

**'If you leave this story feeling
unsettled,
disturbed,
disturbed,
alarmed that this could happen-
good.**

You should be alarmed.

That is the point:

**to scare you,
to make you not want to be
another
mindless,
thoughtless
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.
follower.**

Adapted from Harry Knowles,
Ain't It Cool News

of feet, like someone's sprinting. That don't sound right even to me.

Two benches away my mate Kady looks up.

I chew my lip. Miss Carter is still looking to pick on someone. She already sent Tariq to the Head's office. Could be anyone next. Although if she's sent him, she mightn't want to send another; might look like she can't cope. But sprinting in the corridors. Someone's gonna get it for sure.

Another crackling sound and definitely running. I cross my fingers under the bench. Miss Carter don't care if you ain't done nothing. She'll pick on you just the same. Please don't let it be me.

Miss Carter screws up her face, spins on her heel and marches towards the door. She snorts as she moves. She's going for the source. Good. I flex my ankles, breathe out slowly, uncross my fingers.

Before she makes it to the door some kids bust in. Two of them. No polite knock. No note. No uncertain hovering.

I half rise, alarmed. Now we're *all* going to get it. My head starts banging. That's so unfair. They're so stupid. They walk right up to Miss Carter. They crazy? She opens her mouth in a snarl. She ain't seen such rudeness since Psycho Sam.

There's something about the way they do it. With no fear. Even Psycho Sam picked his battles. Suddenly I'm on automatic. I ain't seen kids act like this before. Something's up. I start backing up towards the tech den door. I'm out my seat. Am I crazy too?

I can't help it. Something ain't right.

I crouch, ready for anything.

One of the kids pulls out something. He's smiling. My mouth drops slack. Looks like a gun. Can't be. It's realistic though. He's gone loop. Must have. He's so going to be on the Volunteers' Programme next week. It happens, you know. It's not just a rumour. The End of Your Education. You Are Now Officially Slave Labour. He shoves the gun at Miss Carter. Must be one of those copy weapons they sell everywhere.

It's not.

And then there's this noise and this hole appears in Miss Carter's forehead. A small, red, round hole. It's got delicate edges that unfold like rose petals. She's grunting like some kind of tribal pig. Then I see the blood and her eyes and her mouth starting to sag open, and it's all gone mad. And the kid is wheeling round with an impossible grin on his face, waving the gun at us. And somebody is screaming. They're all screaming. Except me.

For one mad second I think they've come to liberate

us. Do Away With Teachers. Do Away With Detentions. But I'm wrong. The boys' eyes tell me. I can't make out who they are. I'm so shocked I can't make out anything. They're out of school uniform; could be anyone. Don't stare at them, Leah. Don't make a sound. I'm too shocked to make a sound. School uniform makes you a school kid. Those two ain't school kids no more. They've bust loose. They don't care about students versus teachers. They've fricking bust loose. They don't care about nothing. They're just doing destruction. One of them is kicking over the teacher's stool. Aliesha's screaming, Kady's screaming, all the kids in detention are screaming.

I see Anton moving for the door to the tech den. I back up further. I forget about Kady and Aliesha and the screaming others. I'm going to follow Anton. Kady's a drama queen and Aliesha's a loser, but Anton's smart. I like him. He likes me. And what good will it do staying with Kady and Aliesha?

The first killer seems unsure whether to fire at me. Instead, he raises his gun. He points it at Aliesha. He swings it towards Kady. They're both screaming. He likes the screaming. He says, 'Eeny meeny miney mo. We are the Eternal Knights.' And then he shoots Aliesha. She falls. He carries on shooting.

I'm almost at the door to the tech den. Almost through

it. Anton is nearly there too. I look at Anton. I'm thinking:
Get out. Hide. Get out. Hide. Get out. Hide.

Suddenly Anton is right beside me. 'Run,' he hisses.

I leap from the lab, burst through the tech door, don't bother with no one else; I'm into that tech den like a bullet. I pull at chairs and bins and leap the benches. Vials and shit crash to the floor. I tear through it, swerve shelves, rip through air like it's got a sell-by date.

Footsteps crash behind me. Them? Kady? Did she get out? Not her. Must be Anton. Clever Anton. He's in Year Ten, different, not really Challenge School material. It better fricking well be Anton.

I can hear ragged breath right at my back. Someone's bellowing. And getting closer. Up ahead is Lab Two. When I reach it, I see it's empty. Ten metres empty. I weave in between the lab benches, ducking, leaping, twisting. How good a shot can those kids be? The floor's covered with smooth plastic tiling. Treacherous. If I slip, I'll crash. A booming, popping, shrieking tears past me. Christ, they're shooting at me!

Holy shit! My only chance is to get across the lab. I topple a pile of books, kick over the apps systems. My lungs can't make it. I got one chance. On the other side of Lab Two is the Level A corridor, but down some stairs, round a corner, past office doors and toilets, the

Level B corridor leads to the Humanities wing and the side entrance.

One chance.

Get to the exit. Challenge Schools are built on the transparency system. It's going to be impossible. They call it the Nowhere To Hide build. But that's them. We call it the Know Where To Hide. But do I? And even if I know somewhere, they will too.

Just run.

Just pray.

Just make it to the side entrance.

Is Aliessa dead? If not, she needs help. She always needs help.

Is Kady dead?

Go back?

Out. Of. The. Question.

This is it then.

There's a deafening roar behind me. They're into Lab Two, only ten, fifteen metres behind me.

I run.

Just before the steps to Level B, I sprint, stopping at the turn of Level A; I take the stairs. I'm in the air. I scream, my arms outstretched in front of me. I hit the ground still running and tumble forward. Keep running.

I turn towards the toilets.