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Frog or Prince?

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(...) I set off at quarter to five and notice that I needn't have worried about prying eyes. Apparently the good citizens of Hellenburg (in other words everyone) observe what amounts to a curfew on Sundays. At any rate, the so-called pedestrian precinct is like a ghost town. Not that there's much on offer during the rest of the week, but on Sundays it might as well be called the death precinct. They're probably all sitting at home, drinking coffee, stuffing themselves with cake and listening to the latest Cliff Richard-CD. Although, to be quite honest, a piece of cake would go down nicely right now. Perhaps I should get Karo's mother to give me a recipe. She always bakes really yummy cakes. My mother hasn't had time for anything so trivial for absolutely ages. And if she had, she'd probably produce some Japanese concoction with fish in it or some other disgusting stuff. But then Karo's mother doesn't really have that much time either. Since she and Karo's father split up, she's been working at the supermarket check-out and is usually totally knackered by the time she gets home. My mother just drifts from one self-discovery course to another, and if she doesn't find herself soon, I'm going to move in with Karo. They probably wouldn't even miss me. I take the piece of paper out of my pocket and check the address once more, just to be on the safe side, but the ear-splitting noise booming from the house marked number 47 confirms that I've come to the right place. Ok then. I press the doorbell and prepare myself mentally for a long wait, but the door swings open immediately.

"You're too late for 'Pass the Parcel', unfortunately," says this utterly adorable guy. His dark hair is long and curly and his nose is covered in freckles. And his eyes – well, he has eyes like ... Damn! For some strange reason my brain has suddenly shut down and I just stare at him like a complete idiot.

"I, er..." I stammer half-wittedly. "I, um, my little brother, he's..." Mira, concentrate! "I'm here to er, um, collect Lukas!" See, you can do it! Now pull yourself together, so that you don't give this guy the impression you're a complete moron. But Mr. Drop-Dead-Gorgeous doesn't seem to have noticed anything weird. "No idea, what all these brats are called," he sighs. "Best thing is if you come in and grab hold of the right one!" I follow him into the living room, where the noise level is even higher. About ten little boys are jumping up and down and screaming at the tops of their lungs as if they were competing to see who could make the most noise, and I block my ears, totally stressed-out.

"Hallo, I'm Anton's mother," a woman next to me introduces herself. "And I'm also employed as tamer of this mob today. If I were you I'd go and sit on the patio and wait a moment. It's not quite as noisy out there. Would you like a slice of cake and some lemonade?"

I nod. "Yes, please!" and I allow her to escort me outside. Who knows what my mother has stuck in the oven at home. No doubt it'll be some kind of experiment involving tofu, and so a piece of cake beforehand can't do any harm.

"Tuck in!" says the friendly mother and gives me a huge piece of chocolate cake and a glass of lemonade. "I won't be long," and already she's disappeared back into the den of little beasts.

Just as I'm shovelling an enormous piece of cake into my mouth someone behind me asks: "Are you new in Hellenburg?" Trying not to choke to death, I nod, my face bright-red.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to kill you," says the curly-haired Love God, watching me from by one of the flowerbeds. "Everything ok with you?"

I take a large gulp of lemonade and nod once again.

"Yes to which?" he asks.



“Yes, I’m new here, and yes, I’m ok now,” I say with as much coolness as I can muster under the circumstances, and although it’s not really that warm anymore, sweat is running off me. It’s high time someone invented a deodorant for crisis situations such as this one. So as not to lose face entirely, I battle my way through the chocolate cake and just when my mouth is full again, sure enough, he fires off his next question: “And what class are you in?”

Here comes the next swallowing emergency. I thank my lucky stars I’m not eating roast pork, otherwise I’d have needed an ambulance long ago.

“Seventh”, I splutter.

“Aha,” mumbles the big brother and is just about to comment on this fact when the patio door opens and two of the screaming monsters come charging out. One of them happens to be my little brother, who welcomes me with the words, “So where’s Mummy then, Piralira?” Piralira... I notice how a broad grin spreads over CurlyHead’s face, and I’d really love to do Lukas in on the spot and bury him right here under the shrubbery. I seem to have graveyards on the brain today.

“Mummy is coming home later,” I snap. “Where’s your jacket got to?”

“In the hallway,” calls Lukas, bouncing up and down next to me like a rubber ball.

“And I’ve won a prize and played loads and loads and eaten looooooads of cake and lemonade!”

“You can’t eat lemonade,” I say, irritated. “You drink lemonade!” I hope my mother gets back home before the little brat starts puking his guts up. He has a tendency to do that after children’s birthday parties, and a puke-covered bed is the last thing I need today.

“See you around then!” says Mr. Gorgeous from by the flowerbed.

What exactly does he mean by that? See you in a year, at the next children’s party? To be honest, I wouldn’t mind at all if we could bring the date forward a bit.

“Yeah, so long,” I say and make sure I get out of there with the little pest asap. Have I already mentioned that little brothers don’t really spell bliss?

“Wow, it was really great,” my brother prattles on as we make our way home. “We played games in the park and then there was cake and Anton blew out all the candles and then there were balloons and then ...”

“By the way, what’s Anton’s big brother called?” I interrupt his constant babble.

Lukas gawks at me. “Big brother?”

“Yes. Big brother. The one with the dark curly hair who was in the garden just now!” To help jog his memory I add, “When I was waiting for you!”

“Dunno.” He considers the question. “Anton’s hamster is called Diddle!”

Thanks a lot for that vital piece of information, kiddo. This is just too much to take. The one time in his entire life he has the chance to pass on a vital bit of info and he doesn’t even notice the big brother! Oh well, who cares. The guy’s probably been living in Hellenburg his whole life and on closer examination will turn out to be as thrilling as the pedestrian precinct here. Then again...