

Sample translation

***Kiek* by Mariken Jongman
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Translated by Laura Watkinson

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Wieger slurped down the first gulp of his beer.

‘Ah,’ he sighed. ‘That’s the head gone.’

‘I’d prefer to keep my head on,’ I answered.

Wieger laughed. ‘Not much chance of that, not with Yvonne.’ He took another swig. ‘Does she know what you’re up to? That portrait of your dad?’

‘No. And I don’t want her to find out about it either. It’s none of her business.’

‘I won’t tell her a thing. You can count on me.’

‘Oh. Not a thing? Not one single little thing?’

‘What do you mean, not a thing?’

‘Well, you know, like, maybe there are certain things you don’t need to mention.’

‘Such as?’

‘Well, such as me lying about where I spent the night. Or about going to Tombstone. And maybe the break-in stuff isn’t strictly necessary either. I mean, maybe she doesn’t need to know about it. You know, what good would it do her if she found out?’

Wieger looked at me. His eyes were laughing, even though his mouth looked serious. ‘Nice try, Kikicat.’

It was good to be together again. Just the two of us.

Since the little gnomes had come along, having a conversation with Wieger hadn’t been so easy. Mum said that was only to be expected – kiddies suck up all of your attention. I thought ‘suck’ was the right word. Just like aliens, sucking you dry from the inside and eating you all up, but you don’t realise until it’s too late and you’re just an empty shell.

‘But you can put that idea right out of your head. I’m going to tell her.’

‘But she’ll kill me! You know what she’s like.’

‘You should’ve thought of that sooner. Before you started breaking and entering.’

‘Would you rather we’d just frozen to death, out there on the street?’

‘You could have stayed with me. There are always other options, Kikicat. You make your own choices and so you have to face the consequences yourself too.’

‘But I’m not making the choice for you to tell Yvonne. You’re doing that!’ I shouted, a bit too loudly. The two men at the bar looked in our direction. The slumping guy didn’t. Maybe he was asleep.

Wieger turned around. ‘Teenage daughters,’ he said to the men. ‘Every parent’s nightmare.’

‘Shut your mouth,’ I growled at him.

‘They manage to turn everything to their advantage,’ he went on. ‘They always know best.’

‘Well, there are worse things in life,’ one of the two men said.

‘Like what?’ asked the other.

‘Being on a plane and the plane crashing. That’s worse.’

‘Yeah, that’s worse,’ agreed the other man.

The men didn’t laugh, but Wieger did. Then he looked at me again. ‘Well, they *think* they always know best anyway.’

He took a swig of his beer.

‘You’re better off with babies then,’ I answered. ‘At least they’re good and do as they’re told.’

Wieger almost choked on his beer. ‘You must be joking. Babies are much worse! They’re tyrants. Dictators.’

‘Draw a little moustache on them and you’ve got your own mini-dictator.’

‘Exactly. No, seriously, having little ones is more trouble than I thought. It’s wonderful, but it’s hard work. I thought children were always four years old when you got them.’

I was. I was four years old. When he got me.

‘We’re-going-we’re-going-we’re-going!’ Lottie and I sang, holding each other by the arms and jumping up and down on her bed. Timing it so we bumped into each other. What that bed really needed was a good old bouncing, I thought. And unfortunately I said it out loud too, so we soon ended up in a giggling heap on the floor beside the bed.

Saturday was getting closer. The big day. Silly Billy Hardbums day. Our very first real concert, except for school stuff.

‘I’ve got a bad feeling about this,’ my mum said on Wednesday.

‘I’d rather you didn’t go,’ she said on Thursday.

‘You’re staying here,’ she said on Friday.

It wasn’t looking good. The only thing to do was play my trump card. ‘Well, at least Nan and Granddad will be pleased I’m not allowed to go. So they’ll have their way. Maybe I’ll pop round to visit them tomorrow. Instead of going to the concert.’

Silence fell. ‘Not allowed to go? Not allowed? That’s a bit strong. I just want you to get back here at a decent time. And you have to send me regular texts, so I know everything’s okay.’

‘Fine, no problem.’

‘And you have to promise to bike there with other people, not on your own.’

‘I promise.’

‘And not just with Lottie either, eh? In a group.’

‘Promise.’

‘And otherwise you call me and I’ll come and pick you up.’

‘Yep, fine.’

Then silence. Mum stared into the middle distance. It was done. I had my way. But still I felt as though I should say something else.

‘I’m not going to get up to anything silly, you know. Don’t worry. Nan and Granddad...’

‘What about Nan and Granddad?’

‘Nothing, they’re just so... I don’t know, suspicious.’

Mum sighed. ‘You just try imagining what it’s like growing up there. With those people.’

‘It sounds like a real pain, never being allowed to do anything.’

She stared ahead again. ‘Mm. I’m just happy you can be yourself, Kiki. It’s important, being yourself. You’re lucky you can just be yourself, eh?’

I nodded. No idea how I could be anyone else.

We’d been waiting at the school gates for twenty minutes. My nose had turned into an ice cube. My feet were frozen. So were my hands.

‘Come on, let’s go,’ Lottie said. ‘He’s not coming now, no way.’

Was it my imagination or did my lips really make a cracking sound when I pulled them apart?

‘But *why* not? I don’t get it. Don’t. Get. I mean...’ I racked my brains for words to express it more forcefully, but still couldn’t come up with anything better than, ‘I don’t get it. Why’d he stand me up?’

Lottie slapped her cheeks, probably hoping to bring a bit of life back into them. ‘Maybe he’s a stand-up bassist. Boom boom. Nah, he’s just an airhead.’

That was of course the most logical explanation. ‘Yeah, an air-guitar head, that’s what he is,’ I said.

‘Got that right!’

‘Don’t need him, do we?’

‘Nope. Come on, we’re going.’

Lottie jumped onto her bike. So did I.

We tore off as though pursued by a gang of polar bears. I hoped that the unpleasant thoughts would blow right out of my mind, but they appeared to be frozen solid.

Did you really think he wanted to go to a gig with you? That he’d ask you of all people? You? Kiki? Yeah, right, you sad cow.

Before long we were outside the old glassworks. The building was big, old and a bit ominous-looking. It looked as though it might collapse at any moment. But worse than that, it looked as though it was packed with people who all had a special something in common: their contempt for a girl called Kiki. *Ha ha, did she really think you’d go with her, Jurg? Bwa ha ha! She must be out of her mind! Hope she still turns up, so we can all have a laugh at her!*

‘Maybe we’d better just go home,’ I said.

‘Are you mad?’ Lottie shouted. ‘After all we’ve been through? I’m going in and so are you, even if I have to drag you in there by the frozen ears.’

'Two peeps, that'll be six shiny coins,' the boy said. He was sitting in the entrance, behind a table with a tin of money on it. His hair hung in loose strands around his face.

'They've already started,' he said. Stating the obvious; the decibels were blasting our eardrums even out here.

'Is that right?' Lottie said. 'Then you'll let us in for free, won't you?'

The boy looked a bit uncertain. 'Erm... nooo, that's... erm... no, we don't do that.'

'But we're going to interview the band,' I said.

'Can I see your press pass then?'

'I don't have one yet. It's for the school newspaper.' The school newspaper. I made that up on the spot.

'But it's going to be on the internet too,' Lottie said. Also made up on the spot. 'And who knows where else it's going to end up? It's good advertising for you too, for the Halls of Valhalla.'

'Show me your notebook then.'

I took my list of questions and my Dictaphone out of my bag. The boy on the cash desk looked impressed. 'Oh... well... fine then. Just go on through.'

We walked down the long corridor, following the sound of the music, with huge grins on our faces, but straight, dignified backs that gave nothing away. We opened the swing doors. The grin disappeared from my face. There was Jurg. And he obviously wasn't pleased to see me.

'Shame it's thawing,' Wieger looked outside. It was drizzling. 'If it had stayed freezing, we could have gone skating soon, on real ice.'

Skating was good fun. Even though I wasn't that keen on the cold. Wieger had taught me to skate. Using a chair for support at first. Then holding his hand and gradually letting go. Skating was difficult and I was scared of falling, but I wanted to be good at it, for him.

'It doesn't matter if you fall, Kikicat,' he said. 'If you fall, you just get back up.'

'But it hurts.'

'Not for long. Don't be scared. You can do it.'

I was scared though. And I kept falling over too, again and again. And he picked me back up. He was right; the pain wasn't too bad and it didn't last for long. Especially when we had hot chocolate with squirry cream afterwards.

Wieger waved at the barmaid and pointed at his empty glass.

'It's an old tradition where I come from,' he said to her, when she arrived at the table with a fresh beer. 'Sunday morning, after church, a couple of beers.'

'We haven't been to church though,' I said. 'We've just come from the police station. I got picked up by the police.' If Wieger could show us up, then so could I.

The barmaid gave me a sympathetic nod, as though everyone gets picked up by the police at some time or other. Wieger didn't appear to have heard me. He was looking at the barmaid. His eyes followed her as she walked away. 'What a wonderful rear view,' he said. He was easily distracted. I'd gone round to visit him a while before, in the hope of getting some information out of him about my biological father. He didn't know anything, of course, but you could never be sure. Maybe, somehow or other, he actually did know something, perhaps without even knowing that he knew it.

Wieger was spoonfeeding Anna; Sara was breastfeeding Suzie.

'Did Mum ever tell you anything about my father?' I asked. I was leaning backwards on my chair, propping myself up against the dining table with my feet.

'Your father?' Wieger said. 'Open up.'

Anna's lips parted slightly.

'The man who... made me,' I said. 'The bass guitarist.'

'Good girl, that's right! I don't know...'

'You must have asked Mum about it at some point though. You know, like, hey Yvonne, by the way, who is Kiki's biological father?'

'Hm...'

He scraped some of the food from around Anna's mouth with the empty spoon.

'Everyone has a biological father, don't they?' I was wobbling perilously close to the point of crashing backwards. 'Or did you think I just came tumbling out of the sky?'

'Yep, out of the sky. Like a little angel. Come on, sweetie, open wide!' Wieger pushed another spoonful into her mouth. Half of it got stuck around the entrance.

'Do you want a go?' he asked me. He held the spoon out invitingly, with a nod at Anna, who looked really gruesome, with that red smeared all over her face, as if she'd just torn apart some defenceless prey.

I didn't react. 'Did she really never, ever say anything about it at all?'

Another spoonful. 'Why do you suddenly want to know? Yeees, that's right, Anna banana, my little beetroot bandit!'

'I just do. And it's not suddenly. I want to know now because I want to know now. Not sooner. Not later. Now.'

'Oh, oh, oh, aren't you a mucky little monkey? Eh, what did you say, Kiki?'

'Kiki,' Sara interrupted, 'maybe now's not the best time for that kind of question. You're not going to get much out of him at feeding time.'

No, that much was obvious. But what kind of time would be good then? Maybe I should just fall over backwards, chair and all, and frighten the life out of him. Serve him right. Then I realised that his punishment would be more painful for me. And at that moment I fell.

'Hey, Kiki, keep the noise down,' Wieger said.

'Ouch, have you hurt yourself?' Sara asked.

I picked myself up, and the chair too, took a celebrity magazine from the floor and started reading. It was hard to concentrate on the famous people and their problems. Partly because of all the baby babbling – coming from Wieger, I mean, not the gnomes – and partly because I couldn't care less about them. Page after page, going on and on about actors, TV presenters, pop stars, you just name it, and not one single word about bass guitarists. Don't they matter too? Don't they have any problems?

Lottie screamed in my ear. 'Sven's here too, wow.'

The room was smaller than I'd expected. And less crowded. There was a sour smell in the air. Music thudded out of huge speakers on either side of the stage.

'Jurg's over there,' I shouted. 'He's pretending he can't see me.'

'What do you mean, "pretending"?' Lottie shouted back. 'He's got his back to you. He really can't see you.'

'I can tell just by looking at his back,' I yelled.

'I'm going to go over there,' Lottie shouted. 'And ask him why he didn't turn up.'

I grabbed her coat and pulled her back. 'Nooooo! Not Jurg!!!' Then the music stopped.

Of course it did, right at that precise moment. Every face in the room turned to look in my direction. And of course I was looking right at Jurg and he was looking right back at me.

I turned around, closed my eyes and thought very hard about Jupiter. *Jupiter, Jupiter, Jupiter*. I thought very hard about Jupiter, because I know that when you're on Jupiter, a little thing like this doesn't seem that bad at all. Then it's just one of those crazy little things, down on that crazy little planet. And from that distance you can clearly see that the globe is still spinning around as normal and not falling apart.

But it didn't help. I wasn't on Jupiter. I was here, everyone could see me and the world was in fact falling apart. It all took perhaps just a second, before the applause started and a new song began, but that second appeared to stretch out, in a sort of gloopy slow motion. Is it possible to stretch time, like chewing gum, until it's just a thin little thread?

I took a deep breath. Breathing – I'd forgotten all about that for a moment. Okay, forget about Jurg and his mates. What's done is done. What did it matter anyway? I didn't need anything from him, did I? Just his nose. And I already had that. Oh yes, and his personality traits. Well, I knew one of them now.

I took a look at the bass guitarist from the Silly Billy Hardbums. A new piece of dad. His mouth was hanging open and his bottom lip twitched along with the movements of his fingers. Oh no, I'd only just realised I wasn't going to get any help from Jurg. I was going to have to tackle him on my own. Well, with Lottie, but I'd have to do the talking. I'd have to ask him for the interview myself. And he was one scary-looking bassist.

The longer I looked, the scarier he got.

‘He looks like his instrument,’ Lottie yelled. She had her sketchbook in her hand. I saw she’d already done some quick sketches of his gaping mouth.

I pulled a ‘huh?’ face.

‘He’s all long and stretched out too! Like his bass. Two of a kind!’

She was right. The bassist was tall, with long limbs and long fingers. His bass guitar looked too small for him, like it didn’t fit him properly. It was hanging down so low, almost down to his knees, that he hardly had to bend his right arm at all.

‘But I don’t want that drippy gob,’ I shouted in her ear, pointing at the sketchbook.

‘Whaaaaat? Slippy knob?’

‘No! Drippy. Gob! Oh...’ Hey, Jurg wasn’t standing in the same spot now. The others were still there though. Where was he? I scanned the room. Must have gone to the loo. Suddenly I was looking right into his face. And he was looking right into mine. I quickly looked straight ahead instead. Oh, ugh, why did I look over at him? Bet he thought I was looking for him or something. Maybe he actually thought I... The music stopped. ‘See yaaaa!’ the Silly Billy Hardbums singer roared into the microphone. Someone turned up the lights.

‘We saved on the entrance money,’ Lottie said. ‘Shall we get some drinks?’

We walked over to the bar. With a face that could have taught Siberian temperatures a thing or two, I marched past Jurg. He must have been thinking *all sorts*. Well, he could think whatever he liked about me. If he was going to act as though I didn’t exist, then he didn’t exist for me either. He was air. Less than air. He was a vacuum.

The concert was over. We were standing in the dressing room, which was about the same size as the main hall. Lottie had just shoved me in there, but then I don’t think I’d have gone through that door without a little force.

I took another deep breath and looked around. Most of the space was full of old junk, like the crammed storeroom of a second-hand shop. The less packed part of the room just had a few tables and chairs, with members of the band slumped on or around them, and clothes and instruments strewn all over the place.

‘Hey, look,’ the drummer said apathetically. ‘Girls.’

‘Finally! Groupies,’ said the guitarist/singer. He’d taken off his shirt, which he’d knotted around his head during the second half of the gig. His chest was still bare.

‘Yeah, that’s what it’s all about’ the bassist said.

‘Hm. A bit young maybe.’ The drummer, who had been slumped on a chair, sat up straight.

‘Is one of you Mimi?’ the bassist asked.

‘No,’ I said.

‘Oh. Some girl called Mimi was supposed to be coming, to do an interview.’

‘Kiki,’ Lottie said. She pushed me forward. ‘This is Kiki. She’s here to interview you.’

Jurg had obviously said my name was Mimi. Lame. Or even worse: maybe he really thought my name was Mimi. He'd just forgotten.

'Oh, right. Kiki, could be, Mimi, Mimi, Kiki. What about her?'

'That's Lottie. She's doing the pictures.'

'I'll just take a few photos,' Lottie said. 'Then I'll be off.'

Now that I was actually talking to the bassist, I thought he was less scary than when he was on stage. More ordinary. I didn't mind so much about Lottie wanting to dash off now. She'd got talking to Sven and she wanted to talk some more. Not just talk either.

I picked at the candle wax on the table.

'My head's thumping a bit,' I said.

'Well, that's what you get,' Wieger said. 'You had a good night though, didn't you?'

'Oh, yeah.'

'So what did you get up to?'

'You know, this and that. All sorts.'

Even though my head was thumping, my brain wasn't feeling quite as hazy as it had been earlier that morning. I wanted to make a list of all the details about last night. But I didn't have a pen. Wait a second though... I reached into my back pocket. Yes, it was true. I'd taken the pencil and put it in my pocket. I pulled it out.

'I stole a police pencil.'

'Good girl,' Wieger said. 'That'll teach them.'

We laughed.

I was glad I'd got them to call Wieger. Strange I hadn't thought of it immediately. Wieger always sticks up for me. Especially about small things, things that don't seem so important, but actually are. You feel stronger when there's someone there to stick up for you.

Like Granddad's last birthday when Wieger was still around. Just another of those little things.

I'd been given a slice of cake and I was eating it straight from the plate.

'Forks were invented for a reason, Kiki,' Nan said. 'You're supposed to use them.'

'But why?' I asked, still chomping away. 'There are loads of things you can eat perfectly well without a fork. Look.' I took another bite of the cake.

'Manners. That's why. Watch this.' Nan picked up her fork and broke off a small piece of cake. 'It looks nicer for other people if you eat like this instead of behaving like a wild animal gobbling down its prey.'

She lifted the fork, daintily popped the cake into her mouth and started chewing. If there had been any wild animals in the room, they'd have been very impressed.

'It's healthier too,' said Granddad. 'Otherwise you just bolt it down. With a fork you automatically eat more slowly.'

I suppressed the urge to see if I could bolt it down with a fork too. I was pretty certain I could.

'This isn't the Stone Age, Kiki,' Nan said. 'Although I sometimes have my doubts, the way some people these days...' A shrug of the shoulders replaced the rest of the sentence.

'Yeah,' I said, nodding away as I chewed and swallowed. 'I saw something really strange the other day. There was this man and he was washing his hands really carefully before he started eating.'

'Yes, that's pretty strange nowadays,' Nan said.

'But then he started eating with a knife and fork!'

Nan and Granddad looked at me with raised eyebrows.

'Yes, and what's strange about that?' Granddad asked. 'It's just hygienic, isn't it?'

'But if you eat with a knife and fork, you don't touch your food with your hands at all. So why do you have to wash them then? If you're going to eat with your hands then you should wash them. That makes more sense, doesn't it?'

I'll never forget Wieger's booming laugh. 'Kiki, you're absolutely right,' he whooped. 'There's no arguing with that. I'm never going to wash my hands before eating ever again!'

He gave Mum a grin. She flashed him an angry look in return.

'It's perfect common sense,' I said.

But some people aren't very receptive to common sense, no matter how hard you hit them around the head with it. Nan was one of those people. It was nonsense, she said, and she wouldn't budge. I had to use my fork. For the sake of good manners and hygiene. But I wouldn't have cared if she'd made me use ten forks. Because Wieger winked at me. And I felt all velvety warm inside. I'd said something clever and the feeling made me glow for hours afterwards.

I was standing with Joris at the bar. That was his name, the long, stretched-out bassist from the Silly Billy Hardbums. Joris had a whole pile of drink tokens and he got me a Coke. The interview had gone well. I'd found out loads about bass guitars and about the personal traits of bassists.

Joris reckoned that bassists weren't less popular with girls as such. It's just that the singer always gets the most attention. The instrument doesn't have that much to do with it. Singing is what attracts the girls. So, I asked him, if everyone sang the same amount, would they all get equal amounts of attention? Yes, he said, that was right. So I asked him why they didn't do that then. That'd be fairer, wouldn't it? He said he couldn't inflict that on the world; the world already had enough problems without him starting to sing.

So, a good personality trait for Joris was that he was funny. I didn't have any annoying personality traits for him yet.

Lottie was standing nearby, talking to Sven. She was laughing and tossing her hair back. She and Sven were about the same height, but she was gazing up at him, because she'd shifted her weight onto one leg and was standing there with her hand on her hip. She looked like a bit of a poseur, actually.

Jurg came over. He took a quick look at me, then looked at Joris. He gave him a punch on the shoulder. 'Well played, man!'

'Yeah, it went well. Except for "Bums All Over the Place". I was way off the beat there for a bit, eh?'

'Didn't notice a thing, man.'

'I completely lost it. It's that chord sequence, I think. Dead tricky. But it could've been Patrick, might have been him who was out, not me.'

'Yeah, maybe. Know what you mean. Sometimes you just can't tell.'

I was standing there with them. They let me just stand there with them. They were having important discussions about 'chord sequences', 'Patrick' and being 'off the beat' and I was part of it all. Everyone who saw us standing there would think: that girl's one of them. I looked at Lottie. Or rather, at the place where she'd been standing just a moment ago and which was now empty. Where was she? She'd better get back here before it was time to go. What time was it anyway?

I really didn't want to think about my mum. There I was, being part of everything, belonging, with real people and real life, and I wasn't ready to leave any time soon.

Maybe send her a quick text, to say that things hadn't finished yet. Hm, I really should have sent her some texts earlier. But when you've started living real life, you don't feel like bothering about your mum.

I looked for my phone. Gone. I squatted down and tipped the contents of my bag over the floor. Still no phone. Help, I'd promised to send my mum regular texts and I hadn't even sent her a single one yet. Wait, it was still in the dressing room. It rang during the interview, so I stuffed it between the cushions on the sofa.

I pulled my phone out from between the cushions. Eighteen missed calls. Of course I hadn't heard anything during the gig. I banged out a text like a girl possessed:

ALL OK. B BK SN. GIG RAN L8. Phew.

I walked back to the bar. The drummer came to stand with us.

'Hey, Patrick,' Jurg said. 'Good gig, man.'

'Yeah, it was great,' Patrick said. 'I really went for it. Pfff, think I must have lost a bit of weight up there.'

I took a swig of my Coke and looked at Patrick. He didn't look as though he had any flab to spare. He was all muscles and sinews, without an ounce of fat.

Then I looked at Jurg. He was acting completely normal, as if he hadn't left me standing there waiting for him for ages at temperatures of minus forty. I could always ask him of course. 'Where were you?' Well, in theory anyway, but there was no way I'd ask him

for real. I'd look like a complete loser, because it'd mean admitting that I'd really thought he'd come. And that'd mean admitting I was a silly, naive cow who would fall for anything, who believed whatever boys said. And it was so obvious that he hadn't meant it. He wasn't even vaguely interested in me. Even now, he was just talking to Joris and Patrick. I wasn't one of them at all. I just happened to be standing there, like a spare part. Maybe I should go and look for Lottie. Maybe we should think about heading home. Maybe we should –

Out of the corner of my eye I saw something hurtle through the swing doors. What was it? I turned my head. My mum. She stood there, like a wild bull in the arena.

And I was the red rag.

I had to push on with my Win-Over-Wieger campaign.

I hadn't made much progress as yet. I took the last swig of my hot chocolate.

'I don't want Mum to murder me. She's already mad at me for something else. If she finds out about this, I'm done for. Might as well just emigrate.'

'What did you do?'

'Nothing. I just went to a concert. By my dad's mouth. She thought I stayed out too late and I didn't send any texts. So she lost it.'

'She was probably just worried about you.'

'Yeah, probably, but why can't you be worried and still keep your cool? She just totally kicks off and starts making such a fuss that you want to die.'

He knew exactly what I was talking about. He knew Mum.

'Okay. But why didn't you just send her a text?'

'Oh, I just forgot. Would you want to keep sending your mum text messages while you were out living life and being free?'

That was a good answer, because I knew how much Wieger loved his freedom.

'No, but I'm fifty-three and you're fourteen. That's a bit of a difference, eh?'

'She wants to chain me up. And chains aren't nice.'

'No. But sometimes you have to put a leash on a dog. Because you can't trust them not to do something silly. Just like fourteen-year-old girls.'

'You can trust me. I don't do silly things. Not usually anyway.'

'Or because they don't always know what's good for them. That's why parents were invented.'

So Wieger was going to play the responsible parent, was he? Fine, if that's how he wanted it, I'd play along.

'Is that right?' I said, all smiles. 'Well, as a fourteen-year-old girl, I can tell you one thing that's not good for you. Drinking and driving.' I nodded at his beer. 'We're going back on the moped, aren't we? Well then.'

Wieger looked at me. For a moment he didn't seem to know what to say. Then he leant forward and took a swig of his beer.

'Two's okay,' he said. 'Just two. Nothing wrong with that.'

‘But you’re not setting the best example for untrustworthy fourteen-year-old girls, are you?’

Suddenly the slumped barfly sat upright. He turned around and said: ‘She’s got a point, mate.’

‘Bugger off!’ Wieger shouted across the bar. ‘I’m just enjoying a drink. Mind your own business.’

He downed the rest of his beer, then turned to me and said, ‘We’ll walk back if you’re that worried about it.’

I was right; the barfly agreed with me. But it didn’t do me the slightest bit of good.

I was on the wrong track. Stupid of me. I shouldn’t be attacking Wieger. I should be gently working on him. He knew exactly what my mum was like and I had to use that to my advantage.

‘I just don’t want her to start interfering,’ I said quietly. ‘She’ll make a mess of everything. You mustn’t tell her about the portrait. That’s mine. Just mine. It’s my dad,’ I said, bashing the edge of a beer mat on the tabletop. Mine, mine, mine.

‘You really should tell her about it,’ Wieger said. ‘You’ve lied, you’ve broken into a building, and the list goes on. That drawing of your father gives you a reason. You just want to have something tangible to remind you of him. She’ll understand that. It’s a mitigating circumstance. Some sort of justification.’

‘Not as far as she’s concerned. She doesn’t have a clue about justification. Or justice. There’s nothing just about her.’

‘Come on, Kiki, now you’re exaggerating. Your mum can be a real sweetheart.’

She charged over and grabbed hold of me. ‘Are you completely out of your mind?’

‘Owww, let go.’ That ‘owww’ didn’t sound very cool. But she pinched me and it really hurt. Strange that I was worried about the ‘owww’. Like the rest of the situation was actually cool.

Of course it would have been nice if the floor had opened up so I could disappear into it, quietly, without any fuss. Just nice and simple: bye bye, that’s all, folks. Sink down into the ground and be gone. But I wasn’t gone. I was still standing there and my mum was there, screaming at me and shaking me around. The three boys at the bar were watching. Along with the rest of the room, about forty people, I reckon. I heard someone say this performance was better than the band’s.

Here’s a small selection of all the things my mum yelled at me:

I called you fifty times
are you out of your tiny mind
I am going to tie you up
no, I’m going to chain you down

don't go thinking I'll ever set you free
or that I'll ever let you do anything else
anything at all
or let you talk me round ever again
pulling your tricks on me, you selfish, selfish girl
you can say goodbye to your life
it's over
over
what kind of idiot do you think I am
a pushover, a walkover
some kind of moron
I am not going to let you keep on taking the piss
do you think I don't know what goes on
what kinds of things happen in places like this

Suddenly she turned to Joris. No idea why she picked him, but that was what she did. She pointed at him and repeated what she'd said: 'Do you think I don't know what goes on in places like this?'

Joris stared at her as though she was some strange and fascinating natural phenomenon.

'I'm sure you know all about it,' he said. 'Who are you anyway, Kiki's sister or something? What's the problem? Chill a bit, girl!'

Something miraculous occurred. My mum chilled a bit.

'Kiki's only fourteen,' she said. 'I don't want her hanging around this kind of place at night.'

Now she sounded just like Nan. But I wasn't going to tell her that. And I was too occupied with my blocks of shame. One piled on top of another to create a huge wall of shame, so high you couldn't see over the top.

'Hey, I thought you said you were sixteen?' Joris said.

Boinnk. Another block on the wall.

She dragged me outside. I cycled after her. At every junction I thought: I'm going to take this turning, ride away into the distance and never come back again. I'd rather freeze to death in a filthy doorway than stay with her. I wouldn't freeze to death anyway. The flames of hate would keep me warm for all eternity.

But I didn't do it. I didn't take a turning. I cycled mechanically after her. It was as though my body had no will of its own and could only carry out her commands.

When we got home, Mum didn't say a word. I headed upstairs and went to bed as quickly and as quietly as possible.

I texted Lottie. where r u? u ok?

She answered quarter of an hour later: bttr thn ok. jst gt home. tell u all l8r. lovelovelove S. Lx.

Of course I couldn't sleep. So after a while I picked up *Frankenstein*. I wanted to borrow the film from the library but they didn't have it. Turned out it was a book as well. And that was what I was reading. I don't know why I kept on reading it. It wasn't like I thought it was good or funny or whatever. Maybe I kept reading because the two of us were working on similar projects, Victor and I. Victor was the creator of Frankenstein's monster. We were both making a new person, out of parts. I was using bassists from gigs; he was using bits of corpse that he dug up.

It all went wrong for Victor. His project ended in disaster. I was starting to get the same feeling about my project too.