

Work experience

It was lunchtime at Middleton Secondary School. Lucy Gardner sat with some other Year Ten students on a low wall. She took out her mobile phone and quickly opened a YouTube page. She wanted to watch Jack Powell. She really liked Jack. Lucy followed many YouTubers but he was her favourite. He was really funny and talked about interesting things.

Suddenly, one of the other students, Tom, jumped up. 'Hey! That's my apple, Chris. Give it back!'

Chris laughed and quickly threw the apple over Tom's head to a tall girl, Alice. She took a bite then gave it back to Tom with a smile. 'There you are.'

'Oh, yuck!' Tom laughed. 'I'm not eating that now.' He threw the apple at Chris but Chris moved and it hit Lucy on the arm.

Everyone laughed.

'Oops,' said Tom. 'Sorry.'

Lucy raised a hand but didn't take her eyes off her phone. Tom and Chris and Alice and the others were okay – she sat with them every day – but they weren't her real friends. Her real friends were Jack and all the other YouTubers. They didn't know her but she knew *them*. *They* never laughed at her. They were more grown-up. It was easy to be with them – she could just listen.

'Oh, no!' said Alice suddenly. 'I forgot. We've got Mr Fry this afternoon. We have to choose a job for work experience. I forgot to think about it.'

'I forgot too,' said Tom. 'A week out of school. Where do I want to go?'



'I want to do my work experience in a computer shop,' said Chris. 'A week in a computer shop – I'll have the best time!'

Tom smiled. 'Yeah, I want to do that too.'

'Oh, no,' said Chris quickly. 'You can't take my idea.'

Alice turned to Lucy. 'What job are you going to ask for?'

Lucy pushed her long brown hair back from her face and took her earphones out of her ears. 'Sorry. What?'

'Where do you want to go for work experience?'

'YouTube in California!' said Tom and everyone laughed.

'I like books,' said Lucy. 'So maybe a bookshop. Maybe Bigalows in the mall.'

Tom jumped to his feet. 'Oh, yeah! That's a good idea. My older sister told me about a boy in her class. He went to a bookshop for work experience and he just sat in a back room all day. He only had to do some small jobs – move some boxes, put some books on a shelf. Then he played games on his phone all week.'

Lucy wanted to work at a bookshop because she liked books. She wanted to be a writer. She put her earphones back in and listened to Jack.

Two weeks later, Mr Fry stood in front of his Year Ten class. 'Quiet, everyone, please. Two weeks ago, I asked you to choose jobs for work experience. The school has now found jobs for you.' He took some papers from his desk and started to give them out. 'These notes have the names, addresses and phone numbers of your place of work.' He gave Lucy her note and then looked at Tom and Alice. 'Three people chose to work in a bookshop, but Bigalows in the mall will only take two students. So, Tom and Alice, you will go there.' He turned back to Lucy. 'We've found a place for you, Lucy, at Middleton Books on the High Street.'

Everyone in the class started to laugh.

‘Quiet, please,’ said Mr Fry.

Chris turned to Tom. ‘Who goes to the shops on the High Street?’

Alice answered. ‘Nobody goes to the shops on the High Street.’ The boys laughed. ‘All those shops are old and small and dark. I never go there. The mall is better.’

Tom said, ‘I went into that bookshop on the High Street, years ago, with my mother. There was a really old woman there. She was strange...’

‘Quiet. NOW!’ shouted Mr Fry.

Lucy looked at the note in her hands. Alice was right. Nobody went to the shops on the High Street now. Years ago it was the centre of town, but now it was empty – dead. Why couldn’t Tom or Alice go to work at Middleton Books? Why did *she* have to go?