

What was the use? Now the baby was born, all I ever heard was Marcus this and Marcus that. Never Dan. Always Marcus. And then there was Freckles (Steve) and his dopey friends. Every day, no matter which route I took, they'd know and would leave me limping to school. They said if I told anyone, they'd just hurt me more. What could I do against a nine stone monster? He could lift tables effortlessly, and I weigh less than a table.

So here I am, finally doing the unimaginable... I'm running away. Tomorrow morning, mum and dad'd find a note on the coffee table, saying:

Dear Mum and Dad (and Marcus)

I can't cope with everything. You never care about me anymore. If Marcus wants fed, you rush to his aid. If I fall and fall and hurt myself you'll tell me to be careful.

I'm sorry, but it's not just you, it's school too.

I love you, and don't be angry,

Dan X X X

Course, I'd packed the bare essentials. Crisps, bread, biscuits, oranges, water, juice, coke and a sheet and pillow to sleep with. Then there was my survival kit, which I'd got last year for Christmas. It contained a torch, a compass, matches and lots of first aid equipment. I set off at 02:57. I'd looked at my watch to check. I wanted to know what time I left my home, my life behind, abandoning it... abandoned. The perfect word to describe how I feel. I crept out of my room and onto the landing. As I tiptoed carefully down the stairs, the steps squeaking like mice, I heard a door open. My heart missed several beats. My gut wrenched as I heard a soft padding coming towards me and heavy breathing. I let out a silent breath of relief as I saw the familiar face of my Labrador, Bouncer, peering down at me with his large puppy dog eyes. So I carried on, slowly down the stairs. When I reached the bottom I hurried to the door, turned the key, and as silently and as cautiously as a shadow, I disappeared into the cold and bleak night.

I walked for what seemed eternity. My legs ached, my whole body was numb and on my feet I had blisters upon blisters. Then, just as I was about to collapse with fatigue and exhaustion, I saw a signpost with the fading words, 'Farmer Mc Cornis' quality cows fifty yards.' I felt a surge of energy as adrenalin seeped into my blood. I began to run. The farm had been abandoned for years, and it had old stables and cattle sheds, somewhere I could rest. I reached the heavy metal gate and pushed it open with the last of my strength. It groaned from years of rusting. I walked stiffly towards the nearest barn. I lifted the heavy wooden plank shutting the two doors and heaved them open. I staggered blindly inside. Collapsing to the dusty floor, I forgot about my fear of spiders and unpacked my sheet and pillow. Laying them on the floor, I lay my head and suddenly fell asleep.

It was morning when I awoke to the sound of a cockerel shrieking. The sun shone through a single window above the two doors. At the far end of the barn was a raised a raised platform, probably to keep the hay out of reach from the animals. My stomach grumbled and I realised

how hungry I was. I took out a half piece of bread and water. I slowly nibbled at the bread, knowing my supplies would need to last. After eating the bread and drinking half a cup of water, I stood up, leaving my rucksack behind, and walked out of the barn. To my right was an old outhouse. As I walked up to it and opened the door, I found to my surprise, a toilet. It wasn't connected to the mains, so it was empty and smelled disgusting. As I closed the door and looked behind the outhouse, I saw a stream. An idea occurred to me. Maybe I could dig a shallow trench downhill to the edge of the stream. If I built one in the opposite direction and connected that to the stream upstream, I could fill the loo with stream water and waste would go downstream. And I could make a kind of dam but just lots of twigs laced together at the upstream to block any litter blocking the toilet.

When I turned around, I saw a field. It was barren and empty. Not much use except as somewhere to throw litter. When I returned to the barn, I put a small bottle of water in my left pocket and a mini packet of crisps in the other. I zipped the pockets to stop everything falling out then carefully concealed my bag in a pile of spades then swept my footprints so no one knew I was there. Next I began to walk towards the forest. It was a source of food and meant I could save the food I had for as long as possible. In the woods I saw many animals. Rabbits, deer and squirrels. I found lots of different nuts and berries and put them in my jacket pockets. By the time I returned to the farm, it was evening and the sun was just setting and the first drops of rain began to fall. I ran inside the barn and slammed the door shut. Sitting down, I put all the food I'd found into my bag, in case I ran out of food. Then, as the rain started to pound against the rotten, ageing roof, I drifted to sleep.

For the next three days, I slowly ate my supply of food and water. I had fallen onto a log, cutting my knee open. I washed it with valuable water, put antiseptic cream on and bandaged it up. Then, one afternoon, I heard the sound of sirens, police sirens. I hastily grabbed hold of my bag, swept the floor of my footprints and sprinted for the forest, not realising I'd left my compass. I soared over logs and brushed past overhanging branches as I ran for my life. I ran for hours. Sunlight was hardly visible, so I started using my torch. Finally, as I began to faint, I sat on a log and got my breath back. I had no choice but to stay there for the night.

But soon, I began to hear voices. They were coming from everywhere, I had nowhere to run. My leg was bleeding heavily. I felt light headed and couldn't think. Suddenly, I felt a hand grasp my shoulder. I turned around, fear in my eyes, only to see a kindly women police officer standing in front of me. "Daniel Richards?" she said. I began to sway and my answer came out as a whisper, "I... yes, I feel sick." I heard twigs napping and a sharp pain in my chest as everything went black.

When I woke up, I had tubes up my nose and needles poking out from all over my body. Next to me, on a sofa, was mum. Heavy bags hung under her eyes and tears had smudged her mascara. Her eyelids flickered. She looked at me with sad, gloomy eyes. But then she smiled, and laughed and her eyes filled with happiness and glee as she saw me.

"Oh where have you been? I've missed you so much, I didn't know about school, you should have told me, and I know you've felt left out recently, but Marcus needs lots of attention at the moment, but that doesn't mean me and your father don't love you." I began to weep as she

hugged me and cradled me in her arms. Then dad came in, hearing mum talking, and hugged me too. Marcus was at home, with gran, so since I had to spend three days getting my body back to strength from not eating enough, I could spend them with mum and dad.

Everything's fine now, no Freckles to pick on me, no Marcus taking all the attention; though he still gets more than me! And my grades have gotten better as well, so for a treat, mum and dad are taking me to flamingo land for a week in the summer holidays, a whole week without Marcus, and it's worth it, but I'm beginning to like the way he can make everyone run to his aid. One thing's for sure, I'm never running away again.