

A Clean Break

by Nicholas Richards

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A boy rails against his treatment.

Characters

Oswin – aged about 15

Lucia – older sister to Oswin

Mel – school friend of Oswin

Callum – younger brother to Mel

Petros – young cousin of Mel and Callum

A dark outdoors scene. At the back there is a glow from a window in a futuristic house. The ground is littered with stones.

(Oswin, a young boy, emerges from a door in the house radiating anger. He walks slowly downstage, pauses, picks up a stone, weighs it in his hand thoughtfully, and quite suddenly hurls it at the backdrop – the ‘house’. He pauses, does this again, and then sits on the front of the stage in a deep sulk. The door at the back opens and light shines down the stage. Lucia, Oswin’s elder sister, emerges and peers into the gloom.)

Lucia: Oswin...? Oswin – are you out there? (She waits a moment.) Oswin?

(Lucia shrugs and goes back inside, closing the door. Oswin gets back on the stage. Off Right singing heralds the arrival of Mel, Petros and Callum – friends of Oswin. Oswin, hearing the voices, again slips off the front of the stage and lies low.)

Mel, Petros, Callum: (Singing Off) *We’re off to the party, girls and boys;
We’ll have a deal of fun,
And we’ll make a lot of noise,
And we won’t stop the singing till the night is worn out;
And we’ll laugh till we’re hoarse, and we’ll twist and shout!
And we’ll sway to the tunes of the crazy band,
And I’ll dance with you and I’ll hold your pretty hand;*

(Enter Right Mel and Petros and, a little behind, Callum.)

For we’re off to the party, girls and... (They come to a stop when Mel speaks.)

Mel There it is, Petros! That’s his house.

Petros: It’s huge!

Mel: His father’s a senator.

Petros: Half a horse?

Mel: No, silly! *Senator*: member of the Senate - the ruling council.

Petros: I thought you said he was...

Mel: Yes, they’ve just made him *Proconsul*. Top man.

Callum: That’s why they’re having a party.

Petros: *We’re* having a party next Tuesday. It’s my father’s birthday.

Mel: (Gazing at the house, with a sigh) Imagine that! Most powerful man on the planet!

Petros: My dad programs computers.

Mel: Good for him. Everyone plays a part.

(The three stand looking at the back, unsure what to do.)

Callum: Well... Shall we announce ourselves?

Petros: What if Oswin's not there?

Mel: Of course he's there. It's a big day for his family.

(Mel walks slowly towards the house, mustering the courage to announce their arrival; Petros wanders idly to the front of the stage; Callum beats himself to get warm.)

Callum: Whoa, it's cold! If we don't get invited in, it's hypothermia all round!

Petros: It's not so cold where I come from. We have a really warm dome over *our* town. **(He notices Oswin below the stage.)**

Mel: Lucky you.

Callum: Hope Oswin's not in a mood.

Mel: He's always in some sort of mood. When it's a good one, well then he's the best.

Petros: Someone's over there. **(He goes closer.)** Hullo? You all right?

Oswin: **(Not moving)** I like ditches – don't you?

Petros: No. **(Proffering hand)** Petros. Pleased to meet you.

(Mel and Callum come forward to see Oswin.)

Mel: Oswin?

Callum: What are you doing, hiding in a ditch?

Oswin: You've answered your question.

Callum: Here's another: Why?

Oswin: There's a party in my house.

Callum: We know. Isn't that a reason to be inside?

Oswin: You would have thought so – but *no*. Why are *you* here?

Callum: To see you.

Oswin: **(Getting onto the stage)** Well you've seen me now. **(With a comic little wave)** Goodbye.

Mel: Oh come on, Oswin: stop play-acting! What's up?

(Oswin sits on the edge of the stage and looks blankly into the audience.)

Callum: You've no coat. You'll catch your death out here.

Oswin: Who's worried?

Callum: We are. We happen to be warm-blooded.

Oswin: Then go home. I didn't ask you here.

Mel: We heard about your father's good news... And the party...

Callum: And so we thought...

Oswin: You'd gate-crash.

Mel: **(Annoyed)** Actually no, we thought because you're our friend you'd invite us in. Anything wrong with that, Oswin, o you paragon of friendly generosity?

(Oswin looks away. Petros plays with stones. Callum beats his sides to get warm.)

Mel: Our cousin Petros is staying with us so we brought him along.

Oswin: What for?

Mel: To join in with the fun we're all having! Honestly, Oswin: can you not be more civil?

Oswin: **(Mimicking)** Honestly, Mel: can you not be less pompous?

Petros: **(Simply)** I hear your father's been elected top man. Congratulations!

Oswin: One is not *elected* Proconsul, my little Petros: one is *appointed*.

Petros: **(Hurt)** That's me told.

Callum: Come on, Oswin: can't we go inside with you? Out of this cold night of misery.

Oswin: *You* go. They'll let you in – they wouldn't want *you* to die of cold.

Mel: **(Sitting down beside Oswin)** What on this rusty old planet's eating you?

(Oswin stares fixedly into the distance. Petros picks up a stone and is just about to fling it into the audience when Callum holds his arm.)

Callum: No. Perhaps Oswin's sister's eating worms over there.

(Petros lets fall the stone.)

Petros: My father says we need all the worms we can get.

Mel: Oswin's sister's not the lying-in-ditches sort - is she, Oswin? Nor are you usually. So what's up?

Oswin: **(After a painful pause and a sigh)** I have to apologise. Tomorrow.

Callum: **(Sitting on the other side of Oswin)** Well we'd accept it now. And then we can go in.

Oswin: No, not to you. I mean a *Public Apology*. In the Forum.

Mel: Why? What have you done?

Oswin: You remember a fortnight ago...?

Mel: My young brain's still up to that, yes.

Oswin: During morning break we went to town...?

Mel: Well we're allowed: we're scholars.

Callum: You don't have to apologise for that, surely? But you could apologise for being an utter turnip.

Petros: What's a turnip?

Callum: Tell you when you're older.

Oswin: We bought drinks... cans. I had ginger beer. And we drank them by the Viking Monument.

Mel: Remember it well. Don't think it's a tale I'll be telling my grandchildren though.

Oswin: And then we noticed the time and had to run back to school.

Callum: Great story but...

Oswin: I left my can. Hadn't even finished it.

Petros: It'll've gone flat by now.

Callum: And *I'm really cold* - by now.

Petros: And be full of flies.

Mel: **(With a knowing nod)** Oh I see where this is going.

Callum: Not inside where it's warm, that's for sure.

Mel: You've been caught littering.

Oswin: Who would bother to go through the CCTV footage to find an abandoned drinks can?

Mel: Cameras flag up littering automatically.

Petros: What're you talking about?

Callum: **(To Petros)** They're really litter-strict here. Drop a sweet paper and your name's mud.

Petros: My real name's Petrosianović. I don't tell anyone 'cos it's embarrassing.

Oswin: **(Angrily)** Didn't mean to leave it! I was trying to keep out of trouble and get back to school before end of break. Simply forgot the... stupid little can.

Callum: It's not the end of the planet, is it?

Oswin: Not for you. You don't have to stand in front of the town's great and good **(taking out a sheet of paper – his apology)** and petty and bad and say... *this*.

(Oswin hands the paper to Callum.)

Callum: *I a-...* **(He has difficulty in reading it.)** I am not a scholar. Words too long for me.

(Callum hands the paper to Mel, who reads it formally and fluently.)

Mel: *I acknowledge transgression of the Cleanliness Code ordained by the Council of Tempe South, and I hereby make public and complete apology for my injurious action...*