

## Nobody's Twisting Your Arm

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# Nobody's Twisting Your Arm

by [isitandwonder](#)

## Summary

Once again, Paul has to change school due to his father's career ambitions. How bad will it be this time? He's used to bullying, being the principal's son. But at RAKIS, things might get worse than ever before. For there's this guy Feyd, who's giving Paul a really hard time. As he's about to find out Paul's most intimate secrets, something else is awakening inside Paul...

## Notes

I know a bit about Dune but nothing about high school. And I like to switch between tenses. Sue me. For visuals, Paul looks like Timothée in Bones & All; Feyd looks like young Sting.

# I Don't Like Mondays

„And then I twisted his arm and punched him in the face again and again. He wailed, spluttering blood, and begged me to let go of him.” Sardonic laughter accompanied those very first words Paul heard when he stepped through the entrance doors of RAKIS (Royal Academy for the conveyance of Knowledge, Ideas and Science), his scholastic home for the next year.

They were uttered by a tall, muscular redhead whose soft face looked rather innocent, which made the tale he told sound all the more savage. He was surrounded by a gang of guys with shaved heads dressed all in black leather.

Paul instinctively turned the other way and gave the group a wide berth as he passed through the hall looking for the director's office.

He already hated his new school. Junior year kicked off to be a nightmare.

He recalled what his mother had told him over breakfast this morning (not that he had eaten much, his stomach already turning at the thought of the start of the new academic term).

“Give it a chance. You must face your fears.” At least she'd had the honesty to forgo an encouraging smile. Her grey eyes were serious but there was no pity in her gaze. Small mercies.

“Well, it would help if my father wasn't the new principal.” Paul had mumbled while sullenly crumbling a piece of toast all over his plate.

“You know that your father wasn't too keen to take over here. But it was a case of emergency. When he was called in he couldn't refuse.”

‘Bla bla bla’, Paul thought. His mother never tired of defending his father's career choices, depicting them even as sacrifices he made for the sake of others. Though to Paul it looked that everybody but his family came into the equation.

It had been bad enough as a sophomore at his last school, a somewhat elitist boarding school by the sea.

Paul could still hear the taunting voices of his fellow pupils sing:

*Chubby cheeks, dimple chin  
Rosy lips, teeth within  
Curly hair, very fair  
Eyes are blue - lovely too.  
Teachers pet, is that you?  
Yes, Yes, Yes!*

It was not that his cheeks were chubby. On the contrary. He was all elbows and knees. Which had made reciting the nursery rhyme even funnier for his classmates.

The rest – unfortunately – applied, which had given Paul a hard time since he was about twelve. Being cute was okay for a little boy but not for a teenager. His looks had led to all sorts of name calling. ‘Princess’ and ‘fairy’ had been the nicer insults hurled at him on the sports field during PE.

Well, and now RAKIS.

Despite its name, the school was set in an area euphemistically described as socially disadvantaged. Which meant it was a shithole, plain and simple. Crime, drugs, violence, poverty – you name it, RAKIS got it aplenty.

Of course, his dad couldn’t resist to take over when the former headmaster was kicked out in contempt; officially for meddling with the lunch money. But Paul had listened in on the late night talks his father had held with the school board. There were wild accusations flying around: corporal punishment of pupils, even sexual abuse allegations. The disgraced Vladimir Harkonnen had left scorched earth.

A hotspot like RAKIS was exactly the pedagogical playing field Paul’s father had longed for. Finally, he could bring education to the underprivileged. If he succeeded at RAKIS, only the sky was the limit. Paul envisaged his dad already dreaming up his new manifesto as Secretary of Education.

And so here they were.

The old principal’s name had not yet been removed from the office door Paul forced himself to knock on.

“Come in!” His father’s voice – deep, sonorous, full of confidence – answered from the other side of the frosted glass. “Ah, Paul, it’s you. Good to see you. Can you help me move this desk over there by the window?”

His dad was already starting to make a difference to his office. A withered palm tree had been discarded in a wired waste paper basket. Books piled high in one corner. Heavy dark-brown leather furniture had been pushed to the side, and against one wall leaned a picture of what Paul believed was the old headmaster: a fat, round face, lots of chins, fleshy lips and small, cruel eyes with a piercing stare. Paul wouldn’t have wanted to face that man alone in this room.

A few minutes later the heavy old desk was placed where his dad wanted it.

“This is much better.” Leto Atreides brushed his hands on his trousers as he leaned back against the desk, smiling at his son. “You look fucking miserable.”

“I am.” Paul answered. No use to lie to his father. He shrugged, kicking the thick dark carpet with the white tip of his Converse.

“I know this isn’t easy for you...,” his father set off on one of his motivational speeches. Paul was literally saved by the bell.

“I have class. Do you have my papers?” Paul reached out as his father took some documents from a shelf. “Thanks.”

He was already at the door when his father offered: “I can drive you home this afternoon.” Paul knew this was his father’s way of a peace offering. He wouldn’t make it easy for the old man.

“I’ll take the bus.” He closed the office door behind himself and sprinted down the corridor. Only when he reached the by now almost empty main hall did Paul realize he had no idea where to find his class.

As he stood there looking left and right for an answer – luckily, the group of leather boys as Paul called them to himself was nowhere to be seen – a girl skidding around a corner bumped into him, sending her books and his papers flying all around them.

“Shit!” The girl exclaimed, crouching down to retrieve her stuff.

“Sorry.” Paul just stood there and watched her.

“Won’t you help me?” She looked up at him, pushing a strand of brown curls out of her eyes and behind her ears.

“Sorry.” Now Paul got on his knees too and began sorting his papers from her notepads.

“I’m fucking late. Mr Halleck will skin me alive.” She finally seemed to have collected her books and got up.

“You’re in Mr Halleck’s class? Classical poetry?”

The girl nodded, straightening the long skirt of her plain mud-coloured dress.

“Me too.” Paul said sheepishly. The girl just stared blankly at him. “I’m new here.”

“You don’t say.” The girl started to walk down a corridor. About ten meters ahead she turned back to Paul. “You coming, or what?” And she smiled.

Paul ran up to her and together they hurried towards a bright orange classroom door. Before they knocked the girl looked at him and said: “I’m Chani, by the way.”

“Paul.” Said Paul.

“Okay, let’s face our demons.” The girl took a deep breath before rapping her knuckles against the battered metal.

Paul wasn't sure if he liked or despised Mr Halleck. After entering his classroom, the teacher had first scolded Miss Keynes for being late AGAIN before he'd turned to Paul.

"And I don't care who you are, just find a seat so we can get on here." He'd gestured towards the rows of chairs and desks and Paul had slipped onto a free seat as far back as possible, grateful for at least some more minutes of anonymity before his fellow pupils would find out who he was.

Now Paul was listening as Mr Halleck, a tall man looking more like a boxer than a poetry teacher with a prominent scar on his chin, outlined the curriculum of the next year. Some rather boring sounding old pieces they would have to work through were interspersed with modern authors Paul loved. When it came to assign presentations, Paul put his hand up at the mention of Paul Celan.

"Anyone else? Come on, help the new guy."

To Paul's utter astonishment, a beautiful blond girl sitting in the front row raised her hand, turning back towards him and giving him a rather mysterious smile.

"Miss Corrino, thank you." Mr Halleck nodded towards the blond. "And your name is?" His pen was hovering above his list as he seemed to see Paul for the first time.

Before Paul's mental eye flashed a few memorable instances of bullying he'd had to endure at his last school: being locked in a toilet cubical while other pupils threw used toilet paper over the partition; the dinner lady openly spitting onto his food because his father had expelled her son from school; a fresh dog turd left in his locker; not to mention the frequent beatings he took at night after curfew in the boy's shower room, administered with a bar of soap in a sock...

*Teachers pet, is that you?*

His only companions Paul had found at the school's pet zoo. He didn't know why he'd liked the desert shrews best. Maybe because they were kind of cute and ugly at the same time? Another name for them was Muad'dib.

"Muad'dib." Paul said quickly; holding Mr Halleck's gaze.

The teacher raised an eyebrow but jotted down the name before continuing to assign further papers.

When class was over and Paul was packing up his things, the blond girl sauntered over to him.

"Hi, I'm Irulan." She offered him a soft hand to shake. "It's obvious that we two don't quite... belong here." She still smiled sweetly as her eyes wandered the group of teenagers around them. Most were dark, their clothes cheap and plain, while she wore something bright and tight and shiny, perhaps even made by a designer. At least it looked expensive. Paul had an eye for these small things.

He immediately disliked Irulan's attitude.

"Give me your phone." She demanded, entering her number after Paul reluctantly handed over his device. "Call me this afternoon." She turned and rushed out, leaving the light smell of exclusive perfume behind.

"Bitch." Chani seethed next to Paul. He jumped. "Good luck with her."

"Is she that bad?"

"Worse." Chani made a retching sound. "Where're you off to next?"

"Philosophy with Mr de Vries."

"Ah, fuck... someone hates you." Chani shook her head. "It's on the second floor, up the stairs at the end of the corridor, room 203. He's a true asshole. Beware. Vlad loved him."

"Vlad?"

"Our old principal." Chani gave him a hard look. "You can call yourself lucky you missed him. But his cronies are still working here. Sorry, I've to go. Maths with Mr Hawat. Will you meet me for lunch or do you want to hang out with Irulan and her posse?"

"Where?" Paul felt his face heat.

"By the bike shed. I don't like eating at the cafeteria. And they don't like us. We bring our own food." With that she turned and left.

The first shock in Mr de Vries' class is that the innocent looking brute Paul had overheard in the hall this morning is sprawled over a chair at the back of the room.

He's talking animatedly with a big, muscular guy looking more like a senior, so Paul wonders what he's doing here. There's also a certain resemblance in their looks – the ginger hair, the pale eye colour, the full lips – but Paul doesn't dare to look too long in fear he might attract the boys attention.

He chooses a seat as far away from them as possible, but it's no good.

"Hey, you."

Paul doesn't look up as he gets his notepad from his backpack.

"Hey, you!"

A shadow darkens Paul's desk.

"My cousin is talking to you." The big guy is standing in front of Paul, leaning in close while putting both his hands on his desk. His fingers are thick as sausages.

Paul looks up, then over. “Hi.” His voice is small, quivering. He hates himself for being afraid of these two, but they trigger some of his worst fears.

“You’re new here.” It’s not a question. Paul just nods.

The one still slouching on his chair is chewing his full lower lip while seemingly thinking what to make of Paul. Peripherally, he registers that the classroom is filling with more pupils but Paul’s gaze is glued to the redheaded boy.

He winks at Paul. The other one bending over his desk chuckles. Paul forces himself to stay very still but his fingers are leaving sweaty marks on his notepad.

“What’s your name?”

Paul swallows. “Paul.”

“Paul.” It sounds like a four letter word. Well, it *is* a four letter word, but these two make his name sound ridiculous.

The fat guy leans in even further. “That’s a faggot’s name.”

And there it is. Paul feels like he’s trapped in a time loop.

“You’re a faggot, Paul? I think he’s a faggot, don’t you, Rabban?”

“Definitely.”

“And what do we do with faggots?”

Paul is not to know what specific treatment they have in mind for him. From the door a snarling voice calls: “Feyd! Rabban. What are you doing here? Out!”

The shadow hovering over Paul disappears, clearing the view. He can now see the teacher, a small thin guy with bushy eyebrows and a quite intense stare.

Even Feyd sits up straight under that stern gaze.

They’re studying Machiavelli in this lesson. Paul tries to concentrate but he imagines feeling a pair of pale eyes staring daggers at the back of his head. He doesn’t dare to turn around and check, but he feels the well-known tingle of fear.

‘I must not fear...’ he recites his mom’s mantra. Easier said than done.

When class is over the boy called Feyd shoulders him hard in passing, knocking his books out of his hands.

“Faggot.” He hisses, giving Paul a dangerously saccharine smile.

Paul waits until everyone else has left before stepping into the corridor. Eventually, he finds the toilets and locks himself in a cubicle. He lowers his head between his knees, sitting on the



closed toilet lid, taking deep breaths. It's kind of disgusting here, with puddles of whatever liquid on the floor and cigarette burns decorating the door, but there's no other chance to privacy in a school.

He knows this all too well.

He also knows that he fucking hates it here.

# **I need to hear some sounds that recognize the pain in me**

## Chapter Summary

Paul meets new friends

His last class before lunch break is History with an ancient female teacher called Miss Mohiam.

She grills him.

With a superior smile she asks him to answer every question first, only to then call on her best pupils to correct him. It's humiliating. It's frustrating. Paul's actually quite good at history, or so he thought, but after 90 minutes with Miss Mohiam he seriously doubts himself.

She ends the lesson with some rather cynic words: "Remember, these are illusions of popular history which a successful religion must promote: Evil men never prosper; only the brave deserve the fair; honesty is the best policy; actions speak louder than words; virtue always triumphs; a good deed is its own reward; any bad human can be reformed; religious talismans protect one from demon possession; only females understand the ancient mysteries; the rich are doomed to unhappiness. Till next week, I want you to write a 3000 words essay in which you demonstrate upon a historic example how religion was instrumentalized like this, by whom, and for what purpose. Always ask 'cui bono?'"

Paul quickly gathers up his things and makes his way out of the classroom with his head hanging low, his hair falling into his eyes, hiding his face. Down the stairs. Out of the first door he sees. He's standing in a bleak concrete yard. The sun is burning, so no one else is outside. The only highlight here is a ping-pong table. Behind it stretches a withered football pitch. And at its far edge a bike shed can be seen.

When Paul arrives there a few figures crouch in its shadow.

There's Chani, sitting cross-legged on the dusty ground, a Tupperbox filled with sliced yellow fruit in her lap.

Others squat in a semi-circle around her.

As Paul comes closer they all put their lunch boxes down in the middle.

Chani smiles up at him, gesturing for Paul to join them.

"Sit down."

Paul kneels awkwardly.

“You bring something?” A guy to his left asks.

Paul opens his backpack. He’s glad now that his mom had urged him to take a lunchbox. It is filled with crackers and grapes. He puts it next to the other containers.

“Nice.” A girl with short dark hair and huge silver earrings says.

“Okay, this is the new guy. Paul.” Chani introduces him. “And these are Jamis, Still, Harah, and Farok.”

They nod, wave and grin.

“Hi.” Paul isn’t sure what else to say.

“Let’s eat before the heat melts everything.” The earring girl, Harah, says, and grabs what looks like a small sandwich from one of the containers.

Paul forces himself to nibble on something. The food isn’t bad but he’s not hungry. Or rather, he’s still far too anxious to eat.

“Delicious grapes.” Farok comments. Paul isn’t sure if he’s taking the piss or not.

The others are talking about people and places he doesn’t know. He sits by in silence, wondering when it would be appropriate to leave.

After about ten minutes, he gathers his empty lunch box and stands up.

“Excuse me...,” he mumbles and hopes to be allowed to quietly slip away.

“Where’re you going?” The guy who Chani called Still is asking. He’s scruffy looking, shaggy brown hair, big nose. But his eyes are kind and his smile is friendly. Paul can read such small signs.

“I just... I need to... do... stuff...” It sounds so lame it’s obvious he’s lying.

“Stuff? What stuff?” Still grins.

Paul feels himself blush. Why does he always have to be so socially awkward around people?

He forces himself to shrug casually. “Just stuff.”

“You seem hella anxious.” Jamis says. He has a nose piercing, Paul notices, a small golden loop in his left nostril. “You should relax more.”

A strained sigh escapes Paul. “I wish I could.”

“I’ve just what you need.” Farok takes a spliff from the front bag of his grey hoodie.

Paul blinks. Chani and Harah laugh.

“I shouldn’t. My mom says I shouldn’t-“

“My mom says the same.” Harah chuckles, reaching for the joint. “Who cares?” She lights up.

The intense sweet smell fills the hot air.

Paul watches the joint circle. He’s not sitting back down but he’s not leaving either. Then it’s his turn as Still passes him the spliff.

He really, really shouldn’t... but his mum doesn’t have to attend this fucking school. So what does she know?

He inhales. Not too much. Just a little.

His knees give out but he kind of masks it as slumping back down. Black spots appear before his eyes and he quickly passes the joint on to Farok.

He only hears white noise in his ears. Golden speckles dance in the sunlight. He thinks he tastes something sugary in his mouth, like cotton candy. Then a copper stench fills his nose. His tongue feels furry, like he’s chewing a dust cloth. He coughs. And coughs again.

“Paul?” It’s Chani. Her face is at a strange angle and it takes a moment for Paul to realize she’s looking down at him from above.

“Yeah?” His voice is thick.

He tries to focus, to look in the direction of Chani’s voice. But instead of her he sees the fat face of the previous principal, a salacious grin on his lips. Then Chani is re-appearing, but she looks somewhat different... suddenly, there’s a knife lying on the ground, dripping with blood. Paul wonders where it came from. But he somehow knows it’s his. And that scares him.

A hand touches his shoulder and he twitches in panic. He reaches for the knife but it’s gone...

“Bro, you almost passed out.” Now Farok’s face is coming into view. Paul feels his mouth break into a grin, dry lips cracking. He can’t stop smiling. Then he notices he’s lying on the ground. He starts to shake uncontrollably.

“Where did you get this stuff?” Chani asks Farok, sounding somewhat alarmed.

He just shrugs. “It’s the usual.” But he looks doubtful.

Chani shakes her head, frowning. “Paul?”

“Give him some water.” Harah suggest.

It’s better after he drinks some water. The copper smell is almost gone, as is the weird taste in his mouth. As he sits back up the world tilts back onto its axis.

“Sorry.” Paul is feeling the comedown by now. “I had such a fucked day.” He rakes his hands through his hair. Yes, that must’ve been the reason, all the stress he’s been through today.

“What happened?” Chani asks. She’s squatting in front of him, holding the water bottle.

“There’s this guy I met two times today. Ginger. Wears black leather. Name’s-“

“Feyd.” His new friends say in unison.

“Yeah... You know him?”

The group exchanges a look.

“Feyd-Rautha Harkonnen. Vladimir Harkonnen’s nephew. A real piece of shit.” Chani looks worried. Paul doesn’t like it.

“He... said some nasty things to me.” Paul tries to swallow but his mouth is suddenly dry again, so he reaches for the water.

“What things?” Even Farok sounds a little uneasy.

Paul doesn’t want to repeat that word. He’s doesn’t know these guys too well. Maybe their views don’t differ so much from the rest when it comes to certain topics. This is high school after all. No one likes outsiders. Not even outsiders.

“Just... some stupid shit. Nevermind.”

“You know, Feyd is really... unpleasant.” Everyone suddenly seems quite serious.

“Like Irulan?” Paul tries to joke.

Chani rolls her eyes. “Irulan’s just an arrogant bitch. Feyd is dangerous.”

They all nod in agreement.

“Dangerous?” Paul’s voice is a little shaky.

Silence. Then Still coughs. “There was this party. Feyd drugged a guy. Then knifed him. Just like that. The guy barely survived.”

“Why? Did they have some beef?” Paul asks, feeling a bit dizzy.

“No.” Chani shakes her head. “That’s just Feyd’s idea of fun. I guess when you live with an uncle like his...” She shrugs.

The relaxed mood has evaporated completely. They start to gather up their stuff. Then Jamis says: “Try to avoid him. That’s really all you can do.”

Great advice, Paul thinks. But how is he going to do that when they share at least one class?

# **I made a fool of myself yet once again**

## Chapter Summary

It's PE class...

In the afternoon, there's PE with a teacher called Duncan Idaho. Paul wants to laugh at that name until he meets the man.

He's at least 6'7. Long hair. Full beard. Built like a mountain. Fit as fuck.

No one is making fun of Mr Idaho. Not even Feyd – who is, of course, in the very same PE class.

He strolls onto the field wearing black shorts and a black sleeveless mesh shirt, flicking a cigarette butt into the wilted shrubbery. Paul wonders if he carries a knife in his pocket.

First, Mr Idaho lets them run a few rounds around the withered football pitch. That's not too bad. Paul is good at running. His lithe body is made for endurance sports.

Feyd is at the back of the pack, more walking than jogging. But Mr Idaho isn't having it, shouting at him to get a move on.

“Come on, Feyd, you don't want to be lapped!”

Paul tries not to care, tries not to pay too much attention to Feyd. He listens to his own heartbeat, his breathing. It's a bit like meditation.

After warm-up, they are paired for a bit of stretching.

Paul hopes to get Jamis, who's also in this class, but Mr Idaho has other ideas.

“Feyd, you team up with the new one.”

Paul's stomach drops as he sits on the dusty ground opposite Feyd. His pale eyes twinkle mischievously.

“Hi, faggot.” Feyd mouths. He sits down heavily on Paul's legs for him to do sit-ups, his fingers painfully digging into Paul's lean thighs.

Feyd doesn't blink while Paul works himself up into a sweat. He just stares down at him so Paul feels like an especially enthralling but likewise disgusting bug. His breathing is ragged and his stomach muscles start to cramp but he doesn't want to give Feyd the satisfaction of outstaring him and forces himself to hold his gaze.

“Change.” Mr Idaho shouts.

Now it’s Paul’s turn to sit on Feyd’s legs.

“Don’t get a hard-on, faggot.” Feyd stage-whispers. A few guys around them snicker.

It’s enough, Paul decides. Maybe he’s still a bit high from lunch and therefore braver than usual. Maybe his mom’s lessons about not always turning the other cheek have sunken in. Anyway, even at the risk of a knife buried in his stomach, Paul decides to dig his protruding seat bones deep into Feyd’s ankles as he squats on his shins. That’s the advantage of being skinny. Seeing the boy wince feels quite good.

“Ouch.”

“What?” Paul asks innocently, brushing sweaty curls from his forehead. “Have you strained something?”

Jamis is working out next to them. He laughs, but then disguises his amusement with a cough.

“Fucking fairy.” Feyd hisses.

Mr Idaho stops next to them.

“Problem, guys?”

Paul doesn’t answer. Feyd eventually shakes his head. His face is blotched and red, an unattractive look for his fair ginger complexion.

“Good. Go on.”

They do, in silence.

After stretching, they don’t play football. They play soccer.

Paul loves soccer. It’s like chess on grass. Just faster.

He plays on the left wing. Feyd is also on his team, as center-forward.

The other team scores first. Then Jamis, who plays defender, serves Paul, who hits a cross over to Feyd, of all people.

He dribbles around the other team’s defender, and then the ball hits the net.

Feyd screams, running over to Paul, throwing him to the ground with a mixture of a dropkick and a hug. Jamis is also there, as are the other boys from their team. They all end up in a pile on what remains of the grass on the pitch.

They win by a goal resulting from another Paul-Feyd combination.

Back in the changing room, all the boys drop their sweaty, dirty kits and head for the showers, high-fiving each other, shouting over the sound of the running water.

Paul stays back, fidgeting with his shorts, his shoes, his t-shirt... He hates getting naked in front of others. His body looks like a stick figure. A pre-pubescent stick figure, for he's practically hairless. Someone once called his chest a chicken breast.

Jamis, with shampoo in his dark hair and otherwise naked as on the day he was born, calls his name: "Paul, come on, or the hot water will be gone!"

He should have taken his dad up on his offer for the ride home. He can't go on a bus in his smelly state.

From the corner of his eyes he sees Feyd on the far side of the shower, talking with two other boys as they soap their skin. He's not paying any attention to Paul. So eventually he drops his shorts and steps under the lukewarm spray, turning his back to everyone, facing the cracked white tiles.

He tries to be quite quick but his curls seem to soak up shampoo and take ages to rinse. Everyone is already towelling off when he comes back into the changing room. At least he has a towel around his narrow hips.

The hook where his clothes had hung is empty. There's only a pile of dirty sportswear on the floor.

He feels his face flush.

"Very funny. Where's my stuff?" He looks around. Most boys are avoiding his gaze.

"What's the problem, Paul?" Jamis is next to him, already half dressed.

"My clothes are gone." Paul feels very naked, suddenly on the verge of crying.

Feyd comes out of the loo with the two other boys he talked to in the showers. They all grin.

"Problem?"

Paul rushes past them and into the toilets – too late. His clothes swim in the pissoir, drenched in urine.

He just stands there and stares.

"Fuck." Jamis exhales behind him. "Let me get Mr Idaho."

Paul closes his eyes, takes a breath, then grabs Jamis' arm. "No." He knows from experience that involving a teacher will only make matters worse.

This could even go before the headmaster. Then Paul's true identity would be discovered. This little incident could pale to what's in store for him should Feyd find out who he really is.



Instead of calling on Mr Idaho, Paul marches back into the changing room right up to where Feyd is shouldering his backpack to leave. He won't cave in this time. He won't survive another year of bullying.

"You-!" Paul grabs Feyd's arm, swirls him around and punches his face so hard he thinks he can hear bones crack and teeth splinter.

But Feyd looks more surprised than hurt. He shoves Paul backwards but he holds onto his arm and they both tumble to the ground. Soon, they are intertwined in a kicking, scratching and biting knot of limbs. The other boys have formed a circle around them, cheering them on.

Now the copper taste in Paul's mouth is very real.

Suddenly, a loud voice thunders through the cacophony, drowning out everything else. Two huge hands pull them apart, holding them at arms length.

"What's going on here?" Mr Idaho wants to know.

No one answers him.

"Apologize, or I'll drag you both over to the principal's office!"

"Sorry." Paul swallows blood.

To his surprise, Feyd says sorry too.

"You worked so well as a team. And now this! I'm quite disappointed. For the rest of the term you too will play on every team together and do every exercise together. And if I so much as sense animosity between you, I'll have you both expelled. Is that clear?"

They both give a brief nod.

In the end, Feyd leaves, and Paul stuffs his wet clothes into his sports bag, breathing through his mouth. Jamis helps him to pick a somewhat makeshift outfit from the trunk lost and forgotten clothes are collected in. Paul ends up wearing too short blue track pants and an itchy woollen jumper, but it's better than getting on the bus just in a towel or his dirty sports kit. At least he still has his sport shoes and doesn't have to go barefoot.

When he arrives home, he quickly sprints up the stairs to his room, changes, then runs down into the basement to put his clothes into the wash without his mother noticing. But he shouldn't have bothered as he realizes when he enters the kitchen.

There's a note from his mom saying she and his little sister Alia went out. Of course, his father isn't back home yet. Very likely an important meeting with important people... more important than his family.

But then, Paul isn't too sad to have the house to himself. This way, no one will discover his humiliation. His mother possesses a sixth sense when it comes to detecting her son's mishaps.

He's getting a glass of milk from the fridge when his phone lights up. He'd been prudent enough to keep it in his backpack and not in his trouser pockets, otherwise it would have been ruined.

But over all the trouble he had totally forgotten that he was supposed to ring Irulan.

He cautiously swipes the screen. "Hello."

# There's always something left behind

## Chapter Summary

We learn a bit more about Paul...

“Hi, did you forget about me?” The voice on the other end asks a bit petulant.

“Sorry, I just came home.”

There follows a long minute of silence. Paul doesn't know what else to say. He can't share what happened in the changing room. Though Irulan will hear about it – like the rest of the school – by tomorrow. The latest.

“Okay...,” Irulan seems doubtful. “Uhm, anyway, our assignment.”

“Yes.” Paul is eager to steer their conversation onto safe ground.

“Have you read any Celan?”

“Of course!

*„Nachts, wenn das Pendel der Liebe schwingt  
zwischen Immer und Nie,  
stößt dein Wort zu den Monden des Herzens  
und dein gewitterhaft blaues  
Aug reicht der Erde den Himmel.“*

„Okay, okay,“ Irulan interrupts him. „Great, you speak German. Just, give me the gist of it and I'll design a hell of a presentation.”

“It's not that simple.” Paul tries to find the right words to explain the magical, surrealist idiosyncrasy of Celan's poetry, but Irulan doesn't seem to be interested in such intricacies.

“What do you mean? Don't make things difficult.” She's annoyed, Paul can hear it.

“I'm not. It's just... this is poetry. It's not easy to translate. It's about this sense... no, this feeling-”

“Okay, I think we should meet. This seems to require some real talk.”

“Now?”

“Well, of course not now. I'm busy. Tomorrow afternoon. Shall we say your place?”

“No!”

“Okayyyy...” she clearly thinks him a weirdo by now.

He has to make up a believable explanation. Quickly. “It’s just... we have worms. Woodworms. In the beams. Everything is wrapped up in plastic sheeting. The exterminator sprays poisonous gas.” He coughs a little for affirmation. “It’s really not fit for visitors.”

“Well, my place then. I’ll text you the address. At five. Don’t be late.”

“I won’t.” Paul assures her but she’s already ended the call.

Paul puts the carton of milk he’d grabbed back into the fridge, then wanders his new home. Unpacked boxes line the floor. Half-heartedly, he opens one and takes a few things out. It seems to contain mostly knickknack. A small bronze figure of a bull that once belonged to his grandfather. A strangely shaped sharp object Paul thinks might be a paper knife belonging to his mother. A jar filled with orange sand, collected during one of their travels.

He arranges these objects on the mantelpiece in the living room, moving them around until he’s satisfied.

It’s not easy making a home cozy when you’ve spent the last years living at a boarding school where your father was headmaster. It’s like living in your dad’s office. Paul hopes they can build something better here.

Especially for Alia. If people think him strange – they think his sister a freak.

Though, somehow, Alia seems unbothered by it. She’s unabashedly herself. Paul has no idea how she copes but he admires her for it.

Unsure what to do with himself, Paul goes back upstairs to his room. There he unpacks a few of his own crates full of clothes and books. He finds a battered edition of Celan’s poems (in German) and puts them on his nightstand to browse through later in preparation for tomorrow.

Then he decides to do a bit of decorating and pins a Mapplethorpe print on the wall above his bed. He wonders if his parents will say something, ask questions. So far, his father seems quite oblivious. Paul’s not so sure about his mum.

Alia, of course, knows, because snooping around as she does, she’s found his journal. Unaware as she is of personal boundaries, she’s read it. Quite openly. Paul had found her sitting on his bed, cross-legged, absorbed in his most private thoughts.

“Alia, what the fuck, give it to me!” He’d snatched the journal from her little hands.

She had looked up with her strange huge blue eyes. “That boy is treating you like shit. Why’re you even in love with him?”

“That’s none of your business!” Paul had snapped and thrown her out.

But her words had rung in his ears for days. All the way until they'd left Caladan. He hadn't bothered to say good-bye to Tim. A last humiliation avoided. It hadn't felt like a win, though.

He's fishing for his journal he keeps stuffed under his mattress when his phone lights up again.

A DM on Insta, from an account called Sihaya10191.

>FirePuma142? Seriously?<

Paul picks up this phone.

>Who's that?<

Simultaneously, he types the handle into the search bar. The account he finds is private.

>Guess!<

>Not in the mood<

>Yeah, I heard about the locker room<

So it's not Feyd. Or he's taking the piss (now figuratively). But why would he bother to DM Paul?

>How?<

>Jamis told me<

>So you're a friend of Jamis?<

A picture arrives. It's Chani's face, grinning.

>Send me a follower request<

Paul does, and her profile unlocks. He sees pictures of her with Harah, Stil, Farok, Jamis in different locations. In parking lots. At bus stops. A diner. They laugh and make silly faces. Harah and Jamis kiss in a few snapshots.

>How did you find me?> Paul asks.

>Female Intuition \*wink emoji\*<

>Yeah, sure<

A follower request pops up in Paul's inbox. He quickly mulls over the content of his account. Not that there's much. A few snaps that won't mean a thing to others but are important to him. Cause they remind him of Tim.

>Wanna hang out tonight?< Chani asks.

>I'm knackered<

>Come on, old man<

Paul's eyes wander around his room, resting on the Celan book. He's sure he knows enough about his writing without reading up on it tonight.

The house is silent.

Nothing holds him here.

>Ok, when and where?<

>\*smiley face\* You have a car?<

>Sorry, just a bike<

Chani texts him an address.

>That's the estate where we all live. We'll wait for you in the parking lot<

# Dare

Paul follows the directions on the map, glimpsing at his phone screen as often as he dares while steering his bike with his free hand. He's getting increasingly worried he might have taken the wrong turn. For the roads get poorer and poorer, with huge potholes in the asphalt. Night is falling, but most of the street lamps are broken. The houses lining the streets look like ruins and Paul would've thought them derelict and empty, but some of the otherwise black window holes are illuminated. There are people sitting on the curb as well, and Paul feels their eyes on himself as he bikes past them.

Eventually, after passing a long stretch of dusty no-man's-land, he sees a structure looming at the horizon. As he comes closer, a concrete building emerges, more long than high, square, brutally planted within the barren landscape like someone dropped it from above, a discarded architectural residue that for some strange reasons people decided to inhabit.

In the gloomy twilight it looks absolutely haunting.

There's a concrete square in front of the building, resting place for some abandoned, burned out vehicles. On a bench below a rusty basketball hoop that has lost its net a long time ago sits a group of people. They wave when Paul approaches.

"Hey, you made it!" Stil shouts, patting Paul's shoulder while he looks around for a place to park his bike. In the end he decides to carefully lean it against the broken fence separating the parking lot from the carcass of a playground.

He greets Harah and Jamis, briefly hugs Chani.

"Where's Farok?"

"Some family business." Harah answers.

As Paul raises a questioning eyebrow, Chani fills him in: "He has to help in the shop his family runs. Every afternoon until late. But don't mention it, he's embarrassed. Don't know why, as his family is the only one I know with an honest job."

"What do your parents do?" Paul asks without thinking.

"They're dead." Chani shrugs as he starts to make a sad face. "Don't worry, I can barely remember them. It's been a long while. I'm living with my aunt now."

"She's cool." Jamis grins.

"She is, but she's also a pain in the arse. She always wanted to be a scientist but that didn't work out and now she's pushing and nagging all the time for me to get good grades so I'll win a scholarship for a good university."

“You will.” Harah high-fives Chani. Her big earrings sparkle in the light of a flame as Stil lights a cigarette.

“We’ll see.” Chani stares at the barren ground. It’s too dark but Paul thinks she’s blushing.

“You’re the smartest of us all.” Stil throws an arm around her shoulder and squeezes her.

“Shut up.” Chani punches him in the chest and he coughs, almost dropping his cigarette.

“But if it works out, what would you like to study?” Paul is curious.

“Environmental research.” She answers quick as a shot.

Paul is impressed.

“Wow.”

“Yeah, I told you she’s smart.” Stil sounds proud.

Paul wonders if there’s something going on between them.

“What about you?” Paul asks no one in particular, just throws the question out into the group.

“Jamis is only interested in martial arts.” Harah laughs.

“I want to have my own dojo. That’s my dream. Instructing all those kids who hang around the estate, doing nothing, only getting into trouble.”

“You sound like one of the social workers.” Stil teases.

“So what?” Jamis looks him square in the face. Paul realizes he’s serious.

“I’ve no idea what to do with myself.” Harah says. “Maybe I’ll just have a few kids.” She giggles, side-eyeing Jamis. He kisses her rather sloppily on the mouth.

“I’m going to built my own business.” Stil says, staring over Chani’s shoulder into the night.

Everyone starts laughing.

“Like what?” Chani asks.

“It’ll come to me.” Stil smiles rather confident.

“What about you?” Harah asks Paul.

He freezes for a second. “No idea, that’s why I asked. I like philosophy, poetry... but how is one to earn money with that sort of thing?”

“Become a writer. A poet. Or a philosopher.” Paul isn’t sure if Chani’s taking the piss. “Or a revolutionary.”



“First, I have to survive school.”

“Yeah...,” Jamis conspiratorially looks at the others.

No one says a word.

“So you all know?” Paul asks wearily.

They reluctantly nod.

“Feyd is such an asshole.” Harah declares. “Someone should put him in his place.”

They all nod again.

“I’d really like to pay him back.” Paul whispers.

They all share a look.

“Let’s have a beer first.” Stil suggests, reaching behind the bench and opening a can.

Alcohol is another thing his mother has warned Paul about. But as he has already broken one of her rules today he thinks he can continue with his unruly behaviour. He’s 17, for fucks sake! A becoming revolutionary.

It’s the cheapest brand available, but the first swallow tastes like ambrosia, especially as Paul is parched after his bike ride.

Stil pulls out a knife and slams it into the can, pulling the lid with the other hand. He presses the can to his mouth as beer start to gush out.

Everyone cheers.

Paul has never shotgunned a beer so he drinks too much, too fast. The supply seems endless. Quickly, his head feels light. They all laugh, talking nonsense, making stupid jokes, arms around each other, heads resting on a comforting shoulder.

Paul allows himself to relax, to feel at ease.

This time, he doesn’t taste copper. He feels good, actually. So good. Dizzy, but good. Euphoric. Their surroundings lose its drab atmosphere and starts to appear full of possibilities. No one is here to stop them, to control them, to tell them what to do. Paul has never felt so free. He could be anyone, do anything. He sees not one but many futures – in which he’s happy, content, having fun with his friends... his lovers...

In one of these visions, he’s with Tim. They’re kissing in a busy street and Tim doesn’t pull back, doesn’t tell Paul he’s weird and should stop behaving like this. Paul closes his eyes, giving himself over to the fantasy just a little longer... he can still smell Tim’s smell. It’s sweet. Cinnamon. Orange.

He drinks more beer.

There are other boys. Men. There are fights. There's bliss. Happiness. Sadness. A funeral. A baby.

It's life. Or lives. Many lives.

The many lives of Paul Atreides.

He laughs out loud.

Stil hugs him, handing him another can.

"Paul... you're one of a kind."

At this moment, Paul loves him.

At one point, Jamis and Harah leave, holding hands. Usually, Paul would now feel like a third wheel, but the alcohol warms him from the inside and shuts his brain off somehow. At least the part that always worries.

He's sitting on the bench between Chani and Stil and they all gaze up into the night sky where the second moon is just appearing.

"He's named after you." Chani giggles.

"What... Paul?" Paul asks. God, he's drunk.

"Muad'dib." Chani swallows too much beer which gives her a violent coughing fit.

Paul pats her on the back. "Oh... yeah... I know, it's ridiculous..."

Stil gives him a strange look. Maybe it's because he's touching Chani a little too long. Maybe it's because Paul isn't a very good liar. Paul hopes Stil is as plastered as he is.

To divert his attention he jumps up from the bench. "Okay, what're we going to do now?"

"Well..." Stil is looking at Chani who's still trying to get her breath back.

She shakes her head. "No..."

"Why not?" There's a sharp undertone in Stil's voice.

"Because he just arrived today-"

"You already seem quite taken with him."

Chani gets up and stands before Stil, who actually seems to shrink a little.

"What's your problem?"

"I just think if he really wants to be one of us we have to test his courage."

“Stil, no, that’s stupid-“

“I’ll do it.” Paul is surprised to hear his own voice say those words.

No one has ever asked him to play chicken. He suddenly passionately wants to belong.

“You hear him?” Stil asks triumphantly.

Chani turns around. “Paul, you don’t have to do this.” But there’s a gleam in her eyes, something wild and primal.

“What’s your dare?” Paul asks Stil, raising his chin.

Suddenly, Stil has a knife in his hand.

“Let’s pay someone a visit.”

## **Anyone can make a mistake**

Paul has no real memory how they got to the address in what seems to be a rather posh part of the town. Big old houses sitting within huge gardens, barely visible from the street.

He's still high, and the old trees lining the pavement sing to him when his fingertips brush their bark. He can swear he hears them hum.

Chani is there, next to him. And there's Stil, a few steps ahead. Paul stumbles after him while Chani holds his hand.

Next, they climb a fence, Stil pulling Paul up while Chani nimbly gets atop the concrete wall. Sitting on the cope, Paul can make out lights in the distance.

The building is not like the other elegant villas they'd passed. It's a brutalist cube that looks like a bunker, its windows just slits. To Paul it feels extremely hostile.

When they run across a manicured lawn to hide behind brambles Paul expects bloodhounds chasing after them. But the night stays silent.

"Where are we?" He whispers.

Stil and Chani share a look.

"This is where Feyd lives."

Now Chani hands him something.

It's the knife.

"What-?" But they shush him as a door opens onto a wide terrace in front of them, just a few yards away. A single figure steps outside, framed for a second by bright light from behind. Then the door closes and it's almost dark again, only the two pale moons ghostly illuminating the scene.

A flame flashes. Paul briefly sees Feyd's face, eerie in the flickering light from below. But it quickly fades to grey behind the orange glow of a cigarette.

Feyd smokes hastily.

There's a sudden noise from inside the house. It sounds like glass crashing against a wall.

For a moment, the glowing tip freezes mid-air. Then the orange glow moves away from the house, towards the three people crouching behind the thorny shrubbery.

A roar pierces the night, a deep, guttural voice.

"Feyd!"

He doesn't look back, steps onto the lawn and Paul can see him now. His face is blank. But his shoulders are tense and his free hand is balled into a fist.

"Now." Stil whispers and pushes Paul into the open, right within Feyd's field of vision.

"You?" Feyd mouths surprised, or actually rather bewildered. But the acerbic, mocking sarcasm Paul heard at school is gone from his tone. There's even a kind of jaded fatigue to him.

Until he sees the knife in Paul's hand. That sight seems to wake Feyd up a little. He seems neither frightened nor worried, but there's a new alertness to his posture.

Paul sways. He has no idea what he's doing here. The night air is too warm, suffocating him. His head spins. To steady himself, he raises his arms to keep his balance. The blade in his right hand sparkles in the light of the two moons.

The copper taste is back in Paul's mouth. He spits onto the lawn and for a moment feels wild and daring. Maybe even brave.

His silence seems to make Feyd uneasy. He looks as if he wants to back away, but behind him is only the house with the screaming, angry man inside.

Feyd drops his cigarette.

"What is this?" He asks. But his voice is low, as if he wants to placate this unexpected intruder.

Paul has no answer for him. He wonders why he doesn't call for help, why he doesn't sneer at him. Where's his loud-mouthed bravado now?

But he likes the look on Feyd's face as he continues to wave the knife in front of him.

It's not quite fear, but he suddenly appears like the school boy he is. Young, alone, uncertain...

It makes Paul grin as he revels in this moment. Who's laughing now?

"Listen, what I said today, I didn't mean it..." Feyd's voice is persuasive as he takes a step towards Paul, hands stretched out as if to offer a peace sacrifice.

More noise from inside the house. Now it sounds as if someone is chopping up the furniture.

Feyd looks back over his shoulder, and that's when Paul stumbles and falls forward.

They both land on the grass, and Feyd makes a weird sound, something between a cough and a sigh.

Hot, wet, sticky moisture runs over Paul's right hand. As he looks down he realizes the knife is buried to the hilt in Feyd's stomach.

Suddenly, he feels quite sober.

“Shit...” He jumps back up, pulling the knife out. Blood gushes from the wound.

Feyd groans.

Then Stil and Chani are behind him, hauling him away.

“But we can’t leave him like that!” Paul shouts, his shrill voice ringing much too loud in the otherwise silent garden.

As he looks back at Feyd he’s still half lying on the ground, raising an arm like a drowning man calling for help. His other hand is pressed against his stomach, thick blood oozing between his fingers.

Paul frees himself from Stil’s grip just as the terrace door opens once again.

“Hey, who’s there?!” A hoarse voice shouts. The doorway is filled with a bulking mass, blocking out almost all the light from inside.

Paul doesn’t think. He just takes Feyd’s hand, pulls him to his feet, grabs him around his shoulders and starts to run.

He can hear voices yell after them.

He can also hear Feyd’s heavy breathing. He can even feel his hot breath on his cheek.

He doesn’t stop until they reach the garden wall. They can’t climb over it, not with Feyd losing so much blood.

“There’s a breach... behind a bush, somewhere down there.” Feyd pants, indicating the direction with a nod of his head.

Paul follows the wall until there’s a hedge growing in front of it and yes, there, behind a huge old rhododendron is a gap in the wall. They stumble through it and are back on the street.

Paul remembers Stil and Chani and looks around, but they are nowhere to be seen.

By now Feyd is toppling over, sinking to his knees while the hand pressed against his stomach trembles.

The bloody knife is still in Paul’s hand.

He stares at it for a moment before dropping it.

“No, don’t leave it here.” Feyd gasps.

So Paul picks it up again, disgusted by its stickiness. He desperately wants to wash his hands.

“My car...” Feyd gestures down the road and Paul lifts him up again and drags him forward.

Eventually, they reach an old beige Ford Mustang. Feyd fishes with his bloody hand inside his trouser pockets for the keys.

“You drive.” He hands them to Paul, leaving a bloody handprint on the passenger door as he tries to steady himself a little.

“Where to?” Paul takes the keys, covered in Feyd’s blood. He’s never driven a car before.

“Hospital.” Feyd huffs. He’s pale.

Paul somehow maneuvers him onto the passenger seat , then climbs behind the wheel.

He’s seen his parents drive. This can’t be that difficult.

He turns the key and gives himself over to his intuition. The car bucks forward.

“Ease off the clutch... now shift into gear... accelerate...” Feyd’s eyes are closed, his head lolling from one side to the other as he blurts out commands.

But Paul is a quick learner. And a surprisingly good driver.

They hit the main road and follow it.

“You know the way?” Paul asks but Feyd doesn’t answer. There’s a sweaty sheen on his ashen face.

Paul takes out his phone. “Direction to the nearest hospital.” He demands.

It only takes about five minutes. But that's because Paul doesn't bother stopping at red lights, nor does he care about other traffic regulations.

He almost carries Feyd inside the ER. They must look like a crime scene because instantly nurses are all over them, putting Feyd onto a gurney while simultaneously checking Paul over.

Feyd is carted away and Paul is led into an exam room once the nurses are satisfied that he’s not the one bleeding to death. As he sits on a stretcher he looks down at himself. His clothes are soaked with blood. Feyd’s blood.

He has no idea where the knife has gone.

His head starts to hurt, a pounding pain that makes him screw his eyes shut. When he opens them again a doctor has entered the room.

“Tell me what happened?” She asks.

Paul swallows. His mouth is dry.

“How is he?” He croaks out.

“Still in surgery, but it’s looking okay.”

Paul sighs, leaning back against the vomit-green wall.

“So, what happened? Who did this to your friend?”

Paul stares down at his hands for a long minute. Then he shrugs.

“Would you like to call your parents?” The doctor asks sympathetically.

Paul shakes his head. The pain increases and he stops.

“Can I just wait?” He asks.

“Sure. But can you give me your and your friend’s name so we can contact your parents?”

Paul remembers the screaming man, his impression that Feyd wanted to be as far away from him as possible...

“His name’s... Stil. I don’t know him that well. I’ve just started school here today...” He trails off.

Has it really been just one day?



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