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It's the summer that I die. Like the beginning?

God, don't start. Not with that filth about me being too young for this kind of talk. That I don't know what I'm saying? Well I do. And you'd better believe it. I'm not somebody who just opens her mouth to get attention. Like a child. I mean. So listen, this really is the last summer for me, then it's *finito, sunshine*—the end of the line, no more stops after this one, as Inspector Emperor might say when he's banging up a crim on a TV show I sometimes watch. And I'm not kidding: I'm as old now as I'll ever be, and it's no big number, I promise. Though, I have to say: what's the worry? I got born, I messed about a bit, I shoved off. (Or did I *get* shoved off?) Same for everyone isn't it? You can't go on forever.

It's like a fact.

But don't worry about it, what happens to me and stuff. No one else does. Except maybe my mother. Though what it's got to do with her, well, I wish she'd just do what I'd like everybody to do, and that's stop screwing with my head. Because, believe me, that's how all the trouble in this world begins. Wars and everything. With people wanting to mess with your ideas. To change you.

Dead right.

But, you might ask—and this is kind of fair—how did I know this was going to happen to me? Well, I'm not sure. Except that I

did see it coming, in a pantsy, boring sort of way. It felt very real too. Real enough. When, one day in May, this vision arrived and got snagged in my skull. And afterwards it would keep popping up, like a head in a Smack-The-Gopher machine on the seafront—now you see it, now you don't—though I totally forgot it the rest of the time. (This is how it *had to be*, really. Because like if you thought you were going to snuff it every five minutes, you just wouldn't bother getting out of bed every morning, would you?) So, most days, I could still get on with my life. Which was cool. But then this dreamy glimpse of the future would come back, and I'd see that lasting the year out literally wasn't on the cards for me. And, yes, it *could hurt*...

Leave it. Too late to be acting soft now. Plus, you need to know what happened to me.

Right. It's the summer that I die. The start of it.

'This is mental.'

Fifteen bodies in a row. Swimsuits in bubble-gum pink, sunshine yellow or bright orange like the jackets that men wear to dig up the road. Or honking florals that mothers just love to see on their little ones, with elasticated bodices round their little-boy tummies, and their straight-up-and-down thighs barely filling the leg holes. A few others, though, are in proper bikinis, with neat bootlace straps. Able to wear them for the first time ever, with something to fill the cups. Breasts budding to a perfection they know all about. Big time.

'Somebody's got to do something.'

Says Janine. She's the tallest in the class, including the lads, and she's also sort of older than everyone else, at least in the head. She could easily wear a bikini, though she doesn't want to, not yet, not being the showing-off kind. In fact she's probably quite a nice person, though she's not much of a laugh and doesn't have any real friends. But then, amongst this lot, there's nobody really worth being mates with.

I'd have to say.

The sunlight slants from the high windows across the empty space between the water and the ceiling, snaking in and out of the frame of the diving board, along the benches at the side, and shimmering on Janine's well worried face, the muscles tensing in her white legs as she steps forward from the line. Behind her, the rest of the not-yet-adults know what's going on. But the situation can't be *serious*, they think, not really. And anyway, what can they do about it? They're just children. Yeah, still that, when they want to be, which is like most of the time, in my book. And now they're in that giggly, giddy-tired state that they get in at the end of every afternoon. Off their heads. All except Janine, the sensible one in the class. There has to be at least one.

She looks round. Fifteen, including her. Where there should be sixteen.

The sunlight brightens, like a cloud's gone past, and it throws the shadows of the window frames and the dangling cords that open the blinds across the ribbed tiles. Meanwhile, in the office, Mrs O'Farrell's voice is trilling Irishly away. *You drive me Cray-zee Maiz-ee, You really amaze me, Maizee.* What a song, she's thinking. Who'd've thought that old thing would end up back in the charts. Though what are the charts these days? All that downloading and uploading and what-have-you. Ah, well, another day nearly over. And it's not been too bad. The girls not too disruptive. There was something going on a minute back, but it sounds like it's gone quiet now.

And quiet it is.

'What're you waiting for, Janine?' says Petra, arms folded across her flat pink chest, Sophie next to her, with a sneer set in concrete, though it's hiding a proper fear that something really bad might be happening here, and it'll all be her fault.

Janine spins round. 'Go get Miss.'

'Go get lost. I'm not grassing,' says Petra.

The rest watch. Each passing second getting slower, lumpier. What can they do? It's not *their* fault, the thing that's made them all go quiet, that wiggly shape too deep in the water—yours truly, if you didn't know by now.

I roll further from the surface, mouth clamped, there having been no chance of a last breath when, as everyone else was getting out, I got pushed off the shallow end, banging my head on the steps as I went down. Now, as I come round—too late to help myself, it seems—I see I've drifted way past the two-metre mark. The water is silky between my toes and fingers. My nostrils are burning with chlorine, the traces of a dozen different shampoos—Tesco's finest, Superdrug's cheapest—and the salts of periods and girl-piss and girl-sweat. My hair floats across my face like the trailing tail of one of the giant jellyfish they keep in the SeaLife Centre, chosen for its golden-syrup colour to please the wieners with their snotty noses pressed against the glass of the tank. And now I know how they feel, those jellyfish. As my heels make the lightest contact with the bottom of the pool. A shiny penny, a pellet of blackened Elastoplast, a hair grip in the grout. The sloping black lines of the racing lanes, the dreamy disturbance of the water round the filtration grid. I do a little turn, one cheek of my arse bouncing softly on the deck. Way above me, Janine is peering over the edge of the pool, with the half-kids behind her, hands cupped over their mouths, the words already organised in their daft heads: *Nothing to do with me, Miss. Honest.* And I can't hear a thing.

It's the most complete silence imaginable.

I drift further down the slope. Remembering a science lesson, just that morning, when they made us look at water in a beaker and told us the name of its curved surface which we had to remember, or otherwise we might die or something. It was *mesiscus*, or *demiscus*. Or maybe it was *domestos*, and that's where they got the name of the bleach from. Anyway, it doesn't matter now. It's just another of those trillions of useless facts they

try to cram in your head at school, and really the last thing on my mind. As these final seconds get squashed up. To no time at all.

Then the show begins.

And, really, it's just like everybody says. You see it all. Your life and everything. Right from the start. No, from even before that—way out in the depths of space, and such places.

I'm not joking...