

Disclosure

By Bunny McFadden

Part I

Isra

"I know something you don't know," whispered Isra playfully as the procession of turnips passed. Thin blonde mothers and frowning fathers in rows of black downy jackets took measured steps around them. The crowd crept closer to the children who paraded through the town but maintained an invisible gap around Isra and her friends. She barely noticed the crowd avoiding the sullen flock of teens, nor the drones filming above for broadcast; Isra was too excited about the gossip she'd seen on social media. "I heard that in St. Gallen they already got theirs!"

"No way," her brother Mo replied, fidgeting nervously with his smart watch. Holographic advertisements toggled in and out of view; Mo was perpetually fighting against the updates that defeated his ad blockers. "Nobody has their report cards yet. You're so naive."

"And you're so cynical!"

The twins switched to Turkish, bickering quietly while the late autumn parade passed down *Poststrasse*. Mo held up his watch and said in English, "All of you are so naive!"

Some of the mothers looked up at him, frowning at the interruption.

"None of you have anything encrypted!"

"Don't start that again," Isra snapped at her brother. "Nobody is going to use your silly little encryption app."

"Silly? I'm not the one spending hours putting together a vision board for a wedding!" he whispered, his voice just loud enough for his sister to hear.

"Be quiet. You're making me miss the parade!"

Mo rolled his eyes at her in return and went back to fiddling on his watch.

Isra smiled at a little boy walking past them. He wore a cute little black bat costume, complete with soft purple ears flopping atop the bonnet over his curly hair. The boy smiled back with gapped teeth back at her; the mothers around them seemed stern and disapproving, but Isra tried to say, "You're doing a great job!" with her smile.

"Looks like that one at least carved his own," Mila said next to her, adjusting her red

woolly scarf. Isra smiled harder at the kid. She pictured herself pouring sunshine and good energy into her aura.

It worked! The little boy waved at the group of teens who huddled in the chilled air. He swung his turnip proudly, displaying the lopsided smiley face he had carved into it.

Isra looked at the other kids walking in the parade. Most of them were young and still had baby fat on their cheeks. They waddled like fluffy lambs, bundled in their winter outfits. The sixth-years were already too old for this; they were relegated to tables where they had to sell their carvings next to the sausage carts. Isra sighed wistfully, imagining the butterflies she'd carve on hers. The only benefit of aging that Isra could see was that she was old enough to come down to the lake and see the parade alone.

Well, mostly alone. Next to her, Mo frowned. She could practically feel her brother's pessimism sometimes, like a cold wind discouraging everything it touched.

#

Mila

Mila frowned at the carved turnips for sale on the tables by the parade route. It was clear to her that some of the parents, particularly the affluent ones, held the knives that had made these elaborate *Räbelichtli*. Her uncle would scoff at the one on the corner and point out how there were tulips and peonies, proof that no child could have possibly carved it.

"Look," Mila said, pointing to a boy with warm terracotta skin and a bat costume. "At least that boy made that one himself." The boy's bandaged finger corroborated Mila's theory. "I can't believe they don't do this for themselves." She tutted, sounding much older than 15.

"My buddy in Basel told me we're getting our report cards mailed straight to our parents," David said, shuddering in the wind. "Can you imagine your parents seeing everything you looked up, or what you texted to the group chat? So embarrassing."

"I think Mo's right," Mila said, twiddling her blonde hair between her fingers thoughtfully. "Zeit Bright shouldn't have all of this info." She tucked her hands under her wool scarf.

Mo leaned in, having heard his name.

"Did I hear someone say I'm right?" he said. "Did you hear that, Isra?"

When Isra thought about it, Mo seemed to be right about a lot of things. Sure, he was critical, but he knew more about tech than any of them. It was strange to use her watch almost every waking minute of the day and not know how it really worked.

"Maybe we should give your brother's app a chance," she whispered to Isra.

The little bat boy swung his lantern higher and higher until his pendulum nearly made a

full circle. He giggled, and the teacher caught wind. The stern woman immediately chastised him.

None of the other children wore costumes, and Mila felt a gnawing in her ribs when she saw the boy's light go out in the wind. She was 15, and as such obviously much older and wiser, but she'd felt like the little bat boy before. Alone, unsure, and told to grow up. Hopefully he'd toughen up, because they didn't give you much time to be a kid these days.

#

David

The turnips along the steps glowed menacingly, their misshapen stars and squiggles vaguely nauseating. Perhaps it was his lingering headache, but when he listened to the family next to them, it sounded like they were mocking one of the kids saying he was being a naughty field bat. He blinked. There weren't any bats here, were there?

David frowned, unfamiliar with the dialect. Although he was a native German speaker, he could never quite understand people here. The other day, he embarrassed himself trying to buy a Nutella butter croissant from the cybernetic counter clerk at the bakery near their apartment. The Swiss Germans had their own name for it, a *gipfeli*. If it wasn't for the fact that he was about to land a spot in the Flying Footballer junior league at the Red Bull academy in Salzburg, he'd try a little harder. He wasn't lazy or anything, but this country didn't even have a spot in FIFA's top 15. There was no point in learning their dialect when he had drills to practice and opponents to study.

The footballer stopped trying to make sense of the conversations he could overhear and instead looked over at his friends.

"What do you think is on your report card, Mila?"

Mila shrugged nonchalantly, sipping her warm apple cider, but she glanced at her watch. David checked his as well. He felt his eyes cross a bit as it scanned his face and unlocked.

"I feel a bit sick," he muttered.

"Yeah, David, it's because you have a concussion," Mo retorted.

"What?"

There was a moment when David thought he saw a notification from Zeit Bright, but it was just the passing glare from a swinging turnip lantern. The black hourglass icon remained thick and motionless.

Next to him, Mo huffed. "It's like none of you are listening to me! David, you have your health app turned on, and your watch logged a concussion from today's game. Since you don't

encrypt anything, I can see all of it If I just—"

The mothers in the audience watching the parade tutted and whispered harshly.

"Alright, alright," David said. "I get it. You're a big hacker. Cool."

"David, anyone can get into—"

"Yeah, yeah," he said, waving his hand. "Update me when you can get into Tutor Squad for free so I don't have to pay for a subscription." David's parents promised it would get easier, but it had already been two years since they had moved to Zürich. Even though he had a lot of friends, he still felt out of place, like a clattering bottle in a recycling bin on a Sunday. His classes were all impossibly hard and he never felt good enough here. He checked his smart watch again.

#

Mo

As the parade picked up, the friends stood against a current of moms jostling for a closer look. Where they'd previously been ignored, Mila, David, Isra, and Mo now had to stand tall to see the fairytale stage over the rest of the swelling crowd, and buggies clipped at their ankles followed by curt *entschuldigungs*.

The light from the swaying carved lanterns was hypnotic, and for a few minutes Mo felt like he could forget about his worries. He elbowed David, pointing at a lantern. "That one's shaped like a cat's butt," he whispered, and they snickered. The November air felt dark and cold against Mo's skin, and he pulled the ear flaps of his shearling hat to warm his nose.

Some of the mothers tapped the sides of their smart glasses urgently to capture recordings of the children who wandered down, and Mo ducked his head, hoping the shadows kept his features hidden. He didn't like how freely everyone was taking photos. Didn't they know anything about the way companies kept track of people?

Mo tried his best to thrift everything, including his hat. He never bought food when he was hanging out with his friends, but that was partly because the Swiss snuck pork into even the *Röstis*. Everything here was cooked with pork fat. Still, he knew there was a record out there with train tickets, school grades. Probably the texts his friends sent. The cantons all used the same shadowy public education department, an institution employing contractors who collected files on every student from Aarburg to Zürich. He kept trying to convince them to use his app, but nobody seemed to care.

A stranger bumped sharply into him, and Mo turned to apologise. The passer-by hissed, "Uncover that face unless you want people to think you're up to something."

Before Mo could respond, the stranger was gone, just another tall man in the gathered

sea. Around him, there were several people in balaclavas and fleece neck gaiters, and Mo felt a wave of hot rage under his skin at the injustice.

"What's wrong," Isra said, elbowing him gently, and Mo thought for a moment that she saw the exchange. At least he was not the only Turkish person here. Maybe that's why their parents insisted they go everywhere together. Then Isra laughed softly.

"You don't like the turnips. They're no pumpkin but aren't they pretty?" she said, sighing wistfully.

Mo paused, rocked by a sudden feeling of desolation. He covered it quickly, turning his head to the crowd so his sister didn't see his eyes. "Mmm," he said in a fragile voice.

Isra continued, oblivious. "It makes me hungry for bal kabağı sinkonta."

"Yeah, but you probably can't make that with turnips," he joked insincerely.

Mo turned his attention back to the parade. The boy in the bat costume had given him an idea.

#

Part II

Isra

"Mila, can you come with me to Migros?" Isra felt herself blushing. She wondered if her friend would make fun of her for buying a turnip. It just looked like so much fun, and she could already picture the way she would carve the butterfly wings, how they might fold to indicate motion. "I need to buy something," she explained.

"Oh, my god." Mila looked alarmed, her own cheeks bright and rosy from the cold. "Of course. I wish I— I'm sorry. I didn't even bring a purse tonight," Mila said, and before Isra could process any of that, they were hooked at the elbows, shouting at Mo and David to not wait up.

"We'll text you," Isra called to her brother, and he shouted back, "Please don't!" Isra rolled her eyes.

The inside of the grocery store was pitch black. When the two friends passed under the glowing orange Migros sign, the sensors triggered beaming lights that left no shadows between the spacious aisles. After an evening illuminated by the damp orange light of turnip lanterns, it was almost too bright inside the empty grocery store.

"Where are you going? The tampons are over here," Mila said, trying to drag Isra over to the blue boxes that lined the back aisle away from the windows. Music cheerily played through the speakers, and soft audio clicked on, advertising the products any time they lingered at a display.

"I'm not here for tampons," Isra said quietly. "I don't get periods, Mila."

Isra looked over at her friend, trying to judge if she understood. The vegetable display was silent, though both stood there for a few minutes. Vegetables didn't need much advertising, it seemed.

"Oh, then why did we come?" Mila asked, slightly surprised.

"I wanted to buy a turnip, but it looks like they're sold out." Isra held back a tear that threatened to spill down her cheek. "And I was embarrassed because you might think it's babyish to want to carve *Räbenlichter*."

"Isra, you're my friend. I'd never judge you like that." Mila said gently. "I think it's kind of sweet that you want to try it, even though it's so Swiss." She laughed again, nervously. "Look, we also sometimes make them with paper bags," Mila explained. She picked up a stack of brown bags near the disposable plates. "It's all the same. In fact," she laughed, "It's probably easier to make this. Turnips are quite hard to carve!"

Isra nodded. "That little boy had a cut on his thumb," she said. "None of the other kids did. But you know what I noticed about the parents?"

Mila gave her a smirk. "All of them had these mysterious cuts on their palms!"

The two giggled.

"I just can't believe that so many parents carved their children's projects for them! My uncle makes me do everything myself," Mila said, and Isra was reminded that they had a lot in common.

As the daughter of immigrants, Isra sometimes had to be the translator who helped her mother understand what the bank tellers and store clerks were saying. Since they had moved here, the roles between adult and child had switched upside down. She didn't get as much of a chance to relax and be a kid.

"I'm sorry for assuming", Mila said. "I saw you blushing..." Mila's voice trailed off, and she stood next to Isra in silence, unsure of what to say.

"I still get ads even though I don't get periods," admitted Isra. "I guess they don't know everything."

Both girls glanced down at their watches, which were already pinging with advertisements for different period products.

"I just remembered that they said our report cards were going to include our health details!" Mila exclaimed.

Isra nodded. "I've been thinking about that for weeks," she said. When Zeit Bright announced they'd release the report cards that had all the data collected for each minor in

Europe, she'd felt a ball of disappointment tinged with relief. Part of her just wanted to come out and be done with it, but if she got ads for period products, that might mean that Zeit Bright still didn't know that she was a transgender woman. Some of her teachers didn't, after all.

"I hate that my watch is buzzing already. It's always trying to get me to buy something," Mila complained.

"I didn't think of it like that," Isra admitted. "It's kind of nice, it's like a friend who wants to suggest things to me. If I didn't get an ad, I would have never known how good Cailler chocolate is compared to *Läderach*."

"Ugh!" Mila said. "Don't even say that name. When my uncle got married, they fired him."

"The gay one? I didn't know he worked for *Läderach*! It's too bad. He could have gotten us chocolate," Isra said with a smile, trying to tease Mila a bit. Mila smiled back.

"But how did they even know?"

"Their wedding photographer got featured in *Vogue Italia* and one of the pictures they printed was him and his husband planting their pine tree after the ceremony."

Isra frowned. "A pine tree? Is that something that happens at all weddings?"

"Only if you want to do it," Mila laughed condescendingly. "Why? You're not already planning your wedding, are you?" Isra blushed again.

In truth, she had a vision board for the day, a playlist of songs, and even a mental guest list of who she'd invite. She kept going back and forth on Mila, who always moaned about the patriarchy and would probably want to make a speech that would just kill the mood.

"Well, if you get married, you won't be able to become a Helvetian."

Isra perked up at the strange new term. "What does that mean?"

Mila hummed as if she had a little secret.

"Mila, come on! That's not fair. Is it a secret club? I KNEW it," gasped Isra. "I knew you were hiding something! You are always sneaking off in the evenings!"

Isra scanned a pumpkin at the self-checkout and walked out.

"Come on, Mila, we have to catch the train back to Zürich, and you have to tell me all about this Helvetian thing. First, are there shirts? A secret pin?" Isra babbled on, excited by the thought of a secret club.

#

Mila

Mila's stomach did a somersault under her guilt. There was a second where she could have come clean, but it passed before she had worked up the courage to admit that she was just

kidding about the Helvetian thing. By the time they were walking back, it felt easier to just lie.

"So, how do you know if someone is a Helvetian?"

Mila thought for a moment and remembered the goddess that they had learned about when she was a kid. "Braided hair," she explained.

"Perfect," Isra said. "It's a great excuse for you to finally teach me how to braid!"

#

David

Although the parade wasn't over, the group wandered back to the train station. The S8 toward Zurich had a friendly red face just like the ones back in Germany. David happily listened for the chime on his watch when he entered. It scanned automatically and pinged with different notifications, and as long as you had the SBB app, you could even join a whole chat with everyone else on the train. David loved when he rode home after a football game, because the others would notice his jersey and post thread after thread of appreciation. In a city like Zürich, it felt like he could be a hometown hero. Even if this wasn't his hometown.

David glanced down at his watch for the option to share his location, excited to see if there were any results from the floorball championships. He had skipped watching tonight because Mila and Isra had really wanted to come to this lantern thing, but he wanted to at least know the score before he got home. His dad would cook something special if the Alligators won.

He was about to tap the location share when Mo grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the bicycle carriage. Mila and Isra were there already.

"Did you hear the score yet?" he asked. His head still pounded.

"Oh, I love when we talk about floorball," Isra said. "The Red Ants are the best!."

"Who are you rooting for? Let me guess," Mila said with a smirk. "The Piranhas, or the Red lions? The Scorpions?"

"I won't tell you if you're going to tease me," David said, and he felt himself closing off his expressions, going blank like he did when the broadcast drones zoomed in on his face after a loss.

"Hey," Isra said gently. "If it helps, I'd only make fun of you if you were a fan of the Wizards."

"Are you talking about the floorball game?" Mo said, looking up from his watch. . "David's a Grasshoppers fan."

David looked up at his friends, ready to defend himself, but none of them laughed.

"Here," Mo offered. "I'll look up the scores, but it'll take a minute because I'm using an

encrypted search."

"Really?" Isra said. "Encrypted search? Mo, nobody cares if you are looking up how the Grasshoppers did in the floorball championships!"

Mo ignored her, and David smiled. Sometimes he wished he had a sibling to bicker with.

"David. Good news. The meek prevailed! They'll inherit the land!"

"What are you even talking about," David said, laughing. "It's 'inherit the Earth.' I didn't even pass the ZAP and I know that."

#

Mo

Mo felt his cheeks flush red with momentary embarrassment. Why did he quote a bible verse? Religion wasn't even something he liked to study. The train was filling up with others at each stop, and he felt squished further and further into his shell.

"Hey," David said quietly. "I was just kidding around ."

Mo smiled at David.

"Mila, look!" his sister said excitedly. The girls were in the seats across from Mo. "I just got an ad on my watch for blockers!"

Mila glanced at the watch and asked, "Like hormone blockers?" Mo watched the conversation warily, observing Mila's expressions. "I mean, I support you if you want to do that," she said, and Mo let out the breath he didn't realise he'd been holding. He was glad his sister finally had a friend she trusted, but the fact that she was getting ads geared toward trans girls wasn't something he wanted to celebrate.

"You keep thinking these apps, these companies are your friends," he said with a lump in his throat. "They're not your friends, Isra."

After a moment, Mila said, "Mo's right, I think."

"I'm right again? What are the chances," Mo said sarcastically.

"I think I'm starting to see your point," Isra reluctantly admitted. "I keep thinking of my watch as a friend. It just knows me so well. But it's not my friend, is it?"

Mila and Mo glanced at each other, sharing a frown.

"I'm your friend and I'm trying to get to know you better," Mila said quietly.

"But we can't always talk in person," Isra said. "I know Zeit Bright isn't my friend, but at the very least it's always with me and predicting my needs. I guess I like that I can't hide anything from it."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you," Mo said excitedly. "I've built an encrypted app, so

we can use it to talk to each other and look up things. And the best part is that I can adjust the settings on my watch so that none of the other apps can listen or track me when I'm browsing."

"Don't we already have that, though?" Mila asked. "I mean, we can turn off cookies or whatever "

"Not exactly," Mo said thoughtfully. "There are many ways for technology to track our every thought, regardless of cookies. Even with things like cookie settings, the default mode is set to share all of our data with hundreds or sometimes thousands of companies for advertising. And, the very fact that Zeit Bright can decide when and what data it wants to disclose about us in these report cards without our consent is alarming."

"My buddy in Basel told me they even track the shows we watched as a kid," David added.

"Why would they care if I watched Pingu when I was five?" Mila asked.

"Let me ask you this," Mo said. "What episode of Pingu was your favourite?"

"Maybe the one where Pingu goes skiing. I must have watched that a million times."

"So," Mo explained. "If they know you watched reruns of the episode where Pingu goes skiing, and they also know your mom got her bonus two weeks ago, AND that your dad searched for cheap places to vacation this winter, they might sell that information to Zalando." He took a breath and continued, "And then Zalando will pay an influencer on Instagram to model some cute ski outfits. They'll make sure to boost the ad by selecting your target age and gender to make sure it shows up on your feed. Then all they have to do is blast a well-timed email to your school account with ads for Moon Boots right before dinner time."

"That sounds like a lot of work," Isra said sceptically.

"You're right, which is why everything has already been automated to the t. That's why they have these report cards. They're just the lockers where they've been storing all the data they collect about you. But the problem is, based on all this information they know about you, about us, they can make all kinds of assumptions about us. Take David, for example," Mo said. "If his watch recorded his concussion and a football recruiter—"

"Scout," David corrected.

"If a scout sees that David has had three concussions this year, maybe they wouldn't want to recruit him, because he might develop a health issue because of them."

"But I only had one concussion," David whined. "And I didn't even feel it."

"David, I thought you were drunk earlier because you struggled to even walk up the stairs."

David stayed silent.

"Fine," Isra said, annoyed. "I guess we can try your app."

Mo fist-pumped the air.

"Ok, I'll drop it to your watches. I don't have a name for it," he explained.

The train pulled in underground at the *Hauptbahnhof*, and it sparked an idea. "Maybe Subterranean?"

None of the teens were quite sure what would happen when their algorithmically compiled files got released on New Years Eve, but the privacy laws expired on 31 December. That's when the Zeit Bright ball would drop, and not just the one they strung up in the Old Town. The only reason Zeit Bright was even complying with the new privacy laws was because it could repackage its spying as a sort of personality quiz, like a career aptitude test based off intimate texts between friends and which snacks a teenager craved when they got dumped. Mo thought bitterly about how they framed it. "Look, we did you a favour," Zeit Bright seemed to be saying. Meanwhile his watch was constantly buzzing with advertisements for the next first-person shooter drone game, the next fast food, the next edition of football cleats. And his sister had it worse. She was a smart girl but he could tell that the advertising tactics made her feel ugly, hairy, dark. He had caught her trying to lighten her skin with a single use attachable fairness mask last summer, but thankfully the company had only sent one sample.

"Wait a minute," Mo said to himself. "That's it!" He remembered the little boy in the bat costume. Bats pinged out a signal and used the waves that bounced back to figure out their surroundings. The watches worked the same. They kept getting signals from drones and cybernetic instruments, and that's how they kept breaking his ad blocking. If he could block the signals, they wouldn't be able to communicate with his watch. It could be like a Faraday cage.

#

Part III

Isra

Isra tucked her round handmade buttons into her rucksack and patted them, making sure they were snug. She had an unopened envelope in her hands; she didn't dare put it in her rucksack or pocket. It had been in her hands since it arrived by drone this morning. All the other teens and many of their parents and families were queued up when the delivery drone came by. Some even opened their report cards then and there. But Isra, Mila, and David had a plan.

#

Mila

The woods were thick and heavy with snow in early January. Still, Mila recognised the spot. There were little pits where children still built fires, and the kitas that came had left small traces of their impact. She sat on a damp log, far from the trees.

When she was still a kid, all of the technologies that tracked their every move were separated. Sure, her Mini Marni Macaroni dolls that came with the box of pasta at Migros could listen to her and respond. If she said, "I'm bored," Mini Marni would say, "Let's go shopping!" But they didn't take her voice and sell it to another company. These days, if a little girl told her doll she was bored, Mini Marni would put that data up on a consumer board and offer it to the highest bidder. They'd make everyone feel guilty for causing this boredom. The little girl's teacher would get ads for costly professional development on dealing with children with attention problems. And the little girl's parents would be prompted to purchase extra Mini Marni friends. The companies would use that feeling of guilt to drive up sales and profit.

"There you are," boomed Isra. Mila looked up.

"I brought something for the first meeting of the Helvetians."

Mila's guilt was eating her up inside.

"Isra, I have a confession to make. There isn't a secret society of Helvetians. I made that up because it sounded cool."

"Oh," Isra laughed like a bell. "I knew you were making it up, but now we're the secret society. Anyway," she continued. "I know you didn't want something all pink, but I hope you don't mind. I brought us some pins," she explained, holding out the handmade buttons. They had a curly H on them, and the background was a mix of pinks and blues.

"There you are," David said. Mo was right behind him.

"Wait a sec....," Mo said, alarmed. "What are you people up to?"

Mila smiled.

#

David

"You kept saying you didn't want to burn the report cards," David started. "But we had to do something. So we're going to zoombomb Zeit Bright during their press conference and burn them live."

Mila opened a laptop. "I made a hotspot from my watch, so we connected to 7G," she

explained.

"I helped her," Isra added as she fixed her lip gloss in a pocket mirror. "I guess some of that tech genius is genetic. And I brought your report card, too, Mo. In case you change your mind!"

David lined the stones around the firepit carefully and laid his emergency shovel within reach in case the flames spread. "We got the idea from Herr Keller when he was lecturing us last week. He said he couldn't wait to get our report cards so that he could see who was actually doing their homework and who was buying pre-written essays from the Tutor Squad. And then he said we needed to write 300 kilobytes on the burning of LGBT registration cards in the spring of 2025, by the weekend."

"Oh, I remember that," Mo said. "I needed some extra cash for one of my watch enhancements--"

"You mean jail-breaks," Isra laughed.

"Anyway, Tutor Squad pays enough for some kitchen foil in a pinch." Mo smirked.

"I thought my essay sounded like you!" David said. "Don't tell my coach but I had to choose between practicing for the Flying Football League scout or writing that boring essay."

"David!" Mila tutted.

"What? I knew you'd lecture me about the history of it anyway. I just didn't have time to read about it on my own."

Mila shook her head.

"David's right, you know," Isra laughed. "I wrote 200 kilobytes of my essay just by typing out what you were ranting about on the mag train home."

"Not to interrupt," David said, interrupting. "But we're ready," he said. With that, Mila dialed in.

#

Mo

"I have several questions," Mo started. His sister laughed.

"It's a little too late for that," she said. "We're almost in the conference call!"

"Ok, I'm impressed that you—"

Mo didn't get a chance to finish speaking. They were in, and before he could blink, his friends lit the report cards on fire. Mila shouted a declaration at the webcam.

The papers must have been pretty flammable, because there was nothing but a tiny pile of ash after a few seconds.

"Well, now that you've finished," spoke the formidable woman in the conference call screen. "I thought you should know, you're muted."

Mila and Isra exchanged embarrassed looks.

"Can you hear me?" She wore a red suit and thin pink lipstick.

Mila, David, and Isra stood awkwardly, not knowing what to do.. So Mo leaned forward and unmuted themselves, then said, "Yes, we can." He paused awkwardly. "We're protesting the report cards," Mo explained. He hated being in the spotlight like this.

"By burning them? You know we have digital copies, right?" the woman said, condescending laughter in her eyes.

"Yes," Mo continued, a little braver. "But maybe you should pull up our files first?"

"I already am," the woman said, and Mo realised her name was Madeline. She was Zeit Bright's CEO.

"Go ahead," Mo said. "Start with David."

David looked at him, panicked. "Mo, the head of FIFA is right there," he said, agonised. "He sits on Zeit Bright's board."

"Here we are," Madeline said, looking at the tablet on her desk. "It says David Müller is a fifteen year old who likes lip gloss, eats three packets of Belvita on Saturdays, and takes hormone blockers."

David looked confused for a second and then realised what Mo had done.

"Yes," Mo continued. "I have David right here. Does he match your profile?"

Madeline stumbled with her words. "I—," she started. "I suppose not."

"You tie our data together in little ribbons and put it out for sale, but you don't realise that we are people. We may not be adults, but we're still people. And we deserve privacy. Everyone deserves it."

An assistant was whispering into Madeline's ear, and she raised her eyebrows.

"About a month ago, I figured out how to block you from tracking my watch. I covered it with a few layers of foil and my makeshift Faraday cage stopped the signals. Your last pieces of data on me were the proof I needed. But I couldn't convince all my friends to wrap their watches in foil. It looks pretty weird," Mo said. Isra nodded in agreement behind him. "So I had to think of how I could protect my friends, too. It was pretty simple to switch the names in your data lockers. And if a fifteen-year-old can hack it, maybe you should consider more stringent privacy measures."

"This is a lesson I'll remember," Madeline replied, not unkindly. "I didn't realise young people even cared about privacy. Maybe I've been underestimating you."

Mo smiled and shut the laptop screen.

Isra tackled him in a huge, sobbing hug, and David and Mila joined her.

"I actually got the idea from our essay on the LGBT registration cards, too," Mo said.

"They all burned their cards in protest but since they had gathered together to do it, the police just arrested them as a group. I always thought it would have been more clever to forge different names on the cards. You know, to point out the hypocrisy. If the politicians who made these laws could feel the effect close to home, maybe they wouldn't have taken ten years to draft this privacy expiration bill."

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Part IV

The four friends settled into their seats, bedecked in facepaint and costumes. Before them, a sparse crowd of mostly players' family members were spread across the stadium. The floorball Championship in Defeat was well underway, but David didn't mind. He was just glad his friends had made it. David chowed down on the smoked turnips sold at the food stand and rubbed his hands together in the cool early spring sunshine.

After a long day of interning at Zeit Bright, Mo was a bit tuckered out, but in that happy, satisfied way he'd soon come to enjoy. Working side by side with Madeline was a blast, and getting these tickets was a great perk. Since the zoombombing incident, Madeline had made efforts to rethink what information was collected and shared and how to make this more transparent. They'd invited a team of youth to serve as an advisory board, and Mo was one of their first recruits.

He was now part of a team cooperating with governments, digital rights groups and the tech industry to push for the rights of people using their technologies and move towards more ethical ways of making money that didn't put profit over humanity. Mila and Isra giggled at the butterfly stickers on their hands. Earlier, they'd tried scanning with their watches, and both couldn't wait to see the expressions on David and Mo's faces when they tried it for themselves. The stickers were something that came out of the local youth technology competition, and Mo had a hand in convincing Zeit Bright to give up their transformation software for free. But his sister kept her project completely secret and he was dying to know what the stickers did.

"Say cheese," Isra said, raising her watch to snap a picture. David looked up with a grin, and the watch transformed him into a tiny red ant.

"How'd you do that," Mo said, snatching the watch. "That's really cool!" He was impressed. This is what open source technology could enable. Even his sister, who didn't use to consider herself a techie, was able to make a fun and innocent game once she had her hands on the proprietary software.

"Mila helped me. We didn't know which team we should root for, so we went with the Red Ants this time."

"Yeah, I thought they were perfect for the occasion. Small but mighty," Mila smiled.

The friends laughed, scanning their faces and making the simulation ants wave their little legs when someone scored a goal.

"I wonder if any of these famous athletes have a report card. I want to know what the right wing eat for breakfast to move that quickly!" David said.

"That's a good question. Now that we've got Zeit Bright on our side about youth privacy, maybe we should tackle adults next. After all, they need a champion like us on their side. All the adults I know have no clue how to order an espresso on the drone cart, let alone how to prevent tracking or what a cookie is."

"Mo told our grandmother it's a kurabiye and she understood right away."

Mo and Isra smiled at each other.

"Madeline said she didn't give us enough credit. Maybe we're doing the same with our parents. They still have time to learn. Especially if our advisory board puts together a demonstration."

Mila whispered, "Maybe we can wait until after my dad buys that Pingu-inspired ski trip for us, though." She winked conspiratorially at Isra.

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Epilogue

"So she didn't get to make a turnip lantern that year, but we made sure that the bride got to burn her report card," the maid of honour explained in her toast, her eyes bright with happy tears. "And the four of us have been friends since then for nearly twenty years. It's about time these two got married!", Mila said looking over at Isra and David.

The crowd laughed softly.

"Anyway, congrats to the happy couple! Zum Wohl!"

The bride and groom clinked shovels and began to dig a spot for the tender pine tree behind them.

A handsome man with black hair tutted at a guest. "No photos today," he said, tucking the guest's smart glasses back in his suit pocket. The Zeit Bright Head of Privacy then straightened his tie.

"My brother's right. But don't tell him I admitted that," laughed the bride, setting down her shovel. Soft strands of hair escaped her perfect braid, but it made her look wild and free. "Let's enjoy this moment in the present, together."

