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This book has been produced in partnership with Reflex. Reflex exists to empower children, young people and young adults to break the cycle of offending and reoffending, equipping them with the skills, character and confidence to realize their full potential. www.reflex.org

Breaking the Chain

Darren Richards



diffusion

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For J. B.

*Thanks to my wife, for her support,
and to my boys who inspire me daily.
Also to Tim, Sam, Primi and Rebecca
for their wisdom and input.*

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1

Eggs for breakfast

‘Cell search! Stand by your doors,’ shouted one of the officers.

Men stood by the doors of their cells. The dogs with the officers were given a bag to smell and a treat if they found something. It was a game for them.

Ken Atwater leaned on his walking stick and watched the sniffer dogs run about. He had seen them do this many times.

Ken was not someone you would pick out of a crowd. He was an old man with a narrow face and eyes that stood out like bright gems. He wore a tatty jumper which hung off his bony shoulders. The sleeves were bunched up like armbands.

The men called out and joked with their mates on the other side of the prison landing. It was a sound Ken was used to, like clanking doors and jingling keys.

Ken saw that one young man was losing his cool. A first-timer called Josh. Although Ken had not met him, he knew who Josh was. Josh had only arrived in the prison a few days ago but he was already causing trouble and getting a bad name.

‘I shouldn’t even be here!’ yelled Josh. ‘This is out of order!’

Josh was so angry he felt like screaming. His hands were shaking and he had knots in his belly. That morning, he had been given a letter from his girlfriend. It was the sort of letter every prisoner dreads. Josh had been with his girlfriend for a year and now she had broken up with him.

‘Do you want a nicking?’ an officer warned Josh. ‘Settle down or you’re going in the shower room until you calm down.’

Ken watched as Josh punched a wall and let out a yell.

‘OK! That’s enough!’ the officer said crossly and he led Josh away.

‘Poor kid,’ thought Ken.

When the cell search was over, Ken saw Josh coming back on to the wing. He looked calm but fed up.

‘Morning,’ called out Ken. ‘You look like you’ve had better days!’

Ken’s voice sounded croaky. It was the first thing he had said that day.

‘What?’ asked Josh.

‘I said, good morning. Do you know anyone yet?’ asked Ken.

‘No. Not yet,’ said Josh.

‘Well, I’m Ken. Most of the lads here call me Suds,’ said Ken.

‘I’m Josh. Why do they call you Suds?’ asked Josh.

‘It’s a long story. Let’s get some breakfast,’ Ken said with a smile. ‘I’ll even give you my eggs. You had a rough start today.’

‘Yeah, man. Thanks,’ replied Josh.

What do you think?

- How would you describe Ken? What is he like?
Do you like him?
- Why was Josh feeling angry? What else might Josh have been feeling?
- Think of a time when you lost your temper.
How might things have been different if you had stayed calm? What are some good ways of controlling your anger and keeping calm?

2

Something happened

‘The tea here is terrible,’ said Ken, pulling a face. ‘I prefer peppermint tea. But the breakfast isn’t too bad.’

‘Thanks for this,’ said Josh. He jabbed Ken’s fried eggs with a fork and flicked them on to his plate. The yolks spilt, mixing with his baked beans.

‘So why are you called Suds?’ asked Josh, with a mouthful of eggs.

‘Well, I never knew my real dad,’ Ken said.

‘But the man who adopted me told me I was found in a basket, on top of a washing machine.’

‘You’re joking,’ said Josh.

‘I am not,’ said Ken, suddenly sounding serious. ‘I was found on a washing machine next to the washing powder. That’s why I’m called Suds.’

‘So, you were adopted?’ asked Josh.

‘Sort of,’ said Ken. He got up from the table to leave.

Free flow was starting. Soon prisoners would begin moving around the prison. Ken wanted to be back in his cell before the rush.

‘That’s it?’ Josh asked, feeling a little short-changed.

‘No, that’s not *it*,’ Ken answered. ‘I haven’t told you the best part yet.’

As they arrived back at Ken’s pad, he said, ‘Come in and I’ll tell you the rest.’

Ken sat down on his bed and Josh sat on a chair by the table.

‘I grew up in a big house, by a lake,’ began Ken. ‘The man who brought me up was very rich. He owned TV stations, newspapers, and that kind of thing. He was a powerful man. He even had the Prime Minister’s private phone number.’

‘Sweet deal!’ Josh said with a grin.

‘I was very lucky,’ explained Ken. ‘I had a great education. I had all my meals cooked by a chef. I even had a nanny! I had a lot of nice things and a lot of fun, but I would often wonder about my birth family.’

Ken sighed. He sat back on his bed and kicked off his shoes.

An officer came to the door of Ken's cell.

'Josh,' he said, 'I can take you to the gym now if you want to go.'

'No, thanks. I'm chatting to Suds,' replied Josh. He couldn't believe he was passing up a chance to work out, but he really wanted to hear the end of Ken's story.

The officer looked at Ken in surprise. Ken nodded, as if to say, 'It's fine, he's with me.'

'So, how did you end up in here?' asked Josh.

'There's a twist in this tale, lad. Something happened that changed everything,' said Ken with a smile.

