cheek to come over and give her a serious talking-to about responsibility and acting in a professional manner and all that bollocks. When you got right up close to him you could see the little bumps all under his chin and round his neck where the stiff curly beard hair tried to poke through his skin. It looked like a rash. He smelt of trainers and grey underwear and cheap aftershave and sweat. He had thick funny eyebrows that nearly met over his nose and big grey eyes swimming in his face like fishes. She wouldn’t touch him with a barge pole. And he had spots all over his back.

She’d taken a walk to cool down but the sight of the meek little hecks milling about just made her feel worse. Nothing to buy at the food stalls but fucking falafel and bean stew. Weedy bean-eating bastards. Nothing to do but fucking handicrafts, carve your own bicycle, spin your own shoes type of thing. She wouldn’t be surprised if they had a Shag your own Sheep stall round the corner, nature-freaks.

She’d come back to the tent and the message-tone of Gemma’s phone came on. It could have been something important but it turned out to be a text from Jenny saying ‘yd betr watch out 4 tom rnd tht slag’.

That would have to do. She tossed her hair back, smacked her lips to smooth the gloss and adjusted her sarong so her belly-button ring showed. Armed and dangerous she swaggered out of the tent. Send texts about me, would you? Call me a slag, would you? You haven’t seen slag yet. And neither has Tom.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Folake Shoga.*