

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

DESA MUCK
DEADLY SERIOUSLY
ABOUT SCHOOL
A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR
SCHOOLKIDS

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Desa Muck: Deadly Seriously About School

A Survival Guide For Schoolkids

1.

HEY TEACHER, LEAVE THEM KIDS ALONE!

Needless to say, there's no other way to write about school than deadly seriously, as there's an endless array of educationalists (i.e. teachers and others professionally involved in what can and can't be done in school) lying in wait for you. They are joined by all the others who are under the misconception that they know what's best for children. And they're all constantly worrying that during the school year someone will try to talk you out of studying and encourage you to misbehave. But there's absolutely no need to worry. I'm not like that, I'm not brave enough. Besides, I barely managed to survive school myself. The incredible fear that managed to settle in my very bones in those days still prevents me from offending anyone who is in any way connected with school. After all, my children will be going to school for quite some time yet. School is what it is and all I want is to help you, so that you don't do what I did and spend all your free time and energy trying to work out how to avoid it. You won't succeed, as it will stalk you till the day you die.

Nor is there any need to suffer on account of school as I did. There were times when even death seemed kinder, not to mention illnesses, the kind that reliably confined you to bed. I just longed for one of those. And most of all I wished that a virus that causes a severe allergy to school premises would be identified. You'd be in perfect health in every other way, just unable to go anywhere near school, teachers or anything else that is in any way related to them. And you'd have a medical certificate to prove it.

I would wake up at night, screaming with terror, and once I spent a whole winter night lying on the snow-covered balcony of our flat in the hope that I'd come down with pneumonia in the morning. I didn't even sneeze the next day. And the most unfair thing of all – now, when I don't ever have to go to school again, I have problems with rheumatism and my kidneys because of that night. And what is the lesson of all this? You just can't win against school. No one in the history of mankind has. I know of people who did not set foot in school from grade one, but roamed around, thieved, broke into places, maybe even disappeared someone for ever, anything as long as they didn't have to go to school. And where do you think they ended up? In jail, where they passed all their exams and even graduated, and there have been quite a few who have ended up in the electric chair or faced the gallows with multiple PhDs under their belt, when in their younger days they had barely managed to sign their name. Had I known when I was your age what I know now, I would instead have directed all that energy into getting through

with as little pain and effort as possible and, if I was lucky, have fun along the way. And if there was really no way of avoiding it, I might even have learned a thing or two.

If I had gone to school when I was supposed to, I would have been rid of it for ever. As it is, the problem keeps creeping along behind me, because as a writer I have to attend school events celebrating the winners of reading competitions, where I will be forced to meet teachers until the day I die and while chatting to them realise that most of them are perfectly alright people. After these meetings I go back home feeling guilty because I was so unfair to them when I was at school. Yes. And if I had been a better girl in school I'd now be living a peaceful, contented life without feeling that throughout my life I must try much harder than others to prove that I'm no worse than those who did well in school.

2.

THE CELEBRATION OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

The first of September. You walk into your classroom pleasantly excited. Will they notice that you've grown taller and lost weight during the holidays? That you have a cool new hairstyle and a whole new image? Yes!!! They have noticed. You realise that you've actually missed them, even the horrible ones you hoped would decide to go to another school. You sit in your old place. All the old chewing gums you stuck to the edge of your desk are still there - you never know when they could come in handy. The first day of school. You breathe in a relaxed fashion. Your conscience is clear and fresh, just like the new notebooks and text books in your school bag. Today there will be no tests.

Let's say you're in class 7B of XYZ primary school. Your form teacher walks in. The children quietly realise that they're actually glad to see her and she has to admit to herself that she has somehow missed them. How they have grown. She looks quite healthy too, in spite of the fact that everyone over the age of twenty has, let's face it, one foot in the grave. The teacher starts enthusiastically explaining what seventh grade will be like. You listen politely, although everything is crystal clear to you already. You've heard from the older kids that seventh grade is a bit more difficult than the sixth but much less than the eight, whereas the ninth is less demanding again. There's nothing else you need to know.

Mary is sitting at the front, right in the middle, in front of the whiteboard. She's wearing a clean, light coloured blouse and a dark skirt, while her hair is cut short. She's holding a pencil which is jumping up and down with impatience, as is everything inside her. She can't wait to do

the first test, writing those neat, pretty letters in the glaringly empty notebook, whose soft covers are protected by wrapping paper. And when the teacher asks her the first question, no one will be able to stop Mary talking ever again.

“Thank god holidays are over. I’m gonna be top of the class again,” she thinks as her heart misses a beat. “Jessica can keep that mini skirt that barely covers her armpits and Katie those curls that reach to the floor. All the best grades will go to ME.”

Her eyes are shining and her nostrils are flaring like a racing horse at the start of a race.

Mark is sitting in row three, by the window. He’s looking outside, where things are happening that the rest of the kids in the classroom have no idea about: the school yard suddenly starts pulsating with electric blue light and a medium sized flying saucer slowly descends. Then it lands and nothing moves. Mark can hear an unusually deep voice in his head: “Forgive my English, earthling child, I only had three minutes to learn it. We hail from planet Lazyus. We’re taking you with us so that we can study someone your age. There are no schools on our planet, all we do is have fun and enjoy ourselves. We will do to you what we do to our own children: plant in your brain all the knowledge from the primary school and secondary school and university of your choosing so that when you return you’ll be able to get any degree you want. Now we’ll use a vacuum ray to suck you into our spaceship and leave a note on your chair excusing your absence from school for the next few years.”

The hypnotic voice in Mark’s head is interrupted by Plum (her surname is actually Plummer): “Mark, you know I don’t let you sit by the window as you’ll be tempted to spend the whole year looking out, day dreaming. Change places with Nelly by the door.”

Nelly sighs and thinks: “Same as last year. No point in getting upset. Experience shows that works best... We’ll get through it somehow. We’ve managed to every year so far...”

And they have.

3.

OLD LOVES, OLD HABITS (OR ABOUT THE ETERNAL NAIVETY OF
TEACHERS)

Jack sat, well, lay actually, in the last row. He was leaning back and his legs were stretched out far under the desk. He was thinking:

“Blowing rolled up bits of paper at people’s heads is out this year. I’ll introduce spitting and pushing down the stairs instead. They’ll be really impressed at my improved technique of pulling chairs from under them. And Katie’s hair has really grown, great for pulling... She’ll have it all chopped off by November at the latest, ha ha...”

He yawned with boredom and went on thinking: “The rat hasn’t decomposed enough to put it under Milly’s desk.” His dopey eyes moved to the stooped shoulders of a girl sitting in the last row but one, to his left. Great. Milly was very close this year and at just the right angle. He searched around his pockets and found a small stone. With a practiced throw he hit Milly right in the middle of her back. Milly twitched and turned around. A familiar apologetic smile that Jack found particularly annoying appeared on her wide, nearly empty face on which the nose, eyes and mouth were all gathered in a small heap in the middle.

“And there was me thinking that they’d leave me alone this year. I should have sat nearer to the front,” thought Milly. She was the only one that no longer harboured any hopes that this year would go as it should. No other year had. But Jack was not the only one who was watching her. At the desk next to hers (she’d been sitting on her own since grade two) were Katie and Jessica.

“Don’ you ‘ink ‘at Milly hath puth on a hun’red poun’s ‘uring ho’i’ays?” mumbled Katie through the wad of bubble gum in her mouth.

“Yeah and she’s dressed as if she’s going to church,” Jessica said, nodding. “And Nelly! You could put on something other than jeans now and again...”

“Katie and Jessica! If you keep talking I’ll have to move one of you, just like last year,” Plum threatened tetchily. The bubble that Katie had just managed to blow burst and stuck to her face. Plum kept talking encouragingly. It was sunny outside. Have you noticed how every single year it’s sunny on the first of September? It’s all a part of the conspiracy known as compulsory education. In agreement with the Ministry of Education, every year Mother Nature ensures that pupils are in a good mood so that despondency does not take hold on the very first day and kids don’t start wondering what the point is of sitting at their desks for hours every day.

At that moment something happened that further improved the homeliness and family atmosphere in the classroom. There was a knock and the door opened. A messy head of hair appeared and a face with the grin of a satisfied hamster.

“Percy! At least on the first day you could get here on time. It’s twenty past eight already,” Plum said with a sigh. She was quite annoyed. And disappointed. Somehow she had hoped that it would be different this year. She’d had a long talk with Percy on the last day of school before the summer holidays and it seemed he’d got the message. But now... Percy also seemed surprised. By now Plum should know that he was ALWAYS late. She had the whole previous year to get used to the fact. And anyway, what’s the big deal? A minute or two up or down. Why does being late annoy teachers so much?

4.

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF PUNCTUALITY

Yes, really, why does being late annoy teachers so much? It’s just unnecessary complication, like everything else that goes on in school. Really. Being late could easily be prevented if they introduced flexi-time. This would mean that everyone could come to school according to his or her own desires and needs.

This is how it would be:

Imagine you’re doing something you’re especially proud of. Let’s say you like telling jokes, in fact, you’re quite famous for this. You’re leaning on the teacher’s desk, there are a few of your mates gathered around you (everyone knows you tell jokes before lessons begin). You start: “A guy comes to visit someone in a loony bin and he meets a nutter pulling a toothbrush on a string...”

Stan rushes in: “Hey, don’t start telling a joke without me. I had to go to the loo.”

“OK. A guy comes to visit someone in a loony...”

“We had to go and comb our hair, sorry,” say Steph and Lucy as they come in. You put your jokey face back on and start once more: “So, this guy comes to the loony bin and meets a...”

“Sorry, mate, you know I just had to get a burger,” Collin wheezes in. “Start once more from the beginning...”

That's how the first lesson would look if being late was allowed. Every time the teacher began the lesson, another pupil would come in, greet every one separately and explain what he or she had been doing the day before and then finally sit at their desk with that facial expression that says: I wonder what the teacher is going to say today?

Is it any clearer to you now why coming to school on time is a rule respected by everyone who does anything in school? But nonetheless, there are people who just can't get this and find punctuality the greatest possible nuisance. These people should know that however nice or good looking they are, sooner or later everyone is going to hate them. Both teachers and kids. Why?

1. Teachers: imagine that you've been up all night because your youngest child was teething or you've spent the night marking test papers. In the morning your car refused to start, the children were crying as you took them to the nursery, you couldn't find your keys... the usual stuff that happens to an adult who has to go to work. In spite of everything, you manage to drag yourself to school. On time. And then, half an hour later, Percy peers through the door and dares say right to your face: "I didn't feel like getting up." Would you give him an understanding hug and a kiss?

2. Kids. Imagine that it took you a long time to go to sleep the night before. Perhaps you watched a thriller or you were worried about school. Waking up the next morning is torture equal to that experienced by top runners just before they cross the finishing line. But you gather up all your strength and drag yourself to school, clearly aware of your sacrifice. And then around half past eight the door opens, Percy puts his head through, shrugs and says: "I overslept." Yes. The worst possible anger starts eating away inside you, lessened only slightly by the teacher screaming and giving Percy a final warning.

Besides, even those who are late don't have it easy. I know many of you try not to be late. I know your heart beats so hard that it echoes around the empty corridors as you're crawling towards the classroom, thinking that your heart can be heard around the whole school and especially in the head teacher's office. Fear and embarrassment are gripping your throat. What will happen when I walk in? I'll never be late again, ever, you tell yourself. And many of you really do it very rarely. So when it does happen (and it happens), show that you're sorry. Apologise. So, the first of the rules for getting through school as easily as possible is: however hard it may be, you must go to bed on time (without any complaints!) and stealthily get up early enough in the morning. Even royal children can't avoid it, or the president's dog.

5.

ATTENTION! THERE IS A SOLUTION!

Back to our story. The enthusiasm for school had not diminished even after a few days, when suddenly lightning struck this pleasant idyll.

“We’ll be having an oral test tomorrow. The poem on page seventeen and sentence analysis” said the English teacher casually as if asking for the whiteboard to be cleaned. How dared he! They’d only been in school a week and he was already testing them. Did he want to send them to an early grave?

“You’ll have to put your brain in gear a bit now that the holidays are over. You didn’t think you’d be doing nothing all year, did you?” he asked them after a wave of moaning and groaning flowed around the classroom. But yes, that was exactly what they had thought.

But in Mary’s ears his words sounded like wedding bells. The boring afternoons were over. Finally she had a good reason for not going out and playing ball with the pesky kids or twisting her ankle on her roller blades. (Mother: “It’s such nice weather out there!” – Damn the good weather, Mary hated it!) Ooooh! She’d be able to spend hour after hour at her desk, repeating with great pleasure all those long, complex sentences from school books until she knew them all off by heart. The teacher would only say the title and Mary would start rattling off the rest.

In contrast, Milly was overcome by deep despair. Revision was pure torture for her. How could she remember all those incomprehensible things that even in school made her head swim and pulled her eyelids down as if they had a magnet in them? Jessica and Katie were also worried because it’s very difficult to find time for revision when you have to spend the whole afternoon choosing a nail varnish (Jessica), or if you’ve put a poster on your wall of a topless male model advertising Levis jeans, whose muscles are exactly level with your eyes (Katie). Mark had very wisely decided already that he would not start revising until the end of May, as there was no point in doing it any earlier. Jack was the only one who was completely relaxed as he had decided to use his old trick: if he managed to annoy his teachers so much that they let him through just to get rid of him, OK, if not, he’d just repeat the year. He quite liked seventh grade. This was his third attempt at getting through and he had become rather attached to it. And anyway, who gives a monkey’s about school. All the cool dudes he knew, who drove BMWs, had all passed six grades at the most, so among that crowd his seven grades would be tantamount to having a PhD.

So, everyone in the class agreed that revision was a hellishly strenuous and bothersome thing. Even Mary thought that it meant suffering, but she enjoyed it precisely because of that. However, they all thought this because they had not heard about the most recent research on learning carried out and published by Prof Dr Giselher Guttman from the University of Vienna.

He has also invented a few tricks that will make the pesky matter called revision dead simple for you. So: ATTENTION, KIDS! IN ORDER TO STOP YOU, COME SPRING TIME, HAVING TO GO MOANING TO VARIOUS AGONY AUNTS THAT YOUR GRADES SUCK AND THAT YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO REVISE, READ THE NEXT SLIGHTLY LONGER CHAPTER, OR YOU'LL HAVE ONLY YOURSELF TO BLAME.

But, in order for you to be able to give your undivided attention to the story that follows, I have put those instructions at the end of the book, where you will of course ignore them, unless you're a weirdo who would really like to find out how to make revision easier and less time consuming.

6.

LONG LIVE CHEAT SHEETS!!!

You can test the honesty of your parents this very minute. Go and ask them: "When you were at school, did you ever use a cheat sheet?"

And if they say without a moment's hesitation: "Certainly not. I didn't do that kind of thing!" then they have told you a horrible lie. But you must know it's not their fault. When they were young, cheat sheets were an embarrassment and a serious crime. If during a test (in those days they were called "silent exercises" because even breathing couldn't be heard in the classroom during one) they were caught cheating, all hell broke loose. Not only did you automatically fail the test, you also had to go to the headmaster, who gave you a serious reprimand, resulting in no one really remembering your name, just the fact that you're the one caught cheating. Possibly things are still the same. But regardless of this, some of the children in our classroom, Nelly for example, did prepare cheat sheets. Among those who didn't have them were Jack because he didn't care, Mark because he was too lazy and preferred to make up excuses so that he didn't have to take the test, and Percy who was counting on coming in so late that he would miss the test anyway. But in fact cheat sheets are a very useful tool and a must. Why?

Imagine the following scene: you have a biology test tomorrow. There's so much material that it could easily smother you. No, no living person could absorb all that. So what can you do? Run away from home? Rush over to the kid next door who has scarlet fever and try to catch it? Whatever you do, that biology stuff will stay in your notebook or text book, lying in wait for you. And that's not all. It will multiply while you try to avoid it and the tension gripping your heart

will only grow and grow. Oh, well, I'll just have to write a cheat sheet, you think, feeling a twinge of shame. Good decision! Do it straight away. Start reading the material you have to cover and first write the title on your cheat sheet, such as PHOTOSYNTHESIS. And then you begin to feel sick. There are at least two pages in the book on photosynthesis. You do actually understand it, but how will you remember it all? And how to fit it all onto a small sheet of paper? What you must do is write down only the bits that are most important and which will remind you of other less important things. So:

sunlight (energy) ->

chlorophyll in leaves (the green pigment)

+

carbon dioxide from the air

-> photosynthesis

= sugar

Plants use energy from sugar for growth and survival.

You can create these short summaries (yes, they look like small meaningful units) in every subject.

But so that you don't have to spend the whole afternoon before every test writing cheat sheets, you can create index cards in advance. Just like the ones doctors use. All you need is a few boxes (one for each subject) and empty index cards. You separate the two halves of the box with a cardboard divider. You write short summaries of all the units in each subject: expressions that are difficult to remember, explanations of individual terms, in foreign languages individual words and their translation, irregular verbs, grammatical rules, etc. Every day you quickly look through the index cards and when you realise that you already know what a particular card says and that you no longer have to read it, you put it in the right hand section of the box, through which you have to look only once a week in order to refresh your memory.

And how do you use a cheat sheet in a test? Hide it under your skirt or in your slippers (which is what I did)? Or in your sleeve or scribbled in minute letters on the palm of your hand or the inside of your lower arm? Perhaps on the chair you're sitting on? There are many possibilities. But I tell you that if you've written your cheat sheet properly, you won't even need it because while you were writing it your brain has already stored so much data that it will simply erupt onto the paper during the test. You can, of course, take your cheat sheets to school so that you feel safe and so that during the break before the test you can have a little look at them. But after this you will no longer need them. I swear. Cheat sheets really are cheating, plain and simple, wherever you may hide them.

10.

ANOTHER SCHOOL TRAP – CORRESPONDENCE DURING LESSONS

The bell rang: it was the end of break. Jack returned to the classroom with his two sidekicks in tow. Nelly was sitting at her desk, looking through the history book. She may be tested orally. She was just about to turn a page when a pocket knife was stuck in her book, precisely in the spot where Primož Trubar's eye was. Nelly recognised the shadow that fell on her desk as Jack's. He said:

“Just so that you know, Nelly, you and I are an item.”

And off he went.

Nelly instantly turned into a heap of melted wax. She looked round and saw Katie and Jessica's angry faces. Jessica was particularly miffed as her and Jack had been an item until then. She stuck her long varnished nail into the desk with rage, as if it was Nelly's heart she was stabbing. And at that moment Nelly really did feel her heart was like a small, helpless kebab in her chest. This was followed by a small, tiny feeling of pride. To be replacing Jessica, the uncrowned Miss of the School, was no small matter. There was even a girl in grade nine who was after Jack. Nelly would rather let all her teeth be pulled out than turn back to look at him at that particular moment, but his image clearly arose in her mind: Jack at PE. In comparison to the other boys in the class he was like Gulliver in Lilliput. Perfectly developed, wearing tight gym pants and t-shirt, he was even shaving already. To her horror she realised that she was already very familiar with every detail of him. Impossible! When had she examined him so closely?

The history teacher walked in. The kids referred to him as Killer, not because he was dead strict but because he was dead witty. He was the only person in the world who, besides perhaps his own mother, believed that he was funny, but he thought that it was because no one else understood his jokes. So it would be impossible to tell when he was being serious and when he was trying to be funny, if not for the fact that, when he was joking his face took on a particularly expectant, mischievous expression that was almost pleading. The class would obligingly laugh at such moments and Killer was happy and in a good mood for the rest of the lesson. Needless to say everyone tried really hard to laugh as otherwise he took an instant dislike to you.

As soon as Killer sat at his desk and opened the diary, a folded sheet of paper arrived under Nelly's desk. She opened it up and read:

YOU TRAITOR! WATCH OUT! IF YOU DON'T LEAVE JACK ALONE, YOU'RE DEAD MEAT!

Nelly looked around and saw Katie and Jessica glaring at her threateningly. She quickly wrote back:

I DON'T GIVE A TOSS ABOUT JACK, HE'S ALL YOURS. IT'S BENEATH ME
TO BE GOING OUT WITH SUCH A JERK.

She unobtrusively watched the bit of paper travel back to Jessica, who greedily read it and then showed it to Katie.

"Nelly, your tongue is long enough to sweep the chimney!" said Killer and wagged his ears expectantly. The whole classroom laughed and Killer started looking at the grade book.

"Let's see then... What's your surname, Nelly?" Nelly went numb because a new bit of paper had just landed under her desk. It said: HEY BABE. BE SURE TO WAIT FOR ME AFTER SCHOOL, IF NOT WATCH OUT. YOURS JACK.

At that moment Nelly realised that her life had suddenly become very complicated.

11.

A HEART IN A CRUMPLED UP BIT OF PAPER

Nelly crumpled the bit of paper into a ball and wanted to throw it under her desk when Killer, who had suddenly appeared right next to her, pulled it from her hand.

"Let's have a look at what we have here," he said joyfully and opened the paper. "Oh dear, a love letter."

He mischievously looked around the classroom and dramatically read out the content of the note as if he was reading out the names of the Oscar nominees.

"Well, well, well... so when's the wedding then, Jack and Nelly?"

Complacent laughter rolled around the room.

Nelly could very clearly sense herself blushing, the redness spreading from her ears down her neck and then up to her face, like hot tomato sauce. Through the roaring of blood in her head she could hear Jack answering in a loud, clear voice:

"None of your business. You're not invited anyway."

A deathly hush ensued. Then Killer spoke with a voice that would win him an ovation even in Covent Garden opera house:

“Oh yeah, Jack? You think you’re ever so cool, don’t you? A hero? Let’s see just how brave you really are!”

He paused for a moment, just in case someone laughed. But no one did, there was too much tension.

“So, come up to the whiteboard, Jack. Protestantism in Slovenia.”

“There’s no point. Just give me a fail grade, I don’t know anything about it,” Jack said lazily as he leaned back in his chair, his hands in his pockets.

“OK, just say the word. Would you perhaps like two fail grades?” Killer asked with false helpfulness. He was relieved to hear some laughter. The situation was a bit delicate for him, too, as he could not be sure just how far Jack was prepared to go.

Nelly’s head was ringing. This is all she needed. Jessica will hire a hit man and the whole class was laughing at her to boot... Those damn bits of paper. Couldn’t all that nonsense wait until the break? She would never ever accept a scrap of paper or write one herself again. Oh, dear Earth, please open up and swallow the whole school! But Jack did well, didn’t he? Like a real man, she thought. What are you thinking? A real man? A jerk!

When Killer was recounting in the staff room the tale of how he had handled Jack and his colleagues politely laughed, Plum said nothing. She could remember very well the damp hands through which little notes had travelled when she was at school. All their hopes and fears were on those bits of crumpled up paper. Will Joe reply or not? What will he say? What will his face show when his neighbour puts the bit of paper in his hand? Will Marion be my best friend again or will she keep walking home from school with Maddy, pretending not to know me? Look, she’s got the bit of paper. Will she reply? No. She has shown it to Maddy and they’re both laughing now. Next time I’ll write that I’m dying from some terrible disease. I’d like to see them laugh then...

Those dear notes travelling under the desks. No, Killer was wrong to have read it out loud. But then again... Plum remembered how during those hours of ardent correspondence she didn’t remember anything the teacher said in the meanwhile. So what should she say to the kids about this? There are problems with and without correspondence. She would suggest they do it during the breaks or send them by post... Oh, yes, the post, that would be so much more romantic and thrilling. But she knew that this custom which had been present since the beginning of school would be very difficult to eradicate. And then recently these pesky mobile phones have appeared on the scene, additionally complicating matters.

12.

HOW TO BECOME A DESERT ISLAND

But the worst thing Killer was able to come up with that day was yet to follow: after he had gone, he thought the fun and laughter could have been even greater, so he returned to the classroom, where the kids had already breathed a sigh of relief, and looked around cunningly until he felt the tension had peaked and then, barely able to stop himself from laughing, said: "So that the you two lovebirds can get to know each other better before the wedding, you will write a paper together on the Slovene education system in the 19th century so that everyone will be able to see just how easy you have it nowadays. You can get the relevant literature from me. And let work be the only thing that unites you, no other nonsense before the wedding!" When he felt that the other children were neighing enthusiastically enough, he slunk off to the staff room to pester the other teachers.

When Nelly thought that nothing worse could happen in her life than having to write a paper together with Jack, something happened that she could not have imagined even in her worst nightmares. It started during the main break. She rushed into the corridor, where all the current classroom issues were settled during breaks, and there were quite a few that had to be settled during this particular break. First, she had to talk to Jessica about Jack. Nelly could already hear her own voice ringing out in her head as she told the girls:

"Hey, Killer hasn't got a clue. I have no intention of writing a paper with that idiot. I'd rather die... etc..."

This kind of statement always soothed a girl's troubled nerves.

The girls were gathered in front of the toilets and Nelly could already hear Jessica saying in an important voice:

"So it's all settled then, it's my treat." "Where are we going?" asked Nelly.

"We're going for a pizza after school," said stinky Magda. "Katie's treat." "Great!" said Nelly, breathing a sigh of relief. So the Jack thing was forgotten. It really was pointless for the girls to come into conflict because of some guy... But then Jessica dropped the bombshell:

"I didn't know you were invited, Nelly..."

An awkward silence followed. Nelly had a lump in her throat and felt a few red hot patches on her face and she knew that the deep redness would spread right across her face.

"OK... I don't have time anyway..." she said, pausing for a moment. This couldn't be true. These things only happened to Mary and Milly, not her. Any moment now one of the other girls would say:

“Right then, in that case we’re not going either...”

But they were all silent, staring out of the window in embarrassment at the grey, rainy day. The hypocrites! They had betrayed her for a lousy pizza. She looked at Dasha, her best friend, who quickly turned away, saying:

“I’ve got to go to the loo!”

Nelly looked at Milly, but she also had to go to the loo, as did Magda, who was in such a rush that she slipped on the smooth floor and fell.

Nelly knew. A war had started. She went back to the classroom. Now she belonged to the club that was greeted by “Quick, let’s go, the nerds are coming”, which until then had consisted of Mary, Milly and stinky Magda. Even worse, she wasn’t even in that club any more. She knew that Jessica would ensure that within the shortest possible time Nelly became the most hated girl in the school.