

# 1

Alex ran up as fast as she could up to her room.

She had been thinking about this all day. Last night, as soon as she had got back and snuck past Jessica who was still watching television, she had rushed up to her room to count her money.

Four dollars and fifty cents.

That was more than enough to buy a few things from the food truck. That night she had fallen asleep to dreams of what each of those treats had tasted like.

Sitting through school had been agony. Painting horses had not been as much fun today, and she found herself quickly adding things to her horses that made them look like they were made out of ice-cream. Even Josh's jokes hadn't seemed as funny today as all she could think about was getting home, getting her money and getting back to the food truck.

She had overheard one of the girls in the playground talking about buying a cake that had a fairy on top and Alex had felt immediately jealous. But, then she remembered the way the woman in the truck had smiled at her and that had made her feel better and secretly wish that no one else knew about it but her.

Finally the bell had rung and Jessica had arrived and this time Alex didn't really mind that Jessica was talking on the phone again. She didn't even really mind that her parents were going to be working late again because her mind was focused on getting to that food truck as fast as possible.

Her fingers were nearly shaking as she reached into Tabitha's doll house and pulled out the little chest that sat at the end of the the tiny bed. Carefully she opened it and saw her dollar coins. Alex couldn't

restrain a smile. She had learned her maths at school and in her head she was quickly figuring out the numbers. By her calculations she should be able to get maybe three things.

Which was when the worst happened.

“Hey Alex, what you doing?”

Alex almost jumped as she turned around.

Jessica was standing in the doorway. Alex closed her small fist around her money. She wasn't sure why, but she didn't want Jessica to see it.

“I'm just playing with my dollhouse.”

“Cool. But, your gonna have to give that a rest for now. Your mum just called and said I needed to give your hair a shampoo.” Jessica's mouth turned down into a distasteful little frown. “Apparently there's a headlice problem at your school.”

Alex's heart dropped. “I have to have a shampoo now?”

“Yep. I need to get it done now because then I have to make dinner. So come on.”

“But, I was gonna pla-”

“Alex, seriously. Come on. I wanna get everything done before Adam comes over later.”

“Adam's coming over?” She wasn't supposed to have guests over.

Jessica raised a single eyebrow and stared at Alex. “Yeah. So hurry up.”

Alex said nothing and walked into her bathroom.

As she got undressed, she quickly hid her money under her clothes. No doubt if she saw it, Jessica would ask where she had got it from and maybe take it off her, and that would be the worst thing in the world. Well, nearly the worst thing in the world. Right now the worst thing in the world was that she was in the bathroom about to get her hair washed instead of getting to go outside and visit the amazing food truck. In her little life, Alex thought this might just be one of the worst things that had every happened to her.

While she doused Alex's head with headlice shampoo, and careful to keep her distance, Jessica made sure to tell her how much she thought headlice was gross and that she couldn't believe she was doing this.

Alex restrained herself from saying that she didn't need to do it, but she kept silent. Adults, even young ones like Jessica, typically didn't seem to like it when little children pointed out something silly they were doing.

The shampoo washing seemed to last forever. Jessica was not gentle, but at least she wasn't as rough as the previous nanny. Jessica at least did it so that the shampoo wasn't going in her eyes.

"All right kiddo, you sit there. We gotta let it sit for ten minutes. So, you just sit there and I'll be back."

Alex sat on the edge of the bath wrapped in a towel, her head covered in lice shampoo, and Jessica disappeared. A few seconds later she heard Jessica laughing and talking on her phone again.

Alex looked down at her clothes, peering through as though she could see the coins lying hidden beneath. Then the image of the food truck and the smiling owner popped into her head and she began to plan how, no matter how long this took, she was going to get out to the truck. It was naughty to think like this, and Alex felt a little twinge of guilt about planning to go outside when she shouldn't but Jessica wasn't being very nice today and the lady's smile in her head said everything was surely fine.

Alex sat there thinking like this for a while because Jessica took a lot longer than ten minutes to come back. Alex's skin had goose pimples by the time she was really wanting to get back into her clothes.

She was just about to go looking for Jessica, when the nanny popped back in.

"All right then. Head down and close your eyes."

Jessica led her to the shower and quickly washed the shampoo out. Then it was on to brushing. Which took even longer, all the while Alex was thinking how much time was passing and secretly praying that the food truck would still be there.

"Okay, all done. Get dressed and I'm gonna make a quick dinner. You come down when you're dressed. K?"

"Where having dinner now?" Alex's heart sank even further.

"I've already told you Alex. Seriously, I need to you to listen. Adam's coming over. Now hurry up."

Alex got dressed silently as Jessica rummaged around in the kitchen downstairs.

By now, she was starting to feel a little hopeless. Perhaps she would never get out of the house. Why of all the days, did Jessica need to not be watching TV today, like she did every other day. Alex almost felt like there was something trying to stop her from getting outside. But, that was silly.

Alex silently went downstairs and sat up at the kitchen bench.

She looked up at the clock. It was nearly six o'clock. She looked out

the kitchen window and was sad to see that the sky had gone from blue to a darker purple and orange. Night was coming on.

"There you go. You eat that up, and then after dinner I'll set you up with a movie upstairs okay?"

Alex picked up the fork and put a limp forkful of microwaved noodles in her mouth.

"Alex?"

"Okay."

Jessica sighed and rolled her eyes. "Seriously. What's up with you today." She didn't wait for an answer and wandered into the living room.

Alex ate her noodles in silence and when she was finished she went up to the upstairs den where Jessica was flicking through Netflix.

"What do you want to watch?"

Alex shrugged. Outside the sky was getting a bit darker, the orange starting to fade out.

"How about Frozen? You like Frozen."

"Sure."

Jessica switched it on and walked to the door as the opening credits began.

"Now don't come downstairs okay? I'll be up at the end of the movie to put you to bed. Your parents will be home late again tonight."

Alex nodded and Jessica left.

It was while Princess Anna was singing that she heard the front door to her house open and Jessica gave a laugh. Then she heard a man's voice. Adam.

She knew she shouldn't but Alex crept to the top of the stairs to have a look. She'd heard so much about him that she wanted to see what he looked like. She kept herself hidden, because Jessica would be mad if she saw her.

The man looked like he was about Jessica's age. Tall. Wearing a black hoodie that had some band on it that looked a bit scary to Alex. He had blonde hair that was trimmed short on the sides and long down the back. Alex agreed that he didn't look so good with this haircut. Jessica gave him a big hug and then they kissed, which grossed Alex out so she crept back to her movie. Downstairs she heard laughing and then some music was turned on loud.

On the screen in front of her Elsa was busy singing alone, but Alex didn't pay much attention. Her mind had once more turned to the food truck and all the treats that she had dreamed about buying. But, she

knew she wouldn't be allowed out now. If she went downstairs and asked Jessica would get annoyed. Plus, it was getting late and there's no way Jessica would let her out now.

Alex quietly crept to her room, careful to not make any noise, not that anyone would have heard her over the music that was playing. She went to her small stash of money and held it in her fist as she looked out the window, hoping, praying that it was not gone.

She peered over the trees and to her great relief, she could still see the pink with some flashing lights. The truck was still there.

But, for how long? The sky was quickly getting dark, and this was about the time the lady yesterday had said that she was finished for the day. But, what if she wasn't there tomorrow. What if tomorrow she drove somewhere else to sell all her amazing treats. Alex knew that if she didn't get to the truck today, she would probably never see it again.

Squeezing that money in her hand, Alex made a decision.

The air was getting cooler, which made Alex glad she had brought her big woolly pink jersey. It kind of matched the food truck which made her happy. She had crept down the back stairs that lead into the kitchen so as to avoid Jessica and whatever she was doing with Adam in the living room. She knew she had to hurry so she could get back before the movie was over and Jessica came up to put her to bed which, by Alex's estimation, gave her about forty minutes. Plenty of time.

The park was empty now, and the streetlights were just starting to come on and Alex picked up her pace. She had never been out alone when it was starting to get dark and it kind of creeped her out, but this was smothered by the excitement of what she would buy.

Coming around the corner, Alex stopped in her tracks. The food truck was still there, which was great but the little window was closed.

*No!* Alex's heart hammered in her chest. She ran the rest of the way, across the road without even looking. But as fast as she ran, the window remained closed.

She looked down the road and could see a group of kids walking away with their parents, their hands holding ice-creams.

Alex felt like crying, but tried hard not to, wiping at her eyes and hoping that no one would see her. Girls her age were not supposed to cry. That's what her mum told her. But, she couldn't help herself. She wasn't sure that she had looked forward to something so much in her

life. And now it was closed.

Standing on tip-toes she tried to look in the little window, but she couldn't see much. It was a bit dark in there, and there was no movement.

Hopelessly Alex stepped away from the truck. She couldn't believe that she had missed it. She had to wipe her eyes more now, because the tears were coming faster and she couldn't get rid of them fast enough.

A cold wind blew down the street that somehow managed to get through her jersey and she shivered through her sniffles.

Alex thought that might be the worst day of her life. Even worse than when their old dog Rufus had died, which was strange because she had loved Rufus more than anything in the world. But, those ice-creams and cakes had just looked amazing and even now she could almost taste them on her tongue.

With the hopelessness that only a child could feel, Alex turned away from the truck and went to walk back home.

"I was wondering if you would come."

Alex stopped and turned.

There, leaning against the side of the truck, was the old lady from inside the truck. She was wearing a bright red dress and a scarf over her shoulders all shades of different colours, and a smile that started making Alex feel all better again.

"I had almost given up hope, but I told myself you'd be here, and here you are." The woman had a twinkle in her eye that made Alex forget all about her tears.

"You knew I was coming?"

"Of course. I could tell the first time I saw you that you would be back. And, I was right."

"I just wanted to buy something. I have some money." Alex held out her hand to show her few dollars.

The woman just smiled. "Well that's perfect then. I've got something for you too, something special I prepared just for you."

"Me? Really?"

The old lady nodded. "So, where are your parents then, my dear? It's a bit late for a wee thing like yourself to be out on your own eh?"

Alex was about to lie and say that they were just walking a bit slow, but something in the old lady's face told her that she would know if she was lying. "They're working. They'll be home a bit later."

"An older brother or sister perhaps?"

Alex shook her head, wondering if she was going to get in trouble

for being out here alone.

But, the old lady just smiled, gave a curious look up and down the street, and beckoned her to follow her around the other side of the truck.

“Well, this will be our little secret then won’t it.”

Alex followed her around the back where there was a little door. The old woman stood at the bottom of a little set of steps and was holding it open for Alex.

“Come on my dear, you’re going to be very happy when you see what I’ve made just for you.”

Alex felt her stomach growling. “Is it a pirate ship. I really wanted one of those.”

“Oh, my dear. It’s much much better than that. You’ll see.”

Excitedly Alex placed her foot on the bottom step and began to enter the truck.

It was at that moment that something inside her began to worry. It was the same thing that had warned her about a truck that was coming one day when she was about to cross the road. A little voice at the back of her head that had told her to stop and look. She had, and and seen a truck hidden by some cars that sped right past her. If she had stepped out she would have been hit.

Well, as she took another step up into the old lady’s food truck with it’s world of sugary delights, that little voice in the back of her brain spoke out again with one word.

*Run.*

Then the most awful smell of all things rotten and sick hit her nostrils.

But, by now it was too late, and Alex felt the old lady’s firm hand on her shoulder pushing her into the truck which was surprisingly dark for somewhere that was half windows, and the door was shut behind her.

And the old lady spoke, now with a markedly different voice that made the hairs on Alex’s arms stand up.

“Come on then dearie, let me show you what I have just for you.”

Not long later, the truck eased away from the curb. Its twinkling lights were off now, and in the fading light of the day what had once been a brightly coloured festival of colour and enticement now became remarkeably unnoticeable. Its bright pinks no longer pulled at the eye and, in fact, seemed to want to be ignored.

A couple walking down the road for an evening stroll barely noticed it drive past, and soon the truck had disappeared, never to be seen on these particular streets again.