

A person is standing in front of a red brick wall, holding a large, rectangular sign made of flattened cardboard. The sign is held with both hands and has the words "CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE" written on it in large, black, hand-painted capital letters. The person is wearing a dark-colored jacket and light blue denim jeans. The brick wall behind them is made of red bricks with white mortar.

CAN'T GET  
THERE  
FROM HERE

TODD  
STRASSER

AUTHOR OF  
GIVE A BOY A GUN



## NEW YEAR'S EVE

Maggot said we should go up to Times Square to watch the ball drop and pick some pockets, but we never got around to it. Instead we hung out in front of the Good Life Deli like we always did. Maggot, Rainbow, 2Moro, and me. A cold mist drifted out of the dark, the little droplets sparkling in the streetlights. Maggot and me sat under the awning of the newspaper stand on the corner. The damp matted down our hair. Black puddles dotted the street and steam rose like ghosts from the manhole covers. Rainbow sat cross-legged against the wall, loose strands of blond hair falling out of a blue wool cap, her head nodding almost down to her lap. 2Moro leaned against the streetlight with her arms crossed, not saying anything to anyone, just waiting for someone to say something to her.

It was one of those nights when there wasn't much traffic on the streets of New York. Most of the New Year's parties were done with their stupid celebrations and back in the four-walled cells they called apartments. Prisoners of the system, Maggot said. Now, only the newspaper delivery trucks and taxis passed, their tires making squishy sounds on the wet, black pavement. Out



here in the cold where we weren't walled in, we were free to go where we pleased.

"Guess the cops have the night off," Maggot said, his brown dreadlocks stringy from the mist; his breath a small cloud of fog.

"The rest of the world, too," muttered 2Moro. She was wearing a red-and-orange patchwork jacket, a tight black skirt, and high black boots. Her short dyed red hair was matted down on her forehead like a cap. The piercings in her ears and eyebrow and nose glinted in the streetlight. Tattooed around her neck was a circle of black barbed wire.

I sipped cold coffee from a paper cup. At night we drank coffee to stay awake. It was safer to sleep during the day.

A man and a woman came around the corner wearing raincoats and sharing a red umbrella. They slowed down when they saw us. The woman slid her arm through the man's and said something in his ear. Probably wanted him to turn around and go another way. But the man shook his head. Taking stiff strides, they walked toward us.

When they got near, the woman wrinkled her nose like something smelled bad.

"Have fun tonight?" Maggot asked, kind of menacing.

The couple broke stride. "Yes, we did," the man answered.

"No work tomorrow, huh?" Maggot said. "Get to sleep in."



"That's right."

"Day after that it's back to the old nine-to-five grind," Maggot said.

"You could say that," answered the man.

"Happy New Year," said 2Moro, not in a friendly way.

"Same to you," said the man. He and the woman hurried past. She kept glancing over her shoulder at us until they reached the next corner.

"Robots," Maggot said. "Just following the rules. Work till they die. Then new robots replace them."

"Check this." 2Moro tilted her head down the sidewalk. A man came toward us, unsteady, dragging the toes of his shoes. The shoulders of his suit were dark with water and his white shirt collar was open, a blue-and-red tie hanging like an upside down noose. His face was clean-shaven, and even though his wet hair fell flat on his forehead, you could see that it had been recently trimmed.


We watched as he stumbled along, not yet aware of us. When he passed under a streetlight, something gold glinted on his wrist and light reflected off his wet polished leather shoes.

"Come to daddy," Maggot whispered, cracking his knuckles.

From her seat against the wall Rainbow raised her head. "Oh, Maggot, you're so full of it. You never rolled a drunk in your life."

"People do it all the time. How hard could it be?"





Her street name is **Maybe**. She lives with a tribe of homeless teens—runaways and throwaways, kids who have no place to go other than the cold city streets, and no family except for one another. Abused, abandoned, and forgotten, they struggle against the cold, hunger, and constant danger.

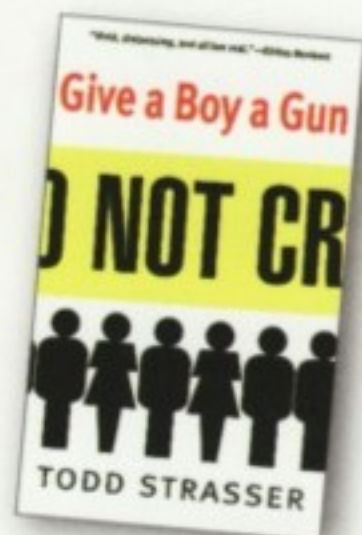
With the frigid winds of January comes a new girl: Tears, a twelve-year-old whose mother doesn't believe Tears's stepfather abuses her. As the other kids start to disappear—victims of violence, addiction, and exposure—Maybe tries to help Tears get off the streets . . . if it's not already too late.

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