

The Whole 'Cool' Thing

I just want to begin by saying that none of this was my fault. The whole thing started with my favourite girl band: *WitchCraft*.

They were who I wanted to be. They were beautiful. They could sing and dance and above all ... they were *cool*. They all wore their hair the same way: long, straight and really dark, slightly metallic green that was

almost black, but not quite. I had all their songs on CD; I had their posters on my bedroom walls; I had the *WitchCraft* schoolbag, the *WitchCraft* lunchbox, the *WitchCraft* magazines, the *WitchCraft* clothes and now I wanted the *WitchCraft* hair.



‘Over my dead body,’ said my mum. ‘You are *not* dying your hair green.’

You can see my problem. My mum just doesn’t understand cool. I mean, I ask for one little thing that’s really, really important to me, and she acts like I want to have a brain operation or something. Anyway, that still left me without my long, straight, green hair, and something had to be done about that. My name is Melanie. I’m ten years old, and this is my story.

Getting your hair styled is an expensive business, at least if you’re a girl. It’s cheap for boys, but then what do boys care about hair? The only time a boy cares about his hair is when he wants to look like his favourite footballer. But for girls it’s expensive and you need parents to pay for expensive things. So when a new hair stylist opened on the corner just down the road from us, I couldn’t help noticing they had a poster of *WitchCraft* – with their dark green hairdos – up in the window ... and



underneath it was a sign saying:

Official WitchCraft Stylist.

Get The Latest WitchCraft Look For Just €15!

I sprinted home as fast as my *WitchCraft* trainers could carry me.

Fifteen euros isn't much for a cool hairstyle, but it was still more than I could afford right then. I had maybe three or four euros in my *WitchCraft* purse at home. I'm not very good at saving money.

As I ran, I tried to work out how I could get some more cash. Mrs Collins next door would pay me to walk her little dog, but it was always trying to bite my ankles, and it pulled at the lead so hard all the time

that it nearly strangled itself. I was worried that some day it would pass out and I'd have to give it mouth-to-mouth. I could do a charity run (I'm a good runner) or maybe stand out on the street with one of those plastic boxes: 'Support Melanie's Bid For New Hair'. But I didn't think anybody would figure that me getting the latest hairstyle was a very good cause. I mean, it wasn't like I'd actually die if I didn't get it – although sometimes it felt that way.

There was always the chance of making some money by selling some of my *WitchCraft* gear, but to be honest, I'd rather give mouth-to-mouth to Mrs Collins's dog.

By the time I got home, I knew there was only one thing I could do. I was going to have to ask Wayne. You see, I'm not good at saving money, but my little brother Wayne is. Believe it or not, he actually has a piggy bank. It's shaped like a football, but it's a piggy bank all the same. And in that piggy bank is at least fifteen euros, maybe more. The only problem was getting it out of Wayne.

I was going to have to be really clever about this. I needed to make him think that he'd be doing himself a big favour by loaning me the money. I ran upstairs and pushed open his bedroom door.

'Hey, listen,' I said to him. 'I've got this really great idea for a ...'

'I'm not loaning you any money,' he snapped, without looking up from his stupid computer football game. Sometimes I forget that just because he's annoying, that doesn't make him a complete idiot. He can be pretty sharp when he wants to be. Being clever hadn't worked, so I tried begging instead.

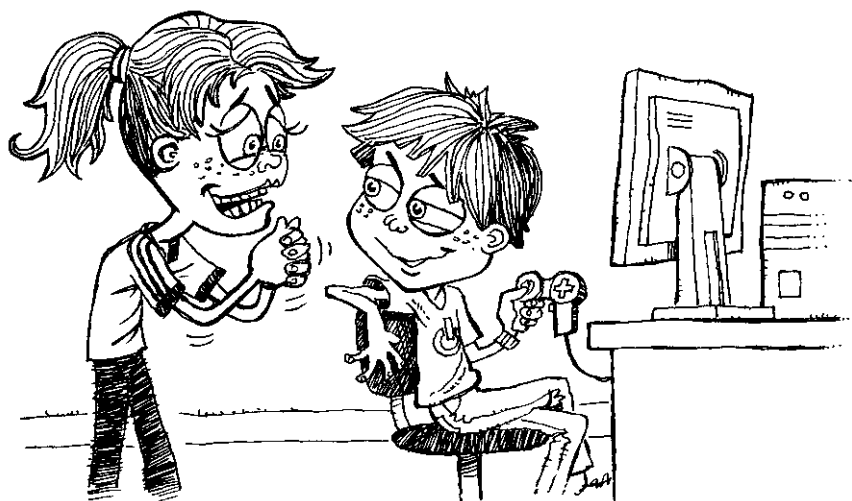
'Wayne! Please! This is really important!'

'So is this. I'm into the semi-finals!' he yelled back. Wayne was no good at real football, but he was the top goal scorer in our school on a games console.

I put my hands on my hips and waited for him to finish the match, then I hit 'pause' on the console.

'Hey!' he scowled.

'Please, Wayne. Please, *please* lend me some money. I'll give it back in, like, a week, I promise.'



‘So, why not just wait a week, and get it then?’ he asked.

‘Don’t talk to me like you’re Dad – you’re not Dad. Please lend me the money. I’ll do anything.’ I bit my lip as soon as I said that. It was a dumb thing for any girl to say to her little brother.

Wayne grinned his nasty grin.

‘Anything?’

‘Well, it depends.’

‘That’s not *anything* then, is it?’ He raised his eyebrows. ‘That’s just *something*.’

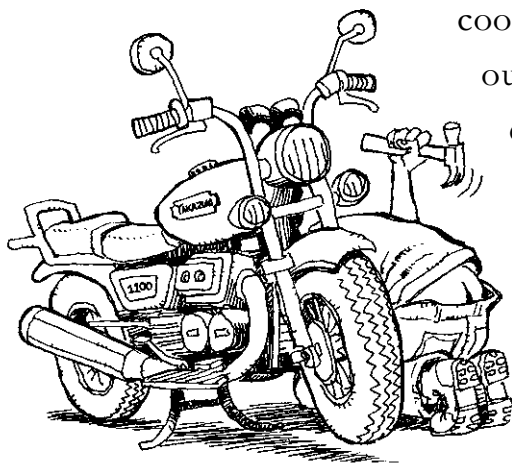
‘Ohhh ... all right then, anything.’ I clenched my fists. ‘Please will you lend me fifteen euros?’

‘Okay,’ he grinned again. ‘But you have to help me start up Dad’s motorbike.’

I knew he was going to say that. Dad had a big, old motorbike – *really* old, like nearly twenty years or something – which he hardly rode at all. He used it to spend Sunday afternoons out in the back garden getting his hands dirty, fixing something that wasn’t broken. Or some of his friends would come around, and they’d all stand beside their oily old bikes, talking about them. They were just like *boys*, but older and fatter. A motorbike would have

made most men a little bit cool at least, but not our dad. And however uncool Dad might be, Wayne was worse. There was no hope for him. He was just *so* embarrassing.

But Wayne had



always wanted a go on the motorbike and Dad would never let him, so now he wanted me to help him get it started. Dad would kill us if he caught us – but I said yes.

You'd be amazed what I'd do for the right hair.

Wayne got his football-shaped piggy bank down from the top of his television and opened it up. I couldn't believe how much he had. It must have been nearly sixty euros in coins. He handed me the fifteen euro coins and put the rest back.



‘We start tomorrow at oh-nine hundred,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked him.

‘Nine o’clock,’ he groaned, rolling his eyes back.

‘Then why didn’t you just say so, instead of trying to sound like an astronaut!’

‘Just don’t be late.’

I took the money and charged down the stairs.

‘Don’t run on the stairs!’ Mum called from the

sitting room. 'You'll fall and break your neck!'

'I'm going out!' I shouted back.

'Where? When will you be back? I'm making lunch for half one.'

She came to the door of the sitting room.

'I'll be back then,' I promised.