

Transcript

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[introduction music]

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for advanced learners. The name of the story is *The Digital Fugitive*. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Digital](https://www.easystoriesinenglish.com/Digital). That's [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Digital](https://www.easystoriesinenglish.com/Digital). There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

A few weeks ago I went to Bristol Pride. Pride is an event that happens in many cities around the world where people go on marches and have celebrations to commemorate and fight for the rights of LGBTQ+ people. Bristol Pride is a particularly large celebration. It has a parade and a large festival on a field with various stages set up, and over 40,000 people were expected to attend this year. I don't know how many people *actually* attended, but it certainly seemed like a lot!

I went with a friend, and we decided to take part in the march since neither of us had done it before. There were, of course, many people there representing companies, charities and political organisations. Actually, it was quite surprising just how many groups had been sent by their workplaces. It made it hard to find the real people inbetween! But there were plenty of flags, colour, shouting and excitement, and even some dancing in the parade. Having said that, I'm not sure if I'd go again unless I was with a big group, as it took ages to start and there was mostly a lot of standing around. It was fun, though.

The actual festival was much more exciting, although I really had to pace myself, take things slowly, as I was suffering with some fatigue that day. Still, we were able to enjoy some amazing performances. In particular, there was a circus tent that had contortionism, which is when people can bend their body parts into amazing shapes, stripteases, burlesque, vogue, pole dancing... It truly was amazing.

Unfortunately, there were some musicians who I really wanted to see but wasn't able to. One of them, Alexandra Burke, couldn't perform because she'd given birth a few days earlier. The other two, Priyanka and Carly Rae Jepsen, performed later in the day. But I was so tired that we had to leave before their performances. I was really frustrated that I wasn't able to see them, but I was at a point where I could barely stand up, so it was probably for the best.

Have you ever been to a pride celebration? How was it? I think I'd enjoy a smaller pride to be honest. There is one in the seaside town near me, but I wasn't able to go this year because I wasn't feeling well enough. Anyway, come over to the transcript at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Digital](https://www.easystoriesinenglish.com/Digital) and tell me about your pride experiences in the comments

section at the bottom. Or if you've never been, tell me if you'd like to go, and where you would like to attend.

By the way, there are some cultural references I just thought I'd explain in today's episode, in case you don't know them.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid is a famous Western film about two cowboys who are being chased after robbing some trains. The film ends with the two heroes getting shot by the Bolivian Army, and the ending is quite famous for how bittersweet it is.

Stephen Hawking was an English theoretical physicist who did very important work on quantum mechanics. Stephen Hawking used an electric wheelchair to get around, as he had a motor neurone disease, and he also used an electric device to generate speech when he became unable to talk.

GCHQ, which stands for Government Communications Headquarters, is an organisation within the UK government which works on cybersecurity for the country. MI5, also known as the Security Service, is the organisation that generally works for counter-intelligence and security within the UK. You might be familiar with these organisations if you are a fan of the *James Bond* films.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

A **fugitive** is a runaway, someone who is trying to escape the law. If someone breaks out of prison and tries to not get caught, they are a fugitive. Fugitives can be quite dangerous, as they will often do anything to avoid going back to prison.

Nerves are little wires that run through our body and take messages from one part of the body to another. When you move your arm, it is because your brain has sent a signal along your nerves to tell those muscles to move. At least, I think that's how it works. I'm not great at biology! **Nerve endings** are the ends of bundles of nerves, and they let us feel sensations such as heat, cold and pain.

A **powerchair** is a type of wheelchair that uses electricity to move around. Powerchairs are usually powered by batteries or motors. Powerchairs are easier to use than wheelchairs, as they do not require upper body strength and can cover uneven ground better.

A **cog** is an important but very small part of a machine. Cogs are metal circles with 'teeth' sticking out of them. Cogs sit together, and their teeth connect, so that when one cog moves, it turns the other cog at the same time. If you open up a mechanical watch, you will see plenty of small cogs in motion. When someone works for a big company and plays only a small role in it, we can say that they are a cog in the machine.

A **prosthetic** or **prosthesis** is an artificial body part, a body part which has been made to replace one that was removed. For example, if a soldier loses their leg in the war, then they may get a prosthetic leg to replace it. However, prosthetics are expensive and many amputees, people who have lost a limb, cannot afford them.

Middle management is the part of a company that acts as management between low-level staff and high-level staff. Usually, line managers and people who work in human resources are within middle management. Middle management has a reputation for being full of petty people—people without much power who want to control those below them by whatever means possible.

The **underclass** of a society is the lowest class of people in that society. Usually, when we talk about 'the underclass' it refers to the poor, the unemployed and the disabled. Because these people are unable to contribute to the system of capitalism, they are considered the underclass.

Scrap is bits of metal or electronics that have been thrown away because it doesn't work anymore. If you go to a junkyard, you'll find lots of scrap metal. In some big cities, you

can find markets where people sell scrap metal and electronics, and some people buy the scrap and use it to build their own cars and electronic devices.

Merge means to fuse or to combine. If you have two departments in a company and you combine them into one, you merge them. If you have two classes in a school and combine them into one, you also merge them.

Accessibility means whether something is **accessible**, whether it can be easily accessed or used by all people. Usually, the term 'accessibility' refers to whether a place is friendly to disabled people. For example, if a building has ramps for wheelchairs, lifts and doesn't have too bright lights or too loud noises, we can generally say it is accessible. Many disabled people use accessibility devices, such as hearing aids or wheelchairs, to make the world around them more accessible.

Physiotherapy is a way of treating health problems through exercise. For example, if you have an operation on your hip, you'll probably need physiotherapy afterwards to make sure you have a full range of motion with your hip. A physiotherapist will prescribe you simple exercises to do daily to make sure you can move your hip without risk of injury.

A **painkiller** is a type of drug that kills pain, that reduces pain in the body. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are the two most common types of painkillers in the UK. However, in the UK you can only buy two packs of painkillers in a shop at any one time, to avoid people overdosing on them.

A **bodybuilder** is someone who works very hard to build up the muscles in their body. Bodybuilders spend a long time at the gym, and often pay close attention to their diet, using supplements and protein powder to grow their muscles more quickly. Some bodybuilders even take part in competitions.

Puff means to release smoke. When you puff on a cigarette, you inhale from it and blow smoke out. In the past, steam trains puffed out lots of smoke when they left the station.

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A big thank-you to my new patrons, as well as patrons who have increased their pledge. I'm recording this episode in advance, and I haven't had time to mention the new patrons here, but I will in the next episode.

And a special thank-you to my Teacher's Pet patrons: Vera Kaufmann and Rüdiger Richter.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

The Digital Fugitive

The **fugitive** rode up the mountains, flying for the first time. She squeezed her legs against the side of her bike, fried **nerve endings** pushing the machine higher and higher. Rocks and bits of dirt jumped back at her, spirits angry against the attack of technology.

When she reached the peak, she was sweating and aching, and yet she wanted to lift twenty kilograms.

She found a flat surface and pressed the button that turned her bike back into a **powerchair**. It was still so new, the sensation of sitting right in the centre of a factory machine and feeling all its **cogs** spinning around you. She wasn't sure if she liked it. Then there was that unfortunate pain as the device pressed on her thighs—she hadn't had enough time to fix

that problem. The whole thing lasted a few minutes, far longer than any state-built device would. Worth it, though.

She rolled cautiously forward, testing the stability of the ground. The powerchair could handle some dips and rises, but an unseen rock could send her falling. Fortunately, there were a few metres of flat ground, hidden from the winds—and the view of the people following her—by a large piece of rock. She hated how weak she felt moving over there, so slow. Of course *they* could build the devices better, or give her an actual **prosthetic**. But that would be a *precious waste of resources*, and how else could they keep their **middle management** **underclass** right where they wanted?

The fugitive sighed, and for the first time ever, looked out from the top of a mountain. A place that *she* had reached herself. Of course, she'd seen similar views on YouTube videos, and even once or twice in virtual reality, although VR gave her an awful headache.

She wasn't sure whether it was the beauty that made her cry, or the wind blowing into her eyes. Really, there was nothing that spectacular about the view. What had once been undisturbed fields had now been changed into vertical gardens and digital recycling facilities—the sight of the latter made her stomach hurt.

Behind her, she thought she could just hear the sound of the police dogs running up the mountain. This had been her last, desperate idea: lead them to a place they thought she couldn't go and hope that they'd give up on her. Helicopters used too much fuel, she thought, and it would take them too long to find another vehicle that could follow her.

But she'd underestimated the power of regular humans. It was foolish of her. She herself had spent years collecting **scrap** metal, bribing underground parts dealers, doing *everything* to modify her powerchair. They'd all thought she was mad, and she supposed she was. It was one thing to modify a regular motorbike, have it respond to microchips under your skin, but who ever heard of **merging** with one?

That was before the war. Well, before the war started affecting people at home.

An email had popped up on her phone one day, melting around the cracks in the screen.

From: noreply@warcouncil.gov.uk

Subject: We need your personal electronic parts

She was tempted to throw her phone down, smash it more than it already was. But she couldn't afford a replacement, not with how high lithium prices were.

So she read the email while her heart melted into her powerchair.

The powerchair they wanted to take away from her.

In order to collect electronic parts for the war effort, we are going to recycle components from your Powerchair X03. You will be provided with a manual wheelchair capable of fulfilling the same daily functions.

Her throat went dry. They couldn't do this. The powerchair was a *part* of her. They'd literally have to cut her out of it, break the links between her and the machine. And living without it would...

No worries. She'd buy a junk powerchair and repair it.

She read on.

*According to the procedures for changing provision of **accessibility devices** for disabled persons, **physiotherapy** to aid in the operation of a new device may be offered following a discussion with a doctor.*

She **scoffed**. Her arms were plenty strong enough. When she wasn't modifying her chair, she was lifting weights.

What came next did make her throw her phone down.

It has come to our attention that you have modified your Powerchair X03, breaking

conventions for the responsible ownership of state-provided accessibility devices. Therefore, after we have taken your device, a ten-year ban on electronic accessibility devices will be enforced upon you. If you are discovered to be ignoring this ban, you will be fined.

Thankfully, her phone didn't break, but her heart did.

Ten years without a powerchair. She had never used a manual chair before, but she'd seen them occasionally, dragged by homeless people who couldn't afford anything better. They were bulky, unable to squeeze through narrow doorways. They were slow, and couldn't even climb small steps. They got your hands dirty. And worst of all, they didn't connect to any microchips, meaning she'd have to take her **painkillers** manually.

That was when she knew she had to finish her project and get out of there. She'd rather be **Butch Cassidy** than **Stephen Hawking**. Not that there was room for Stephen Hawkings anymore. All minds like that had been eaten up by **GCHQ** and **MI5**, granted digital prosthetics in return for lifelong loyalty.

The fugitive sighed and pulled out a cigarette and a lighter. A strange last meal for a digital fugitive. But she needed something painful, something real, before they threw her back into a life of emptiness.

She realised now that the motorbike was the only thing that kept her alive. *This* was something she could change. She was like one of those **bodybuilders** who pumped their bodies with steroids. She, too, used advances in technology to push herself beyond her natural capabilities. It had made her feel strong in a world that loved only war and state loyalty.

She **puffed** twice, but ended up coughing. She gave up, throwing the cigarette in the direction of one of the recycling centres. Let them find some chemical or fibre in that.

The sounds were coming nearer now, no longer on the border between imagination and reality. Hungry dogs and sweating policemen just *desperate* to pound someone's face in. Never mind that she was disabled. She'd broken the law, hadn't she? Justice fell on all with equal force.

With a smile, she pressed the button again, changing her powerchair back to a motorbike. Why go softly? She'd never given in to bullies on the playground. She'd knocked them down and run them over.

She turned around in her bike, in her *body*. This was her, a motorbike monster without a care in the world.

The red faces of policemen reached the peak of the mountain, attack dogs jumping ahead of them.

The fugitive turned on her engine.

'Let's give them hell, Sundance Kid.'

THE END

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