

Wild Boy

The First Shirt

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This book is dedicated to my grandchildren,
Finlay, whose writing gave me the idea, Blake,
Nina and Sigrid.

People call me Des

Sometimes they call me other things, particularly Almost. I call him Almost because he is Almost, but not my dad. I am eight and three-quarters. I can write but I cannot add up very well. That's what Miss Hancock, my teacher says.

The Dilemma

Every story has a Dilemma, Miss Hancock says. A Dilemma, a Climax and a Conclusion, or it is not a proper story. My Dilemma is that Chips keeps going wrong. Chips is Almost's motorbike. He works for To-Your-Door, delivering curries and fish and chips. I call it Chips because sometimes, when Almost is in a good mood, he lets me have a bag of chips.

The night it happened it was raining. It wasn't really, but always start a story with rain, Miss Hancock says. The more the better. So it was pouring down when Almost was out with Chips. The rest is true. Almost.

We live in a flat, four floors up in Fourways Tower. I was in bed but could not sleep because of my cough. Almost was off on his evening delivery. I heard him trying to start Chips. There was a big bang. From our window I saw Mum run out.

Almost was hitting the bike with a spanner. It went clang clang clang bang bang bang, poor Chips. Mum tried to stop Almost and he shoved her and she almost fell over, poor mum. Then Almost drew his foot back and gave Chips the biggest kick ever. It hurt him more than Chips. He hopped and he yelled and the window below us opened and Mrs Griffin, whom we called Mrs Grumble, shouted at him. I dribbled water down on her and mum was cross but Almost laughed and said it was rain wasn't it Des?

Almost couldn't work without Chips. So we went on benefits and Mum took me to school for breakfast. I hate it. Not just because it is porridge but because of Stewart and Henry. They are horrible. Their mums bring them in BMWs. It's not what they say, it's what they do. They look at me and grin at one another.

"Mmmmmm!" Stewart rubbed his stomach. "I had bacon and egg".

"Mmmmmm!" Henry licked his lips. "Sausages and mushrooms. "

I went for them. Like Almost went for Chips. I went for them until Miss Hancock pulled me off.

"What did you do that for?" Mum said. "Please don't fight any more or they'll put you in isolation."

"What's isolation?" I said.

"Locked up. Like ..."

"Like what?"

She shook her head and didn't say any more.

After porridge next day at school I had an apple. That was all right and I sneaked a number of apples into my school bag for Mum. She likes apples.

I was wearing a crap pair of trainers from the charity shop. Henry was wearing a new pair of Nikes with flash

red stripes. He asked me what sort of trainers mine were, serious-like and Stewart said he would like a pair like that and they both laughed. I remembered what my mum said and said nothing but Henry trod on my lace which was undone and I slipped and crashed into a desk and half the apples fell out of my bag. I went to hit Henry but Miss Hancock came in. You wait, I said, you wait!

The lesson was about stories. I like stories. I like them cos you become someone else and live a different life. I like living a different life.

Miss Hancock said don't forget every story has a dilemma, a climax and a conclusion. It could be about a football game, a rabbit - anything, so long as it has those things. At the end of the lesson I had forgotten about bashing them but they hadn't. Henry was saying something to Miss Hancock who told me to stay behind and opened my bag and took out all the apples. She said I musn't take more apples than I need at breakfast. You can't eat all those apples, can you, Des, she said. They're not for me I said. They're for my mum. She likes fruit.

Oh, Des, she said. Oh. That was all for a bit. Oh Des. She got out her handkerchief, blew her nose and looked out of the window. I thought she was cross with me again but she gave me an apple, the biggest and the reddest of them all and said it was all right to take one for your Mum and I was not to forget to write my story for the next day.

I don't understand grown-ups. Sometimes something is wrong, then the same thing is right. I gave my Mum the big red apple and she started crying. See what I mean?

Then I wanted to watch a story on the telly but Mum said I had to write my own story first for Miss Hancock. I yelled at her I didn't *know* no stories about rabbits or football like Henry and Stewart! They wore football shirts and went to the match! She still wouldn't let me watch telly and she wouldn't hold me or kiss me until I wrote my story.

I was so miserable and stared out of the window. I thought of what Miss Hancock said. Every story starts with rain. I wrote on ruled paper in my best handwriting. *It was raining*. Then I did not know what to say and stared out of the window. Then I wrote *a lot*. I did not know what to say again so I looked out of the other window. There was poor old Chips. So I wrote the story you see here. *People call me Des* then fell asleep with my pencil in my hand.

In the morning it was raining like my story and Almost was still asleep but Mum kissed me and said my writing was good. I could see she had been crying and I knew it was something to do with Almost so I hugged my Mum. There were pools in the playground and my trainers were wet. I hate my trainers but I didn't say anything cos I know it upsets Mum.

Miss Hancock read out Henry's story about the football match but she never read out mine. At the end of class she called me over. I thought here we go again. She said my writing had a very good Dilemma and an even better Climax but there was no Conclusion. I said that's because there isn't one. Every story must have a Conclusion, Desmond, she said. Mine hasn't, I said.

Whatever I do is wrong. When school was over Miss Hancock showed my story to Stewart's dad, Mike. He laughed just like Stewart and Henry did at my trainers

and things. I would have punched him one but he is bigger than me and Mum was there. I ran to her and said I never ever wanted to go to school again. She held me and said Miss Hancock wanted to talk to me but I never wanted to see her again either.

Then Stewart's dad said my story was very good. Stewart was very good at lego he said but he couldn't write a story like that. That's because I don't have no lego I said and he didn't know what to say. Any road, I said, Miss Hancock says my story is not finished because it has no Conclusion. He knelt down. He has a bit of a beard and a smile. That's what we want to talk about, Des, he said. I didn't know what to say. When people look at you like that, they're either going to be very nice or more nasty than ever.

Mike's going to give us a lift home, Mum said. When we got to the BMW I heard Stewart say to his dad I don't want him in our car. Why not, his dad said. Because his trainers stink, Stewart said. Get in! his dad shouted, real angry. I got in the back with my Mum. It smelt clean and it started right away unlike Chips and was really really quiet. He stopped near poor old Chips and opened his boot. It was like a treasure chest in there, batteries and chisels and wires and things. Mike owns a garage, Mum said.

Mike tried to start Chips and it made a horrible screeching noise. He shook his head and took a bit of the engine to bits. I saw Almost's face at the window. I thought hello. Here's trouble. Almost was down in a flash, hair sticking out, fists clenched.

What do you think you're doing he said. Trying to start your motorbike Mike said. Almost told him to sod off. I thought Mike was going to chuck his chisel at him

but he threw it in the boot with the rest of his stuff. Mum tried to talk to Almost but he told her to shut it, he was going to fix it himself when he got the stuff and I thought that was that.

CONCLUSION

Mike said to Almost had he read the story? What story? Almost said and Mum gave him my story. Here we go, I thought. Almost never reads that much. He ran his finger along the lines He muttered. Then he sniffed. Then he laughed. He shoved it back at mum and muttered to Mike he couldn't afford to pay him.

Just pay me for the parts, Mike said. When you can. Almost turned away and Mike screwed and unscrewed and tried to start it. It went off then died. Then Almost held things for him and after a bit it went thrum thrum thrum and everybody cheered and Almost went back to deliver food and everything was all right. For a bit. The end. Author Desmond Taylor.