

EXCERPT for HOW I LIVE NOW, By Meg Rosoff

1

My name is Elizabeth but no one's ever called me that. My father took one look at me when I was born and must have thought I had the face of someone dignified and sad like an old-fashioned queen or a dead person, but what I turned out like is plain, not much there to notice. Even my life so far has been plain. More Daisy than Elizabeth from the word go.

But the summer I went to England to stay with my cousins everything changed. Part of that was because of the war, which supposedly changed lots of things, but I can't remember much about life before the war anyway so it doesn't count in my book, which this is.

Mostly everything changed because of Edmond.

And so here's what happened.

2

I'm coming off this plane, and I'll tell you why that is later, and landing at London airport and I'm looking around for a middle-aged kind of woman who I've seen in pictures who's my Aunt Penn. The photographs are out of date, but she looked like the type who would wear a big necklace and flat shoes, and maybe some kind of narrow dress in black or gray. But I'm just guessing since the pictures only showed her face.

Anyway, I'm looking and looking and everyone's leaving and there's no signal on my phone and I'm thinking Oh great, I'm going to be abandoned at the airport so that's two countries they don't want me in, when I notice everyone's gone except this kid who comes up to me and says You must be Daisy. And when I look relieved he does too and says I'm Edmond.

Hello Edmond, I said, nice to meet you, and I look at him hard to try to get a feel for what my new life with my cousins might be like.

Now let me tell you what he looks like before I forget because it's not exactly what you'd expect from your average fourteen-year-old what with the CIGARETTE and hair that looked like he cut it himself with a hatchet in the dead of night, but aside from that he's exactly like some kind of mutt, you know the ones you see at the dog shelter who are kind of hopeful and sweet and put their nose straight into your hand when they meet you with a certain kind of dignity and you know from that second that you're going to take him home? Well that's him.

Only he took me home.

I'll take your bag, he said, and even though he's about half a mile shorter than me and has arms about as thick as a dog leg, he grabs my bag, and I grab it back and say Where's your mom, is she in the car?

And he smiles and takes a drag on his cigarette, which even though I know smoking

kills and all that, I think is a little bit cool, but maybe all the kids in England smoke cigarettes? I don't say anything in case it's a well-known fact that the smoking age in England is something like twelve and by making a big thing about it I'll end up looking like an idiot when I've barely been here five minutes. Anyway, he says Mum couldn't come to the airport cause she's working and it's not worth anyone's life to interrupt her while she's working, and everyone else seemed to be somewhere else, so I drove here myself.

I looked at him funny then.

You drove here yourself? You DROVE HERE yourself? Yeah well and I'M the Duchess of Panama's Private Secretary.

And then he gave a little shrug and a little dog-shelter-dog kind of tilt of his head and he pointed at a falling-apart black jeep and he opened the door by reaching in through the window which was open, and pulling the handle up and yanking. He threw my bag in the back, though more like pushed it in, because it was pretty heavy, and then said Get in Cousin Daisy, and there was nothing else I could think of to do so I got in.

I'm still trying to get my head around all this when instead of following the signs that say Exit he turns the car up onto this grass and then drives across to a sign that says Do Not Enter and of course he Enters and then he jogs left across a ditch and suddenly we're out on the highway.

Can you believe they charge £13.50 just to park there for an hour? he says to me.

Well to be fair, there is no way I'm believing any of this, being driven along on the wrong side of the road by this skinny kid dragging on a cigarette and let's face it who wouldn't be thinking what a weird place England is.

And then he looked at me again in his funny doggy way, and he said You'll get used to it. Which was strange too, because I hadn't said anything out loud.

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