

KERSTIN GULDEN



FAIR PLAY

**SPIEL MIT, SONST
VERLIERST DU ALLES!**

Kerstin Gulden

FAIR PLAY

JOIN IN OR LOSE EVERYTHING!

Sample translation © Helen MacCormac 2020

For further information please contact:
nathalie.wittfoth@rowohlt.de

THE FOUR

A sacrifice. Not something you'd want to be, or do. Sacrificial lambs come to mind, victims of murder, weak and defenceless. You're such a victim! Not something you'd want to hear at school. Or is it more gallantry and chastity, heroes and martyrs, Iron Man in the Avengers: Endgame? One thing they've all got in common? Spoiler alert! - someone usually ends up dead.

Even so, we decided to sacrifice something after the summer holidays: we gave up our freedom. Just for three months. It'll be worth it, we thought. Officially it was all about our big goal: to save the planet, or try at least. Maybe the experiment wouldn't have gone haywire if that had been all. But we all had ulterior motives for taking part ... or refusing to do so: status, money, revenge, love. The stakes were higher than we thought and we lost more than we bargained for. We lost one of us.

It's the first of January. Time for another decision. A New Year. A new beginning? When we press LAUNCH, you'll have to ask yourself the same question as us: What are you willing to sacrifice and what for? We stand in a circle, staring at each other, three of the four who started it all. Would we do it again if we knew how it ends? Would you? You have an advantage though. While we decide whether to unleash our legacy on the world, you can work out what you'd do differently. Better perhaps. We've got something for you. Our story. This is it [...]

ELODIE

701

posts

62.833

followers

522

following

Hey, hey, hey, my lovelies! Fab news! I've agreed to take part in an experiment. It starts in a week's time. For three months an app, called Fair Play, is going to help me live the way we all should if we're going to stop the climate crisis. Here and on all my channels, I'll keep you updated with unabridged and honest reports on how I'm doing #fairplay, developed by genius @theotherleo, based on an idea by @keraspiegler. Click on the links in my bio to find out all about the project. BTW we're taking part in the Berlin Senate Competition. Wish us luck!

I re-read the text I just posted. It proves that I have every right to be here, and I can ignore the expressions on Max, Leonard and Kera's faces at the same. They range from confused to irate. But that's not the only reason I'm feeling so nervous. Will Fair Play resonate with my fans? Only a couple of likes so far.

"Elodie?" Max touches my shoulder. He gives me a more friendly look than the others do. "I'll ask what we're all thinking: Why this sudden change of heart?" I can see genuine interest in his eyes, but I don't know what to say. That it was a simple business decision? If the look on her face is anything to go by, Kera is already wearing an "I hate Elodie"-T-Shirt under her jumper. One she and Cemine designed together.

When Ms Weniger asked me if I wanted to take part, when she said "because you gave Kera the idea in the first place, Elodie," I already

knew the real reason. Unlike most of our teachers, Ms Weniger has a pretty good idea of the roles we play at school. Max is popular. He'll attract attention for the project, but because he hasn't got an account, he won't inspire anyone to register. So Ms Weniger needs my influence and I've decided to agree. The way she put it, the experiment sounded new and exciting, not a bit boring. If we're going to have climate accounts, then I might as well use them to create good content for my fans and solve my problems. And anyway, being one of the four lends me a bit of VIP status. That's always good thing. *Bzzzzz!* A comment from Karl.

@_KARL_THE_GREAT_: Are you serious, Elodie???????????

"Would you stop checking your mobile while we're talking please?" Kera rolls her eyes. But I look back at the display the minute it buzzes again. The right reaction is so important. Karl's comment wasn't a great start and it's the first few that really matter. They usually determine the direction a thread's going go. It's Cemine. Oh no. My next critic.

@Cemine_Ciçek: glad you're taking part!

My heart beats faster than it should for a single positive comment. It's because it's from Cemine, I realise, and don't know where to park that. Her unexpected support gives me courage. There's no need to hide. I mute my mobile and set it down before I answer Max.

"It's simple really! I'm going to use the app and report about it on my channels."

"So you don't really support the project? Fair Play is just another way to boost your profile - like everything you do. You want it to be part of your money machine." Kera rolls her eyes again but this time she can't disconcert me. In fact I'm angry now. Kera's parents own a large architectural practice. She'll never have money worries. I'm not going to let someone judge me for having a smart business sense. How I wish I could shout "That's not really me!" and tell her all the things I'm not allowed to say.

"Does it make any difference why I'm taking part?" I sound tough and I

like that. "You need me. I can give the project a platform. It's good for Fair Play if I support the project. It's a win-win situation."

For a moment, I think I've failed to convince them. I think they're going to ditch me. Kera looks the most sceptical. But then Leonard says:

"If you comment on the experiment when it's up and running, more people from other schools will hear about it and understand what it's like to live with the app. I'm glad you're here."

"No problem. Thank you. All of you, I mean."

"You've got more than a thousand likes for that post already." Max, who seldom looks at his phone, is staring at his screen. "Do you see, Kera? She's tagged you."

"I don't follow that kind of stuff," she says but she looks over Max's shoulder and that's all it takes. I'm in. Kera gives me the thumbs up:

"At least you're honest about it. Welcome on board!"

After they've gone, I linger behind, savouring the feeling that I'm part of something bigger this time, something with substance. Then I gather up my things. [...]

MAX

LONDON UNDERGROUND RUSH HOUR VIBE! The whole hall is packed. Since Elodie's post went viral, more and more people have signed up for Fair Play. Almost half of the school, according to Leonard at our last meeting. That's Elodie's doing. Now she's sitting beside me and the rest of the Fair Play Four, all in a row on the stage. We watch Ms Weniger walk over to the podium to welcome everyone. Behind her, on the screen, my logo blazes black on mint green. It makes me feel awkward and a bit proud at the same time. That's how I feel about everything to do with this Fair Play thing.

I still think the project is a stupid idea. I want to enjoy life for as long as I can. Eat burgers with a hangover at one in the morning, grab a cheap last-minute flight to Barcelona, or to Thailand even. I want to dance the night away at a beach party where the beats coming out of huge speakers make everything inside me vibrate with power enough to light up a whole city. If the world is going down the toilet, I want to experience it first. There are some good bits though. Passing my exams, for one thing. I've checked my grades. With Ms Weniger's help, I could just scrape through. And Kera. I went to the first meeting because of Ms Weniger but I've gone to the rest because of her. The more I get to know her, the more wonderful I think she is. And she doesn't think I'm stupid or boring after all. She said to me, "You know what, Max? There's all sorts of intelligence. Most of it has nothing to do with what they teach you at school. But it's just as important." Then she sent me ten articles about creative thinking. That's what she's like. I grin at the thought of having secret superpowers below the radar of the authorities and tune in to what Weniger is saying.

"I'd like to thank each and every one of you for volunteering to test Fair Play," she says. "It's not going to be easy, but this is a unique opportunity

to show the world that you are willing to sacrifice your personal needs for a joint goal. And such a meaningful goal. Perhaps the most important goal of our time. I wish you all the very best of luck."

That was all. Weniger didn't go into any more detail. She sees this as *our* experiment. Everyone starts clapping and Weniger steps back from the mic to make room for Leonard. He looks surprised when everyone continues to clap as he steps forward. Then he smiles and I realise I've never actually seen him smile before. Or else I can't remember, except for once when Karl slipped and broke an arm in the gym. I thought that was way out of order.

Karl isn't here. He asked me if I minded if he didn't turn up.

"Because you're part of it all." Karl is very loyal. That's what I like about him.

"No worries," I said. "I wouldn't go if I didn't have to." Karl was happy with that. He's gone out with his elder brother and their gang instead. I would rather be with them. But ... then I wouldn't be sitting here next to Kera. I glance at her furtively. When she came back after the summer with a Millie Bobby Brown haircut I was wowed! I like her long hair too, but it distracts from her gorgeous face.

Kera senses that I'm looking at her. She turns her head and I pretend I'm focusing on Leonard's presentation behind her. He's busy going through a long list of terms and conditions that no one will ever bother to read. Most people will just accept them all. The school will have checked everything beforehand anyway. Let's hope we can trust them ...

"As soon as you accept the terms, the app installs itself on your mobile. Every user has a personal climate account. It's marked green as long as you stay within the given budget and turns red if you exceed it. Your personal account balance flows into a collective account which is also either red or green. That account is updated in real time. The big goal is keep the collective account out of the red. If we manage that - and don't forget that we represent the total world population - then we'll have managed to contain environmental pollution enough to prevent triggering the irreversible chain reaction that would otherwise destroy our planet. You've got three months. That's how long the experiment runs for. The account level on the day of the deadline is definitive. Will the project end

with a green account, or won't it?"

Leonard lets the question hang in the air for a moment before continuing.

"There's a website for anyone without Fair Play, which monitors the collective account. The world is watching us. And so is the chief education officer."

Laughter. Leonard opens the website. It looks good on the big screen, really professional. You can see I put some effort into it. Maybe I can include it in my portfolio.

"By the way; pupils who boycott Fair Play are still part of the experiment - whether they like it or not." Leonard's eyes are gleaming. "All the users have the same assets to start with. When these are used up, their personal accounts are overdrawn and they are free to adjust their levels of consumption. Pupils without the app are counted as average users and the collective account is docked accordingly. In order to reach the big goal, all the users have to counteract the non-users' estimated consumption. So, the more people who use Fair Play, the more personal credit everyone gets. Which means it's a good idea to persuade your friends to join in."

I knew this already. But there's something about Leonard's words – "whether they like it or not" – that goes against the grain. A girl, maybe fourteen years old, puts up her hand. Leonard doesn't want to be interrupted but she's sitting right in front of him in the first row for everyone to see. Leonard obviously knows her.

"Yes, Isobel?"

"I don't really understand," the girl said. "Can you explain it more clearly? More simply?"

Leonard mutters something inarticulate like "um". It's a classic! He's the person who finds this stuff easy - and people can't understand what he's saying. Like most of my teachers.

I can't watch. I hurry over to Leonard and grab the microphone. I have to jerk it out of his hand. He's clutching it that tight. I sit down on the edge of the stage opposite the girl and dangle my legs.

"Hello, Isobel. I'm Max. It took me a while to understand too. Shall I tell you what worked for me?"

Isobel nods.

"Imagine I open a bank account for you and nine of your friends."

"I don't have nine friends."

"A small circle of close friends is much better anyway." I like Isobel's unconcerned frankness. "Do you play a team sport then?"

"Football."

"Imagine I pay one hundred euros into an account that belongs to you and nine other team members. If you split up the money fairly, each of you gets ten euros, right? But if five of you spend fifteen euros each instead of ten - these are our average users - that leaves the rest of you with less to spend. You only get five euros each."

"We could get an overdraft."

"You could do that. But the idea of Fair Play is not to have an overdraft. A hundred euros is all we've got - the LIMIT we need to halt the climate crisis. The great goal is to not exceed that limit. That's why your portion changes, depending on how many people are taking part. If it's the whole school, or in this case all 10 team members, then everyone can spend the full amount of 10 euros and the collective account stays in the clear green zone. Was that any help?" I lean towards Isobel and hold up my hand for a high five. She hits it.

"Yes!"

On the way back to my seat, I **throw** the mic to Leonard. He almost **drops** it.

"Max can explain so well," said Leonard, "because he's the only one of us four, the only one in this room in fact, who *doesn't* have an account. Isn't that so, Max? Let's see how long you can sponge off the rest of us. We'll work on you until you get Fair Play."

Silence. Leonard is enjoying this. I don't mind people knowing I haven't got Fair Play. No one would have guessed, because I use all the social networks anonymously. But the way Leonard just said that irritates me.

I look over to Isobel. In the darkness of the auditorium I can't really see her face, but I'm pretty sure she's looking disappointed. [...]

LEONARD

The big account is in the red. Dark red. After the initial enthusiasm, the Fair Players soon realised how hard it is to stick to the limit. We've only been using the app for two weeks. But the longer we stay in the red, the harder it is to get out again. The Fair Players are very motivated. They still think it's just a matter of time before they manage to turn their accounts green along with the big account. We don't want them to get demotivated whatever happens. Moods can change fast. I should know. I end up swearing every day if my account goes red. Like most of us. I'm not stupid. The project that can be sold as a success story is the one that will win the competition. That's what the politicians and the media want. So, for us to win, the big account has to be green on the deadline in two and a half months' time. And to achieve that we need more people to take part. Preferably the whole school.

How are we going to manage that? What I can do to make it happen? I've been racking my brains all through break. I'm sitting on my coat on the well wall. I've never dared sit here before. Fair Play has done something to me. It started at the Fair Play Four meetings. All of a sudden I found myself at eye-level with Kera and Elodie and even with Max. Then I did the presentation in front of the whole school. Standing on the stage, I was scared. I thought I'd get booed off, laughed at, have rotten tomatoes thrown at me and the screen. I was expecting it even. Instead there were friendly faces, good questions and lots of applause. It's as if people registered who I was for the first time ever. How often have I imagined coming into the classroom one morning and being someone else? Jack from California (of course!) for instance, the exchange student who's so cool he can wear sun glasses in the depths of winter. Or that aliens had blanked the other pupils' memories (and captured Karl, taken him back to their planet and put him in a zoo.) Now

it's happened without needing aliens or a new identity. All it took was a bit of programming!

I breathe in the cool air. The sun casts a pattern of shadows and light through the leaves of the trees onto the ground. I let my legs dangle down the well shaft like Max did on stage. I can hardly believe how terrified I've always felt here until now. But it's still not very pretty. Now that I've broken the ban, I don't think I'll come back to the well very often. It's a place for freaks. The potheads from year twelve are here, along with the neogoths from year ten and all the depressed kids you find in every year. There are used condoms lying around and the occasional syringe, broken pencils, bits of paper. Blank of course. This isn't where people write love letters or make life plans.

The next set of weirdos comes around the corner. A group of grunks with fags in their hands. The grunks have taken grunge and punk and turned it into something new - I heard Elodie say that once. They love Nirvana and the Sex Pistols. And there's some overlap clotheswise. Plaid shirts, leather jackets, DMs, holey jeans. The hairstyles are more complicated. There are colourful mohicans and Kurt Cobain lookalikes. I notice too late who's hiding behind the grunks. It's Karl. He leaves the group and heads towards me.

"You know what they're calling me? Foul Player! Foul!" he shouts at me.

I think Karl should appreciate his new name more. It suits him perfectly. But then I realise how serious this situation is. Everyone at the well is backing off already. I need to get out of here. My head knows this, but my legs don't. I manage to stand up, that's all. Maybe it's because I've run away too often. Maybe I don't want to run any more. Then Karl's there. My back crashes hard against the rim of the well. His fingers are around my neck.

"Foul Player! Just because I won't download your filthy app," he spits in my face and then kneels on top of me. I'm desperate. I want the concrete to give way and disappear beneath me; I want to fall down the dark damp shaft. Anything to make this stop. The pressure on my chest and my throat increases. I can't breathe.

"That's the end of Fair Play. You're going to stop this crap right now,

gottit?" I'd promise him anything if he'd just let me go, but as long as he's choking me I can't speak. In Karl's eyes I'm still a victim. And right now his is the only perspective that counts. Why did I have to get involved?

Then suddenly it's all gone. The pressure, my choking, the pain. Karl. I blink in the sunlight, and push myself up onto my elbow. Karl is still there after all, but he's not alone. Matt and two of her friends are blocking his way. Matt's real name is Matilda, she's got neon-pink hair and she's the leader of the grunks. You could be fooled by her freckled friendly-looking face. She can be five-foot-five of pure aggression when she wants. She shoves Karl and when he attempts to fight back, she fends him off, as if it were nothing.

"You've got exactly three seconds to piss off," says Matt.

"One ..." She shoves him again.

"Two ..." Another shove, more vicious this time. He won't let her push him around, I think. He's just working out how to fight all three of them. I'm impressed by Karl's resolve despite myself.

At "Three..." Karl ambles off after all; he's provokingly slow and won't stop swearing.

Matt turns to me

"Everything OK?"

I'm done in and just nod. Matt's friends help me to get up. I manage to stand by myself. I feel a bit wobbly but it could be worse.

"Don't worry." Matt wipes her hands on her jeans. "He won't bother you again. People who enjoy hurting people respond well to physical violence." She sounds like a psychology professor talking about her latest therapy concepts, not like someone who just witnessed what she's saying live. Matt slaps me on the back and as the shock starts to wear off, I feel confused. Why? Why did Matt come to my aid? No one has ever helped me before. Everyone's always too scared they'll be the next victim. Unless they're a grunk of course. The grunks aren't afraid of anyone, but they don't usually get involved in other people's fights. We hardly know each other but here they are, right in front of me, as if I was one of their own.

"Fair?" Matt says suddenly

"Er ... yes. Fair", I say without understanding what she means.

"No, no. I say Fair and you say Play. It's our new greeting. Fair?"
I grin from ear to ear:
"Play!"
[...]

KERA

"Hey, Kera! Are you sure you're allowed that?" A year nine pupil who I know from my time in the school newspaper points at me. He shakes his head disapprovingly. I know exactly what he means. I hide my coffee (Throwaway cup! Plastic lid!! Flown in coffee beans!!!) behind my shopping bag (varnished paper!!!!) which is too bulky to conceal and run towards the bus stop a bit faster. I didn't notice I had forgotten my reusable cup until I got to the coffee shop. I had been about to take it out of the dishwasher when I got distracted by the newspaper lying on the kitchen table. The leading article was interesting and posed a question which I wanted to know more about. Three hours later I fell asleep clutching my laptop. Without a beaker, I should have left the coffee-shop, but the smell of freshly-roasted coffee crept up on me, enticing me, and making my body crave caffeine. Oh well, I thought, it's too late now, I might as well have cow's milk and the biggest cup they've got and a blueberry muffin even if it's not the berry season and it is wrapped in plastic. Feeling guilty, I then bought a top I've been wanting for weeks, to make me feel better. My guilty conscience wouldn't let me take a taxi home though, which was a shame, because then the year niner would never have spotted me.

I am really trying to stay within my limit. But I keep getting caught out by some hidden expenditure I'd not calculated for because I hadn't known about it. My life is far more harmful to the environment than I'd ever have thought. For example I've just found out that my email storage space costs energy. Hour by hour and byte by byte I was using up my account without knowing, because I ignored the Fair Play's messages. I know that a sent email is as bad for the environment as a plastic bag, but I had forgotten to count the archive as well. There are at least three thousand mails in my in-box, mainly old newsletters and articles, not put in any

order although I remember them all. I was shocked and started deleting them at once. It was like being forced to delete an external part of my brain. I gave up fairly soon despite myself.

So my account has been in the red for a while now and that ninth-year pupil knows it. It shouldn't really matter. Although more and more pupils are joining in, there are still a lot of Fair Players who haven't got the hang of it yet. Bet he's not doing much better than me. But he's not one of the Fair Play Four. I'm the only one of them who can't seem to cope well. Max is off the hook of course without an account. No competition. Leonard's icon has been green for several days now. What annoys me most is that Elodie hasn't been in the red once since she downloaded the app. Elodie! Miss "buy this nail polish or three and be as glamorous as me!" When I dreamt up Fair Play, I was sure people like her would find it hardest. The app would soon show up the real person behind the bling. All our pages and sites and profiles would be good for something at last - they'd display the truth for everyone to see for the first time. And now this! Elodie sails through the experiment with flying colours and it's me who is being shown up. I suppose my plan has worked, only it's *my* true self who's in the red. Me of all people. I wasn't expecting that. I now know what's worse than being the centre of attention. It's being the centre of attention because of something you're ashamed of.

The year-nine boy gets on the same bus. Great! He bumps into me just as I'm about to have a sip of coffee. "Oops." Hot liquid spills onto my trousers. I'd normally shout "Be careful!" or "idiot!" But now that my reputation has been tarnished by a red icon, I don't feel so confident. Not even with people two years below me. I should be used to the stick by now. My critics online are far worse, especially the anonymous ones. "Walk the talk, Kera!". "Is this a theory-praxis-gap or what?" or – this one really hurts – "Hypocrite!" I do have some supporters, too. Cemine, Iso and (I have to admit) Elodie, whose fans attacked the trolls like a swarm of locusts. They can't stop my coffee getting cold.

When I get home I pour it down the sink. Iso, sitting at the kitchen table, gives me a quizzical look. I don't meet her eye and my mobile buzzes. Fair Play informs me that the electricity for the lights will be divided by four as usual. I don't have to confirm that. Iso must have done

so already. Dad has made steaks for lunch - my favourite. But every bite I eat makes me feel guilty. I turn up the sound of my mobile and feel a bit calmer, knowing that Fair Play can audio-message me if I'm about to go further into the red,.

I spend all afternoon lying on my bed, trying to work out how to make the annoying red icon on my profile turn green. A thought I shouldn't be thinking has lodged itself in my brain. What if I said we were six people for lunch, not four? It would only work if Iso wasn't there, of course, or else Fair Play would cross-check our data. But that way any used electricity would be divided by six. Would that really be so bad? *Yes Kera, dammit, it would be awful, because this isn't about you.* It's much bigger than that. If my wants matter more to me than my principles, the people calling me a "hypocrite!" would be right. I'd be no better than Eichner¹ who only cares about his image. But a few minor tweaks when there are no Fair Players about who might sneak on me ... I jump when someone knocks and Iso sticks her head around the door

"Someone to see you, Kera."

"I didn't hear the doorbell ring."

"Outside by the gate"

"Who is it?"

Had I arranged to meet Cemine? How embarrassing if I've forgotten, I've hardly seen her recently.

"You'll see." Iso says and turns red (in the face!). I long for a time when that information isn't necessary any more.

I go into the garden, wearing my granny slippers and my baggy favorite leggings. When I see who's waiting, I wish I'd bothered to change my shoes or put on a decent pair of trousers at least. Max is leaning against the garden fence. He's parked his Schwalbe moped on our drive with a basket strapped to the back.

"Ready?" he calls as I walk towards him.

"For what?"

¹ *Christoph Eichner is the Berlin chief education officer. He has set up an environment awareness competition for upper secondary schools. The topic: 'Summer drought and microplastics – is rescue in sight?!' Anything goes: research projects, experiments, actions, campaigns, as long as they run a minimum of three months and contribute to solving the environmental crisis.

"Our date?"

"I don't remember agreeing to one."

"No, but you didn't say no either. And it is Tuesday, five o' clock."

"But not the first Tuesday after the presentation in the school hall. That was two weeks ago."

"I didn't say next Tuesday. Just Tuesday. There's no harm in trying. Picnic?"

Flakes of faded white paint crumbled off the fence onto Max's jumper. My jumper, in fact. He never did give me back my Norwegian jumper and is wearing it today along with a neon pink hat which doesn't match at all but still looks good. I brush off the paint as an excuse to come a step closer

"You're a bit crazy though, aren't you?" I say.

"Would that matter?" He steps towards me too. Max doesn't need an excuse.

"It depends." Apart from the fence there's not much between us.

"As long as you don't murder your dates and bury them out in the woods?" "Only on Mondays."

"That's OK then! I'll just change my shoes."

When I get back, we head off to Green Wood on foot, leaving the moped behind. It's Max's idea. I think he wants to show me that he knows the Fair Play options, even if he doesn't have any himself.

[...] The day is perfect for an outing. Sunny enough to make us happy. Autumny enough to edge closer together. When I hold my hands over my ears to ward off the wind, Max gives me his hat.

"Despite the general opinion, I do care about being fair," he says. "Here's my hat in exchange for your jumper."

I put on his hat. My ears glow. Not just because they are warmer already, but also because I know the same wool was touching Max just moments ago.

On a hill overlooking the wood, Max spreads out a plaid blanket. His hair shines in the sun. He's brought champagne – "It's far too good to waste on my father's new girlfriend" – and home-made avocado sandwiches. The tree-tops are a beautiful sea of autumn colour. The champagne is bubbly and when Max says "You've got a piece of

avocado just here," and brushes it away from the corner of my mouth with his thumb, I know he's going to kiss me. I close my eyes.

"AVOCADO!"

Max jumps.

"HIGH WATER CONSUMPTION, LONG DELIVERY DISTANCES, INCREASING DEMAND FAVOURS DEFORESTATION. OFTEN CONTAMINATED WITH PESTICIDES. BETTER ECOLOGICAL BALANCE THAN MOST ANIMAL FOODS PER CALORIE."

"What was that?" Max stares at my mobile which is lying on the blanket beside me. I sigh.

"Fair Play."

"Your app talks to you?"

"Sorry. Yes, I forgot to turn it off. One moment."

I reach for my cell phone without changing my position. My lips are still in the same place but they're not going to be kissed now. When I switch off the info function, I see the app's bill for my date with Max so far. The avocados are thought to be from Peru, which is where they usually come from at this time of year. If I can confirm that they come from Spain instead, that would be better for my account. But if I ask Max where the avocados came from, he'll probably chuck a sandwich at me. He's still staring at my mobile as if it's about to explode.

"How does the app know what you ate?"

"It probably heard you talking about the avocado on the corner of my... the corner of my mouth." Thank you, Fair Play, now I've reminded him of the failed kiss as well!

"I wasn't really looking for a three-way date." Max crunches up the blanket below him. "Isn't that going a bit too far though? Protection of privacy and all that jazz..."

"The Fair Players aren't forced to do anything. And anyway, it is only for three months. Transparency is a real linchpin though. Anyone who thinks they have any kind of privacy on the net, anonymous or not, should try researching the topic some time. It doesn't make any difference if Fair Play is listening in too. It's for a good cause, after all."

Max gets a first glimpse of what Cemine and Iso call my icicle look. His body tenses.

"Another glass of champagne?" he asks. "Or will the app tell you off as soon as you get home and let it talk again?"

I'm disappointed in Max. Of course what we are doing is radical, but this is a time for radical measures. We won't get anywhere otherwise, at least not in time. The Fair Play system is just that - it's fair. Far better than eco-taxes, where the rich can buy their way out. My idea is still good and I'm not going to cheat. So there.

I don't want to think the next thought. But it happens all the same. Takes shape in my mind and refuses to leave. *If you would just join in, there'd be more for all of us*, I tell off the Max in my head. [...]