

# 1

It was a smooth spring day, the best of the year so far. The sun was smiling down on the world and the world smiled back. In the playground balls thumped against walls, shoes tapped and skipped on concrete, voices shrieked and shouted. The air was filled with happy hub-bub. Outside.

Inside it was a very different scene.

In class P there was no noise and no play. There were no smiles. In class P there was ... detention.

The teacher in charge, Mr Davies, put down his pen and sighed. He looked out at the seven children sitting in the room and shook his head. Kyle, Dareth, Jordan, Andrew, Sadiq, Max, Sung-Woo – it was always the same gang; ‘The Magnificent Seven’, he’d come to call them. Well, they looked anything but magnificent right now. Scruffy, dozy, unhappy, bored - yes; magnificent – no.

A ray of dazzling sunlight beamed in at the window and grinned across the room.

It was the final straw.

‘Right, put down your pens and pencils and look at me,’ Mr Davies instructed. As expected Sadiq carried on writing. ‘Sadiq, did you hear me?’

Sadiq glared up at the teacher. He didn’t speak, but his look said it all. He banged his pencil down.

‘OK,’ said Mr Davies. ‘What I want to know is, what are you all doing here? It’s a lovely sunny day and you’re stuck inside – and I’m stuck inside with you. Why? *Why* are you in here and not out there?’ He flicked a hand at the playground. ‘Kyle?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Kyle grunted. He was tall and very large and spilled about the desk like an undercooked pudding.

‘Why are you here?’

Kyle shrugged. ‘I didn’t do nuffing,’ he muttered. The others laughed. Kyle never did nuffing.

‘You must have done *something*,’ Mr Davies

insisted. 'Otherwise you wouldn't be here.'

'Well,' said Kyle. His chubby red face glooped into a scowl. 'Sadiq called my mum a fat cow. So I punched him.'

'Call that a punch?' Sadiq scoffed, clenching a fist and waving it at Kyle. 'That was just a pat, man. What I gave you, that was a punch.'

'Ah.' Mr Davies nodded knowingly. 'So you two are in here for fighting. Am I right?'

'Yeah,' said Kyle. He glowered at Sadiq. 'But it was his fault. He shouldn't have said that about my mum.'

'I was only telling the truth,' countered Sadiq. 'Your mum *is* a fat cow and so are you.' The others tittered. Kyle struggled to get out of his seat.

'OK! Give it a rest, you two!' said Mr Davies. 'Let's move on to someone else. Dareth? What brings you here today? Playing truant, shoplifting, smoking, setting fire to the changing rooms, bear baiting, stealing the crown jewels...?'

Dareth smiled broadly, as if he's just been listening to a list of honours awarded to him.

He ran his hand over his cropped head, stopping at the lone tuft of hair that sprouted there. 'I painted me hair green in art,' he announced proudly, ducking his head for all to see. The others gave him an approving cheer.

'Very artistic,' Mr Davies remarked.

'Yeah,' Dareth agreed. 'Cheers.'

'You look like one of those parrots,' piped Andrew. He was a small boy with a small, squeaky voice and an even smaller attention span. He also had very pink cheeks, giving rise to his nickname, Bloomer. 'He does, doesn't he, sir? You know, a ... cockapoo.'

'A *cockatoo*, Bloomer, you derbrain,' muttered Jordan dismissively. She was the only girl in the group, but she could more than hold her own. The others called her posh because she lived in a proper house and with her real mum and dad.

'I don't have to ask what brings you here, Jordan, do I?' Mr Davies said wearily. 'It's all over the caretaker's hut.'

The others laughed, but Jordan didn't even crack a smile.

'Not one of your best efforts, I didn't think,'

Mr Davies continued. 'And by the way, there's no 'z' in 'wise'.'

Jordan shrugged. 'You can spell how you like when you're tagging,' she said. 'That's part of the fun.'

'So, tell me,' Mr Davies went on. 'What does it mean, all those squiggles and symbols? Who do you want to 'Wize Up'?' This was the message that Jordan had sprayed across the back of the caretaker's hut.

Jordan shrugged again. 'I dunno,' she mumbled. She had a way of speaking as if every word was a secret that it pained her to reveal. 'It's just drawing, isn't it? Graffiti. It's not supposed to mean anything.'

'It's art, innit?' added Dareth cheerily. 'Like me hair.' More laughter. Jordan *almost* smiled. Max tumbled from his chair.

'Sir,' squeaked Bloomer excitedly, 'there's a fly on the window!'

## 2

Most of what Bloomer said had no connection with the subject being talked about. Hence, his reference to the fly. He wasn't unpleasant, he wasn't difficult, he wasn't rude – he just couldn't keep his attention on anything for more than sixty seconds at a time. Putting him in detention had no effect whatsoever. If it was supposed to teach him a lesson, it was a lesson he would never learn. Likewise Max.

Max was tall and gangly and, in the opinion of most teachers in the school, utterly bonkers. He regularly fell off chairs, ate paper, wore his shirt over his head, pretended to be a chimpanzee and made his face go purple. If a siren sounded or a wolf howled, it was always Max. He was one of life's natural clowns. Everyone laughed at him. Most people liked him. But he ended up in detention all the same.

Mr Davies turned to the last and quietest member of the group.

'So, Sung-Woo, why are you here?'

Sung-Woo blinked nervously behind his glasses. As ever, his face was creased in a frown. 'Cheer up, Sung-Woo, it may never happen,' his class teacher, Miss Eltham, often joked to him. But Sung-Woo never saw the joke. Occasionally he smiled, but no one had ever seen him laugh. He rarely spoke.

'Well?' Mr Davies prompted. He was genuinely interested in what the reply would be. What on earth was Sung-Woo doing here? How could he possibly have offended?

'I here for learn,' Sung-Woo offered at last.

'Yes, I know that. But what did you do wrong? Why are you in detention?'

'I in detention because I no do my homework.'

'Ah, a terrible sin,' Mr Davies tutted. 'And why didn't you do your homework?'

'Sung-Woo never does his homework,' said Jordan.

'Nor do I,' said Bloomer. His cheeks went a rosy pink. 'Cept sometimes.'

'That's 'cos you're a der,' Jordan remarked. 'Sung-Woo doesn't do his because he doesn't

understand.'

'That's right,' Max added, then screwing his face up ridiculously, 'He no speakee the Eenglish very good. Isn't that right, Sung-Woo?'

Sung-Woo nodded. 'Homework very difficult,' he said.

'But that's absurd!' Mr Davies exclaimed. 'If you're having language problems you should get some help. I'll talk to Mrs Graham about it.' Mrs Graham was the teacher in charge of special needs.

'Mrs Graham's already helping him,' said Max. 'And she helps Kyle too.'

'Yeah, but that's different,' Sadiq snorted. 'That's 'cos Kyle's a moron.'

'Eh?' Kyle uttered. 'You calling me a moron?'

Once more, he struggled to raise his bulk from his chair.

'I believe,' sighed Mr Davies, 'that this is where we came in.'