

## **They said it was meant to help**

They've told me to record this because I refused to write a journal. "My thoughts and feelings." They said it was meant to help. They said it'd help me 'process my emotions.' To understand my actions. Well, fuck that.

So let's be clear. I'm only doing this to shut them up.

What can I tell you? I'm 13. I go to boarding school. I hate it. Well, I don't hate it. I just wish I didn't have to. But I mean, it's normal now. I don't get homesick. I just get on with it. I've got friends. They hate it. And I laugh at them because they hate it. I laugh when they get homesick. They need to grow up.

I have to go to boarding school because my mum and her husband are 'extremely busy people.' That's what they told me when they said I had to go away to school. 'We're very busy,' they said. And they are. Well, my mum is. She's away on business a lot so she can afford to pay my school fees so she doesn't have to see me. Glen - that's his name - says he's really busy. They're too busy to be arsed with me anyway. So that's why I'm here.

My mum and dad are divorced. Most of the kids in my year have parents who are divorced. My mum got remarried and I was a pageboy and had to carry the rings up the aisle on a shitty little cushion.

She's married to an actual asshole. Well, he's not an asshole but he does support Manchester United. She's something big in a chemical company. I think it's pharmaceuticals and I don't mean the good kind. Know what I mean?? I have no idea what he does. I don't think he even knows. He's got a massive porn stash. Don't ask me how I know that. I just know.

My actual dad is an astronaut. He's an actual astronaut. Everybody laughs when I say that and they laugh when I check online when the international space station's going overhead and I wave at it out of the window like a complete fucking dick.

My dad's mega clever - but seriously, how can you have a conversation with a man who pisses in his uniform? I've not seen him for ages but he used to send me emails but they stopped a couple of years ago. I bet the wif's really bad in space. He's really busy as well, but genuinely busy. I don't talk about him to mum. She said it upset her too much and then that really used to upset me and I'd swear or throw something or run away for a bit. I don't really talk about my dad to anyone any more. But I really miss him. When I was younger, I think I thought he was ace.

So my mum is now married to an idiot. He hates me. Well, he doesn't hate me. He sighs and shakes his head and buys me Match Attack cards like I'm like fucking SIX and then tells me I shouldn't watch YouTube because it's messing with my neurons. I hardly speak to him. When I see them I just stay in my room in their house with the curtains closed and tell them I'm scared of daylight. I fake PTSD just so they'll leave me alone.

They think I'm seriously disturbed. That's what they emailed school about. 'We're concerned my son is seriously disturbed' but honestly, they just don't understand me. They can't be bothered trying.

Everything started to go tits up when Joshua started daring me to do stuff at school.

It started quite low key when I suggested that everyone in Year 9 should try convincing our geography teacher that she's got Alzheimer's. We'd change seats when she wasn't looking and tell her we were working on a completely different topic, and that she'd got all our names wrong. She looked so freaked out. I suppose it was quite a cruel thing to do, especially as she's recently bereaved. But school's meant to be fun, right?

The next one was when I told everyone to hum during maths. We were meant to be doing trigonometry and everyone's there humming Jerusalem. It was hilarious. It really sent the teacher mental. I thought he was going to shout at me. He looked furious which was totally not the reaction I was going for. I really liked him as well. He used to smile at me and say 'well done' when I got good marks.

The next few dares were fairly standard. Saluting the Head of Year whenever we saw her. But not just saluting, actually stopping, standing to attention, clicking our heels together and doing the whole elaborate wavy hand arm thing like the Americans do, then marching off - left, right, left, right...

On the new parents' Open Day I was showing some people round - they were actually stupid enough to suggest I should be a guide - and I walked past the Head in the corridor and asked her if she was on her period. After that I don't think the parents I was showing around selected our school as a viable option. And I was sent to the school counsellor for 'a chat.' Please.

Somebody suggested - I can't remember who it was - it might have been Poppy - that I should put laxatives in the House Parent's cocoa and I'm in no way saying I did but if I did, it wouldn't be a surprise to find out that Miss Gregson is seeing a gastroenterologist. Which she isn't because I totally didn't do it.

The next one was a massive fail which is a shame because it had so much potential. I got this one off the internet. I thought it'd be funny to put a viagra in the water fountain in the sports hall. That would've caused mayhem at the gymnastics display. But I don't think the tablet was actual viagra. I have a feeling that Kyle gave me a Tic Tac, the weasly little fucking coward.

But the seventh dare was when I excelled myself. And to be fair, it's the one that really put the metaphorical cat up the arse of a metaphorical pigeon.

The boys' dorms are nowhere near the girls' dorms, for obvious reasons. But the dare was that I would creep into the Year 11 girls' dorm and get Alyssa - who is at least a 36D - to tell me a bedtime story. Sergei (his English isn't great) said that I should make her hold me as though I was the baby Jesus until dawn. What's not to love? Even if I do tend towards Buddhism.

Anyway. That's irrelevant.

I crept out of the Year 9 boys' dorm after lights out wearing black mufti so I'd blend into the dark, ran across the quad and into the girls' block.

My God, the stink of body spray in there almost made me puke.

It was super quiet and everyone was in bed - even the house parents. I wasn't entirely sure where I was going but I just used common sense and ninja darrer's instinct. I figured the Year 7's would be on the ground floor and just made my way up, hoping there'd be a handy poster or a sign or something to give me some clues.

I went up the stairs and listened at a few doors. There was a lot of breathing. I could hear a couple of whispers outside Year 8 - I think it was weird Simone and stinky Trudi - and went up another floor.

Fortunately there was a sign saying 'Year 11 Girls Rock' which is a totally dumb-ass thing to put on a sign but who am I to criticise? Now all I had to do was find Alyssa. The names of the occupants are stuck outside on the wall next to the doors so it was actually pretty easy once I'd got there. In year 11 they're in pairs, so I just had to find Alyssa's door and go in. And then, obviously, ask her to hold me as if I was the baby Jesus until dawn. Without laughing, obv.

But regrettably, that's when I was discovered. A dick-brained Year 8 (she rejoices in the name Sloane) had been following me, and she screamed, the silly cow.

All the lights go on. Doors start opening. People start shouting and within minutes I'm in front of the head admiring her Marks and Spencer loungewear.

I don't know why I did it, I said. I just wanted a woman's touch. I realised that sounded so so wrong as soon as I'd said it so I pretended to cry and said I needed a hug.

Miss Gregson said 'oh you poor poor boy' and looked like she was about to cry. And then I burst into tears. I think originally I meant to pretend to cry but suddenly there were actual tears and I was properly sobbing and then I was saying I hadn't meant to upset anyone and that I just wanted a cuddle.

Miss Gregson asked me how I was feeling and I told her I was depressed. I wasn't. I just didn't want to get into trouble and wanted them to feel sorry for me. But I kept crying and there was snot all over my face.

I miss my mum, I said. And my dad's in space.

But I think I misspoke and said 'my dad's in heaven' and Miss Gregson put her arm around me and left it there for a long time then and the Head asked me if I wanted a biscuit.

Eventually they sent me back to bed and said they'd talk to me in the morning about 'ways forward' to 'help me cope.'

I mean, I'm perfectly fine and in the cold light of day it was hilarious. I think the rest of the year think I'm a bit of a legend. And Poppy said she'd buy me a cake at the weekend to cheer me up which everyone 100% knows is code for something else completely. I don't need cheering up, I said. Everything's fine.

Anyway. I've done it now, haven't I. Recording completed. Feelings processed.

And he is in space. I know he is.