



Global Short Story Competition July 2013

Winner : Ruth Simpsons
Running Away

Highly Commended : Diane Bown-Wilson
Temptin' Bison

Running Away

Ruth Simpson

When I was 10 I ran away from home. My brother and I had fought, I cannot remember what over, but as the screaming and shouting reached its peak, I ran upstairs to my room and slammed the door with such force that the whole house shook. I then crawled underneath my bed to retrieve my suitcase, and set about packing my things as tears tumbled over my hot little cheeks.

By the time I had finished packing: spare set of clothes, my diary and my stuffed squirrel Missy, everything was silent, my brother obviously brooding away in some far corner of the house. I glanced around my room, taking it all in for the final time, closed the door and dragged my heavy case down the stairs into the hallway. Mother was in the kitchen with the radio on, as she always was after a big fight, usually cleaning or polishing something.

I stood in the doorway, sniffing loudly and waited for her to notice me. When she didn't, I proclaimed loudly: "I am leaving," and she turned to face me with a calm look on her face.

"Ok," she said, "have you packed everything?"



I looked down at my suitcase, my clammy fingers gripping the handle. "I'm leaving for good." I said, not wanting there to be any confusion. I wasn't coming back, I hated this place.

Mother moved over to the sink and dropped the cloth she was holding into the basin.

"You'll need a packed lunch," she said, washing her hands. "Wait two minutes and I'll make you one."

After drying her hands, she opened the fridge and began getting out the sandwich ingredients. I moved to a chair at the kitchen table and glared at her. "I'm leaving straight after," I said, folding my arms across my chest.

Mother hummed as she buttered two slices of bread and chopped some tomatoes and sliced some cheese. She smiled as she cut the sandwich in two, carefully wrapped it in foil and placed it in my school lunchbox. She came over to the kitchen table and took an apple and a banana from the fruit bowl, then opened the cupboard of the pantry and took out a packet of crisps and a couple of chocolate biscuits.

When the lunch was prepared, Mother handed me the box.

"I'm leaving now," I said, standing up and taking the box from her. "I'm leaving because no one cares about me here."



Mother put the sandwich ingredients back in the fridge and looked at me. “Are you going to get the bus or the train?” she said.

I hadn’t thought about this. “I’m going to walk,” I said. “I’m going to walk along the side of the road into town then I’m going to run away. And somebody will probably pick me up in their car.”

Mother picked up her car keys, “I’ll drive you to the bus stop” she said, and put on her coat.

I sat with my suitcase on my lap and the lunchbox on top as Mother drove us to the bus stop. I was still very upset and wanted her to know this.

“I am very upset,” I said, as Mother parked the car in the bus car park. “That’s why I’m running away, because everyone in the house makes me angry.” Mother put the handbrake on and we both got out of the car and walked over to the ticket office.

“What bus are you getting?” she asked, checking the timetable on the wall.

I looked at the complicated map, with its many coloured lines and dots, and the long list of times underneath. Monday to Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Bank holiday, School holiday, Christmas day, Boxing day. “I’m going far away” I said, dramatically. “Today.”



Mother traced a finger over the map. “The next bus arrives in 10 minutes,” she said. “You’ve made it just in time.”

“I’ll get that one then.” I said, and sat down on the bus stop bench. Mother came and sat beside me. “What shall I do with your room?” She said, after a while, “and all your things?”

I glared at her, “I don’t care,” I said. “Give them away. I won’t be coming back. I’m leaving because you all hate me.” Mother and I sat in silence until the bus finally arrived. I was glad because it had started to rain and I’d forgotten my coat. The bus stopped and a few people got off and on. I looked at Mother and waited. She didn’t say anything. I walked over to the bus and climbed on, looking up at the driver. He was a large man with no neck and very red face.

“Single or return?” he said, looking down at me. I felt in my jeans pocket for my purse, and remembered that I had left it on the kitchen table at home. Mother appeared from behind me and told the driver she would pay.

“Go and find a seat” she told me, so I found a seat by the window and watched Mother speaking to the driver. The man looked at me and then her and took the money, smiling. But Mother didn’t get off the bus, she walked along the aisle to where I sat.

“What are you doing?” I said, “I’m running away.”



“I know,” she replied. “I’m just going to make sure you make a safe getaway.” She sat beside me and picked up my lunchbox from the floor. “Can I have one of your sandwiches?” She asked. “I’m starving.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “I’m not eating.”

But as soon as the sandwiches were opened, and the salt and vinegar crisps were out, my stomach started rumbling loudly, and I knew I had to eat something.

“I’m only eating because I don’t know when I’ll eat again when I have run away” I said, “I don’t know where I’ll be.”

Mother and I ate the packed lunch as the bus drove on, and I told her again why I was running away. “You can’t change my mind.” I said. “I’m too upset.” Mother told me that she would ring up school tomorrow and tell them I wasn’t going to be coming in, and then ring Ella’s mum and tell her that I wouldn’t be at Ella’s birthday party on Friday.

“I bet Ella will be very disappointed,” she said.

I told her that I didn’t care, that I wished I had never been born.



The sky outside the bus window started to get dark and I couldn't tell where we were anymore, once or twice I thought I recognised a house or a road, but Mother said we were a long long way from home, now, probably near Scotland. Scotland was cold, Mother told me.

"I hope you've remembered your coat." She said. "I'll have to make the fire up when I get back, it's going to be cold."

After a while I fell asleep and when I woke up the bus was slowing down. It was pitch black outside now, and Mother was getting up ready to leave. It took me a moment to remember why I was on a bus, about the fight, about how I was going to run away. Mother and I were the last two people on the bus, and when it finally stopped she carried my suitcase out onto the pavement and handed it to me.

I looked around and instantly recognised my surroundings. It was the same bus stop we had left earlier that afternoon.

"What's going on?" I said, rubbing my eyes.

"Oh no..." Mother said, as the bus pulled away. "We must have fallen asleep and missed our stop, we're back at the beginning again." In the darkness she squinted at the bus timetable. "No more buses tonight," she said. "You'll have to come back tomorrow."



I got into the passenger seat of the car and Mother lifted my suitcase into the boot. She turned on the engine and we drove home, the warmth of the car slowly closing around me like a blanket.

As we turned into the driveway, I picked up the lunchbox at my feet, and turned to Mother. "I'm still going to run away," I said. "Don't think I'm not serious."

Mother smiled and took the key from the ignition. "Ok," she said. "I'll take you to the bus stop on your way back from school tomorrow."



Highly commended Temptin' Bison

Diane Bown-Wilson

In each of us, two natures are at war – the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. – Robert Louis Stevenson

I spotted her as soon as I pushed through the hedge that hid the boundary fence from the football field. Until then, my mind had been on nothing more than the risk involved in grabbing a quiet ciggie behind the bushes instead of following the others back after the game.

She was standing on the other side of the wire looking as if she'd been expecting me to come. But how could she? I hadn't known myself until just then.

She was as luscious as a lollipop, posed like a pole dancer yet still managing to look like a kid hanging off playground netting. Her skirt was as short as a summer's day; her top clung like icing. Her crazy high heels made it seem as if her legs had sprung blades.

Her fingers, twisted through the high wire fence between us, were plump, babyish, although her nail-polished talons were all woman. Falsies for sure, probably bought with her pocket money from Superdrug.



How do I know? With two sisters and a wife, there's not much I don't know about girls, even though knowing less and a being bit more afraid of them might have done me a few favours. Not that there's any problem being married with a couple of kids at only twentyone; it should've kept me on the straight and narrow. But, a wife and kids are expensive and old habits die hard. A bit of dealing, and then a bit more and then, wham, some bastard fingers you and it's fourteen months inside.

She looked at me steadily, expectantly. "Hiya," Her voice was childish.

I returned her gaze. "What you doin' here?"

"Waiting for you."

"Really? How d'ya know I'd come?"

"Didn't. Well, didn't know it'd be you and didn't know when. But I knew one of yous would

come, sometime. And, see, I was right. You did."

"So, you been waiting for me?"

"Sort of."

"Okay. So now I'm here, whaddya want?"



“Nuthin’ really. Just wanted to say hi, hang out...”

I laughed. “Duh – y’know what this place is, dontcha? You can’t exactly ‘hang out’ with any of us here.”

“Yeah, bummer. You bad boys; all slammed up. But, that’s cool - we can talk, can’t we, and who knows what else?” She giggled and wiggled her fingers through the wire. “I bet you could

get through this fence any time you wanted, if you wanted. And then we could do anything we wanted, couldn’t we, you and me?” She looked me straight in the eye like a market trader. Everything is for sale if you want it.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“You’re too young to hear what some people call me. But my mates, they call me Titch.”

She laughed out loud, giving my six foot four, twenty stone the once over. I could have added that some other people, well Kayleigh, called me Bison. But I didn’t.

“Joke. What’s yours, anyhow?”

“Emma-Jane”

Temptation/3



“Puke. That’s a doll’s name. What wrong with Em?”

“Emma-Jane’s pretty. But I like the idea of being a doll...”

This was getting heavy; time to change the subject. “Tell me about you then. How d’ya know about this place?”

“Oh everyone knows. We’re all warned off but I don’t like doing what I’m told. I reckon if you’re not supposed to do something then it’s probably worth doing, so I thought I’d come and see for myself.”

“And?”

“Well, I’ve heard you guys playing football loadsa times so I figured I’d wait and someone would come. And I was right.”

“And now I’m here, what happens now?”

“Well, that’s up to you,” she smirked.

“How old are you, Em?”

“Old enough.” She shrugged, looked away. “Anyhow, what about you - when you out?”

“Soon.”

The word masked a shed load of hope. Three weeks, two days and sixteen hours to be exact.



Then I'd be free. Free to go home to the boys and Kayleigh - if she was still there. Couldn't blame her if she wasn't, but I needed her to be: fourteen months is a long time for a man to go without. Inside here, the air is thick with what we're going to do when we get out. God help the

girls who, willing or not, are going to be on the receiving end.

"D'ya wanna kiss me?" She licked her lips.

I thought about it hard, weighing up a lot of things.
"Maybe..."

She grinned. "Rumour is that there's a hole in this fence somewhere. You know where it is?"

I could have lied. I could have said it'd been fixed, but I didn't. There was a place – all of us knew about it – where you could pull the wire apart and open up a hole just big enough to get through. We reckoned the screws kept it there as a test. To see who would mess up, giving them the excuse to slam someone back for a very long time.

But today, I didn't plan to get away. Just to open the wire enough to let her crawl through.



“Come.” I beckoned and she followed me along the fence for about another ten metres. The bushes were thicker, forcing their way through the wire itself. You’d never normally have found the gap, but I knew what I was looking for. I twisted a couple of sections of the wire where they joined the post and the netting came away.

“Wicked!” She laughed as she kicked off her shoes and hitched up her short skirt even further.

I reached out to her through the gap and took her hand; it was as soft as a kid’s. Then, there she was, right up close to me, clinging on, warm and scented and, without her heels, even tinier than she’d seemed.

“D’ya wanna kiss me?” she said again.

“You’re playing with fire, Em - d’ya know that?”

“Nah, not really. It’s not like you’re a rapist or a pervert or anything. Betcha only did a bit of gear. Don’t have any on ya now, do ya?”

Top marks for that, Em, I wanted to say. Good to know I don’t look like a perv. Instead I said,

“Course not. Even if I had, I wouldn’t give it to you. You shouldn’t be doin’stuff.”



She pulled a face. “You sound like my Dad.”

I am a Dad, I wanted to say. But thank God my kids are boys. I wouldn't want girls, knowing what I know about dudes like me and what we want. But instead I said, “I bet your Dad would go ballistic if he knew you were here.”

“Yeah, well. When doesn't he? He's always on at me. But what does he know?”

“Probably quite a lot which is why he gives you a hard time. For sure he knows what any guy would be feeling right now next to you.”

She giggled, putting her arms around me and burying her face in my chest. We were closer than close, like a banana and its skin. I stroked her hair; no sign of root growth, child-blond and not yet darkened by age. Holding her was completely different to Kayleigh who's tall and thin, like a spider. And unlike Kayleigh, who sometimes breaks away all too quickly, she was up for

it. It was a struggle not to let my fingers loose on a trip round those curves.

I cupped my hand and lifted her chin so I could see her face. She looked up, innocent but knowing.

“This is nice,” she whispered. “I knew it'd be worth the wait.”



It would have been so easy to kiss her, to let her do to me what I'm sure she would've been happy to do. Whether or not she was experienced, whether or not she really knew what that was; I knew for sure it'd be ace after all those lonely nights. But something held me back: not just Kayleigh, something more.

My hands moved swiftly, one to grip her neck, the other to clamp her wrists behind her while I shifted my weight, forcing her back against the fence, pinning her between my thighs. Trapped, she was suddenly afraid.

“Whatcha doing?”

“It's what you wanted isn't it?”

“No - stop it!” she yelped. “Let go of me!”

“Oh this is nothing. Nothing compared to what's going to happen to you. Y'see, Em, it's not about what you want; it's about what big bully boys like me want. And some of us like a bit of rough. And that means that like it or not, you're going to get a little bit roughed up, too.”

Just to make the point, I tightened my hold around her neck. The look in her eyes was now pure terror; she struggled under my grip.



“Y’see, Em, people do bad things. Really, really, evil things. Girls like you get hurt, and that hurt, if you’re lucky, will mess up the rest of your life. If you’re unlucky you may not have a rest of your life.”

By now she was crying, struggling harder. Compared to me she’d the strength of a kitten; I could have kept her there forever. Instead, I let my hands drop.

She fell sideways, then, as quick as she could, scabbled backwards through the fence ripping her top on the wire as she went. Without looking back she stumbled away, sobbing but not screaming. I was glad about that – I certainly didn’t need to alert the screws.

After she left, I hooked the fence wire back together and stood smoking the ciggie I’d meant to have earlier, studying her shoes which lay abandoned in the weeds on the other side. Had my

play-acting been enough? I’d soon be moving on but I wasn’t the problem, it was the rest. Those psychos who just take; those who don’t care that every young stupid kid is someone’s sister or daughter or someday, some other dude’s wife....

I glanced at my watch. It’d only been a few minutes.

I never saw Emma again.





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