

Steve's
Revenge



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Published by Visibility Fiction, 2012

Steve slouched down the bus, giving the expected two kisses to the other kids then threw her backpack on the floor. She slumped into the seat next to Dominic who just carried on playing a game on his iPod.

Thank God it was Saturday. That was the down-side of having Wednesday afternoons off. The bright kids had to go to school on Saturday mornings which meant another day of getting up at stupid o'clock, Mum nagging her while she tried to get Joshua to stop throwing his cars all over the kitchen, and standing in the freezing cold at the bus-stop. At least she only had French this morning, not bloody English.

She looked across the nearly deserted bus and stared out the window at the country lanes passing by. Six months! Six months she'd been in this village and she thought she might be seriously going out of her mind. Not just her mood swings, worse than that. She had her meds for that. But now, having to cope with a foreign language, getting teased about her accent and the other girls in the village being into make-up, clothes, boys, bloody-Justin-fucking-Bieber... It was getting too much for her. Sylvie shot past the bus on her scooter, beeping her horn at her classmates. It just wasn't fair, Everyone else in this whole stupid country had been riding on two wheels since they were about ten. Steve was fourteen...nearly fifteen really. She could have a scooter. She *could*. But oh no, her stupid mother wouldn't let her until she'd got her Code de la Route...hey, she thought that in French, that was good. What was it in English? Highway Code? Yup. Screw her Mum, she needed some transport *now*!

Dominic was digging her in the ribs so she turned her head and said, "Quoi?" It was the first word she'd learned because everyone said it all the time, a bit like "like" in England. She and Aisha had said "like" all the time when they were together. She missed Aisha. They still Skyped each other but it felt like the thread that had tied them together was stretching like a bit of elastic, getting thinner and thinner and one day it would snap. She was pissed off about that. Aisha was the only one Steve had told about her secret. Anyone else would have gone bat-shit but Aisha just took it. Jeez! Steve thought her mum was strict but Aisha's parents were a bloody nightmare!

"Eh, Steeeevie!" At least Dominic didn't call her "Stephaneeeeeee" like everyone else at school did. *It's Steve, for Christ's sake! Is that so hard to say?* "Eh, my folks are going out to Dijon tonight, some dinner with my dad's boss. Want to come round and hang out?"

Steve shrugged, another French habit she'd picked up almost instantly. It showed a pretended disinterest in this case but she said casually, "Sure, no problem. Want me to bring some music or something?"

"Yeah, that." Dominic wasn't what you'd call chatty but mostly Steve liked that. People banging on all the time did her head in.

Dijon! Big city, clubs, stuff to do! Why couldn't her dad have got a job in Dijon and not Paris? Then he'd have got them a flat in town, not this bloody great house in the-village-where-nothing-ever-happens. And he'd have been home every night, not just weekends. Git!

Steve didn't go to school on Saturday morning because she was especially bright, but because she had to catch up on learning French. The system over here was rigid. Everyone had to be taught in French and all schools taught the same lessons at the same time no matter where you were in the country. At least her little brother Josh was learning quickly. He was more fluent than her now because that's how it works; you can pick up languages fast when you're only 7. It did mean they could have conversations in rapid, slang French and her Mum didn't understand, which was a laugh.

Going around to Dominic's...yeah, that would be a laugh too. His dad was a big drinker; they could nick some beer and chill out in the backyard where nobody could see them. Mum would go mental if she knew. Steve wasn't supposed to drink with her pills but stuff it! The one time something even slightly good was going on, Steve wasn't going to miss out.

At least it was French this morning, half written, half gobbing off with Monsieur Reynard. Maybe she'd have a good moan at him. She practiced some words in her head.

My mum is an idiot. I want a scooter. It's not fair. I hate my family.

She knew she couldn't swear in class even though she knew those words better than the right ones. The other kids had wanted to learn to swear in English so now the whole school went round saying "Fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck" all the time but she couldn't stop them saying "sheet" instead of "shit" - they could never pronounce it right.

At least today she wouldn't have to see Mme Bell-end. Her name was Mme. Belin but Steve called her Bell-end because she was such a total bitch.

Bell-end was the English teacher. Yes! Despite *being* English, Steve still had to go to the English lessons and in the first one, that cow had told her to sit at the back and keep her mouth shut. Bell-end called her Stephanie and said that all pupils had to follow the lessons in the book, which was like baby stuff but Stephanie was not to say a single word when questions were asked. Bell-end had a really crap accent too. She pronounced "neighbours" as "nej-burrs" for Christ's sake! When Steve giggled at her pronunciation, Bell-end made her stand up and gave the class a lecture in French. Steve couldn't understand a word of it but Dominic told her later it was full-on disrespect for Steve, her family and all English people in general. She'd said that the class should feel sorry for "Stephanie" because she came from a backward country and could not be expected to behave in a civilised manner.

Bitch!

Dominic got a bag of tiny bottles of beer and set it down between them next to a pile of bike magazines. He and Steve always dreamt of the day when they could both have wheels and be free. Well, free enough to go the 30 kilometers down to St. Gré, the nearest town, where they could sneak into bars and hang out with other kids their own age.

“That!” Steve exclaimed, pointing at a picture of a Harley. “That is gorgeous!”

“Need your bike license,” Dominic pointed out, ever practical.

“Oh shit, Dom, do you have to be realistic? Can't you dream a little?” The beer was making Steve twitchy and she could feel herself going up fast into a manic phase. She'd be on high-octane super-drive shortly and then she'd crash.

Whatever. Nobody at home would notice if she was up or down, seeing as Dad was home and Mum would be all over him like a rash.

“Steve,” Dominic downed most of another bottle of beer and squinted across at her. “You're not like the other girls in the village.”

“Right, go on, Dom. That's because I'm foreign and I talk funny and my head's screwed up, right?”

“No, not that. You...” he hesitated before continuing. “Talking to you is more like talking to another bloke, you know, like, easy. You're not silly-fluffy like the other girls.”

Steve took it as a compliment but hesitated.

She wasn't about to tell Dominic, because he was nice but he wasn't exactly a Mastermind-candidate and he'd end up blabbing it around the village. No, she'd told Aisha and she wouldn't tell anyone else. She wasn't even sure there was a name for how she felt. She didn't like being a girl, she didn't fancy other girls, she was certain she'd be happier being a boy but ... oh Jeez, she didn't know and if she didn't know herself, she wasn't going to go blabbing it to Dominic.

“Hey! I've got an idea. Let's go do something to Belin's car. Let's make it so she can't get to school on Monday!” Steve nearly shouted, suddenly hit by the idea. Old Bell-end lived in the village too. Her car would be out the back of her house and it would be easy.

It was about time Steve paid her back for all those insulting things she'd said.

“Water in the petrol tank? That would stop her getting to school,” Dominic suggested. His granddad was a farmer and Dom had been driving a tractor around the area since he was no older than Josh. All the words Steve had for bikes and engines she'd got from Dominic.

Giggling, they filled a bottle with water and put their coats on, not even bothering to sneak as they walked up the dark, silent road. All the old farts were inside watching telly. The girls with scooters had gone down to St. Gré to go to the disco. Steve and Dominic were free to wander about with only the owls hooting above their heads to see.

Mme. Belin's car was parked round the back of her house and they saw the lights on in the living room. They made the thumbs-up sign to each other as they crept down the side drive.

Fortunately it was an old car and the fuel cap didn't lock, so Dominic took it off while Steve inserted the funnel and they poured in the water.

That would show her. She'd have to get the diesel drained out and replaced. It would keep her off school on Monday, which was their next English lesson. That was the main thing.

Carefully replacing the cap, they scuttled off down the drive again, suddenly aware of how bad it would be if they were caught. Ten o'clock at night, armed with an empty water bottle and a funnel on their teacher's property? Shit! Making as little noise as possible on the gravel they legged it, breaking into a run when they got to the road.

Back at Dom's house they fell into the garden chairs, still bundled up in their coats and went hysterical. When they eventually calmed down, Steve staggered home.

After making it into the house and up to her bedroom without getting caught, she threw herself on her bed and tried to stop her head spinning. She still felt sick, but smiled as she thought of old Ma Bell-end not being able to start her car or coming to a grinding halt in the middle of nowhere on Monday morning.

“Uncivilised, my arse!” Steve shouted at the ceiling as she passed out.

It wasn't until the lunch break that Dominic and Steve heard the results of their plan. Marie-Ange, whose dad had the garage in St. Gré, came over to them, grinning like a fool and waving her hands about excitedly.

“You heard? Old Belin was in an accident! She got two broken legs, yeah? Not going to be out of hospital for weeks!”

Old Bell-end was the most unpopular teacher in the school. It wasn't just Steve who got the wrong end of her spiteful temper. The other kids were regularly humiliated in her class. Nobody was going to feel sorry for her.

“What happened?” Steve asked, suddenly feeling bad. She hadn't meant anyone to get hurt. She just wanted to stop Belin from getting to school.

“Dunno. She was on her way to school on the main road and she must have hit the brakes or something because she stopped and the lorry behind her just went right into her. Car's a write-off, my dad says. Anyway, she's out of our way for a while.”

Dominic and Steve looked at each other with a combination of delight and guilt. They hadn't meant her to have an accident, just...well they hadn't really thought about what they wanted.

“Perhaps she won't come back?” Steve whispered to Dom. “She must be near retirement anyhow.”

The English class that afternoon was taken by a relief teacher called Mme. Legrande. She was young and had short hair, shaped into the back of her neck. Her big earrings tinkled when she moved her head and her clothes were casual, not the skirt and jumper outfit most of the female staff wore. Cargoes and a tight T-shirt with a baggy jacket over the top. Cool.

"Le Grande" meant "Great", maybe that would be a good sign, maybe she wouldn't be a bitch.

"Stephanie Briggs, can you stand up please?"

Oh not again! Steve stood up slowly, defiance in every movement. She refused to look at the new teacher.

"Come down to the front with me please ... how is it you like to be called?"

WTF?

"Steve, Madame. I prefer to be called Steve."

"Great. Come here Steve and stand by me please. Class – you are so very lucky. You have a native speaker with you and that is a great advantage. We will work from the book but you will not listen to me because I am French and I speak English with a French accent. You will please all copy Steve and she will help me to correct you. Is this OK, Steve?"

Dumbfounded, Steve just nodded.

OK? OK? This was fan-dabbie-fucking-dozie!

Grinning at the "great" new teacher, Steve said, "First off, Miss, it's '*What* do you like to be called', not '*How* do you like to be called'. That wasn't quite right."

"Excellent! You see – already even I am making progress!" Mme Legrande burst out laughing and so did the rest of the class.

Steve felt, for the first time in ages, that life was getting a bit more fair. If things carried on like this she might even get a scooter for Christmas.

--The End--