

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

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by Louise Alley

They sat in Clifton Gardens with fish and chips and watched the light fade on the water. Graham shivered in his T-shirt. His mother would have remembered to bring him a jumper, he thought. Above them on the cliff, the restaurant was opening its deck for the dinner shift, putting out the chairs and lighting the gas heaters to ward off the autumn chill.

Alex stared straight out at the harbour. There was a tinny chuntering slowly into the bay to tie up at the jetty.

“You mustn’t blame yourself, you know.”

Graham was startled. He’d already had the excruciating conversation with both his parents last week about his Dad moving to Hong Kong. It had contained those very words. He hadn’t expected it to start up again so soon.

“Oh. No, it’s okay. I don’t. These things happen.”

Alex still wasn’t looking at him. “We both love you very much. It was nothing that you did. We just grew apart as a couple. “

Graham wondered if Alex had picked up the book Deborah had brought home - The Kids’ Guide to Divorce - and swallowed it. He felt annoyance rise in him like bile. “I’m not SEVEN, you know” he said. “I’m TWELVE. I get it.”

Alex kept his eyes on the water. “I know. You’ve been very mature. Mate. I’m proud of you. “

Alex had never called him mate in his life. It sounded terrible with his posh accent.

More than anything, Graham wanted to bash his father, not to pieces or anything, not to really hurt him, but to give him a good hard whack a few times. He wrapped his arms around his goose-pimpled knees and squeezed until the urge to strike him went away.

The voices of the tinny pilot and his friend drifted across the water.

“Yeah, whatever, Dad. Just keep doing whatever you’re doing, if it helps you tick the boxes.”

“I’m not doing anything,” Alex answered, in the same even tone, “I know you must be angry. I just wanted to make sure you’re alright. And if you had any questions...”

“You’re reading a script, that’s what it sounds like. Get over yourself.”

In fact, he’d thought of loads of questions over the past week. How much money would he and his mother have to live on? Was he going to be allowed to visit Alex in Hong Kong? Were 12-year olds allowed on aeroplanes by themselves? Did his Dad have a new girlfriend? But he didn’t want to give his father the satisfaction of providing answers.

Graham threw a chip to a seagull, because he knew Alex hated them. Within seconds they were mobbed. The cacophonous fighting of a dozen hostile birds at last dragged Alex’s eyes towards Gideon.

“Thanks for that,” he said mildly.

Graham wanted to get up and run home, but it was quite a long way and he didn’t have his own house keys yet. He was stuck on the beach in the cold until his father decided it was time to drive home.