WE COME APART

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BLOOMSBURY
Part ONE
Caught

You have to be quick,
none of this pretending to be browsing business
that some shoplifters go for.

It’s in
   grab what you want
and out again.

But the others don’t get it.
They take ages making decisions,
like they might be legit buying,
so I know before we’re done
   that
we’re done for.

And I’m right.

We don’t make it two steps out of
Boots
before a security guard
nabs me by the hood of my jacket.
Liz and Shawna are
legging it up the high street
   and away,
while Meg and I
get dragged back into the shop
and up to an office.
‘Empty your pockets, you little scrubbers!’ the security guard shouts.

‘Can’t make us,’ I say.

‘You want me to call the police?’ he asks.
‘That what you want?’

‘No!’ Meg says, and as quick as a heartbeat turns her coat pockets inside out.

But they’re empty. No lipstick or nail varnish, none of the mini chocolate eggs I saw her stash away either.

‘I didn’t even do nothing,’ she says. She bites her bottom lip, starts to well up. Looks all sorts of pathetic really.

‘Now you,’ the security guard says, poking the air around me with his fat finger.

I turn out my pockets wondering if all the gear I tried to nick
will somehow disappear too,
like Meg’s did.
But it doesn’t.

Everything clatters to the floor:
lipstick, blusher, mascara, nail varnish
and
bloody mini chocolate eggs.

Mini chocolate eggs that I didn’t nick.
Mini chocolate eggs that Meg can’t get enough of.

She winks.
She winks to tell me to keep schtum,
to make sure I don’t tell it as it is –
that she somehow managed to stuff her loot
into my pockets on the way up to the office,
that she’s meant to be my mate
but is stitching me up
and letting me take the rap
for everyone else’s thieving.

Again.

‘What’s all that?’ the security guard asks,
pointing at the gear on the floor.

‘Never seen it before,’ I say.
'Really?' he asks.
'Well, it just came out of your pockets.'

'Can I go now?' Meg asks.

I stare at her,
hard.
Is she for real?
Like, is she actually going to leave me here
on my own
with some mentalist security guard
and the threat of juvenile jail?

'Mum'll be expecting me,' she says.
    'I ain't nicked nothing.'

The security guard picks up the phone.
'Yeah, you can go,' he tells Meg.

Then he grins at me,
well pleased with himself –
Captain Catch-A-Thief.
'But you.
You're going down to the station.'
HERE

In the one month
since we
arriving to live in
London North, England,
it rain most
of days,
and sunshine only a few,
which is funnier because
we come here in
summer.

Tata say we here for
short time
only
to make the Queen’s cash

then

return back
to our city, town, village
for to buy:

house mansion

then

car with top speed
then

fashions for impressing

then

gifts for my older brothers and sisters who we leave in Romania.

Tata lucky he have connections to give him strong job.

On some days after we arrive I helping Tata with his tough work. He driving his white lorry van around streets, spying seeking searching for the metals that people in London North not wanting.

We put every items on lorry and top man pays Tata hand cash for metals.
It good for me to helping Tata because now I am main son and need to quick learn how to make family monies and be provider for all. This is what my peoples do. Roma mens become cash provider, for keeping all family happy in clothings and food.

I am fifteen and man now, so my working in lorry van make much sense.

Real reason we come to England is because I am older, and cannot be without working wealth, or wife.
And Tata must to make
sacks of cash
for to pay
family
of girl
back home.

And then
we can to marry.
Which make gigantic hurt in my head.
Caseworker

You can’t even get into the youth offending services building without going through a series of locked doors and signing yourself in with two different doormen.

Along every corridor are blue plastic chairs arranged in pairs, kids in hoodies slumped in them so you can’t see their faces. Some of them are with their parents, some aren’t, but there’s this low rumbling of rage in the place.

You can smell it in the air.

I don’t have to wait long to meet my caseworker – ‘Dawn Green’ according to her badge – who’s got the smug look of someone who thinks she knows more than most people.
But Dawn Green knows jack shit about me.

She tilts her head to one side like she’s talking to toddlers: ‘So . . . taking part in a reparation scheme would save Jess from getting a criminal record.’

‘Reparation scheme?’ Mum asks.

‘Yes. As this is her third offence, the police can’t turn a blind eye. She has to show a willingness to change, to give back to her community.’

‘So it’s like community service,’ Mum says.

Dawn bites the insides of her lips. ‘It’s helping out in parks and attending self-development sessions.’

Always quick with an apology, Mum says, ‘Well, she definitely wants to show she’s sorry.’

‘And she’ll do what she’s told,’ Terry adds, like he’s my dad and this is any of his bloody business.
What is he even doing here?

‘Great, so, the police have proposed a scheme lasting three months. What do you think, Jess?’

Dawn turns to me, finally, and I know that I’m meant to tell her how sorry I am for being such a drain on society and

of course
I’ll pick up crap down the park to make up for it.

But a massive part of me wants to say no, wants to turn to Dawn and go,
I’d rather do time and get a record than
hang out with no-hopers and do-gooders for the next twelve weeks.
Thanks all the same though.

But I don’t get a chance to speak.
Before I can open my mouth,
Terry leans forward and grabs Dawn’s hand,
shakes it like they’ve just done a deal
and says,
‘When does she start?’
ENGLAND IS THE STRANGER OF PLACES

Some peoples
smile and say hello
in street or on bus.
Other peoples
not like my face
and don’t returning
the smile I sharing.

Mămică feel same as me.
Sometimes I see her
feeling sad
or
I can hear her
anger conversations with Tata:

‘This place isn’t for us, they don’t want our kind
here,’ she say.
‘We won’t be here long,’ Tata say.
‘Don’t make promises you can’t keep.’
‘For God’s sake, Miri, we’ll be home by
Christmas.’
‘We don’t fit in here.’
‘I know, but I’m making good money.’
‘So when we’ve made enough, we’ll go home?’
‘As soon as we’ve the money to pay for a wife
and some left over.’

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'Christmas?'
'Christmas.'

And I hate hearing these conversation because many times I not wanting to return there. Most times I not wanting to think about old life.

Or new wife.