

Free Choice?

short story contest E1, advanced level

Nick looked around nervously. Every movement mattered now, he had to be quick. He checked his angles once more to make sure nobody was watching him putting this brand new winter coat into his backpack.

Just as he tried to slip it down from the clothing rack it got stuck.

"This can't be happening!" Then, finally, after what felt like an eternity, he closed his backpack and turned around to leave.

But he couldn't.

In front of him stood the store detective glancing down on him, trying to look more like a police officer than a mall cop. "I'm guessing you weren't going to pay for that, right?" he snapped at Nick.

"Yes... Of course I was!" he stuttered.

"That's what everyone says. Sorry but that won't do. You're coming with me son."

He grabbed Nick by his arm and led him to his small office.

"Take a seat," he ordered. "Now I know this is a difficult time for you young boys. You try everything, no matter how dumb it is.

But now is your chance to make a choice!

I don't know if you got dared by your mates to steal or if you wanted to brag to them - and I honestly don't care. Trust me, I've heard every excuse in the book. What matters is you making a choice now!

You could turn your whole life around, you know? You have to choose the right path. Maybe even get a job. I know guys like you. You're a good kid. You just have some bad friends, convincing you to make bad choices.

But I believe that if you take the right ones, life will reward you.

So I'll let you go. Sounds like a deal? Just don't steal anymore, it's just stupid, alright?"

Nick stepped out of the mall into the cold dark streets. It was raining every day, now that winter was coming.

Would his little brother even survive without the jacket in their little apartment without electricity?

And he already had a job, the money just wasn't enough for food, rent, and a jacket.

"Making a choice...", he muttered. "Bullshit."

written by Paul Ockel, E-Phase, November 21