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Call on Me in the Day of Trouble

by Rosalyn Hurst

He looks around the room with some curiosity. Windows stretch from ceiling to floor, the walls painted with bright garish colours. One is adorned with flowers and animals, rather childish in his opinion. The bright sunlight casts shadows outside, the astroturf still bright green, no faded grass there. One side a fenced off garden, struggling in the heat, and on the high wall pigeons look down, probably as depressed as he felt. He has never been anywhere so quiet. He can hear the murmur of the kids in the classroom, at the back of the building, he hears the keys as staff open and closer doors to the different corridors, but he cannot hear traffic, he cannot hear music, he can't even hear the pigeons through the armour plated glass.

“You OK, Jake? Its all a bit strange I know.”

He looks at the woman, his social worker, and raises an eyebrow, but does not speak. What's there to say? Of course its strange, they keep telling him its not prison for kids, but a place where he will be safe. He swings his legs and kicks the table leg, noticing that it is fixed to the floor.

The door opens and two adults walk in and sit at the round table.

A start, “You've had a bit of a tough time and here you will have space to get better and we will help you. Remember you have done nothing wrong, we are not punishing you,” does Jake hear the light emphasis on that final word?

Then, “You can go to school here, catch up on what you have missed.”

Jake gives an inward groan.

Then Jake asks, “Can she get in here? Will you let her in? Can I speak to her, phone her text her?”

They say, "Do you want that?"

Ashley wakes up slowly, experience learned the hard way has taught her sudden movement will cause nausea, a spinning head. She looks around uncertain of the time. Light creeps in with reluctance through the dirty window as dust dances with abandon on the sun beams. Traffic is heavy, she hears the train rattle over the bridge, a baby crying in the flat next door.

She slowly sits up, the room is strangely quiet, "Jake," she calls, "where are you?"

She gets up wondering what day it is, perhaps he's gone to school, yes that must be it, or perhaps, and here her ever optimistic spirit kicks in, he's gone to score for her. Old enough now to do some runs for the gang.

She goes over to his bed and then the shock, 'Where's his dog, the bloody awful smelly stuffed dog that he cuddles very night? It's gone, Jake has gone.' And then a scream, panic. She runs outside, "Where's my boy?" she sobs, she shouts, she bangs on doors, she stops cars in the street. "You stupid cow!" that's a neighbour, "the social took him last night, poor little half starved creature."

Later, she is told that Jake was found filthy cold and crying in the street.

"I will get better, just let him home," she pleads.

They look at her file, a very fat file, the countless times she has given the same promise and the same descent into hell for the boy. "Stay clean for a year and perhaps ..." the sentence is unended, She says she will, but, but she is not sure. As she goes to sleep, she says 'I will change, I am so sorry,' but the pull of the drug begins to gain hold.

And that same night as Jake goes to sleep he thinks, 'If I were a better son, if I had helped more I would not be here. I am so sorry I have let her down. She needs me. I will learn to look after her'. And the next day he texts her.

His social worker is copied with the text.

"She'll use that boy, she'll never let him go," she says to her colleague. Same old cry "Call on me in the day of trouble," as the saying goes, but the day of trouble for whom, that is the question?