

THE GIRL WHO SAVED THE GREEN

©Keith Waddington 1991-2008

Pink Pyjamas

Jennifer Penny comes from a city full of very tall buildings that make ordinary people seem oh so small.

Jennifer lives with her dad in an old rickety-rackety house on a quiet side street. But their life together isn't quite so quiet because, somehow or other, Jennifer always manages to get in trouble—even though she never really does anything *wrong*. She'll tell you so herself.

Now it was early morning in September and Jennifer had just woken up. As usual she was in no hurry, so she lounged around thinking about how nice it was being in bed. Then, suddenly—but not surprisingly—her hair began to tingle. It tingled like mad. And all that tingling could mean only one thing: Jennifer was having a crazy idea.

Not much later, Jennifer was sitting at the kitchen table.

"You've still got your pyjamas on," Jennifer's dad noticed, glancing up from behind a book with no pictures and taking a sip of his coffee.

"I'm keeping them on," Jennifer answered, messing with her bowl of puffed rice cereal.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm keeping them on—all day—*that's* what I mean."

"Is it Saturday?" Jennifer's dad could never remember the day of the week.

"Noooo it's Monday."

"No school on Monday?"

"School on Monday."

"So what do you *mean*?"

"I'm going to school *in* my pyjamas."

"Oh, I see." Her dad went back to his pictureless book. Jennifer went back to messing with her cereal. Then he looked up and asked, "And why *exactly* are you going to school in your pyjamas?"

"In case I feel sleepy."

"Oh. Now that's what I call *smart* thinking," her dad said.

And maybe now you're starting to see how Jennifer Penny always got in trouble even though she never did anything *wrong*.

Jennifer was finally ready to go. "See you then."

"Right. Be good—but not *too* good." It was her dad's usual way of saying good-bye.

As Jennifer walked down the street, the postman was pretty shocked to see her in pink pyjamas and he accidental delivered Mrs. Watlin Mrs. Wilkins' electric bill, and Mrs. Wilkins Mrs. Watlin's gas bill.

On the first corner, beside a small grocery shop, Jennifer's friend Anila Bardai was waiting so they could walk to school together.

"Hi," Jennifer called.

"Hi? What do you mean, '*hi*'?" Anila crumpled up her face. "You're still wearing your pyjamas." Anila adjusted her glasses on her nose as if they were playing tricks.

"I know," Jennifer said as they walked side by side.

"Why?"

"Just in case I feel sleepy."

"You'll get in trouble again," Anila said, as if she was reading a fact from an encyclopaedia.

"No I won't. We don't have a school uniform so we can wear what we want."

"You always say you won't get in trouble and you always *do* get in trouble."

"You're right about that. But not *this* time," Jennifer said in a singsong voice.

They continued on down the narrow street, with small houses squashed together on either side. Not so far away, the tall office buildings of the city centre climbed into the sky and cast long early morning shadows.

Jennifer took out a yo-yo from her pocket and began to yo-yo as they crossed the empty road and walked along beside The Green. The Green was the closest thing to a park that the kids around there had. It was a big field close to the school and surrounded by squashed up houses. There was grass and some trees and bushes and three bumps they called hills. It was a great place to play.

Along the entire top end of The Green was Mr. Bywater's big old house and massive garden. The garden was like a jungle. Nothing in that garden was ever cut or trimmed, pruned, chopped, dusted or polished. And it was home to countless lost balls. They could see him in the garden now, lurking about like a gloomy ghost.

You see Mr. Bywater was a miserable old man. Well, he wasn't just miserable. He was furiously miserable. He was feverishly miserable. He was fundamentally miserable. Some said he ate kids for breakfast. Some said he liked to chew their bones. Some said he liked the snap and crackle—but best of all he loved the pop. And somehow he seemed to know when a misdirected ball landed in his garden, because he was often waiting, hiding behind a wild tree or bush, ready to jump out and grab any kid brave enough and crazy enough go inside and try and get it back.

Jennifer and Anila cut across The Green, crossed another narrow road and finally entered their school's small playground. Almost all the kids were already inside.

The desks in Jennifer's class were arranged in rows of two. At the very back, Jennifer Penny sat next to Anila. Too bad that the terrible Thompson twins also sat at the back. The terrible Thompson twins found great happiness in making everyone else miserable—especially Jennifer Penny.

When Jennifer walked into the classroom, Miss Largebottom, the teacher, suddenly stopped telling off a kid and stood staring with her mouth wide open. Her mouth looked like a large black cave and no one would have been too surprised to see a bunch of bats come flying out. It was only the third week of the term and Miss Largebottom was a new teacher. Even so, every kid in the entire school already knew she was the worst, meanest, rottenest teacher since teachers had been invented.

"Miss Penny, what's the meaning of this?" Miss Largebottom trumpeted.

"Meaning of what?" Jennifer asked innocently.

"Pink pyjamas, Miss Penny. Pink pyjamas."

"In case I feel sleepy, Miss Largebottom." All the class started laughing like mad. All except the terrible Thompson twins, who only laughed at their own jokes.

"Pink pyjamas are not allowed in *my* class, you saucy child. Go to the headmaster's office this instant."

Miss Largebottom was fearfully fearsome and Jennifer was *almost* happy to go and see the headmaster.

When Jennifer entered the corridor she saw the headmaster happened to be walking towards her.

"I've been sent to see you, sir," she said.

"Aaaah, Jennifer. And I think I can see the reason. Why are you wearing your pink pyjamas to school?" Mr. Strongman demanded.

"In case I get sleepy," Jennifer explained. Mr. Strongman explained that Jennifer Penny had better get home and change, return to school and write an essay during playtime about why wearing pink pyjamas to school is *not* a good idea.

Why Wearing Pyjamas To School Is A Bad Idea

By Jennifer Penny

Wearing pyjamas to school is a bad idea because no one else is wearing pyjamas to school. So you will stand out and your teacher or headmaster will spot you easily. If everyone wears pyjamas to school you will be safe because you will not be spotted.

Wearing pyjamas to school is also a bad idea because when you get home and want to go to bed you will have nothing to wear.

After School

Jennifer and her dad were pretty poor. They ate plenty of cheap macaroni cheese and most of their clothes were second hand. That was why, every day after school, Jennifer delivered newspapers so she could have some pocket money without needing to ask her dad.

Jennifer had just finished the newspaper round and arrived at The Green on her squeaky old bike.

"Hi Jennifer," Anila waved. She was playing a game they called fistball with three boys. It was like rounders but using a tennis ball and your fist instead of a bat. Jennifer waved and sat on the grass with her back against a tree.

"Wanna play?" one of the boys, Raymond Bellwood, asked.

"Nah."

Jennifer watched them play for a while and then pulled up a juicy blade of grass, chewed it and started daydreaming. It was only when Anila shouted, "Oh no!" that Jennifer looked up. Anila had just hit the ball really hard but instead of it flying off into the distance it was flying up and backwards over her head. As everyone watched, it was easy to guess where it would end up.

"Not into Bywater's," Anila begged. And then, half a second later it fell into the jungle garden.

"Anila Bardai, that's a *new* ball," Raymond was shouting. "You better get it back."

"Get it back? How can I?"

"Your a girl. Bywater won't hurt a girl."

"Yeah," another boy joined in, "I never heard of Bywater hurting a girl."

"Well I have," Anila said.

"Well too bad for you. You know the rule. You made it go in so you get it back."

"That's just a stupid rule," Jennifer said, standing up and walking over to Anila. "No one needs to follow *stupid* rules."

"Yeah, but *your* not the one who decides if it's stupid or not because you weren't even playing."

That was true. Jennifer couldn't argue with that.

"It's all right," Anila said to Jennifer, tightening the elastic in her pigtails, ready to cross enemy lines.

She walked over to Mr. Bywater's garden and crouched down when she got close to the hedge. The other kids followed.

"Can you see it?" Jennifer whispered.

"No."

They were all on their hands and knees now, peering through the hedge into the tangled jungle.

"I can see it," Raymond whispered.

"Where?" Anila asked, crawling alongside.

"Lucky you," he whispered and pointed. "It's just there."

Now they could all see it, just a metre or so inside the hedge.

"It's not so far," Jennifer said.

Anila glanced up at the shadowy kitchen window. That was sometimes where they saw Mr Bywater, peering out watching for trouble. But now it seemed safe.

Anila found the nearest gap in the hedge where she could sneak through. The branches and twigs tugged at her long hair and tried to scratch her face. And then she was inside and crouched down low.

"It's okay," Jennifer whispered.

Like a leopard, Anila suddenly sprang forward and dashed towards the ball.

At that very moment something moved and something shook and Raymond shouted, "He's coming!"

Everyone looked around in a panic and Anila grabbed the ball in a panic and she was sure an old white-skinned wrinkly hand was reaching out to grab her but she grabbed the ball first and turned and ran back and pushed her way through the gap in the hedge. All the kids were already running away and Anila caught up with them. They stopped in the middle of The Green and turned back.

"Can you see him?" Jennifer asked. They all looked but there was no sign of Mr Bywater.

"I'm sure I saw him back there," Raymond said.

"Maybe you did," Anila agreed, giving him the ball back. "Sometimes he's more like a ghost than a man."

Jennifer Gets it Right

The next morning, Jennifer's dad noticed Jennifer wasn't wearing her pink pyjamas.

"Wearing regular clothes for school today?"

"Yeppers. I got in big trouble yesterday. Miss Largebottom sent me to the headmaster and the headmaster sent me home to get changed."

"Really? He didn't like your pink pyjamas?"

"I guess not."

"I wonder why?"

"I think he prefers blue."

"That's very possible."

Finally, Jennifer walked down her street until she saw Anila and they walked together.

"Look what I've got," Anila said.

"What?"

Anila fished in her schoolbag and brought out a yo-yo.

"It's a new yo-yo."

Although yo-yos weren't super popular any more, for almost two years there'd been a yo-yo craze in their school. At one time almost every kid could be seen yo-yoing a yo-yo.

"Watch what happens when it spins."

Anila began to yo-yo her yo-yo and the yo-yo began to whistle.

"Wow, it whistles!" Jennifer said. "When you see a cute boy you can make your yo-yo whistle at him!"

"Don't be silly," Anila said shyly.

Jennifer reached into her pocket and took out her own yo-yo.

"Of course, mine's not so nice as yours," Anila said. Jennifer smiled at Anila and they both yo-yoed down the street.

Finally Jennifer and Anila cut across The Green, crossed the road and arrived at school.

Miss Largebottom read out all the names from the register. One by one the kids answered:

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

She had the kind of scary voice that made kids answer, "Here, Miss Largebottom," even when they were somewhere else, Miss Largebottom.

There were many horrible things about Miss Largebottom. One horrible thing was that she gave her class a test every *single day*. And not just a test. It was a monster test that lasted *one hour*. Can you imagine having a *one-hour monster test* every single day? Not only that. There were all kinds of trick questions in her tests that would trick even the smartest kids.

And right now, even though it was only 9:15, Miss Largebottom was handing out a monster math test.

"Why does she give us tests every *single day*?" Jennifer whispered to Anila. "I hate her."

"She just likes to make us miserable," Anila whispered back.

"Right!" Miss Largebottom trumpeted. "You all know the rules. For the next hour there will be *no talking, no standing, no twitching, no peeking, no nudging, no winking, no blinking, no mumbling, no grumbling, no bumping, no crumbling, no fumbling, no rumbling, no stumbling, no tumbling, no raising hands and absolutely no visits to the toilet.* In other words you may breathe and you may read and write." Finally, with a flobbery finger, Miss Largebottom pressed the button on her desk timer so that it would buzz in exactly sixty minutes.

As all the kids began to sweat and scribble, Anila stood and began walking towards the front of the class.

"Miss Bardai!" Miss Largebottom yelled. "How dare you stand up in the middle of a test."

"My pencil needs sharpening," Anila Bardai mumbled, holding up her broken pencil to show the teacher. On the front wall, next to the door, there was a large pencil sharpener with a turn-around handle.

"Your pencil needs sharpening. Ha! You want to peep at other people's papers is more like it."

"No, Miss Largebottom—" she crumpled up her face.

"How dare you argue with me, distasteful child. You know the rules. Now get to the headmaster's office right now. And tell him I sent you there for cheating!"

"But—"

"Now!" Miss Largebottom trumpeted.

Anila Bardai lowered her head and marched solemnly to the door.

"Back to your tests, everyone!" Miss Largebottom yelled.

All the kids looked down at their papers and all the trick questions. And, just like she always did during daily tests, Miss Largebottom sat at her desk in absolute silence, staring ahead, never moving and never saying a single word until one hour later when the timer buzzed.

Question number one:

"There are 33 apples and you take away 8, how many do you have?"

Jennifer wrote:

"8."

And she was right but Miss Largebottom said she was wrong.

Painting

After lunch, it was time for art. Jennifer loved art.

"All right everyone. Settle down." The art teacher was called Mr Goodfellow. "Park your bums and stop your tongues." This was his catch phrase and he was very proud of it.

"Now listen up. Today we'll try our hands at a still life. Now who knows what a 'still life' is?"

"It's a life that ain't moving much," one of the terrible Thompson twins said, though Mr Goodfellow had no idea which one. Both terrible twins laughed away.

"Yes very funny, Thompson. Very humours."

"Well, a still life is a picture of *inanimate* objects. Objects that do not move, such as flowers, a bowl of fruit or *the Thompson twins*."

The class giggled. The Thompson twins fumed.

"Now, this vase of flowers will be your subject."

"Why do we have to paint a sissy bunch of flowers? We wanna paint a battle ship." One of the terrible Thompson twins complained. You see the terrible Thompson twins were absolutely crazy about battle ships.

"Just get on with it like the rest of the class," Mr Goodfellow said.

Mr Goodfellow silently wandered around the class, peeping at everyone's paintings like a peeping Tom. This wasn't so strange because Mr Goodfellow's first name really was Tom. Once, twice, three times he circled. And then he stopped beside Jennifer.

"Now that's an unusual choice of colour," Mr Goodfellow said.

"Which?" Jennifer asked.

"Well, *all* of them, really."

"Oh."

"The actual roses are red but you painted them green. The ferns are green but you painted them red."

"Yeppers."

"Don't you think you should paint things the way they are?"

"I think I should paint things like I like them," Jennifer answered.

One of the terrible Thompson twins—Mr Goodfellow had no idea which—moseyed on over and started pointing with his pointing finger and laughing at Jennifer's crazy colours.

"Is it funny?" Jennifer asked. It was obvious she was furious.

"Funny? It's hilarious. You can't even paint a flower properly even though flowers are sissy and you're a sissy."

"Maybe I can't paint flowers but I can paint *you*."

"Ha! You couldn't paint me to save your life."

"Well, my life's saved," Jennifer said, sticking her biggest paint brush in some sissy coloured paint and painting the terrible Thompson's face so fast he was completely painted before he knew what was happening.

"There. I think I painted you perfectly," Jennifer said. The entire class was laughing like mad and even Mr Goodfellow had to turn away so no one saw the smirk on his face. Both the terrible Thompson twin fumed like a battleship ready for battle.

An Artists Impression with no Twiddly Bits

Jennifer was late for school and she was walking down the street as fast as she possibly could. She came alongside The Green and, even though she was late, stopped dead in her tracks. She looked and she looked and she looked again. She couldn't believe her eyes. Suddenly there was a tall wooden fence all around The Green. It was taller than the tallest adult, so there was no way to see what was behind it. What was going on? Jennifer felt like she was in some kind of strange dream. Slowly she walked along beside the fence, staring at it from top to bottom. She passed a wide gate locked with a large padlock. And then she saw what it was all about. It was terrible. It was worse than terrible. It was terrerrible. There, just ahead, was a big board, two metres long and one metre high with a picture. It was an artist's impression of how a giant office building would look when it was built. Underneath the picture, in long stretchy letters, the words:

Progress Towers

500 Sky High Offices

A Stick-Up® Job

The famous **Stick-Up** company, famous for making blocky office buildings with no twiddly bits, was going to build an office building over The Green.

The Real Question

When Jennifer rushed into class late, she was lucky because Miss Largebottom was inside the Resource Cupboard getting some paper. Jennifer tiptoed to her desk. All the class was whispering about the tall wooden fence around The Green.

"Whispering is not allowed in my class," Miss Largebottom said as she came out of the cupboard. The class fell silent.

"Right you rotten lot. Register."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

Hiding from you, Miss Largebottom.

"Now, I have something *delicious* for you all this morning. A geography test!" Miss Largebottom grinned. "It's such a yummy way to start the day!" The entire class groaned.

"Groaning is not allowed in my class."

Another horrible thing about Miss Largebottom was the way she hated to walk about like normal people. Instead, she had a comfy swivel chair with well-oiled castors on the base that she used to roll around the class. And that's what she did now. Miss Largebottom shoved off from the desk and her swivel chair rolled out and then she shoved off again and it rolled towards Christine Marter, who was unlucky enough to have the desk closest to Miss Largebottom. She dropped the pile of test papers on Christine's desk and swivelled and rolled back behind her desk.

Miss Largebottom slapped the desk timer with her flobbery finger and every kid turned miserably and silently to the test. Jennifer looked at the paper.

1. Where do you find penguins?

Jennifer wrote: "In zoos."

2. Where do arctic geese come from?

Jennifer wrote: "Eggs."

3. If you are ready for an adventure climbing Mount Everest, where are you?

Jennifer wrote: "At the airport."

4. Where do people eat rice every day?

Jennifer wrote: "Chinese restaurants."

The next was one of Miss Largebottom's trick questions:

5. How many continents are there, not counting the smallest one but counting the biggest one three times?

Jennifer wrote: 10. But only if you take away the middle sized one, multiply the coldest one by 4, and add the others if they are wider than the 3rd narrowest.

Jennifer was whizzing through the test pretty fast, but the only question she could really think about was: where will all the kids play if they turn The Green into an ugly high office building with no twiddly bits?

And at playtime, almost every kid was talking about the tall wooden fence around The Green and the giant office building.

"Did you see The Green?" Anila Bardai asked.

"No."

"There's a tall wooden fence around it."

"I know. That's why I didn't see it."

"They want to build an office building there."

"I know. I saw the picture. And it won't even have any twiddly bits."

"We'll have nowhere to play," Anila said.

Yo-Yo Me No Yo-Yos

The next morning, Jennifer was yo-yoing down the street. This time she wasn't late but Anila was nowhere to be seen, so she continued on to school and never noticed the terrible Thompson twins coming up from behind.

"Look, it's Penny with her yo-yo," Greg said to Gilbert. "Let's get her for painting your face."

"Yeah, let's get her precious yo-yo off her," Gilbert said to Greg.

So the terrible Thompson twins ran up and jumped on Jennifer and pulled her to the ground. Jennifer thought the terrible Thompson twins wanted to fight, so she hardly noticed as Greg grabbed the yo-yo and pulled the string from her finger.

"Hey, give that back!" Jennifer shouted. The terrible Thompson twins both stood up and Greg started waving the yo-yo about in front of Jennifer, as if he was trying to hypnotise her.

"Try and get it!" Greg shouted. Jennifer stood up and tried to grab her yo-yo, but Greg tossed it to Gilbert.

"Here it is," Gilbert laughed.

Jennifer stepped between the two brothers. "Give it back!"

"Here it is," Gilbert repeated, and he too started to wave the yo-yo back and forth.

Jennifer reached for her yo-yo. Gilbert twisted on his heels and ran. He ran down the quiet road until he came to The Green, where he slipped between the tall wooden fence and the hedge around Mr Bywater's garden. Jennifer followed close behind and then came Greg. They all ran until there was no space to squeeze through between the fence and hedge. The three kids came to a sudden stop. And then, Gilbert had a terrible idea. Holding the end of the string, he swung the yo-yo around once, twice, three times and then let go. The yo-yo flew through the air. They watched it fly up and over into Mr Bywater's garden.

Jennifer gasped. The terrible Thompson twins laughed.

"That'll teach you to paint my face, Jennifer Penny," The terrible Gilbert Thompson said. They ran back up the hill towards the main road, laughing loudly and feeling happy.

Jennifer stood staring into Mr Bywater's garden. She could see her yo-yo, lying in the grass, like lost treasure waiting to be found. But it was in the worst possible place: directly in front of the mad Bywater's kitchen window. Jennifer peered into the dark kitchen, expecting at any moment to see Mr Bywater's ghostly white face peering back. It was madness to try and get it from there, but she had no choice.

Silently, Jennifer squeezed through the hedge and then crouched down behind a bush, waiting and listening. Not a single sound. Now on her hands and knees, Jennifer crawled along, from tree to bush, bush to tree, closer and closer to the house. Was that a ghostly white face peering out of the kitchen window? Or just the sunlight dancing through the trees and reflecting on the glass? Jennifer's heart beat like a drum in a temple. Could she see two eyes? Did the shadow have two eyes? Were the two eyes watching her? Jennifer hardly knew what to do. She was frozen with fear. Cold beads of sweat formed on her forehead. Was the shadow moving? Still, nothing changed in the garden.

Jennifer decided to make a run for it. She stood, sprang out from behind the tree, raced over the long unkempt grass, dodging nettles and a spiky blackberry bush, jumped over a dead tree stump and finally reached down for her yo-yo.

"GOT YOU!" a gruff voiced shouted right in Jennifer's ear, and two huge hands grabbed her shoulders. Jennifer turned and saw Mr Bywater, his face so close to hers, she could almost feel his white whiskers scratching her cheeks. His mouth was open and he smiled a two-toothed smile.

"GOT YOU!" he rejoiced.

Jennifer struggled, but Mr Bywater was too strong.

"Can't get away from me, you little monster. I'm sick of you kids coming in my garden. Now I'll teach you."

And with that, Mr Bywater dragged Jennifer, who was screaming and shouting and struggling, back towards his house.

"And you can stop that noise," he said with his two-toothed voice.

"Let me go!" Jennifer cried.

The back door to Mr Bywater's house was almost completely hidden in a mass of overgrown bushes and tree branches. The door was open. They stepped inside. The door slammed shut.

There was a strange, sweet and pleasant fragrance in the house. It was a familiar smell. Jennifer tried to think what it was.

All along Mr Bywater was muttering away to himself. "Pesky kids . . . Think they can do what they want . . . Sneaking in peoples gardens. . . ."

And then, as he dragged her into the kitchen, Jennifer realised what the fragrance was. It was the smell you always smell when you go to your grandparent's house or an old person's house. It was the smell of old furniture and old books and old memories.

"He's just a lonely old man," Jennifer suddenly realised. And the moment she realised it her fear completely disappeared.

"Now you sit yourself down," Mr Bywater said, pushing Jennifer onto one of his kitchen chairs and sitting on another facing her. "And don't try to run away."

"I won't," Jennifer said in a singsong voice. Mr Bywater looked at her surprised.

"Trespassing. That's what it's called. Trespassing. You'd better tell me why you were trespassing in my garden, because any minute now I'm going to—"

"I wasn't trespassing—" Jennifer interrupted.

"Any minute now I'm going to—"

"But I wasn't trespassing. I was just getting my yo-yo."

"What's this about a yo-yo?"

So Jennifer told Mr Bywater about the terrible Thompson twins and how they'd thrown her yo-yo in his garden.

"So you see, they wanted to get me into trouble. It wasn't my fault."

"Yo-yo? Yo-yo?" Mr Bywater repeated, thoughtfully. "Yo-yo me no yo-yos. What's so special about a yo-yo? Don't you know I eat *children*?"

Jennifer smiled and said, "I know you *don't*."

"Oh, you do do you do you? And why's that?"

"Because I can tell. I think you're nice. I think catching kids is just your *hobby*."

A smile flashed on Mr Bywater's face as if some one had said, "Say cheese," and taken his photo.

"Well what's so special about that yo-yo then?"

"Not telling."

"Why?"

"Not telling."

"Oh, in that case I don't believe a word of your story; and I think I'll gobble you up right now. Sprinkled with icing sugar."

"My mother gave me it before she died," Jennifer whispered, taking no notice of Mr Bywater's sugar story. "It was the last thing she ever gave me."

"Oh," Mr Bywater said. He stood up, looked out of the kitchen window and saw Jennifer's yo-yo sitting in the long grass. "Well, maybe I won't gobble you up." And this time his smile lasted longer.

"Thank you," Jennifer said.

Mr Bywater looked at Jennifer and Jennifer looked at Mr Bywater, and neither of them seemed to know what to say or do next. Finally Mr Bywater said, "What's your name?"

"Jennifer."

"Well, nice to meet you Jennifer, but you'd better go get your yo-yo and get off to school. You're going to be late."

"Yeppers," Jennifer said, standing up.

Together they walked out into the wild garden. Jennifer picked up her yo-yo, cleaned it on her skirt, and put it safely in her jacket pocket.

"Hurry along then," Mr Bywater said in a sort of sad voice.

"Thank you," Jennifer repeated. They shook hands. Jennifer ran over to the hedge and disappeared through a gap.

At playtime, Jennifer made sure she played with her yo-yo right in front of the terrible Thompson twins. Their faces turned red with rage.

And all day long, Jennifer was thinking about Mr Bywater. Every kid was scared of him and thought he was a scary child-eating madman or worse. But now Jennifer knew the truth about him. So, when the school bell finally rang at the end of the day, she made a decision.

She walked out of the school gates with Anila. They called in at a corner shop. Jennifer came out with a paper bag of sweets and stashed it in her pocket.

They reached The Green and stopped in front of the big sign with the painting of the big ugly sky-high office building.

"Look how ugly it is," Jennifer said. "That stupid office building doesn't even have any twiddly-bits."

"I don't care about twiddly bits," Anila said. "And I wish you'd stop going on about twiddly bits. I just care about The Green. Where will we play when it's gone?"

"I have no idea," Jennifer said, turning away from the painting. "Any way, see you later. I have to go this way."

"That doesn't go anywhere," Anila said, crumpling up her face.

"It goes to Mr Bywater's house," Jennifer answered.

"Well I know that—"

"I'm going to visit Mr Bywater."

Anila Bardai's eyes opened so wide they looked like a couple of jars with round splodges of jam at the bottoms. "Visit Mr Bywater? Now I know you're crazy."

The Visit

This time Jennifer opened the rusty gate and, pushing branches aside, walked down the wild garden path. Now she knew Mr Bywater was just a nice but lonely old man, but Jennifer still had the strange feeling she was doing something she shouldn't be doing.

Jennifer pushed the doorbell but there was no sound so she knocked. There was a shuffling and muttering inside and then the door opened just wide enough for Mr Bywater to peep out. When he saw it was Jennifer he gave a two-toothed smile and opened the door wider.

"Hello Jennifer, is there something wrong?"

"Wrong? Noooo. Can I come in?"

"Come in?" Mr Bywater seemed confused.

"Yeppers. You know, for a visit."

"Oh, yes a visit. Of course!" he laughed.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"I'm a kid," Jennifer smiled.

"Oh, yes! Of course you are. How about a beer?"

"A beer?"

"Oh, oh, I mean some juice." Mr Bywater obviously didn't have much experience with kids.

"Yes please."

Jennifer sat herself down on the same chair as before. Mr Bywater handed her a tall glass of juice. She took a sip.

"Is it apple juice?" she asked, making a face to show she was thinking hard.

"Yes."

"It tastes strange."

"Ah, that's because it's special apple juice."

"How's it special?"

"Well, for one thing it's *real* apple juice. The apples came from the tree out there," he nodded towards the kitchen window, "and I squeezed them myself and made the juice myself."

"Not from the supermarket then?"

"Never!"

This time Jennifer took a big drink and licked her lips.

"It's super yummy."

"I'm glad you like it."

"Can I ask you a question?" Jennifer asked.

"Certainly."

"Why is your garden like that? You know, so wild."

"Oh, *that's* your question, is it? Well—" Mr Bywater hesitated as if he didn't really want to answer. "You remember this morning, you told me that your mum gave you a yo-yo before she died, so now it's very special?"

"Yeppers. Do you want to see it? She took it out of her jacket pocket and handed it to Mr Bywater. It was a very ordinary yo-yo, but Mr Bywater looked at it and said it was very lovely. And Jennifer could tell he meant it.

"You can yo-yo it if you want."

Mr Bywater's eyes sparkled and he gave a grin showing his two teeth. He slipped the loop of string over a finger and dropped the yo-yo. It yo-yo'd down and back up again.

"Hey, you can do it!" Jennifer was surprised.

"Of course I can do it! I haven't always been and old man you know! I used to be quite young when I was quite young!" They laughed together and Mr Bywater yo-yoed the yo-yo again. Then he sat down, handed it back and said, "It's very nice and you should keep it safe."

"I will."

They sat in silence for a moment. "So you were telling me about the garden," Jennifer reminded him.

"Oh, oh, was I? Well, you see my dear, I grew up in this house."

"Did you?"

"My mother was a great gardener. She kept that huge garden perfect and beautiful. You've never seen a place like it. She won awards, you know."

"Did she?"

"Oh yes. Gardening competitions galore."

"I wish I could have seen it like it was then."

"Oh, well, maybe you can."

Mr Bywater stood up, opened a top cupboard and took out a big thick heavy photo album. He sat down and flicked through the pages. "Now let me see. Ah, yes, here they are. She took photos of the garden every year."

Mr Bywater put the album on the kitchen table so Jennifer could see.

"I'm afraid they're all black and white though. It was a long time ago."

"That's all right," Jennifer said, leaning over to look. "I'm good at imagining colours."

Even if the photos were black and white, Jennifer could see the garden was super fantastic. And it was so *tidy* and *organised*. Nothing like the jungle out there now.

"But I don't understand something," Jennifer said, turning the page.

"What's that my dear?"

"Well, your mum kept the garden so tidy and organised, but you let it be a jungle."

"Oh, yes. Well, you see, after she died I tried doing the gardening like she did, but it made me too sad, so I decided I'd just never touch it ever again. Just let it grow."

"That's a bit strange though."

"Is it?"

Jennifer turned another page and asked, "Who are these people?"

Mr Bywater looked at the old photograph. "Oh, that's enough memories for one day," he smiled sadly and put the photo album back in the cupboard. "You can look at more some other time. Oh, I mean if you come again."

"I will," Jennifer said, standing up and fishing in her school bag. "And I have this for you." She handed the sweet bag to Mr Bywater.

"What is it?"

"It's just a gift I bought for you."

Mr Bywater opened it and looked inside.

"Jelly babies?" It was a bag full of chewy chews in the shape of babies and coloured seven different colours.

"Yeppers. I know you don't eat kids, but now you can tell people you really eat babies!"

Joking Around

Jennifer left Mr Bywater's garden and walked alongside the tall wooden fence. She noticed a knothole in one piece of wood and stopped to peep through. Inside The Green was exactly like usual—except it was completely empty. Jennifer had never seen it completely empty before. It seemed very strange, like a house with no door. Then she looked at the big sign with the stupid ugly painting and felt anger grow inside her. Her hair began to tingle. All over her head it tingled. All that tingling could mean only one thing: Jennifer was having another crazy idea.

"Dad?"

"What?"

"Will you do me a favour?"

"What is it?"

"It's just that I need some pocket money this week."

"What happened to your newspaper round?"

"Nothing. It's just that I need a bit more. Just this once. Please, please, please."

"What do you need it for?"

"Well, nothing really. It's kind of a secret."

"Kind of?"

"Yes. It's *like* a secret."

"It's like a secret, but it's *not* a secret?"

"Well, it's a secret *now*, but pretty soon everyone will know. Can I?"

"I'll make a deal with you. I'll give you two pounds for every joke you can tell me in 60 seconds."

"Two pounds for every joke?" Jennifer could hardly believe her luck. She knew zillions of jokes.

"There's one condition," her dad said.

"What?"

"You have to make them up yourself." Jennifer's dad was no fool.

"Aw. That's not fair."

"Take it or leave it."

"All right. Say when."

"Ready," he looked at the kitchen clock, "steady," he looked at Jennifer, "go," he looked back at the kitchen clock.

Jennifer had to think and think fast.

Jennifer: "Erm erm erm, what's the difference between bubble gum and cough-drops?"

Dad: "What?"

Jennifer: "You can bubble gum, but you can't cough drops. Ha!"

Ching. Two pounds.

Jennifer: "Erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm, why did the lion try to catch the bus?"

Dad: "Why?"

Jennifer: "Because he thought it was a hippopotobus. Ha!"

Ching. Four pounds.

Jennifer: "Erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm erm, what's the difference between a kiss and a yawn?"

Dad: "What?"

Jennifer: "You can give a kiss, but you can't give a yawn. Ha!"

Ching. Six pounds.

Jennifer: "Erm erm erm erm erm erm erm—"

Dad: "Times up. Ha!"

"That wasn't a minute!" Jennifer protested.

The Crazy Idea

Yeaaaaaaaaaaaaah. It was Saturday. Jennifer loved to lounge in bed on Saturdays. She loved not going to school. She loved not being at school. She loved not coming home from school.

After breakfast, Jennifer said, "I'm going shopping."

With her newspaper round money plus the joke money, Jennifer had piles of cash.

"What are you going to buy?" her dad asked.

"I told you: it's a kind of secret."

"Oh, that's right. Well, be good—but not *too* good."

When Jennifer arrived home she was carrying a giant shopping bag. She took it straight to her bedroom and closed the door. And there she stayed, all through the afternoon, until her dad called her for supper.

"You've been busy today," he said.

"I know," Jennifer answered. She stabbed a piece of broccoli with her fork and imagined it was a tree and she was a tree-eating giant.

"So what are you doing upstairs all this time?"

"Nothing much," she munched.

"How long does it take to do nothing much?"

"It depends on how much nothing much there is to do."

"How much nothing much *is* there to do?"

"Quite a bit."

After supper, Jennifer went to her bedroom and shut the door.

On Sunday mornings, Jennifer's dad always made French toast for breakfast. Jennifer poured on lots of maple syrup, because otherwise her dad's French toast tasted like English toast.

During the day, with the bedroom door firmly closed, she worked away, silently, secretly.

When Jennifer came down for supper, her dad said, "I've hardly seen you this weekend."

Jennifer didn't answer.

"Want to play out?" he offered.

"Where?"

"On The Green."

"Dad! Don't you know *anything*? They've put a tall wooden fence around The Green."

"Have they really?"

"Yes. I thought everyone knew *that*. They're going to make an ugly high office building—"

"Really?"

"—with no twiddly bits."

"That's disgraceful. They could at least put a few twiddly bits."

Another Stick-Up

Jennifer left for school at six o'clock in the morning. It was much too early. As well as her school bag, she carried a long roll of something wrapped up in newspaper. Luckily, her dad was still half asleep when she left, and when he said, "Be good—but not too good," he hardly seemed to notice that she was up to something that could quite possibly be bad.

"Only one more thing to do," Jennifer thought, "and then the trouble will start."

She reached The Green with her school bag and the long roll wrapped in newspaper. She walked on beside the tall wooden fence and then stopped and unwrapped the long roll wrapped in newspaper and got busy.

When Jennifer arrived at school it was still early and the playground was empty and the doors locked. She put her school bag on the ground and quietly yo-yoed her yo-yo.

The first kids to arrive were the terrible Thompson twins.

"You're gonna be in big trouble," Greg Thompson taunted.

"I wouldn't wanna be in your shoes, Jennifer Penny," Gilbert Thompson smirked. They'd both seen what Jennifer had been up to and could hardly wait for all the trouble to begin. The terrible Thompson twins loved to see other people in trouble.

Mr Strongman, the headmaster, was on his way to school. Mr Strongman lived in the neighbourhood and made it his custom to walk to work. His route brought him beside The Green. Even from a distance Mr Strongman could see something had changed. He walked beside the tall wooden fence. He stopped. He scratched his head. Mr Strongman was looking at the big board, two metres long and one metre high. The big board with the artist's impression of the ugly high office building the **Stick-Up** company wanted to build. Only now the picture had changed. Yes, it had definitely changed. The ugly artist's impression of the ugly office building had been completely covered over with a lovely painting of a lovely park that had obviously been painted by a child. It had trees and bumps the kids could call hills. It had swings and a slide. It had a wooden climbing frame in the shape of a pirate ship. It had benches and picnic tables. In the sky, there was a nice painted sun, a few fluffy clouds and a rainbow coming right down into the park with a pot of gold at the bottom. There was a dog chasing its tail, a cat stuck in a tree and kids everywhere having fun. In other words, it had everything a park should have. Underneath the picture, in long stretchy letters, the words:

The Green
500 Down to Earth Games
A Fantastic Fun® Job

Of course, the painting wasn't signed.
Mr Strongman resumed his walk, only now his steps were faster and longer.

Mr Strongman Shows Some Weakness

Nine ten: the register.

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

Here, but I wish I was somewhere else, Miss Largebottom.

Miss Largebottom was babbling on about history. Jennifer was thinking about the headmaster sending for her. Sooner or later the headmaster would send for her.

And then it happened: at nine-thirty, a small boy from the first year knocked on the door and came into the classroom. His name was Willie Nantar, and for some mysterious reason he was always the one sent with messages. All the kids were jealous of Willie, because taking messages meant getting out of lessons.

"I've got a note," he said, holding out a crumpled scrap of paper. His hand was shaking. Taking notes to Miss Largebottom could be dangerous. Most of the younger kids were afraid of Miss Largebottom. Actually, most of the older kids were afraid of Miss Largebottom as well. As soon as Miss Largebottom had taken the paper, Willie rushed away. All the Kids began whispering.

"All right," she bellowed, "enough of all that whispering. Whispering is not allowed in my class." Miss Largebottom looked at the note. She smiled. Bad news. Miss Largebottom *only* smiled at bad news.

"Jennifer Penny," she looked up, licking her lips. "The headmaster wishes to see you, *immediately*." Oh, Miss Largebottom looked oh so happy.

Jennifer stood and walked towards the door, with dozens of eyeballs following her every step. Jennifer saw the terrible Thompson twins nudging each other, smirking away with delight.

"Gregory and Gilbert Thompson," Miss Largebottom thundered. "Smirking is not allowed in my class."

Jennifer opened the door, and out she went. She walked down the quiet empty corridor, her shoes tip-tapping on the shiny tiled floor. What would happen now? What would Mr Strongman say? What would Mr Strongman do?

Jennifer walked timidly into the outer office, where the headmaster's secretary, Mrs Smiley, typed letters to important people.

"Hello," Mrs Smiley said with a sad smile.

"I have to see the headmaster," Jennifer said. "He sent for me."

"Just a moment." Mrs Smiley went to the door leading to the headmaster's inner office. Not so many kids had been in the headmaster's office. And the kids that had been in the headmaster's office wished they hadn't. She knocked and turned the handle.

"Jennifer's here to see you, Mr Strongman," the secretary said, peeping around the door as if even she was afraid to go inside.

"Send her in," a voice answered.

Mrs Smiley turned and again smiled that sad smile. Jennifer stepped forward. Into the office she went. As usual—because yes, Jennifer had been in the headmaster's office many many many times—Mr Strongman was sitting behind his great big wooden desk. But this time he wasn't alone: sitting in the corner was Mr Goodfellow, the art teacher.

"Aaaah, Jennifer. Sit down," Mr Strongman motioned towards a chair opposite his own.

"Now then," the headmaster began, "I suppose you—know—why I called you in." The headmaster always spoke slowly with big long pauses strange places, as if each word was a pound he didn't want to spend.

"No, sir," Jennifer pretended.

"Come, come, let's not—play games. Are you or are you—not—responsible for the giant painting at The Green?"

"Painting, sir?"

"Painting, girl. I have it on good authority," and here he glanced at Mr Goodman, "that the giant—painting—at The—Green is your handy work."

Jennifer realised she'd have to tell the truth.

"Oh, beside The Green. Yeppers."

"Yeppers? Yeppers? Manners young lady—manners."

"Yeppers, sir." Jennifer said.

The headmaster frowned. "You painted it?"

"Yeppers. I mean, yeppers, sir."

"When?"

"This weekend. I bought the canvas and the oil paint on Friday. I had to use canvas and oil paint in case it rains. It won't wash away, you see. And then I did the whole thing on Saturday and Sunday. It took ages because it's so big, and I wanted it to be good, and I'm not good with oil paint because it like trying to paint with coloured mud, and—

"Yes yes yes," the headmaster interrupted.

"And I got up early this morning and stapled it onto that board."

"This morning." The headmaster always repeated what other people said because it gave him time to choose his own slow words.

"And—where—did you get the money—to—buy all those expensive—materials?"

Why was Mr Strongman asking such strange questions? He should just get mad and shout and say the punishment.

"My dad bought some jokes from me."

"Your father bought—jokes from you?" The headmaster was clearly surprised.

"Yeppers, sir. Two pounds each. Plus I had my paper round money. And I only bought three tubes of paint: red, blue, and yellow, to save money—"

"But all the colours—" the headmaster jumped in. "Your giant painting—has *all kinds of colours*."

"I mixed them. You can mix any colour in the world—so long as you have red, green and blue."

Once again, Mr Strongman looked at Mr Goodfellow, who nodded his head briefly.

The headmaster paused for such a long time, Jennifer thought his brain had been emptied like an outdoor swimming pool at the end of summer, and that all his slow words had gone down the plug-hole. Mr Strongman rested his elbows on the arms of his chair, spread out the fingers of both his hands and placed their tips together, forming a finger cage. He looked through the finger cage at Jennifer as if she was an animal in a zoo.

"Aaaah, Jennifer, I—keep seeing your face in here. Why is that?"

"I don't know, sir. Maybe it's because you keep *sending for me*."

His finger cage collapsed. "I don't suppose you know—that—the—board you put your giant painting on—is private property? And that the artist's impression—of the planned office building is—also privately property? And that vandalism is a—crime?"

"Yeppers, sir. I know."

"You know?"

"Yeppers, *sir*. And I knew I'd get into trouble."

"You knew you'd get into trouble?"

"Yeppers, *sir*."

"Then why did you—do it?" Mr Strongman asked.

"Because it's not right to build ugly high office buildings where kids play. An ugly building with *no twiddly bits*. There's no park around here. There's nothing. If they want an ugly high office building, they should go where kids *don't* play. I wanted to show everyone what The Green should *really* be like."

"Twiddly bits?" The headmaster seemed confused.

"Yeppers, *sir*."

"Very well, Jennifer. This—business—needs serious—unhurried consideration. You can go now. I'll be sending for you again."

Questions and a Crazy Answer

All eyes were raised as Jennifer walked back into the room.

"The raising of eyes is not allowed in *my* class." Miss Largebottom said.

At playtime, questions came flying like paper aeroplanes:

"What did the headmaster want?"

"Was he mad?"

"Is he going to tell your dad?"

"Did you cry?"

"Has he called the police?"

"He hasn't decided yet. I have to see him again."

It was a crazy answer and hardly anyone could even believe it.

At lunchtime, all the kids—except the terrible Thompson twins—marched over to The Green. The kids who hadn't seen Jennifer's giant painting wanted to see it. And the kids who had seen it, wanted to see it again.

"I wish The Green was *really* like that," one kid said.

But everyone stood and stared at the Jennifer's giant painting and imagined the giant trouble she'd soon be in.

A Freakish Fact about Miss Largebottom

Now, pretty much everyone thought Miss Largebottom gave those long tests every *single day* because she hated kids and wanted to make them miserable. And it was true, she *did* hate kids and wanted to make them miserable.

But there was another reason. A strange reason. A freakish reason. And Jennifer was about to figure it all out.

"Right, I have a very sweet and sugary reading comprehension test for today. I know you'll all love it." She paused and stood looking from face to face, hungry for their misery.

Miss Largebottom shoved off and her swivel chair rolled out to Christine Marter's desk.

"Right you rotten lot of vermin," she said as the papers were passed out. "No more whispering. No more moving. No more anything. The test begins NOW!" She slammed a flobbery finger down on the timer. Tick tock the timer ticked its tock.

The reading comprehension text was about the first man to walk on the moon. But Jennifer never got as far as the questions. You see, after she read the text she started to imagine what it would be like to be the first *girl* on the moon. And after that she started to imagine what it would be like to be the first girl on *Mars*. And after that she started to think about being the first girl on imaginary planets and the kinds of creatures she'd discover. Creatures with eleven arms. Creatures with two legs but three kneecaps. Creatures with cross-eyes and other creatures with eyes like circles and when they looked at each other it was like a game of noughts and crosses.

Suddenly Jennifer remembered she was supposed to be doing a test. She glanced up at the clock on the wall. It was 3:20. She'd been daydreaming for fifty minutes! She started to panic and tried to imagine how she could do the whole test in only ten minutes. Then she imagined being the first girl to get zero on one of Miss Largebottom's tests. Finally, she started to think why Miss Largebottom had let her sit there daydreaming and not writing a single word for nearly an hour.

Jennifer looked up at Miss Largebottom. There she was, sitting as still as a statue just staring ahead like she did during every test. It suddenly seemed very strange and a bit creepy. But most of all it seemed a bit of a puzzle.

Jennifer decided to try something.

She raised her hand. All the kids sitting close-by looked up because they knew hand raising was not allowed during tests. But they quickly looked down again and got back to writing because looking up was not allowed during tests either. Jennifer's hand was held high but Miss Largebottom didn't say a word. Jennifer waved her hand about, as if she was standing on a dock and her best friend was sailing away to China. But Miss Largebottom just sat staring as still as ever.

Now Jennifer decided to try something else.

She stood up. But again Miss Largebottom didn't budge or say a word. Now all the class looked up. They knew Jennifer would be in big trouble and some of them, like the terrible Thompson twins, just couldn't wait for the trouble to start. But Miss Largebottom sat steady and sat still and faced forward without even bothering to blink. Why was Miss Largebottom just sitting there, blankly staring ahead as if Jennifer was invisible?

Now Jennifer did something completely crazy. She started walking, slowly, towards Miss Largebottom. Still Miss Largebottom sat silent and sat still. Every kid watched and they could hardly believe their eyes. Why was Jennifer walking towards Miss Largebottom during a test? And why was Miss Largebottom doing nothing.

Now Jennifer was directly in front of Miss Largebottom. Miss Largebottom seemed to be staring at Jennifer, but it was almost as if her eyes really weren't seeing anything. Jennifer walked around the desk. She stared at Miss Largebottom from one side then the other.

Every kid watched in amazement.

Jennifer waved her hand in front of Miss Largebottom's face. Miss Largebottom just stared forward.

Christine Marter, on the front row, whispered, "Is she dead?" Her whisper was so quiet Jennifer almost had to read her lips to understand. Jennifer leaned forward and looked at Miss Largebottom very closely, like an art expert studying an ugly but interesting painting. Then she stood upright and was about to tell all the class something and then changed her mind. Instead, she took a marker pen and began to write on the whiteboard behind Miss Largebottom. This is what she wrote:

Miss Largebottom is sleeping with her EYES OPEN

Everyone gasped. Silently, yes, but they gasped. There was something too freaky about someone sleeping with their eyes open. It was unnatural. They stared at Miss Largebottom and a freakish feeling ran through the class and gave everyone freaky shivers.

Jennifer's hair began to tingle. All that tingling could mean only one thing: Jennifer was having another crazy idea. Walking very quietly so the freakish Miss Largebottom wouldn't wake up, she went to Anila's desk and whispered in her ear.

Anila nodded.

Anila reached in her bag.

All the other kids watched in silence. They watched Anila take something out of her bag and wondered what Jennifer was up to this time.

Art Class

One-ten: the register.

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

You can't find me, Miss Largebottom.

"All right—get lost the lot of you," Miss Largebottom said. It was time for art. All the kids stood up happily and there was a terrific clanking of chairs.

"The clanking of chairs is not allowed in my class," Miss Largebottom said. She knew the kids were in a good mood, so she was in a bad mood.

Out into the corridor, as they walked, Jennifer mimicked Miss Largebottom:

"The clanking of chairs is not allowed in my class."

All the kids—except the terrible Thompson twins—laughed.

"All right, park your bums and stop your tongues." Mr Goodfellow said as the kids arrived in the art room. "Is everyone here? Good. I've decided we should do something different today."

"Awww," two voices said from the back of the class. "It's not fair."

"I spy, with my little eye," Mr Goodfellow began, "something beginning with T, and another T, and another T. Now what could it be? Yes: the terrible Thompson twins. What's wrong with you two *this* time?"

"We don't want to start something new."

"Why not?"

"We're making a battleship out of cornflakes boxes."

"Well you can finish it some other time. Okay everyone. Now, who's seen Jennifer Penny's painting over at The Green?"

All hands were raised.

"Good. Now listen up. I want you all to do like Jennifer did. I want you to pretend you're a big boss and that you're the one who decides what will happen to The Green. I want paintings of the way you think The Green should be. Any questions?"

"I think it should be like a battleship," Greg Thompson said.

Soon, everyone was busy.

"All right, listen up everyone. When you've finished, put your paintings to dry. You can all come at three-thirty and take them home. Understand? Right, good."

All the kids were puzzled because Mr Goodfellow never told them to come and get their paintings after school.

The ding-dong bell went ding-dong. Jennifer's class was always the first out of school. Today though they were last. Each of them carefully carried their own painting of the way they imagined The Green should be.

All Kinds of Things Kids Think are Fun

The next morning, as usual, Jennifer opened the door on her way to school when her dad called, "Be good—but not *too* good."

Jennifer walked down to the road. At the corner there was no sign of Anila so Jennifer continued towards the school on her own. And then she came alongside The Green and stopped dead in her tracks. She looked and she looked and she looked again. She could hardly believe her eyes. Her painting was still there on the big board. But now, stretched out on the wooden fence behind, there were twenty-five others paintings as well. Twenty-five pictures of the way twenty-five different kids thought The Green should be. Everyone from Jennifer's class—except the terrible Thompson twins—had pinned their art class paintings up on the fence. There were pictures of parks and playgrounds and a swimming pool and a funfair and a rocket launcher with trips to the moon and all kinds of things kids think are fun.

And then Jennifer saw Anila Bardai, sitting on the ground.

"That one's mine," Anila stood up and pointed.

"It's nice," Jennifer said. "But why—?"

"We want to help you. We don't want *just you* getting in trouble. And we don't want The Green turned into a stupid office building."

"With no twiddly bits," Jennifer said. Anila crumpled up her face but decided not to say anything about Jennifer's crazy twiddly bits.

They were silent for a few moments and then Jennifer asked, "Do you have your mobile phone with you?"

Anila nodded.

"You should take a photo of all the paintings. Then, even if they tear them down, we can still remember what they all looked like."

"Good idea," Anila said, taking out her phone and pressing the button so it could take photos. "Do you want to be in it?"

"Yeppers."

Jennifer stood beside her own painting with all the other paintings stretching out behind on either side and gave a big smile.

Click!

It's All News to Jennifer

Nine-ten: the register.

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

"Here, Miss Largebottom."

There, Miss Largebottom.

And then Willie brought another note and handed it to Miss Largebottom. She read the message. She smiled.

"Jennifer Penny," Miss Largebottom began, "the headmaster wishes to see you."

Once again, the headmaster was not alone. Mr Goodfellow was sitting in the corner. They were both talking away, but stopped as soon as Jennifer appeared.

"Aaaah, Jennifer. Sit down," the headmaster said. "First of all, I understand the sudden appearance of twenty-five other paintings on the tall wooden fence has nothing to do with you. Is that so?"

"Yeppers."

"Manners, young lady, manners."

"Yeppers sir. I didn't even know about them until this morning."

The headmaster frowned but continued, "Very well. Now then, listen carefully. I said last time that I needed time to consider the situation. I have considered."

"Oh."

"Jennifer Penny," the headmaster said calmly and still smiling, "for *once* you're *not* in trouble."

"Sir?"

It was hard to believe. No. It was impossible to believe.

"Twice as much pocket money for half as much time!"

It was impossible.

"You're not in trouble," The headmaster said again, quite calmly and quite clearly.

This seemed all wrong and for some strange reason Jennifer decided she almost *wanted* to be in trouble.

Even so, when she left the office, Jennifer Penny skipped down the empty corridor.

At break time questions came flying like kites with their strings cut:

"So what happened?"

"Do they know about *our* paintings?"

"Are we in trouble as well?"

"Everything's fine. *Nobody's* in trouble," Jennifer said.

The whole class—except the terrible Thompson twins—was unbelievably happy.

The Terrible Thompson Twins Have a Sharp Idea

That night, the terrible Thompson twins planned and plotted, schemed and rotted. They were so mad they were crazy.

The terrible Thompson twins shared a room. Their beds were separated by a small space filled with broken toys and bits of old food. The terrible Thompson twins were terribly messy twins. And of course, everywhere you looked they had models and posters of battleships.

One reason the terrible Thompson twins loved battleships was because their absent dad was in the navy and he worked on a battleship. They told everyone who would listen—which was almost *nobody*—that he was a captain. Of course it wasn't true.

A battleship has hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of doors, and really it was their dad's job to oil the hinges on all of them. He started at the front of the battleship and worked his way to the back. Of course, on a battleship they don't say front and back. Oh no. They say, "bow" and "stern." Nobody knows why. So their dad started oiling the door hinges at the bow and finally, when he oiled the final hinge on the final door at the stern, well it had taken so long to get there that he had to go to the bow and start all over again. And their dad loved his job so much, he almost never bothered coming home even though their mum looked a like a battleship.

"Everyone's put their stupid picture with Jennifer Penny's stupid picture," Gregory growled.

"None of 'em even painted a battleship," Gilbert answered.

"I know."

"They should turn The Green into a battleship."

"I know."

"All the class should all be in trouble. We're the only ones who didn't put our paintings up."

"That's because we're the only ones not stupid," Gregory decided.

"We should get 'em into trouble. All of 'em. Especially that Jennifer Penny."

"I know."

"How?"

And then the terrible Thompson twins conjured up a terrible plan.

Miss Largebottom Doesn't Get the Point

The next morning, during break when everyone was playing outside, the terrible Thompson twins sneaked back into the classroom. And then they got busy with some monkey business that even a monkey wouldn't do.

"All right," Gilbert said, after their monkey business was finished. "Let's get out of here quick." So they ran outside.

And then playtime was over and all the kids were back in class. Miss Largebottom rolled out on her swivel chair and handed out a monster test.

Jennifer Penny was about to start writing when she realised her pencil was broken.

Anila Bardai was about to start writing when she realised *her* pencil was broken.

Jennifer opened her desk.

Anila opened her desk.

No sharpener.

No sharpener.

Jennifer's sharpener was gone.

Anila's brand new sharpener was gone. She crumpled up her face in silent flabergastation.

At the same time, everybody else in the class—except the terrible Thompson twins—discovered the same thing. Every kid in class—except the terrible Thompson twins—had a broken pencil and somehow their pencil sharpeners were all gone.

The terrible Thompson glanced at each other secretively and sniggered.

Then came the whispering, like the sound of wind and rustling leaves before a terrible storm:

"Have you got a pencil sharpener?"

"Have you got a pencil sharpener?"

"Stop that whispering! All of you!" Miss Largebottom shouted. "Whispering is not allowed in my class.

"Right you rotten lot of rats. No more whispering. No more moving. No more anything. The test begins NOW!" She slammed a flobbery finger down on the timer.

Suddenly there was absolute silence. Everybody looked towards the front of the class. There, on the wall, was the large pencil sharpener with a turn around handle. And nobody—especially Anila—dared to try and use it.

And then, from the back of the class, there came a soft snigger. Jennifer turned around and saw the terrible Thompson twins smiling away, trying not to laugh. And then she knew it was all their terrible plan. But what could she do?

Jennifer's hair tingled and she suddenly had an idea: quite confidently, she raised her hand. Miss Largebottom couldn't believe her eyes. Her blood began to boil and her face turned red.

"How dare you raise your hand, you saucy child you. I have started the timer. Get on with the test or *else!*" She was almost spitting as she spoke.

"My pencil's broken."

"Broken pencils are not allowed in *my* class!" Miss Largebottom barked.

"Not allowed?" Jennifer asked, innocently.

"No."

"You're sure they're not allowed?"

"Quite sure, girl, you horrible specimen of a child."

"You're *really* sure broken pencils aren't allowed in *your* class, Miss Largebottom?" Jennifer chirped.

"For the last time—"

"Well, if they're *not* allowed, I'd better sharpen it quick," Jennifer said, standing up before Miss Largebottom had time to answer. "I mean, I wouldn't want to get into trouble."

"Er . . . er," Miss Largebottom stuttered.

"If broken pencils aren't allowed in your class, I'd better sharpen mine as well," Anila Bardai said.

"Me too," said Christine Marter.

"Me too," said another kid.

"Me too."

"And me."

"And me."

"And me."

"Me as well."

And now the whole class—except the terrible Thompson twins—was marching down to the large pencil sharpener on the wall with the turn around handle. Miss Largebottom's mouth opened wide. What was happening? She was trying to figure out why . . . she was trying to figure out *how* she'd given permission for everybody—except the terrible Thompson twins—to sharpen their pencils during a test. Her mouth was open so wide, some of the kids said they glanced in and saw a family of bats hanging around upside-down and chatting about moving to Australia where they'd heard everything was the right way up.

The Secret Weapon

After school the following day, Jennifer was riding around on her creaky old bike trying to find something to do. And then, as she came alongside The Green, Jennifer noticed there was no padlock on the entrance gate. She stopped, leaned her bike against the fence and gave the gate a push. It creaked open. She glanced around. There was no sign of anyone, so she stepped inside and closed it behind her.

So there she was, back on The Green. Apart from the tall wooden fence, nothing had changed. And yet, at the same time, everything had changed: there were no more kids running about and playing about. Only wind and the sound of the occasional passing car passing by. Still, it was nice to be back.

And then Jennifer took off at full speed, running passed the bushes, running over the hills, up towards the top end where Mr Bywater's old house rose above the tall wooden fence, then running back down again, running running from one side to another, trying to run over and touch every part of The Green. She ran and ran and galloped pretending she was a horse. Panting, Jennifer finally fell to the ground.

And then, without warning, something happened. A noise. Jennifer looked up and saw the gate swinging open. In a panic she looked around and saw the patch of bushes was near-by. She rolled over and over on the grass until she was behind them.

Peeping through the branches and leaves, Jennifer saw two men entering. The first was wearing a suit, shiny shoes and a tie. It was easy to see he was a sit-down man. He looked unhealthy, like he sat behind a desk all day and never got any exercise. And his face was pasty white. The second one was a muscleman, wearing a pair of blue overalls and steel tipped boots.

The muscleman pushed the gate closed. Then they walked side by side onto The Green, looking around. They were getting closer and closer and Jennifer was sure they'd spot her any second. But then they came to a stop.

"Ah, this is no good. No good at all," the muscleman said. They were so close Jennifer could hear them clearly.

"What's no good?" the sit-down man asked.

"This delay. We should be already digging the foundations. You can't build a building without foundations."

"I know I know I know," the sit-down man said. He sounded irritated. "We have a slight problem."

"What's that then?"

"The owner. There's a last minute complication with the land deed."

"What?" The muscleman seemed angry.

"Don't worry. The negotiations are almost done. Trust me. It's like taking candy from a kid."

"Well get on with it then. I have men waiting to start working."

"I will."

"Well I hope so. And what should we do about all them paintings?" the muscleman asked.

Jennifer Penny wriggled further into the bushes, as if talking about the paintings made her easier to see.

"Nothing," the sit-down man answered.

"Nothing?"

"We don't have any choice. If we tear them down it'd make us look bad. We're supposed to be the good guys."

"But if we do nothing, there's no knowing what those kids'll do next."

"Ah, well that's where you're wrong," the sit-down man said. "You see I have a secret weapon."

"What secret weapon?" the muscleman asked. Just then, at that very moment, the gate creaked open again. Jennifer looked up. She could hardly believe her eyes. She gasped. The sit-down man glanced around to the bush where Jennifer hid. She held her breath until he turned back towards the gate.

"Let me introduce you to my secret weapon," the sit-down man said.

Jennifer really couldn't believe who was walking in.

"This is Miss Largebottom."

Miss Largebottom was walking towards them. She gave a brief nod. The muscleman gave her a brief nod in return.

"Miss Largebottom is my sister's husband's second cousin," the sit-down man explained.

"Well that's all fine and dandy, but how's your sister's husband's second cousin a secret weapon?"

"Well, you see, she—"

"I can speak for myself, thank you very much," Miss Largebottom trumpeted in her bossy way. "Just by chance, I started working at the local school this term."

"Well that's fine and dandy, but how does it help?"

"It's *not* fine and it's *not* dandy. But—"

"She's a teacher in that rotten school," the sit-down man interrupted, "and she's spying on the whole rotten lot of them for us. So you see—"

"And, fortunately for *you*, and unfortunately for *me*," Miss Largebottom interrupted, "the ring-leader of the whole rotten lot, Jennifer Penny is in *my* class."

"In *her* class. It's perfe—"

"Precisely," Miss Largebottom interrupted. "Thanks to me and my succulent spying skills, you can know every tiny little thing they're planning and plotting."

"*That's* how she's our secret weapon," the sit-down man said.

"Hmph," the muscleman hmphed. He wasn't convinced that having a spy in the school was much of a secret weapon.

"So, Miss Largebottom, do you have any valuable news?"

"Indeed I do. In the staff room today, the headmaster made it quite clear that he will *not* punish that rotten rat Penny or any of her rotten classmates. He's on *their* side."

"Drat," the sit-down man said. "That's not good."

"And it gets worse. The headmaster has contacted the local newspaper. He thinks *everyone* should know what a *great* thing that Penny rat has started up with her rotten painting."

"Double-drat. Your right, that *is* worse."

"And it gets *worser*. He's planning a meeting next Monday evening in the assembly hall. He's inviting *everyone* who lives around here. Even if they have no rotten kids in the school."

"What kind of meeting?" the muscleman asked.

"They'll discuss The Green and the new office building you plan to build."

"Well *that's* not fine and dandy."

"Don't worry don't worry don't worry. We can't do anything about the local newspaper, but thanks to our secret weapon we have time to prepare for that meeting."

"What do you have in mind?" the muscleman asked.

"It's quite simple. This construction plan is *mine*. So I'll make sure I'm invited to the dratting meeting. Then I'll give *our* side of the story. And you can be dratting sure that when I've finished, the whole lot of them will be begging me to build the office building."

"Hmph, well I hope so," the muscleman said.

"And meanwhile, our spy will tell us if they have any other sneaky plans. Won't you, Miss Largebottom."

"With the greatest of pleasure," Miss Largebottom said.

The two men and Miss Largebottom walked away and out of the gate. Jennifer stood up and quietly walked to the gate and put her ear against it. They seemed to have gone. Jennifer gave the gate a gentle push. Of course it was locked. Jennifer was locked in. She looked around. The fence was much too high to climb over.

Then she spotted something. She ran across The Green, picked up an old plastic milk crate and carried it to the fence at the top end. On the other side, there was a tree in Mr Bywater's garden that had several branches sticking out over the fence. If she could reach one she could climb out. So she put the crate on its end and carefully stood on top. It wobbled. It was hard to balance. Jennifer reached up but the branch was too high. She jumped up and her fingers touched some leaves but then she fell to the ground. She tried again. And she fell again. Then Jennifer walked around The Green and finally found some short pieces of wood a boy had used to make a space station for his plastic space figures.

With the wood carefully piled on top of the crate, she stepped on. It was even more rickety now and just before she lost her balance she jumped upwards. This time she caught the branch with both hands and kicked against the fence as she pulled herself up. Quickly the branch was under her arms. She rested for a few seconds and then forced her legs over the top of the fence. She rested again and then pulled herself completely into the tree. Now she could see into Mr Bywater's wild garden. It would be easy to climb down.

"Jennifer?" She almost fell out of the tree when she heard her name and quickly looked around. Mr Bywater was coming around the side of his house. "Is that you?"

"Oh, erm, yes its me!" Jennifer called, embarrassed. "Can I climb down into your garden, please?"

"Of course you can. Wait, wait, I'll help you." Mr Bywater hurried over to the bottom of the tree.

"It's okay, I'm a good climber," Jennifer said.

"Well, I see that. But what were you doing up there?"

"Oh, I was sort of on The Green."

"Isn't it all closed off?"

"Well, the gate was sort of unlocked, so I went in. But then they locked it."

"Well, now you're here, would you like to come in for some juice?"

"Yeppers," Jennifer smiled. And in they went.

Mr Bywater filled the kettle and put it on the cooker and gave Jennifer some more of his special home-made apple juice.

"I saw your painting," Mr Bywater said, turning around.

"Oh, did you?"

"I did indeed." Mr Bywater sat with Jennifer at the kitchen table. "And all your classmates' paintings too."

"Yeppers."

"You're not too happy about what's happening to the wasteland out back."

"You mean *The Green*? Of course I'm not happy. Who *would* be happy?"

"Mmm, well I never really thought about it."

"Well it's right beside your house!"

"I know, but I've only ever thought of it as wasteland. I mean, it's not really used for anything."

"Well we use it for *everything*."

"So it seems," he said, thoughtfully.

"But you grew up right here. Didn't you play on The Green when you were a kid?"

"Oh, when I was a kid," Mr Bywater stood up to make himself a coffee, "everything was quite different. Where your street is now, well that used to be Walking Fern Wood. And the Corner Shop used to be a cabbage field. It was all quite different back then."

"So you had tons of places to play."

"Oh yes. We had some fine adventures too."

"Well we *don't*. The only thing we have is The Green."

Mr Wig

Willie brought another note and handed it to Miss Largebottom. She read the message.

"Jennifer Penny," Miss Largebottom began, "the headmaster wishes to see you—*again*." Jennifer stood. All the class knew that Jennifer wasn't in trouble. Going to see the headmaster and not being in trouble was very unusual, and everyone—except the terrible Thompson twins—watched Jennifer as if she was some kind of magician turning bad into good.

Once again Mr Strongman was not alone: Mr Goodfellow sat in the usual corner and another man sat in Jennifer's seat—well, it seemed like Jennifer's seat, since she spent so much of her time sitting in it. The strange man was wearing thick glasses that made him look like a fish. He also wore a long crumpled raincoat—even though it hadn't rained for days—a spotted jacket underneath, a pair of pink socks and a pink flower in his jacket pocket. As well as all that, his hair didn't quite look real.

"Aaah, Jennifer," Mr Strongman began. "This is Mr—Wig. He works for—*The—Gazette* newspaper."

"Hello," Jennifer said. Mr Wig nodded his head and his wig seemed to bounce about as if it was fixed to his scalp by a spring.

"Mr Wig would like to hear—"

"Tell me everything," Mr Wig interrupted, suddenly brandishing a pencil and note pad. "And then we'll go take some photos of you beside your *controversial* painting."

In the News

"Wow," Jennifer said. "It's on the front page."

Jennifer had just picked up the stack of papers to deliver on her newspaper round.

On the front page there was a picture of her, standing between her own giant painting and all the others on the wooden fence behind.

Jennifer bought a copy of *The Gazette* after she finished her round and then went home.

"Dad, I've got something to show you," Jennifer said, walking into the living room where her dad was reading another big book with no pictures.

"Really? What's that then?"

"Well, do you remember last weekend?"

"Mmm, you were in your room most of the time. What should I remember?"

"Well, I was being good, but not *too* good," she said and handed him the newspaper.

Jennifer's dad saw her photo on the front and raised his eyebrows. "Well, you were certainly busy."

Jennifer sat down and her dad started reading the story out-loud.

Girl Paints Park

The East End children have no park. What they do have is a bit of wasteland they call The Green. The Green has been the neighbourhood park ever since there was a neighbourhood. But that's all about to change.

"They put a fence around The Green," recounts ten-year-old Jennifer Penny, "and a sign with a giant ugly painting of this really ugly office building. That's what they want to do with The Green. They want to change it into an ugly office building. So I was thinking about that giant ugly painting, and having nowhere else to play, and I had this idea . . ."

Three days later Jennifer had completed a delightful painting of majestic proportions. And then, early Monday morning, with most of the East End still sleeping, Jennifer Penny

stuck her painting over the original architects design. Instead of an ugly high office building, Jennifer had transformed The Green into a wonderful park. The art teacher, Mr Goodfellow, saw the painting and was impressed. The headmaster of her school, Mr Strongman, was equally impressed. Her classmates decided to join in. And now, all along that wooden fence, raised to keep the children out of their own playground, scores of paintings are pinned, each showing a child's impression of how they think The Green should really be.

So why not take a trip over to the East End and check out this art exhibition with a difference. But go quick, before they're torn down and the ugly high office building goes where The Green should be.

Jennifer's dad finished reading and put the paper on the table.

"What does 'magnificent proportions' mean?" Jennifer asked.

"It means big."

"So why not say big?"

"Sometimes big just doesn't seem big enough."

"Big seems big enough to me," Jennifer said.

"That's because you're so small."

"I'm not so small."

"You seem small to me."

"That's because you're so big."

"Let's take a walk down to The Green, shall we. I want to take a look at that painting of yours."

Jennifer Took out her yo-yo and yo-yoed her way up the street with her dad walking beside. When they reached The Green they saw something was going on: a large crowd of people gathered around the tall wooden fence and spilled over onto the road.

"It's all the parents," Jennifer said as they drew closer.

All the parents and all the kids—except the terrible Thompson twins—were crowded around the tall wooden fence. They walked this way and that, looking at the paintings, each mother and father saying that their kid had done the nicest painting. Not only were the parents there, but the headmaster and all the teachers and some television people with cameras and microphones. As soon as the television people saw Jennifer, they all rushed over with their cameras and microphones and professional smiles and began asking her exactly six stupid questions:

"Who gave you the idea to do your giant painting?"

"What gave you the idea to do your giant painting???"

"When did you get the idea to do your giant painting?"

"Where did you get the idea to do your giant painting?"

"Why did you get the idea to do your giant painting?"

"How did you get the idea to do your giant painting?"

After that they ran out of stupid questions and went away.

Jennifer Realises Something

It was a big day. Jennifer had been in the newspaper and on the evening television news.

"You're famous, Jennifer," her dad said, giving her a kiss on the cheek.

"I know, but I don't feel famous."

It was just before bedtime. Even though Jennifer was not feeling famous, she was certainly feeling happy. It was hard to believe that her painting had won so much attention. But then, slowly, as darkness crept into the sky, Jennifer's glee turned into gloom.

"Dad."

"What?"

"I just realised something."

"What's that?"

"I did my painting, right?"

"Right."

"Every kid in my class did a painting, right?"

"Right."

"The whole story was in the newspaper, right?"

"Right."

"And on TV, right?"

"Right."

"So now everyone in town knows what's going on, and how wrong it is, right?"

"Right."

"But they're *still* going to turn The Green into an ugly office building. Right?"

"Well—probably."

"I made the whole thing into a big deal—but sometimes big isn't big enough."

The Story of Goody-Two-Shoes

"It's boring here, let's go to your house," Jennifer said.

It was after supper and Jennifer and Anila were in Jennifer's bedroom. Jennifer sat on the floor and Anila sat on the bed.

"Okay. But it's boring there too."

"It's boring everywhere now we can't play on The Green."

They went out into the kitchen where Jennifer's dad was reading yet another big book with no pictures.

"We're going over to Anila's house. I'll be back at 8:30."

"All right then. Have fun."

"I doubt it," Jennifer said.

"Well, in that case, be good—but not *too* good."

And out they went.

When they arrived at Anila's house they went to her bedroom and started being bored again. Jennifer sat on the bed and Anila sat on the floor.

"Why does your dad always say 'be good but not *too* good'?"

"Because he thinks you can't trust people who're *too* good."

"Why?"

"He says it's not natural to be *too* good."

"What's he mean?" Anila crumpled up her face.

"Okay, well imagine there's this boy and he's a real goody-two shoes. Right?"

"Right."

"And this goody-two-shoes really loves chocolate. He's mad about chocolate."

"What kind?"

"Every kind. Chocolate, double chocolate, triple chocolate, chocolate wrapped in chocolate. You know, every kind of chocolate. But then one day his teacher tells the class that chocolate's bad for you. So he thinks, 'Mmm, I'm a goody-two-shoes, and chocolate's bad for me, so I'm never going to eat chocolate ever again.'"

"He's crazy!" Anila said.

"Yeppers. That's because he's a goody-two-shoes. Now you're starting to understand. Any way, he doesn't eat a single bit of chocolate all that day. And then the next day. And the next. After a week he still hasn't had a nibble. And then a month. But all the time he can't stop *thinking* about chocolate, because even though he's a goody-two shoes, he really loves chocolate like mad.

"And then nearly a year has passed and guess what?"

"What?"

"It's Easter. So Goody-Two-Shoes goes into this corner shop to buy some celery to snack on. But then he sees stacks and stacks and stacks of chocolate eggs and bars of chocolate stacked up to the ceiling. He looks around and he can't believe his eyes and he starts to feel dizzy. And then he feels like he's sort of in a dream and he grabs a chocolate cream egg wrapped in shiny foil and he rips off the foil and stuffs it into his mouth in one go.

"'Hey, you should pay before you eat it!' the man behind the counter says. But Goody-Two-Shoes isn't listening. The taste of that chocolate cream egg is still exploding in his mouth and he's already grabbing another. He wolfs it down and then he grabs a big Easter egg and tears off the box and foil and starts munching the egg and inside there's these tiny chocolate birds. And guess what?"

"What?"

“He starts wolfing down the chocolate birds as if they're real birds and he's a real wolf.

““Hey, stop that,' the shop man keeps saying. But Goody-Two-Shoes is wild for chocolate and he goes from stack to stack grabbing more and more and all the stacks fall down and the whole shop looks like a mad house. So then the shop man has no choice and he calls the police. And the police come and see what's going on and they arrest Goody-Two-Shoes. And he goes to court and the judge says Goody-Two-Shoes is the worst kind of chocolate stealing beast he's ever met and he has to got to prison for three years and think about how bad he's been.”

“And could he have chocolate in prison?” Anila asked.

“Yeppers. But only one tiny square a month.”

“That's not much.”

“Any way,” Jennifer said, “now you understand why you should be good—but not too good.”

Miss Largebottom's Peculiar Punishment

It was afternoon playtime. Jennifer had been playing hopscotch with two other girls and now she looked around the playground for Anila. There was no sign of her. Then the bell rang and all the kids started to drag themselves back inside. When Jennifer arrived in her class she noticed Anila's seat was empty.

Miss Largebottom looked up at the empty seat.

"Where is Miss Bardai?" she asked coldly, glancing up at the wall clock.

No one answered.

"Miss Penny, where is Miss Bardai?"

"I don't know. I wasn't playing with her."

"Oh, fallen out have you?" Miss Largebottom licked her lips and smiled. She loved it when best friends fell out with each other.

Jennifer was just about to say no, they *hadn't* fallen out, when the door flew open and Anila came rushing in.

Miss Largebottom looked at Anila who was rushing to her desk.

"Stop where you are you nasty excuse for a child," Miss Largebottom said very calmly.

Anila stopped in her tracks but was too scared to turn and face Miss Largebottom, so she stared at her shoes.

"You are," Miss Largebottom began, glancing up at the wall clock, "three minutes late."

Anila still stood silently staring at her shoes.

Miss Largebottom forced her large bottom from her swivel chair and walked over to Anila.

Now Miss Largebottom had a very peculiar way of punishing kids. There were three parts in Miss Largebottom's peculiar way of punishing kids, and now it was time for:

Part one of Miss Largebottom's peculiar punishment.

This always began with Miss Largebottom asking why the kid had been bad.

"Miss Bardai, why are you three minutes late, you saucy child?"

Miss Largebottom was standing very close to Anila, leaning over so Anila could clearly see up her large nostrils. Anila could guess that Miss Largebottom was wanting to start part one of her peculiar punishment, so she decided to try and stay silent.

"Miss Bardai, why are you three minutes late?" Miss Largebottom repeated the question. But this time, even though she still seemed quite calm, there was an evil sound in her voice, as if she had a buzz saw inside her chest and it was starting to buzz. Anila had no choice.

"Well, Miss," Anila began. Miss Largebottom was ready for those first words. In the blink of an eye she stuck out two flobbery fingers, thrust them under Anila's chin and began to tap tap tap. She tapped Anila's chin so hard, her teeth crashed together. And every word Anila tried to say came out like babble. So she tried to say, "Well, Miss, a little kid from the first year fell down and hurt his knee so I had to help him go to the first-aid room." But with Miss Largebottom tap tap tapping under Anila's chin with two flobbery fingers, what came out was "Wy mw mw mw ee sm am im hm tw mw hm sm bm im bm."

"What? What?" Miss Largebottom's nostrils flared like the nostrils of a fire-breathing dragon.

Tap tap tap.

"I mw mwn wgm mwm tmym."

“What? Speak up, child.”

Tap tap tap.

“Mmm wm mmw lm ymrm.”

Tap tap tap.

“Mmr mw smmmm.”

Tap tap tap.

“Mmmm wrm mnm.”

Miss Largebottom tapped under Anila's chin so hard that not only did her teeth crash, but her brains rattled in her head and with each tap tap tap she was forced to take a step backwards. And now she was all the way with her back against the wall.

“Don't tell such *outrageous* stories, Miss Bardai” Miss Largebottom said, as if she understood every word. “Now tell me the *truth*. Why are you so later?”

Tap tap tap.

“Wmrm wrm mrm.”

Anila was pushed against the wall and couldn't step backwards any more so now the full force of the chin tapping really crashed her teeth and rattled her brains and tears began to trickle down her cheeks.

“Crying? Crying? Do you know what I do to cry babies?”

Anila remained quiet.

“Well do you?”

Anila didn't want to answer because she knew the tapping torture would just start again.

“Answer me!” Miss Largebottom screamed and her dragony nostrils flared again. Anila tried to say, “Yes, Miss.” But tap tap, all she really said was, “Ym mrm.” And more tears.

“Right then, cry baby.”

And now it was time for:

Part two of Miss Largebottom's peculiar punishment.

Miss Largebottom made Anila turn around and face the back of the class by thrusting those two flobbery fingers under Anila's chin and now, instead of tapping, she pushed Anila's head upwards so she could only look at the ceiling and felt like her neck would break. And then Miss Largebottom pushed her by the chin down the middle of the classroom. Anila was almost lifted off her feet by the force and she rushed forward on tiptoes. Her neck was being stretched and seemed ready to snap as Miss Largebottom chinned her along between the rows of desks. Quickly they were both at the back of the class. Every kid turned around to watch. But they knew what would happen next. It was time for:

Part three of Miss Largebottom's peculiar punishment.

“So tell me what I do to cry babies!” Miss Largebottom cried, leaning forward again. She was so close now Anila could smell her dragony breath. Anila knew she had to try and answer. Otherwise Miss Largebottom would make the chin tapping torture go on and on and on. So Anila tried to answer.

Tap tap tap.

“Mrw mw mt my mrrm mm mmm mo mb bms.”

“Yes!” Miss Largebottom cried victoriously, again as if she understood every word. And then she opened the door of the Resource Cupboard, where all the books and paper and everything else was kept. Again, with her two flobbery fingers, Miss Largebottom chinned Anila into the cupboard, slammed the door shut and pushed the bolt closed.

The door was well and truly locked. There was a dead silence in the class now. Miss Largebottom had only been teaching in the school for a few weeks, but already nearly half of the class had been locked in the Resource Cupboard. So they knew what it was like. There was no window in the cupboard. And of course, Miss Largebottom had removed the light bulb. So it was very dark. It was very very dark.

Anila sniffled and closed her eyes so she couldn't see how dark the dark was.

Miss Largebottom returned to her swivel chair and plonked down her large bottom.

"Right, now I've taken care of Miss Bardai, I have something special for you all." She opened a drawer in her desk and took out a pile of papers.

"We have exactly one hour before home-time, so I have a delicious reading comprehension test."

No one groaned or complained. They were too scared.

The tests were handed out. All the kids set to work. All except Jennifer. Jennifer looked down at her paper and held her pencil but she didn't write a single word. She was thinking about her best friend locked in the cupboard. Jennifer felt her blood boil. More important than boiling blood though was tingling hair. All over her head it tingled. And then Jennifer decided to take care of Miss Largebottom once and for all.

Miss Largebottom Gets What She Deserves

Jennifer glanced at the clock and then again sat silently holding her pencil but not writing a single word. Then she glanced at the freakish Miss Largebottom. Was she already sleeping with her eyes freakishly open? Or was she just sitting staring? There was no way to know. So Jennifer turned back to the test page and looked at all the empty spaces where she should have been writing answers.

The clock ticked. Time slowly passed.

It was 3:15. It was now or never.

Jennifer stood. All the class stopped writing and glanced up. Jennifer looked at Miss Largebottom who only stared ahead vacantly. She was freakishly asleep with her eyes open. Jennifer silently walked to the Resource Cupboard and very very very carefully pushed the heavy bolt. It was stuck. She pushed harder. It was still stuck. She pushed harder still. Suddenly it moved open with a loud clank. Jennifer turned to look at Miss Largebottom and every head in the class turned too. But she was still sleeping her freakish eye opened sleep. Now Jennifer carefully turned the handle and pulled open the Resource Cupboard door. Light spilled into the dark cupboard. Anila was sitting on the floor, her cheeks streaked with tears. Jennifer quickly put a finger to her lips and then gestured for Anila to stand up and come out. Anila understood and silently stood and stepped out into the bright classroom. Jennifer pointed to Anila's desk. Anila looked at Miss Largebottom freakishly sleeping with her eyes open and then went to sit down.

Jennifer tiptoed slowly to the front of the class.

What was she going to do? Every single kid watched and wondered.

Finally Jennifer reached Miss Largebottom's desk. And then she went behind the desk and stood between the whiteboard and Miss Largebottom's swivel chair. Now, very carefully, she took hold of the top of the swivel chair. Then she gave it a gentle push. Nothing happened. She pushed harder and the swivel chair sneaked forward. Almost at once she stopped pushing and the swivel chair stopped. Jennifer held her breath and almost every single kid did the same. Still standing behind the swivel chair she waited a few seconds, half expecting Miss Largebottom to wake up from her freakish sleep. Nothing happened. So Jennifer took hold of the swivel chair and gave it another push. It slowly rolled forward and this time she continue to push and soon they were out from behind the desk. Jennifer pushed the freakishly sleeping Miss Largebottom slowly between two rows of desks. Every kid looked at the freakishly sleeping Miss Largebottom's as Jennifer pushed the swivel chair. And then, as they came beside the terrible Thompson twins, Anila guessed what Jennifer planned to do.

The terrible Thompson twins looked at the freakish teacher sleeping freakishly with her eyes open. Why was Jennifer bringing her to their desks? But they were both too scared to move a muscle because up-close the freakishly sleeping Miss Largebottom looked even more freakish and her wide opened eyes seemed to be freakishly watching them.

And then Jennifer had pushed Miss Largebottom passed their desks and they both breathed a sign of relief.

Miss Largebottom and the swivel chair continued to roll on and then, finally, Jennifer brought it to a stop. She reached out and pulled the Resource Cupboard door wide open. Then she pushed Miss Largebottom and the swivel chair *into* the resource Cupboard, closed the door and locked the heavy bolt. Miss Largebottom, still freakishly sleeping, was locked inside her own dark prison.

Jennifer looked at the clock on the wall and then at the class.

"It's 3:30," she whispered. "Time to go home. *Quietly.*"

And so, very quietly, all the kids got their stuff and shuffled out of the room. Jennifer was last out. She closed the classroom door behind her.

"What happens when she wakes up?" Anila asked. All the class was hanging about in the corridor and now they gathered around.

"She'll find out what it's like when she locks *us* away."

"You'll be in big trouble," Anila said.

"We'll *all* be in big trouble," Gilbert Thompson said.

"Well, you can go let her out if you're so scared," Jennifer said, staring at him coldly. Gilbert Thompson looked down at his feet.

"Does *anyone* want to let her out?" Jennifer challenged, looking from face to face. No one answered.

"No, we don't," Anila said. "She deserves it. But I think Gilbert's right. We *will* all get in trouble."

"It's worth it though," Raymond Bellwood said. "I'd love to see her face when she wakes up!"

"So would I," Jennifer said. "But don't forget it's pitch black in there!"

"Yeah, and I hope she's scared of the dark," Gilbert Thompson said. It was the first time one of the terrible Thompson twins had agreed with *anything* Jennifer had said.

"Any way, let's all go home," Jennifer turned to all the class. "And don't worry. None of us will be in trouble. Not me. Not *anyone.*"

"How come?" Christine Marter asked.

"Because I have another plan!"

The Next Morning

The next morning, when Mr Goodfellow opened the main doors, Jennifer's class was the very last to go inside. And everyone made sure Jennifer was in front. Jennifer skipped down the corridor as if she hadn't a care in the world. The rest slowly followed behind. They were all expecting Miss Largebottom and the headmaster to be waiting for them in the classroom.

Jennifer pushed open the classroom door and walked in. The room was empty. She looked at the Resource Cupboard. It was closed and still bolted.

Anila came along beside. "Do you think she's still in there?" she whispered.

"Yeppers. I think she's been locked in there all night long," Jennifer said, loud enough for all the class to hear. Most of the kids were in the room now and they gathered behind Miss Largebottom's desk, as far from the Resource Cupboard as they could get.

Jennifer casually walked towards the Resource Cupboard as if she was just going to get a piece of paper. All the class watched in silence. As Jennifer drew nearer, several of the kids shuffled back, trying to get even further away, until they were pushed against the whiteboard on the wall.

Without a pause, Jennifer tugged on the bolt. With a clang it slid sideways. The clang made most of the kids jump. Jennifer opened the door.

Inside, Miss Largebottom sat on the floor on her large bottom. She squinted as the bright light suddenly filled her small prison. Her hair was a complete mess, as if she'd been dragged a hundred times around Mr Bywater's jungle garden by a pack of laughing hyenas. Her makeup was all spoiled by streaks of dried tears. She looked up at Jennifer and seemed confused. Jennifer smiled. Jennifer's smile seemed to quickly *unconfuse* Miss Largebottom.

"Right you little rat!" she cried. Her eyes widened. She stood up. Her legs were wobbly after being on the floor so long and she held on to the frame of the door as she looked around the classroom and saw all the kids huddled behind her desk.

"Which of you locked me in the cupboard?"

"I did, Miss Largebottom," Jennifer smiled.

"I should've known." Miss Largebottom raised both her hands and started wriggling her flobbery fingers as if they needed a warm-up exercise before they started doing piano practice. Or some strangling. "And now you'll pay for your crime. Ha! I'll eat you alive, you little brat." She stepped out from the door-frame and moved towards Jennifer, her hands reaching out, her flobbery fingers wriggling.

"Run!" Christine Marter called to Jennifer.

But Jennifer stood her ground and her face became suddenly serious. "I *don't* think you should touch me!" she said, her voice icy. There was something about the way Jennifer stood staring coldly at Miss Largebottom. There was something in her icy voice. There was something about Jennifer Penny that made Miss Largebottom stop just as her hands were about to go around Jennifer's neck.

"Oh, you don't think I should touch you?" Miss Largebottom said. And then she laughed a wild wicked laugh.

"No I don't," Jennifer said coldly.

"And *precisely* why is that? You slimy little worm."

"Because I know all about you spying for that office building man. Spying on everyone, *including* the headmaster."

"Oh you mean Mr Fixer." Miss Largebottom laughed wildly again. "And do you think anyone will believe a kid like you? A rotten kid like you telling rotten lies? That's funny!" Miss Largebottom laughed wildly again, her messed up hair flying all over the place. And she began her menacing flobbery finger wriggling again.

"Run!" Christine cried again. It was obvious this time that Miss Largebottom was going to do some child choking.

"I *don't* think you should touch me!" Jennifer said, her voice even more icy than before.

"You don't?" Miss Largebottom laughed wildly again.

"Maybe the headmaster *will* believe me when I tell him you give us long tests every single day *just* so you can be useless and lazy and sleep. Maybe he *will* believe me when I tell him that you're useless and lazy and sleep when you should be *teaching* us. And maybe he *will* believe me that you're a lazy freak who sleeps with her eyes *open*."

Miss Largebottom laughed wildly and she started her menacing flobbery finger wriggling again.

"And maybe he'll fire you because your not paid to sleep. You're paid to teach. And your not paid to sleep and leave us *unsupervised*."

"Maybe maybe maybe," Miss Largebottom laughed. But now all the class could hear the fakeness of her laugh and see she was suddenly not sure of herself. "Well, maybe he won't believe *any* of your lies. You slimy slug."

"He'll believe this though." Jennifer took a few steps away from Miss Largebottom and reached into her pocket. Then she held up a photo for Miss Largebottom to see. In the photo Miss Largebottom was sitting at her desk and freakishly sleeping with her eyes wide open. On the whiteboard behind it said:

Miss Largebottom is sleeping with her EYES OPEN

Standing beside her, Jennifer held a piece of card with an arrow pointing at Miss Largebottom and the words:

Useless teacher sleeping during 1 hour reading test

The date was printed on the bottom corner.

Miss Largebottom looked at the photo without saying a word.

"And he'll believe this." Jennifer showed another photo. Again it was of Miss Largebottom sleeping. This time the card Jennifer held up beside her said:

Freakish lazy teacher sleeping during 1 hour geography test

"And he'll believe this." Jennifer showed a final photo. This time the card said:

Lazy useless teacher sleeping during 1 hour math test.

NO ONE IS TAKING CARE OF US

"Yes, you're right," Miss Largebottom sneered. "The headmaster would believe those. The problem is, you nasty little piece of nastiness—" Suddenly Miss Largebottom moved as fast as a cat pouncing on a mouse and snatched the photos from Jennifer's hands. Her sudden movement scared everyone and the class tried to shuffle even further back. "As I was saying," Miss Largebottom continued, tearing up the photos into tiny pieces, "the problem is, he'll never see them!" She laughed her wild laugh again and dropped the torn bits into her pocket.

"Oh, but he *will*," Jennifer said, and smiled at the wild Miss Largebottom. "You see those pictures were taken by a camera phone."

At that moment, Anila stepped out from amongst her classmates. "This one," Anila said, holding out her phone to show Miss Largebottom.

"And Anila has written a nice little email explaining about all your spying and all your sleeping when you should be taking care of us and teaching us. Haven't you, Anila?"

"Yes. It's a really nice email. No spelling mistakes," Anila smiled.

"Well I hope not! Because it's addressed to the headmaster. Isn't it, Anila?"

"Yes. And I've attached all those photos so he can have a nice look at them."

"Oh, that was nice of you, Anila. And is your finger on the send button right now?"

"Yes. Do you want me to press it?"

"Press it?" Now, Jennifer turned to look at Miss Largebottom. Jennifer again stopped her smiling and her voice became so icy Miss Largebottom actually gave a shiver and turned as white as a snow. Her flobbery fingers weren't wriggling any more. Now they just looked like cold sausages in a butcher's shop that no one wanted to buy.

"No, I don't think you need to send it. I think Miss Largebottom has just decided to go tell the headmaster that she quits. She suddenly doesn't want to teach here any more. Do you, Miss Largebottom?"

Miss Largebottom silently looked at Jennifer then at Anila holding out the mobile phone. Then, as if she'd just woken up from one of her freakish eyes open sleeps, she turned to the rest of the class.

"Teach you lot? You great bag of maggots. I wouldn't teach in this school for another second."

And she walked out of the class and never came back again.

There was a sudden cheer and all the kids gathered around Jennifer and Anila.

The Meeting Gets Going

On Friday all the kids took home a note for their parents. There would be a special meeting in the hall on Monday evening to talk about The Green and the planned office building. The local newspaper also had a story about it, inviting everyone in the neighbourhood to go, even if they had no kids.

So, on Monday evening the school playground began to fill. The headmaster looked out of his office window.

"I can't believe how many have come!" he called to his secretary. Mrs Smiley came into his office and stood beside him to look out. It was strange to see so many adults standing in a school playground.

"There are—hundreds already," he said. "And it's still thirty minutes—before we open the doors."

"Most of them don't even have kids," Mrs Smiley noticed.

"Obviously there's a lot of interest in what's happening—with The Green."

More and more adults and kids were flowing through the main gates.

"Will the hall hold them all?" Mrs Smiley asked.

"That's a—good point. Call the—caretaker—and have him meet me there in—five minutes."

The caretaker was waiting when the headmaster arrived in the hall.

"Aaah, Jim, it looks like we're going to have a—massive crowd. So I want you to open up the—back wall."

"Right, Headmaster."

The back wall of the hall was a kind of zigzag fold-up wall. With the headmaster watching, caretaker Jim walked to the far corner, pulled out a long handle from the wall and began turning it as if he was winding up giant old clock. As it turned, the first panel of the wall began to slide towards the caretaker. Soon the second panel began to move. Then the third. Soon the entire wall was folding up in a zigzag and sliding out of the way, revealing the large dining room behind. Soon the wall was folded up into the far corner and the hall and dining room made one giant room.

"Thanks, Jim," the headmaster called. "Now there should be—enough place for—everyone."

But he was wrong. When the doors were finally opened, first all the kids came piling in with their parents. The kids sat on the floor at the front of the hall and the parents on the seats behind. But then the grown-ups with no kids started pouring in and soon the dining room was crowded too. More and more came and finally they had to stand on both sides of the hall.

It was all pretty crazy and everyone was chattering like mad. Right now the stage was empty except for an easel standing in the middle with a picture covered by a white cloth.

Finally the headmaster walked onto the stage. All the kids stopped chattering but some of the badly behaved adults continued. The headmaster gave them a look and they soon shut up.

"I'd like to thank you all for coming this—evening. And really, so very many of you. As you all know, we are here to—discuss—The Green and the plan to build a large office building."

A few adults mumbled, but they soon fell silent again.

“Now, I have—erm, how should I say it?—*invited* Mr Fixer to—speak to us. Mr Fixer is the President of—**Stick-Up**—company, the construction company that plans to build the—office building.” The headmaster looked to the side of the small stage. Mr Fixer, the sit-down man, was sitting down with his partner the muscle-man beside him. The sit-down man stood up. As he walked onto the stage the headmaster moved off. The sit-down man was wearing a very big smile and a very expensive suit and shoes made of snakeskin. The laces were made of snakes’ tongues.

The Sit-Down Man Stands Up

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, looking at the adults at the back and along the sides and taking no notice of the kids right in front of him, "as the charming headmaster said, my name is Mr Fixer and I'm very happy to be here with you this evening. You people are really great and this neighbourhood is really great. And that's a fact. So, I'm really happy to help make this a richer more prosperous place for everyone."

"Especially you!" little Willie Nantar, the message carrying boy, said, just loud enough for everyone to hear. All the kids sniggered. A few adults chuckled.

"And believe you me," the sit-down man carried on as if Willie didn't exist, "the great office building we'll build will bring lots of money to this great place.

"For a start, there'll be over 50 construction workers on the site. And some of those construction workers are from this very neighbourhood. So of course, all the shops and restaurants will have more business. And that's a fact. And business means money. And money means business. And everyone who works in those shops and restaurants will all benefit as well. More money for everyone. And that's just during the construction. Once the building is done there'll be thousands of new office jobs. Imagine all those jobs and all that money coming into the neighbourhood. This place will start to get rich." He paused and a few adults mumbled to each other.

"Let's face it," Mr Fixer, the sit-down man, continued, "we need progress. And we all know you can't stop progress. And office buildings are progress. This great country and this great neighbourhood needs more great office space. That's a fact. We don't go out hunting for a living now, do we? We don't hide behind bushes trying to catch buffalo. No. We live in a modern world and a modern world needs offices and more offices and even more offices. And that's a fact.

"Now I know some of the kids here aren't happy that we'll use the wasteland—"

"It's called 'The Green'," Jennifer called.

"—but we can't expect kids to understand about business and money. Can we? Of course not. We live in an adult world, not a kids' world. And that's a fact. Now, please take a look at this." The muscle man stood up and pulled the cover off the easel. There was a painting of the high office building they wanted to build. "Now, we've made a couple of changes to the original design. Here," he pointed, "we've modified the entrance. We've made it a bit smaller so that now we have room for this play area. That's how much I care about this neighbourhood—and that's a fact." He pointed again. What he called "the play area" was a tiny patch of grass with two swings. "Any kid from the neighbourhood can play here any time they want. The other change we've made is to the name." On the painting there was a sign in front of the building. "As you can see, the building will be called 'The Green Office Complex.'"

A few adults mumbled as if they thought it was a good name and a good idea.

Jennifer Speaks

When the sit-down man had finished speaking, he went to sit at the side of the stage and the headmaster returned.

"Well, now we heard Mr Fixer's—arguments—in favour of the office building, I think it's only fair that some one should—speak—in favour of keeping The Green." He paused for a moment. "And I can't think of—anyone—better to do that than—Jennifer Penny."

Jennifer felt as if she'd been hit by a bolt of lightning. No one had told her she would have to talk in front of all those people. Her heart was beating like a drum and she was thinking hard and fast how to get out of doing it. If only she had a note from her dad saying she was sick.

"Come on Jennifer," the headmaster called with a smile.

Jennifer stood and made her way to the front of the hall, walking passed all the teachers sitting at the side. Every neck in the hall twisted and turned and followed Jennifer as if she was the sun moving through the sky and they were a field of sunflowers. And then she was on the stage and from there it seemed like there were millions of people staring at her.

"Hi everyone," Jennifer said shyly, not quite sure how to begin. Some of the kids giggled and a few said "Hi" back.

Jennifer looked at all those faces, left and right, right and left, down the middle. She looked at her shoes and twiddled her toes. What could she say? It wasn't very often that Jennifer Penny was lost for words, but right now she could seem to find a single one that was worth saying. She looked up again and felt her cheeks turn red with embarrassment.

"Erm," she said.

Some kids wriggled about with embarrassment. Adults fidgeted.

"Erm," Jennifer said, glancing at the headmaster and some of the teachers sitting along the side. And then Jennifer saw her dad sitting near the back. Now she felt hot and ready to faint. There was deadly silence in the giant room. What could she say what could she say what could she say? And then there was a sound. A snigger. She looked to the side of the stage and saw the sit-down man whispering and smiling and smirking and sniggering with his partner the muscleman. And then in half a second her embarrassment turned to anger and her silence turned to a torrent of words.

"Well I listened to Mr Fixer," she began in a strong and clear and commanding voice. "But I got bored because he just keeps going on and on and on about money. Money money money. I think he thinks that money's the only thing to think about.

"But money can't buy everything can it? Can it? It can't buy a place to play if there is no more place to play. Can it? And money can't buy a nice place for grownups to sit and watch their kids play if there is no more place to sit or play. Can it?"

"So Mr Fixer should start thinking about things money can't buy. And so should everyone if you want to know the truth." Jennifer looked at all the adults when she said this. And then she looked down at all the kids sitting on the floor at the front and said: "How would you like having a giant pile of money but then your mum died?" Jennifer paused because she was thinking of her own mum and a tear nearly came to her eye. "I think you'd say you don't care about the stupid money you just want you mum back. Well, I know I would, and that just proves that sometime big piles of money are like nothing at all.

"So I listened to Mr Fixer, and I started to think he wasn't so smart." Most of the kids giggled and some of the adults chuckled. "Because the only *other* thing he kept saying

was how we need office buildings. And I don't know *anyone* who said we *don't* need office buildings. I know *I* didn't. *Everybody* knows we need office buildings so that grown-up can do their work stuff. So why does he keep going on about something everyone already knows?" Jennifer turned to face Mr Fixer, the sit-down man. His face was red and he was obviously angry. "But just because we need office buildings doesn't mean that you can just go build them any where. You can't just go build one where kids play when it's the *only* place they can play.

"How would you like it if a man came to your house and smashed up your bathroom and turned it into a living room? I think you'd tell him he's an idiot because even if the living room's super nice, you *need* a bathroom.

"And how would you like if another man came and smashed up your garden and turned it into a petrol station? You wouldn't say it's okay because we *need* petrol stations, would you?"

"And how would you like it if another man came and demolished this school and built a shoe factory? I think you'd tell him we all need shoes, but he must be super stupid because we need the school as well. And I think the headmaster would say the same thing." Here Jennifer paused and looked over at Mr Strongman.

"So, yeah, I listened to Mr Fixer, even though he was *only* talking to adults. And I know one thing for sure: he doesn't care about kids. And you just *know* you can't trust some one who doesn't care about kids. And ***that's*** a fact!"

Everyone started muttering.

"That's all." Jennifer said. She wasn't sure what to do next, but because she was on a stage and there were so many people looking at her, she kind of found herself giving a bow. All at once the kids started clapping and the adults too and then some the kids even started cheering. The headmaster came on the stage, took her hand, leaned over and whispered, "Well done," into her ear and led her to the side of the stage.

The clapping and cheering died down and just about everyone started chattering. If you can imagine a small barn with a thousand chickens clucking, that's pretty much what the hall sounded like.

A Show of Hands

Finally the headmaster came back to the centre of the stage. "Right then," he began and everyone fell silent. "I think we've heard —both sides—of the issue. Does anyone else have anything to say?"

"Let's vote!" Willie Nantar the message boy called out. Some other kids joined in calling for a vote.

"Mmm, all right boys and girls—settle down. Yes we can have a vote. But the result of the vote—will—have—no—power—to change anything. Do you all understand?" He looked down at the kids and then continued: "So, only for the sake of—curiosity, lets have a show of hands. First the adults. If you think we should—keep The Green, please raise a hand."

All the kids looked around and saw it was mostly just the parents who had raised their hands.

"And now, if you think building an office building over—The Green is better, please raise a hand."

Again all the kids turned around and saw a sea of hands rise. Just about all the grown-up who didn't have kids had raised their hands. But even some of the parents raised their hands too. It was a shock to see.

"Well, it's easy to—see," the headmaster began, sounding surprised, "amongst the adults most want the office building—to—be—built." Jennifer looked at the sit-down man and he had a big smile on his face.

"Now, children, if you think we should keep The Green, please—raise a hand."

Every single hand seemed to go up. Jennifer looked and saw even the terrible Thompson twins were holding up their hands.

"And if you think the office building should be built, please—raise a hand."

Not a single hand was raised.

The headmaster stood silent for a few seconds, as if he was thinking about what the show of hands really showed.

The Final Speaker Speaks

And then he continued.

"Now, does—anyone else—have anything they would like to say?"

There was silence. A long silence. Then a voice said, "Yes, I do."

Every single neck in the room twisted around to see who it was.

Mr Bywater was standing up. Instead of speaking, he started to walk to the front of the hall and then onto the stage. And there he stood for a moment, with Jennifer sitting on one side and the sit-down man and muscle man on the other.

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls," Mr Bywater began, "when I first heard about the plan to build a new office building, I thought it was a pretty good idea. After all, that land hasn't been used since I was kid. But then I became friends with Jennifer here." He turned and gave her a two-toothed smile. "That's when I realised that for the kids it wasn't just a piece of empty wasteland. It was The Green where they played. Now, everything Mr Fixer said is true. But everything Jennifer said is *also* true. So what should we do? What *should* we do?"

"Now some of you may be wondering why that fence has been up for over a week, but the building hasn't even started. Well, I can tell you, the reason is the person who is selling the land to Mr Fixer has delayed signing the paperwork. Which means Mr Fixer *still* doesn't own the land."

Everyone was surprised and mumbling ran through the hall.

"That's right, Mr Fixer still doesn't own the land. Now I know this for a fact because, you see, *I'm* the owner of the land."

Mr Bywater stopped speaking because he knew this news would get everyone chattering. And so it did. The mumbling was like an earthquake and the wooden floor and walls seemed to shake. Finally he continued.

"So I've been thinking long and hard about this business. It's a very hard decision, because as I said, everything they both said is quite true. But I've finally decided what to do." Mr Bywater reached inside his jacket and took out a large envelope.

"Inside this envelope is the deed to the land. That means," he said, looking now at the kids, "who ever has the paper inside this envelope owns the land. And they can do what ever they want with it."

Now he glanced at the sit-down man who was looking very nervous, and then turned to the other side and glanced at Jennifer. Mr Bywater opened the envelope and took out the folded paper. It was tied closed with a red ribbon.

"This is the deed," he turned to all the kids and adults and held it up for everyone to see. "If you own the deed you own the land."

He paused. The room was dead silent.

Then he turned to the sit-down man. "Could you come here, Mr Fixer?" The sit-down man seemed confused, but he stood and walked to the centre of the stage.

"I'd like you to have it," Mr Bywater said, handing him the paper. The sit-down man could hardly believe it. Mr Bywater, though he obviously liked Jennifer, had finally decided to sell him the land. He took the paper, his hands sweaty from nervousness. And so the sit-down man stood on the stage, facing all the shocked faces, and he smiled a stupid smile and could hardly stop himself from dancing for joy.

The smiling sit-down man pulled on the ribbon and looked at the important document. He was too happy to bother reading it. Besides, he wasn't a big fan of reading. But just holding the document in his hands and knowing that The Green was his all his was enough to keep the stupid smile pasted on his pasty face.

"Could you show it to Jennifer," Mr Bywater said.

"With great pleasure," the sit-down man said, still smiling and walking over to where Jennifer stood.

"I'm sorry Jennifer," Mr Bywater said as the sit-down man pushed the paper under Jennifer's nose so she could see it was true and that he'd won and that the Green was his all his. Jennifer couldn't help glancing over the text, even though her eyes were brimming with tears. And then she saw something at the bottom of the page and looked up at Mr Bywater as if she'd been hit by a sack of potatoes.

"I'm sorry, Jennifer, I should have done this a long time ago," Mr Bywater said. Jennifer looked back at the document and then again at Mr Bywater, who was now smiling. The sit-down man noticed something strange was going on. He took the paper from under Jennifer's nose and forced himself to read it. All the text was black except the final line at the bottom of the page, which was red. Suddenly he was in a panic. He read the final line of text. He read it again. And he read it again. The smile fell from the sit-down man's face like a cheap cardboard mask. Mr Bywater walked over, took the document from the sit-down man's sweating shaking hands and held it for the kids sitting on the floor at the front to see.

"Look at the last line, boys and girls."

Because of the red ink, even the adults at the back could see it. This is what it said:

The Green now belongs to Jennifer Penny.

The kid's began to clap and cheer and the teachers too and some of the adults as well.

"The Green now belongs to Jennifer!" he called.

Finally Jennifer smiled. It seemed impossible but it was after all absolutely true. The Green belonged to her.

Right and Wrong

It was Sunday afternoon. Jennifer and her dad were sitting on the edge of The Green.

"It's strange to think that The Green belongs to you now," Jennifer's dad said.

"Well, I suppose it does. But I think it belongs to every kid that wants to play here, really."

"You know, when Mr Bywater gave you that document saying it was yours, he said you could do *anything* you want with it."

"I know."

"Do you know why he said that?"

"I think because he wanted me to know I could sell it if I really wanted."

"It's worth millions you know."

"Millions and millions," Jennifer agreed.

"Or more!" her dad smiled.

"What do you think I should do with it?"

"What do you think?"

"Well I think The Green will *always* be here. I'd never sell it, not so long as there are kids to play here."

They sat in silence for a few seconds, looking around at all the kids busy playing, and a few adults joining in or sitting around on the grass.

"Do you know why he decided to give it to me?" Jennifer asked.

"Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you what I think," Jennifer began. "I think it's because sometimes you just can't trust adults. Sometime if you want to know what's right and what's wrong, you have to ask a kid."

"I think you're right," her dad said.

"Because kids are good—but not *too* good."

"Exactly!" her dad said and they both laughed.

"Hey, look over there!" Jennifer said, suddenly silent and pointing.

"What?"

Mr Bywater was in his wild garden but he was actually doing some gardening.

"I can't believe it. He's gardening!"

"Lets go visit," Jennifer's dad said. "Maybe he'll give us some of that delicious apple juice you told me about."

"Okay."

They stood up and set off across The Green, ducking under a kite string, and then her dad kicked a stray ball to a boy who was dreaming of becoming a famous soccer star.

"Hey, great kick dad!"

"Yes! Maybe I should come and play on The Green more often!"

"Definitely," Jennifer said, giving her dad a smile and taking his hand to lead the way.