

The Interview
Gary Duncan

Alan sat in the hallway while his parents talked about him in the living room.

Mum said they wouldn't be long, and had given him some magazines to read while he waited. Woman's Weekly. Auto Trader.

"Look at you!" she'd said, before she went in. "Like you're waiting to see the dentist!"

Alan tried to smile, but it didn't come out right.

Mum had called the meeting the previous week. She'd written him a letter, and slipped it under his bedroom door. Nothing to be alarmed about, she said, but they needed to have a talk.

He'd asked about it the next morning at breakfast.

"Not really a talk," she'd explained. "More of an ... appraisal."

Alan shifted uncomfortably in his seat. The hallway was cold but he felt clammy.

Mum stuck her head around the door a minute later and smiled.

"You can come in now, darling," she said.

Alan got up. He straightened his trousers and buttoned his jacket. It was his dad's jacket, a couple of sizes too big. Dad suggested he borrow it anyway.

You know what Mum's like, he'd whispered. She'll be pleased you made the effort.

Alan knocked on the living room door and went in.

Mum and Dad were sitting on the sofa. Alan's armchair had been pushed into the corner, so he sat on the wooden stool they'd positioned in the middle of the floor.

"Thanks for coming," Mum said, looking up from her clipboard.

"Sorry for the wait, son," Dad said.

"Alan," Mum said, slowly. "As I explained in my letter, we just wanted to have a little talk, now that you're thirteen. Just you and me and Dad."

"A talk?" Alan asked.

Mum nodded. "To discuss your ... progress."

"Your progress," Dad repeated.

"But-" Alan started to say.

Mum gave him that look. She didn't like being interrupted.

"On the whole, Alan," she said, "we're fairly pleased with you. With the way you've turned out."

Dad cleared his throat.

"That's the thing," he said. "With kids. You never quite know what you're going to get."

"Alan," Mum said. "We've given it some thought, and we've decided we'd like to keep you."

She got up and handed the clipboard to Alan.

Alan took it, not sure exactly what he was supposed to do with it.

“Just some terms and conditions,” Mum said. “You just need to sign at the bottom.”