Dance Academy - Bridging the Gap

by TaraReed

Summary

Series 3 episode 13: A lot can happen in eight months, especially when Tara has to face grueling rehabilitation and Christian has to cope with life without The Academy and all the support it has given him for three years. So what happens between the fall and the official opening of the Samuel Lieberman Memorial Studio?

Be with Christian as he strives to find order in his life, and hopes to get Tara back.

The story is compliant to all the episodes televised, to the best of my abilities. I have invested a lot of time to research, so the actual facts should be rather accurate.
Previously on Dance Academy: That's it, the biggest dance audition of their student life, the one that will define their options in the professional world, and Tara falls, flat on her back. Christian and all her friends rush to her side, but what on earth can they do to help?

Tara Falls

And I keep holding her, my hands over her ears, I am not sure why. Maybe to protect her spine, like I was told at the first aid course? But what's the point? Her spine is the issue. Just not the neck that I pointlessly hold in place. So maybe it's to help her hold on to sanity. Or to make me hold on to mine.

'My legs, I can't feel them!' she sobs, and I can't even wipe her tears away, my hands are glued to the sides of her face. A face I want to kiss and soothe. I want to tell her that all will be well. But how could I? What do I know about her back? Falling flat on it like that shouldn't be so bad. But if that were the case, she would be up by now. And she is not. She's pinned to the floor, and not because I'm holding her down. Because she simply can't move.

I snap my eyes closed and fight the dizziness lurching in my head. I won't fall and I won't run. I'm gonna stay here till I'm not needed anymore. Dr Wicks tells everyone to back off, for Abigail to call an ambulance, but she doesn't tell me to move. Maybe I'm doing something right after all. The rest becomes a blur as I whisper her name, 'Tara.'

But she only looks at me for a second as tears keep on swelling in her eyes, pooling as if she were drowning in them. I lean forward and kiss her forehead. She closes her eyes, the tears streaming down the trail carved by their predecessor. And we wait.

The ambulance has just left, and I'm still stuck to my spot. Still on my knees, my hands still Tara's head width apart. Ollie taps my shoulder and yet I do not move.

'Come on, mate, let's go.' Ben's hand is in front of my face. I grab as he pulls me back to standing. But I can't look at him. I just nod my thanks and run out to the changing room. This is desperate time but I'm not going out there in these stupid white tights. Prince charming? Yeah right, useless plonker more like.

When I get out, everybody else is changed and on the move, apart from Miss Raine who is pinned against the wall by a crowd of people, some of them with cameras and microphones. How do these vultures get in so quickly?

Kat hooks my elbow and pulls me forward. The silver sparkle of her dress clashes ridiculously with the sallow shade of her face. She of the eternal smile and twinkle in the eye, she has been drained of everything good. I let her drag me out the back door, into a cab, where we all pile up. The driver doesn't even say a thing. Our destination and collective desperate facial expression tell him all he needs to know.

Waiting

Of course now that we're here there is nothing we can do but take up a seat in the waiting area. Kat is still holding my hand tight in hers. I don't let go. I need to hold down onto something too, so that I don't fly. So that I don't run away, take off and leave it all behind.

We've never been so quiet. In that other night long watch for the memorial there had never been silence. When our voices had stilled the music had carried on till the morning sun had released us and we had ran to the water and splashed like the noisy crazy kids we were.

But here, the only noises are the ones that would be there if we weren't: the doors opening and closing, the hospital staff shuffling about in their spongy shoes, the phones ringing, the hushed
voices. It all becomes a weirdly relaxing background soundtrack, like white noise.

I drifted asleep. I only realise now because I'm opening my eyes and it's lighter. The earth hasn't stopped its revolution. It has let the sun warm its down under face, bringing out a new day. Anger bubbles in my empty stomach. Ah, of course I'm ravenous. Trust my body to betray me, to want its needs met, to think only of itself.

'Christian, are you okay?' Kat asks, her fingers wriggling beneath mine. I must have squeezed them too hard. I nod.

'Go back to sleep, there's still no news.'

'I shouldn't have slept at all.'

Kat gives me a knowing look. 'We all did at one point or another.'

I glance over the group. Ollie is wide awake, his eyes fixed ahead of himself, but both Ben and Grace are asleep, their heads propping each other. As if on cue, Ben snorts a bit, then wakes up. He catches me staring and straightens up, letting Grace's head drop gently to the sofa's armrest. My guilt reflects in his eyes, in the tightness of his lips. But us sleeping or not makes no difference, no matter how much we might wish it could.

Ollie comes back with coffee for everyone. I never drink the stuff, but today is as good as any to start. Before I even have my lips on the rim, Miss Raine walks in, heels clicking loudly, echoing against the walls. She makes no apologies for being here and making her entrance. She has her business face on, that 'don't mess with me' look that melted us to a whimper as first years. 'You need to get ready for your interviews. They will not be postponed. Up you get, now. You can come back afterwards. Go.'

I want to snap back at her, tell her this is none of her business. I can feel my lip curl, ready for a smirk, or a snarl. Who is she to tell me what to do? Who in their right minds can think of bloody Company interviews? It's not as if Tara will go to hers now, is it?

But Tara would want us to go. She would want ME to go. I swallow my retort back. It catches in my throat before nestling unhappily in my stomach. Interview? What the heck am I going to say?
Chapter 2- Who Cares?

Chapter Summary

They have all spent the night in the hospital waiting area worrying about Tara, and now they have to face their Company interview!

Chapter 2 - WHO CARES?

The boarding house is in a storm of rushed and stressed-out-of-their-wits eighteen year olds. Not a pretty sight. I join the throng, slip into the shower the minute Ben is out; the water is still dripping. I turn it right up again. In my numb tiredness it's hard not to linger and let the water calm me down, so I drag the lever down to cool the water to the lowest I can bare and spread the soap over my body in sharp short strokes. I don't bother to wash my hair, I'll get more gel in to tame it. When I get out, the other year three students still there are checking their looks in the mirrors one more time.

I come back to my half empty room to face the jacket and tie I had prepared two nights ago. Two nights and look what happened! I shove the lot to the floor and swing the cupboard door open. I grab the first pair of jeans my hand falls on, the first shirt, then just slip my sneakers on. I don't even bother with underwear. I hook my rucksack on my shoulder and off I go. That's as ready as I'll ever be. This is me. If they want me, they can have me as is.

Everyone hovers in the corridor, even those who have their interviews at the end of the afternoon, like Abigail and Ollie. There they are stuck together on the steps, thick as thieves, the ones with the biggest drive, and yet pretend so hard that they don't care.

'How come you're here?' I ask Abigail. She didn't get to dance last night.

'She just nods and stares back at the interview timetable copy she's got stuck to a clipboard on her lap.

Grace comes out and burrows straight into Ben's arms.

What? She was a guaranteed, wasn't she?

Hushed comments bubble out from everywhere. Ollie and Abi glance at each other. Maybe the rumours are true: none of us are getting in.

I'm so pissed off I could walk out right now. And yet I stay, leaning against the wall, to watch the hecatomb as one by one we fall.

Then my turn comes at last.

I walk my most nonchalant best, slouch low on the chair, as casual as can be. But before I can stop myself, I'm sitting straight again. My mouth is so dry and yet I do not take the glass of water they offer. It's a bit disgusting how they hold the interviews in this room where we have sweated our guts for the last three years, where we have received our best praise, our worst criticisms.

'Mr Reed, we have been charmed by your performance, strong and spirited for a usually rather romantic piece.'

I shrug. I'm in the biggest interview of my life and I shrug.

'What did you make of your performance?'

Ah, Tara has prepped me up for this one; it comes out as an automaton. 'I wanted it to show a
darker, stronger side to the character, his determination, his boldness.'
'And that you did. But there was lightness there too.'
'Yeah, I like contrasts.'
'I see. And talking about contrast, which do you favor, Classical Ballet or Contemporary?'
My mind goes blank for a second, then all I want to do is snort and say "hiphop actually". I am so glad Tara has drilled the interviews with all of us. Kat had tried to help but she could never keep a straight face. Tara had worked with all of us, saying that taking us through our paces made her feel more ready too. Won't be much use to her where she is now. I find it so hard to swallow, but I take a deep breath to muster a smidgen of control. Tara had helped me think through this one too. I would do right by her.
'This is a tough call, because I enjoy both. I love the freedom of expression that comes with Contemporary dance and music, the broadness, the possibilities.'
'They all nod, but with faces still as blank of expression as corpses.
'With Ballet, it's about mastering the technique. I like the rigour and the precision, the challenge of the constraints, of sticking with something that has been danced for hundreds of years, the minutiae.'
'How interesting. You're a man of extremes then?'
'I stared at Rebecca for a second. What the heck did she mean by that? 'Erm, I guess so.'
'And where do you see yourself in, say, a year, in your ideal?'
'Tara's face flashes in my mind. Well, that won't do. They don't give a toss about my love life, or lack thereof. It's dance they want. 'In my ideal, I'm with the company. I've had some great run in the corps, had a few solo...' Even to my own ears that sounds dreary.
'And in ten years.'
'In ten years... Who will I be in ten years? At twenty nine? Who will I be? They wait, and I fail to answer. I should have accepted that water, it would come in handy now. Instead, I close my eyes. The images come instantly. Zach. Jayden. 'In ten years, I will teach.'
'Rebecca's stern face somehow becomes that little bit more apathetic, her lips pouting down, her arms crossing over her absent chest. And I realise I don't care. I slouch back again.
'Well, we'll have to see if we can help you push that to a few more years later, then.' She looks to her colleagues on either side of her. 'Mr Reed, congratulations, we would like to offer you a place at The National Ballet Company.' She pushes a dull yellow binder towards me.
'For a few seconds, I don't say a thing. I don't even move. Then I take it, nod once, mutter a short 'Thank you', and I leave the room.
'I'm out and already half way down the corridor when Ollie calls behind me. 'Hey Reedo, care to share with the group?'
'I stop. I don't even turn when I shake my head and set off again.
Previously on Dance Academy - Bridging the Gap: Christian did what he had to do. He got ready, of sorts, turned up for interview and went through the motions, but he is no clearer to what he has to do now...

Do check my blogs: https://danceacademyobsession.wordpress.com/
and
http://taralouisereed.tumblr.com/

for more Dance Academy stuff!

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Memorial

I may have been erring like a lost soul but it only takes to pass by the Memorial Studio for me to know exactly where I was going, and what I'm going to do.

Zach is there, alone, surrounded by plastic wrappings, tape, screws and the bottom half of a barre. The whole place is a mess, with sectioned off areas, tarpaulins and scaffoldings. And yet it's so inviting, it's where I want to be. The certitude takes hold of me and dissipates the frustration and the anger that had been churning in my stomach. And I feel lighter. For once I feel right.

'You're not gonna get the kids you want with ballet barres.'

Zach looks up and his face becomes alight with excitement, like I'm family, the prodigal son.

'So?' He shifts his weight from foot to foot, his hand still on the frame, but his arms stick out.

'Come on, I wasn't even that worked up on my own interview day.'

I put my bag down to prepare myself. 'They changed it to the afternoon.' The lie comes out so smooth he doesn't even think it could be untrue. I'm that good at deception.

'Grab the other end,' he says.

I take hold of it and lift. 'Does that make it official, you running the centre?'

The barre slides in its frame with a satisfying and easy click.

'I told my wife to blame you.' Zach screws the knob in to secure it. 'How I'm going to fit it in with everything else, I do not know.'

But I do. He won't have to do it all, not by himself anyway. 'It's worth it. At least it's gonna be, if you - if you start the kids with hip hop and drip feed them ballet later.'

Zach snorts. 'You know I wouldn't recognise a pop from a lock, let alone those armchairs things that you do.'

If only I knew what those armchairs-things-that-I-do are supposed to be, but then he strikes a pause and I have to summon all the respect I hold for the man not to burst out laughing.

So we bust some moves. He learns fast. Of course he does, years of classical training does that to you. You only have to look once to memorise and for your body to translate what it sees into movements.

His attempt on the floor is decent, but it's amazing how even in a free moving art form as hip hop there are still rules, dictated by physics, not snobs, but rules all the same.

'That was good, but keep your feet underneath your bum at all times.'
I get a kick out of demonstrating his moves the way they should be done, or at least how I like them done. I have become the teacher. The role reversal is so smooth, so comfortable. This man is strength and humility all wrapped into one.

I end my sequence with a back flip. Zach is duly impressed, but jokes about his back and we get back to work. I lose myself in the simplicity of picking up the mess, tidying cables, sweeping the floors.

'Christian, you've got to go.'

'It's cool.'

'Trust me, this is not an appointment you can be late for.'

Trust. He has earned it, time and again. I will trust him from now on. So I turn round, fetch the folder from my bag and hand it to him. His reaction is priceless.

'You're kidding, right?'

I shake my head. No I am not kidding, and I won't be kidding either when I'll tell him I don't want it. It's his, he got me there. But it's not my path.

Zach moves faster than I expected. I'm stuck in a bear hug before I can say a word. 'I told you, didn't I?'

'I want you to keep it.'

'Well, I can't, it's a contract, you've got to sign it.'

I shake my head again. After the shrugs, this is becoming my signature move for the day.

'Ah no. No no no no, you're not walking away, alright, not this time.' Zach is coming towards me again. But I stand still.

'I wanna-', I am so sure of myself, and yet the words catch in my throat. 'I wanna work here. I want to teach.'

'So do ten years in the company then be a teacher.'

Of course what he says makes sense, everyone would say that, everyone. But I'm not everyone, I never was. Here's the head shake again. 'I finally know what I want to do, I want to start doing it.' And that must be compelling enough. Yes, he sighs and looks at me as if I'm mad, but then he just takes one more deep breath, tucks the contract at the back of his shorts, hands me my broom again and leaves with an armful of crates.
Chapter 4 - Lies

Previously on Dance Academy: Christian may have been reluctant but he still went for his interview. Afterwards his feet led him to the Samuel Lieberman Memorial studio. Zach, shocked by Christian's admission that he will not accept the job offer he received, tuck the contract in his trousers and walks off with it.

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Lies

I tidy and busy myself till it got dark out. Surely all the interviews are done by now. Everyone knows their fate. And I know mine.

A sharp pull tugs at my stomach. Maybe I should have told them so at the interview. What if Ben could get the place now that I was going to say no to mine? My throat and chest tighten. So much for growing up. Once again I had thought of myself. Me, me and only me.

The wide studio with all its building stuff suddenly becomes claustrophobic, alien, as if it has recognised me for the fake that I am. Me? A teacher?

I freak out a bit, turning into the space desperately looking for something to focus on to still my mind. Where the heck is Zach? He's been gone for ages. What was I supposed to do? I couldn't very well leave the place open: it would be hollowed out by morning.

I go to get my phone but that's a daft move. I don't have Zach's number. We may have been pally pally all day but it had been a thin and ephemeral as appearances.

I tighten my fists, close my eyes and take some forced breaths. Then I throw a glance at my surroundings again. The floor is clear, the tools are all put away, there is no longer any wires hanging in weird places. There's nothing left for me to do.

So I rummage through my bag. Nothing to eat. Nothing to drink. I'd rushed out with nothing but some crumpled bits of paper, a chewing gum wrapper, a few battered biros and a mess of crumbs lining the bottom of my rucksack. I fish out the sheets of notepad paper, smooth one and perch on the tool box. Plan. I will plan.

Nearly two sheets are filled by the time Zach comes back. By that point I'm not even sure whether I am more angry or relieved. But I have a choice, and that's not always the case, far from it. Controlling my emotions has never been my forte. I usually act then think and it doesn't serve me well. For once I have a conscious choice, I might as well make the right one.

'I'm glad you're back. I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do, I couldn't leave this place all opened up.'

'Sorry, Christian, I got cornered. But next time you can just go whenever you want, the release is there,' he points at a button at waist level, 'and the door is self locking. Just don't leave anything behind you might need again later.'

'Okay.'

'What's that?' he asks, pointing at my scrawled up papers.

'Plans.'

'For?'
I check his curious expression and seethe at my own stupid assumptions. Who am I to make plans? This is not my place! I clear my throat. 'Erm, for here, recommendations, really.' His eyes turn piercing, as if they are rummaging through my brain. Then they soften into casual glancing. 'Cool, show me.' He hadn't been quick enough, the pretence is all ruined by his unguarded first reaction.

He comes to squat beside me, but good luck to him if he thinks he might decipher my handwriting. I go down the most important and urgent points. 'The barre needs to go into storage. You can't have it just sitting there. The kids will sit on it, dangle from it, use it as a launch pad, and it hasn't been designed for stuff like that. I don't know how insurance works, but I bet they don't cover for that kind of "accidental" use.' Zach laughs. 'Okay, what next?'

'I don't see any music system as yet, and that's good. You'll need to have something covered, you know, so that the kids have only access to a slit thing for CD and a dock for MP3s and phones, with stuck on wires if needs be, nothing removable, unless you want it to walk out with the first users.' 'Wow, I would have never thought of that. You don't have much trust in your future pupils, do you?'

'I know where I come-' and then his words hit me. 'My pupils?'

'What? You expect to teach somewhere else than here? With no qualifications, no one will have you.' Suddenly the happy banter falls flat and his face grows red around the edges. 'I mean, I don't know what your plans are, I just thought... Well, I'm not even sure if it would be possible, I hope it might be but...' Zach looks at me uneasily, then he rattles his throat. I focus all my attention on him, my eyes probably as thin as slits by now. 'I mean, they're going to need teachers, or at least coaches here. But that might not be what you want.' He grumbles some more, getting up and fetching his jacket. 'I need to close this place before my wife gets into a flap already. Maybe if you give me your list I can have a look at it tonight.' I stare at the papers in my hand. 'Or maybe I'll bring it back tomorrow and run through it with you, I doubt you could read it anyway.'

Zach nods. 'Fair. Tomorrow, eight o'clock before my first class?'

I doubt very much Tara's doctors would let me stay all day with her, and what else would I have to do but pack my things tomorrow? 'Yep, can do.'

Zach seems far away, lost in thought. I'm not sure he heard me. Eventually, he looks up again. 'Fine, then we can run through your recommendations.' His tone is so tight, just like mine had been the first time I had tried to lie to my mum. I had wanted to go to the skate park but it had been already dark. So I told her I had to do homework with one of my mates. She'd seen right through me. I'd got better with time. Clearly Zach had had no practice. He is lying, that's for sure, but what about? I take my time to get my bag, carefully folding the paper back in, and observe him as he types into his phone. My stomach hardens again. He doesn't want me here then, not really. All the rest, it's been lip service. I have no training, I would not teach. He's right. Who in their right mind would hire me?

'See ya,' I say as I head for the door. 'Hey, Christian, can we swap numbers please, just in case?'

I stare for longer than is polite, then I mumble my number to him. My phone beeps. He's sent me a text straight away. 'Now you've got mine.' He hitches his satchel over his shoulder and leads the way out, letting the door slide shut behind us. 'Tomorrow, eight o'clock. I'm looking forward to it.' Then he walks away towards the car park.

And I just stand there like a dumbfounded fool.
Previously, on Dance Academy: Despite waiting in the hospital waiting room all night, Christian has no news on Tara, and he cannot bring himself to face the other guys, especially as none of them would take too kindly to the fact that he has no intention of accepting the Company place he was offered. At least he might have an opening at the Memorial.

I snap out of my daze and I run. I could get my bike, but it might be even faster to just head for the hospital. My heart beats fast, my breaths reach deep in my chest, rushing out in gusts that match the tempo of my strides. I might get there in a mess of sweat, but I'm feeling cleaner inside. The front of the hospital is deserted but for a few people walking away. I push through the revolving doors, run through the lobby only to find the next set of doors to be unmoveable. Dread fills me up like I've been caught in a trap. I turn to make sense of my surroundings, ready to lunge for an escape route, but all I see is a large man behind the welcome counter.

'Visiting hours are between ten and twelve, then two to eight,' he says like he pressed a button to play a over-used sound file.

I check my watch. Ten past eight. Ten minutes past eight!

'But- but my friend got in as an emergency last night and-'

'If he was in emergency last night, he is not anymore. So either he's now an in-patient and you will have to come back tomorrow, or he is at home, or-' He gives me a weird look. 'It's one or the other.'

Or she's dead.

No, I can't think that way, I won't think that way. Someone would have called me.

In my hurry to check my phone I jab my finger nail in the stupid excess metal of my jeans. I swear, ignore the pain and dive back in. Messages, plenty of them, enough to get my heart rate pick up as if I'm still sprinting. And then I exhale in relief. Yes, lots of messages. I hesitate between the last two ones. Kat or Neil. Both will hate me for not having visited today. God knows I'm hating myself enough.

I open Kat's: TARA HAS JUST WOKEN UP, SHE'S WIRGGLING HER TOES AND SMILING, WHERE THE HECK ARE YOU?

And then my phone's battery dies on me.

Ah, so she's smiling. No doubt about that. She would smile no matter what, anything to keep everyone happy, lest they should start to worry about her. That smile you mean?

Ten a.m.. I will be there, on the dot. Early, actually. Let see if she's still smiling by then.

I go back through the doors and leave the acidic smell of the hospital behind.

For the second time today, I stand out and I don't know what to do. I want to grab a board and surf, my usual and unfailing access to oblivion, but it's too dark for surfing. I might be a dumb ass, but not that dumb. Skating is equally out of the equation, for that same reason. I wish I had gone to get my bike.

On the way back to the house I stop into one of these weird late opening shops and grab an energy drink, then I creep around our house block to where I keep my bike. The last thing I want to do is bump into anyone.

Just as I pull out into the street I catch a rush of blond hair at the corner of my visor, but I don't wait to check. I rev up the engine and take off.
I ride straight out of Sidney, following the coast whenever I can. I’m not sure whether I’m trying to ride away from the sun or to get it to rise sooner. It doesn’t take very long for the energy drink to wear off. I’m exhausted, running on empty, devoid of purpose, too tired to think or to even wish. I stop, park the bike on a grassy bit by the wild coast and just crash down beside it.

I wake with the early summer sun, groggy, sore, cold and parched. The discomfort is reassuring. Maybe it’s atonement I was pursuing. Not that it makes a blind bit of difference. I might be uncomfortable, but Tara must be in pain, in excruciating pain, pain of the worst kind that no analgesic can do anything about. The thought sobers me instantly. I get back on the bike, reach the nearest station, fill up with petrol, grab some resemblance of breakfast, and ride faster than is wise or legal. I stop right outside the Memorial. No one is there yet. I could use a shower and change of clothes but I still can’t face the others. I just can’t.

I do not have to wait long. Zach comes around with a spring in his step till he sees me, then the rhythm of his walk falters before he puts some steadiness back into it. All my doubts, all the fears from the previous day, come flooding back in. I try to reason with myself. 1. He wouldn't have been walking jauntily like this if something really bad had happened to Tara, that was a given. The tightening in my stomach releases in a rushed exhalation. 2. Seeing me there caught him off guard, but yesterday he made it clear that he would consider involving me in the Studio, that he wished it was possible. Surely he wouldn't know differently over night, would he? My rushed breakfast sits uneasily as my stomach churns again. Before I can reason with myself some more, he's already there turning the key in.

'Hey you, look at you, you're on time.'

'Yeah.'

Zach looks me up and down. 'What happened, Christian? You look like you didn't get any sleep.'

'Not a lot of it, no.'

'Are you okay, is everything okay?'

I take the time to think about this for a moment. I'm throwing back in his face everything that he and Miss Raine, and Mr Kennedy before her, have done for me. I have no qualification or training to do what I want to do. The girl I love is in hospital, her dreams potentially shattered, and I haven't even seen her since she fell. No, nothing was okay.

'In the grand scheme of things it could be worst, but not by much.'

Concern grows on his face.

'Look, I'm okay, but these last few days, man, rollercoaster doesn't even cut it, it sound far too much like fun.'

But everything is gonna work out, I'm sure of it.'

I stare in the eyes of this man who tries so hard to reassure me but he has as much power to promise me that as I had when Tara fell. I had had the sense not to say such a trite thing. Zach respects my silence, he does not even challenge the ire burning in my eyes. He squats down and unlocks the rest of the door, which slides open with a mighty woosh. The sawdust and plastic smells hit me with that same sense of homecoming I had the previous day. That's how we need to keep it, not with those smells as such, but with an atmosphere that will draw the kids in to be who they are, guards down, free to be themselves, at home.

Zach pulls out a chair and two cardboard boxes into a weird triangle and taps one of the boxes for me to sit on as he takes the other. I indicate the chair with a rise of my eyebrows but he completely ignores it.

'So, these "recommendations", shall we have a look?'

There’s an unease in his voice that his smile cannot cover up. Why is he so edgy? My legs twitch, ready to get me out of here at a moment’s notice. I force myself to remain calm. I get my papers out, looking even more crumpled now after a night in a rucksack that has been used as a makeshift pillow.
I can’t help but notice that he keeps on looking at the door. He is waiting for someone. I'm just about to ask when Miss Raine's voice calls out to me. 'Good morning, Christian.' Looking at her, in her cross-over top and knee length skirt, at the disdain on her face as she appraises my appearance, it's like nothing has changed at all.

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