



1 SO HE'S LOOKING at me with his puggy face, this big jerk of a policeman, and I'm thinking, take him out or let him live?

Big question.

I don't like questions. Questions are about choices and choices are a pain. I like certainties. Got to do this, got to do that, no debate. Take him out, let him live. Know what you got to do. Certainty.

Only I'm not certain here. I'm pretty sure I want to take him out. I hate the sight of him and I hate being back at the police station.

The knife feels good hidden inside my sock. Pugface didn't even feel it when he frisked me. But he'll feel it pretty quick if he doesn't treat me right. It's only a small blade but I know how to use it.

He's still watching me with those pig-eyes.

'Right, young man,' he says.

'I'm not your young man.'

He takes no notice. He's too busy smirking.

'In your own words,' he goes on.

'In your own words what?'

'In your own words—what happened?'

'What happened where?'

He gives this heavy, exaggerated sigh. I hate that. Move my fingers slowly down my thigh.

He can't see with the desk in the way. That bosomy policewoman over by the door's watching but she can't see anything either. I can tell from her face.

Anyway, she's too far away. I can have my knife out and into Pugface before she's covered half the ground between us. Probably time to stick her too.

He goes on in that patronizing voice.

'What happened at the pedestrian crossing?'

My fingers are close to the knife now. I stop my hand. No need to move it any further. I'm safe enough. All that's needed is a lunge and a thrust. Maybe a bit more if Bosoms gets involved.

'What happened at the crossing?' says Pugface.

'Nothing.'

'You stood in the road after the lights had turned to green and refused to move and let the traffic pass.'

'Did I?'

'You shouted abuse at the drivers waiting to move on.'

'Can't remember.'

'Especially the man in the nearest car.'

'Can't remember.'

'The man in the green estate. He asked you to move aside so that he and everybody else could drive on. You swore back at him and made obscene gestures.'

'He was rude to me.'

'You don't think maybe you were the one being rude?'

I shrug. I'm starting to enjoy this now.

'Eh?' says Pugface.

'Don't know.'

'It was dangerous.'

'No, it wasn't. He was never going to run me over.'

'Because unlike you, he had some sense of responsibility. Though it would have shaken you up quite a bit if he had put his foot down and driven at you. I don't doubt you'd have moved aside pretty quickly if he'd done that.'

'He wouldn't have had the guts.'

'Is that what you think stopped him? Lack of guts?'

'Yeah.'

'That's what you'd have done, is it? If you'd been the driver and you'd seen some rude little kid standing on the crossing and refusing to move? Jeering and swearing at you, and daring you to drive on? You'd have put your foot down and run him over, would you?'

'Too right.'

He leans back in the chair, glances at Bosoms. I'm really having fun now. They're both out of their depth. They don't know what to do with me. They know they can't prosecute or anything. It's just not that big a deal. I'll get a warning, nothing more.

Then Pugface stands up.

'Seems like we've got a problem, then.'

He moves round the desk towards me. I don't like the look of him suddenly. Don't know why. He sits on the edge of the desk.

Too close. Don't like people that close. Makes me remember things. I think of the knife, squeeze my hands into a ball. He glances at Bosoms again, then back at me.

'The driver's told us he doesn't wish to take things further. He just wanted to report the incident.'

Say nothing.

'He was a bit worried we might not be able to trace the boy who held up the traffic for five minutes, swore at all the drivers, then ran off.' Pugface sniffs. 'He clearly wasn't aware just how well we know you round here.'

He leans closer. I'm hating this now. It's not the police station. It's this face leering down at me. He's got to pull back. He's got to do it now, right now.

But he doesn't. He just smirks again—then leans even closer.

'Do you really think,' he whispers, 'that we haven't noticed you've got something hidden inside your sock?'

I lunge for the knife—in vain. The man's hands are tight round my arms. I don't even see the woman move. One minute she's over by the door, the next she's behind me, pulling me back against the chair. I spit at 'em, snarl at 'em, try to break free. Doesn't do any good.

'Bastards!' I'm rocking about, screaming my head off. 'Bloody bastards!'

'Yeah, yeah,' says Pugface. 'Bloody bastards.'

'Got a nice tongue on him,' says the woman.

'Bastards!' I scream.

'Look inside his sock,' mutters the policeman.

The woman pulls out the knife, fumbles with the other sock.

'There's nothing in there,' I yell.

She checks anyway, then straightens up, holding the knife. The man lets go of me and takes it from her. I duck under their arms and make a dash for the door.

I'm not fast—no point pretending—but being small sometimes helps, and somehow I've taken 'em by surprise. I'm at the door before 'em. I can see Pugface's hands clutching at me, and the woman's, but they're kind of falling over each other.

Then I'm out in the corridor.

Shouts from inside the room. Some constable running towards me from the desk. That's when fire extinguishers come in handy. A squirt over the guy and he slips. Jump over him and out the door.

Nothing to it.