

Arne Svingen

AGENT ELVIN GRIFF

## ESCAPE TO THE END OF THE WORLD

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## 1. HIGH-RISK HAMBURGER

Elvin gazed down happily at the burger in front of him. He hadn't eaten since yesterday, and now he was looking forward to sinking his teeth into the tender meat, the gherkins, the lettuce and all the relish that was wedged into the burger bun. Just as he liked it. He grabbed the burger in his hands and went to chomp a huge bite.

But before the burger could reach his mouth, he froze.

Sitting at the next table was a man

with exactly the same burger as him. But he wasn't eating – it was as though he wasn't interested in the food. A little further away another man was leaning back while reading something on his phone. On his table was a

portion of fries, untouched. There was a woman over by the window, and another man at the emergency exit. They were all smartly dressed and sitting at their tables alone. And apparently, none of them were interested in eating.

Where were all the kids who were usually here with their parents? Or the teenagers

sitting in their big groups? And where had happened to the guy behind the counter who had just served him?

Elvin stared down at his burger. He knew that something wasn't quite right.

If he put the burger back down on the table, they would know that he suspected something. He took a quick bite. He was so hungry that it ought to have been a pure delight, but his mind was working overtime and there was no space in there for him to enjoy the food. The only thing that mattered now was getting out of there. Quick.

The people in suits had positioned themselves cleverly: one at the doorway, one at the emergency exit, and one on either side of him. No matter which escape route he chose, he would have to pass at least one of them.

He took another bite. It tasted of nothing – the only thing his brain could do was estimate

the distance of each possible escape route.

His thoughts developed into a plan.

He squeezed the burger together so that the relish dribbled down onto his pants. Lucky for him that he hadn't picked up any napkins. He put the burger back down on the tray, stood up and walked calmly over to the dispenser, looking neither left nor right.

Elvin tugged out a napkin. Then he took another one and carefully wiped off the mess. Next he grabbed the bottle of ketchup that stood to the side of the napkins.

And then he ran for it.

The agents at the tables reacted immediately, ready to capture him as he made his escape. Elvin splurged ketchup out in front of him. Just as the nearest agent was about to grab around him with his muscly arms, Elvin

dived to the floor and slid along on the ketchup.

The agent at the window was ready to throw herself on top of him, but then Elvin pushed one foot against one of the fitted tables and ended back up on his feet again. He leapt up on the chair, and from there onto the table, drifting over the top of woman like the breeze.

On his way back down to earth he snatched the paper cup from her table. He could feel

that its contents were still hot. He swiftly knocked off the plastic lid and tossed the coffee into the face of the man coming towards him.

‘Aaaarrgh!’ screamed the man.

Now there was only one left. This time Elvin kept it simple. He dummied him to the left at lightning speed, ducked down and rushed past the man on his right.

Elvin threw the door open. He was out. Now



it was all about getting as far away as possible, and on the double. But the agents had clearly come out in force – just then, two characters in dark suits and sunglasses stepped out of a car.

There were no obvious escape routes. Elvin ran randomly along the side of the building with the agents in hot pursuit. Elvin could tell that they were catching up with him. Right next to the burger place was a petrol station. A boy appeared with an ice cream in his hand. What was that he had under his arm?

Fantastic!

In seconds he went from being completely lost to having a solid plan – he recognised the shape of the board under the boy's arm. Its four wheels would save his skin.

Elvin raced right for the boy, who was trying to figure out why there was a boy being chased by two men in suits headed straight towards him.

'I'm just borrowing this,' Elvin explained as he snatched the skateboard away from the boy.

Elvin tossed the board down on the ground. Without stopping he jumped on and kicked off with his right foot. He quickly hit high speed, and soon he was flying towards the footpath under the motorway.

Behind him the agents had come to a halt.

He zoomed into the tunnel and out the other side. Next he took the path that was signposted towards the city centre. He was going so fast that he could feel

tears coming to the corners of his eyes, then  
breathed a sigh of relief.

That was close. Way too close.

It couldn't go on like this. He had to disappear,  
and this time for good.

## 2. A STRANGE SCHOOL

Elvin was snoozing with his head against the bus window. He stretched, the sensation in his body telling him that he had been on board for a long time. In between, the bus had stopped in towns and

villages along the way. Elvin no longer remembered what the final destination was called, but it didn't matter anyway.

Sooner or later he would have to get off. Maybe at a place that wasn't too small, but not too large either. Preferably a nice-looking cluster of houses, somewhere without cameras on every street corner.

He knew that it would be tricky to find such a place. Perhaps it would be impossible.

He looked out with sleepy eyes and caught a glimpse of a sign along the road: *End Creek*.

There was something final about the name. As though he had made it to the end of the world.

Could this be the place?

A few minutes later Elvin watched the bus vanishing into the distance. He had been the only passenger to get off. The driver

had asked him whether he had any luggage, but Elvin just shook his head.

He saw some clothes hanging out to dry on a clothesline in a garden. He hopped the fence and swapped his dirty pants for some jeans that were a surprisingly good fit. Even better, they had big pockets, which came in handy as he transferred over all his stuff.

The streets weren't exactly crowded. Elvin started wandering down towards what looked like some kind of downtown area. The rumbling in his belly was



worse than ever. A snack bar caught his eye. With the last of his money he bought a hotdog from the woman at the window. It tasted like heaven. The snack-bar woman leaned out

of the window and asked:

‘Shouldn’t you be at school?’

‘I’ve got a...um...free period,’ Elvin replied.

‘You’re not skipping class, I hope?’

‘No, I’m heading back to school as soon as I’m done eating.’

‘I don’t remember seeing you here before.’

‘I’ve just moved here,’ Elvin explained,  
‘and I’m going now.’

He began walking down the street.

‘The school’s that way,’ said the woman,  
pointing in the opposite direction.

‘I know.’

Elvin turned around and continued towards the town centre while he finished the rest of the hotdog. It wasn’t long before he came across a large building with *End Creek School* written on the wall. Nothing about the building reminded him of the school he had gone to.

Suddenly a bell rang. He stopped at the corner of the building, just about where the fence began. In seconds the yard in front of the school filled with children. What were they up to? Some of them were kicking a ball, while others were running after each other as they laughed and whooped. One girl was jumping over a rope that two others

were swinging around. What kind of school was this? Why was nobody practising martial arts or doing difficult balancing tricks on a highline above the ground? He couldn't see a single adult ordering them around.

A girl came running straight towards him with two boys hot on her tail. When she had almost made it to where Elvin was standing, one of them managed to grab hold of her hair and pulled her to the ground.

Alright, now it was all about to kick off. She was going to end up in close combat with the two boys for sure. Was she going to use karate or judo?

'Let go!' yelled the girl.

'Heh heh, you're such a gyppo,' laughed one of the boys, shoving her around.

'Go bug someone else!' she snarled.

Both boys looked around, as though checking that they wouldn't be seen by anyone who wasn't supposed to.



‘Quick, get her legs and we’ll throw her in the puddle so everyone can see what a pikey she is,’ said the boy with the dark hair.

One grabbed hold of her legs and the other took her arms. The girl was struggling to get free.

Elvin took a deep breath and clambered calmly over the fence.

### 3. AN INVISIBLE LINE

‘You don’t think it would be a better idea to let her go?’ said Elvin coolly.

The boys stopped what they were doing.

‘A *better idea* to let her go?’ said the one with dark hair, sarcastically. ‘And who are you to have such dumb ideas?’

‘It doesn’t matter who I am. What matters is that you do what I say.’

'And what's going to happen if we don't?'  
Elvin swapped glances with the girl. She  
didn't seem scared – just angry.  
'I know plenty of things that hurt.'  
'Is that a threat?'



'It might be that your fancy clothes get ruined, too. Once in a while I feel like giving some people a new haircut. How about a nice skinhead?'

They let go of the girl. She got back on her feet straight away.

'Do you know who you're talking to?' threatened the one with the blond hair.

'Nope. Neither of you told me your name. Are you going to tell me now?'

'You wanna know something? We rule this school,' said the one with the dark hair angrily, 'and if anyone threatens us it never ends well.'

'Just a minute, boys. Right now you've got a choice to make. You can step over here, and then you might get hurt, or your clothes might get all messed up, or you might end up losing some hair. Or you could get out of here and go throw a ball or something,

and nobody gets hurt. I recommend the second one. Or maybe you're no good at throwing balls? Or do you just like being in pain?'

The two boys stopped in their tracks. Was there something they weren't quite sure about?

'You're the one who's going to get lost. If you don't, then...then...'

Elvin raised his forefinger.

The girl shook her head as though warning him against taking it any further.

'Before you say anything else,' began Elvin, 'imagine that there's a line just about where that little stone is. Can your imaginations handle that?'

'A line?'

'Does that mean that the two of you have an imagination? In any case, if you cross this invisible line, it might just mean that I pull out a little aikido, possibly some taekwondo, or a couple of kenjutsu moves. I'm not really sure what I'm in the mood for today.'

The boys glanced at each other. By the looks in their eyes, they had no idea what was going on.

'What's it going to be?' Elvin asked.

'If you don't get out of our town, things are going to turn rough for you,' said the dark-haired one.

‘Do I have to go far out of town, or is it enough if I just get away from where you two play with your dolls?’

‘You’ve been warned!’

Then they turned around, and left.

The girl walked towards him.

‘Are you completely nuts?’

‘Am I...nuts? That’s not something I get asked very often.’

‘You don’t seem very smart. You’ve just made enemies with Willy and Billy.

They’re in charge round here.’

‘They weren’t in charge of very much just now.’

‘That was pretty weird. They seemed a bit scared. But watch out, those boys are shady.’

The girl came closer, quickly passing the imaginary line on the ground. She reached out her hand.

'My name's Lydia,' she said.

Elvin took her hand and shook it slightly.

'Nice name.'

'You know that now's when you're supposed to tell me *your* name, right? Or maybe that's a state secret?'

'Yeah, it is actually.'

'You're really odd.'

'OK then. My name's...Elvin.'

'Hi Elvin. Are you just visiting?'

He nodded.

'What kind of school is this, really?' he asked.

'What kind of school? End Creek School.  
It's normal. I think. What kind of school do  
you go to?'

'I don't go to school any more.'

'How come? Have you dropped out?'

'I can't talk about that.'

'Another state secret?'

'Yep, that's right.'

The bell rang again.

'You'll just have to stay here and hang out  
then,' said Lydia.

'You wouldn't know a place I could...spend  
the night?'

'Do you need a place to stay?'

'Just for tonight.'

'Have you run away from home?'

'Possibly. In a way.'

'I might know of a place. Meet me after  
school. I finish at two.'

'Lydia!' yelled a man over by the school's main entrance. Lydia turned towards him. 'Remember I still need to talk to your mother.'

'She's still sick,' Lydia shouted back.

'Then I'll have to visit you at home.'

'She'll come to school as soon as she can. I promise.'

'It can't go on like this,' said the teacher, annoyed. 'And get to class now.'

'I'm just saying bye to...'

She turned back towards Elvin. But there was nobody there.

'Where...where did he go?' she said to herself.

'Come on, Lydia!' the teacher shouted strictly.

She glanced around one more time for Elvin before turning to run back towards the school building.



## 4. THE UPSIDE-DOWN TEST

Lydia was walking home from school, beating a stick against the asphalt. Elvin had been following her for a while from the edge of the woods. When he was sure that nobody else was around, he approached her from behind. Lydia jumped.

‘Where did you come from?’

‘You said that you were finishing at two.’

‘But I thought that you would be waiting outside the school grounds.’

‘Doing exactly what people expect you to do is never a smart move.’

‘Who are you, really?’

‘Elvin, I’ve already told you that. And that’s not something I usually reveal.’

‘You think I can be bothered to make friends with someone who won’t say anything about himself?’

‘How do I know I can trust you?’

'You'll have to put me to the test, I  
suppose.'

'So you're willing to take the window test?'

'What's that?'

'Does hanging upside-down make you feel  
queasy?'

'What are you talking about?'

‘That building over there looks high enough. Follow me. I need to find out if I can trust you.’

‘Woooah, you’re crazy!’ yelled Lydia.

‘You’re trusting me not to let go. That’s a great start.’

Lydia was hanging upside-down out of a third-floor window. Elvin was holding her in a tight grip around her ankles.

‘And it’s going absolutely...totally...perfectly...’she said quietly, before finally yelling: ‘FIIIIINE!’



‘Great,’ said Elvin, hauling her back in. ‘At school I learned that this was a good way to test people.’

When she was finally standing back in the corridor of the apartment block again, her face was flushed bright red, her eyes as big as plates.

‘OK, that was your one and only chance to do that to me. But I passed the test, right?’

‘Let’s say so.’

‘Let’s say so? I would’ve been a splatter on the street if you had lost your grip. I trusted you!’

‘I never lose my grip.’

‘You wanna know something? You’re pretty annoying.’

‘I can try to be less annoying, but I don’t know if I’ll manage it. So, your mum’s sick?’

'Yeah. She spends most of her time at home in bed.'

Elvin studied her face.

'What is it now?' Lydia asked, irritated.

'It's just that...you're lying.'

'What? That's pretty rude!'

'No. I can see it from the twitches in your face. It's easy to tell if people are lying if you know what you're looking for.'

'I do actually live with my mum.'

'That's not what you're lying about. There's something else.'

'Who are you?'

'If I had to guess, I would say that you tell people that your mum is sick when actually she's not there. And you say that so you don't have to live in a foster home.'

'Have you been round to where I live?'





'I don't know where you live.'

'So how do you know that?'

'We have hundreds of muscles in our faces, but we don't have full control over all of them. You just need to know what to look for. And you're not being honest with me.'

'And neither you with me. What's that nonsense about you learning the window test at school? Now it's your turn to tell me who you are.'

Elvin stopped.

'That's dangerous for you to know.'

'More dangerous than Billy and Willy?'

'Much more.'

'If I don't find out more about you, you're not coming home with me. Do you think I'm a complete idiot or something?'

'Is your mum in prison?'

'How did you know that?' she asked as a look of shock crossed her face.

'I just guessed.'

'And I'm just guessing that you've won the contest to be the most annoying idiot in the world.'

'OK,' said Elvin, fixing his eyes on her. 'At school I learned that there's almost nobody you can trust. But at this very minute I don't have much choice. And I think you're about as close as I'm going to get.'

'As close as you're going to get? You are so unbelievably rude!'

'Are you gonna take this opportunity to find everything out?'

'If you don't start telling me soon, I'm going home to make dinner. On my own!'

## 5. THE LIFE OF A SPECIAL AGENT

'I am...' Elvin started to say before clearing his throat. 'I'm a...special agent.'

Lydia burst out laughing.

'OK, I'm going home to make dinner.'

She turned her back on him and walked down the street.

'Wait! This is the first time I've ever told anyone this.'

It's not so easy to talk about.'

Lydia turned to face him.

'Special agent? Yeah, right! How old are you? Twelve?'

'I'm eleven.'

'Since when have eleven-year-olds become special agents?'

'I was sent to an elite school eleven years ago.'

‘What? So you...have been at school ever since you were born?’

‘More or less. My parents died when I was a baby, and since then I’ve been at school with four other orphans of the same age.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘As serious as can be. But the school is top secret. Nobody can know about it.’

‘So you’re kinda gonna save the world?’

‘That’s the problem. One day I realised that I wasn’t supposed



to be making the world a better place. I was supposed to be looking after super rich families. The sort of people who have more money than they can ever spend – the kind who think that everyone is out to get them. We're meant to be their super agents.'

'If people are so loaded, then surely it might be the case that others are out to get them?'

'Listen up. There's just a handful of people who own almost everything in the world. The rest of us have almost nothing. People like you. And me. I started asking questions about it and then one day they took me out of class.'

'What were they going to do to you?'

'I think they wanted

to...get rid of me, in one way or another. Imagine if people found out that they're training kids up to become agents. It's illegal, for sure. But it's actually the government that's behind it all. If people found out about it, it would be a huge scandal.'

She flipped it right back at him.

'I can tell by looking at you that it's not true.'

'No you can't, because it's all completely true. And right now I've made the choice to trust you. The only one in the whole world. I'm on the run from people who want to lock me up, and I got off the bus



at a random stop. That stop was End Creek. Can you help me?’

Lydia stared back at him.

‘For real?’

‘Yeah. For real.’

‘What do they actually teach you at that school?’

‘Everything that might turn me into a good agent. Self-defence. Boxing. How to tie a knot in 250 different ways. How to scale the side of a house. Making bugging equipment from an old radio. Disarming dangerous people. Hacking into mobile phones. Disconnecting burglar alarms.

‘Are you serious?’

‘I already told you I’m serious.’

‘Hang on a minute. Do you know what hopscotch is?’ asked Lydia.

‘What? Err, nope.’

'A skipping rope?'

'I can knot a rope.'

'The rules of football?'

'I know what a football is, but I've never played with one.'

'Seesaw?'

'I can see with my eyes.'

'No, I mean a seesaw that you sit on.'

'What? But you can't...I don't get it.'

'I never thought I would be so impressed that someone knew so little about such normal things.'

'But I can walk a highline strung between two buildings at the same time as shooting a bow and arrow.'