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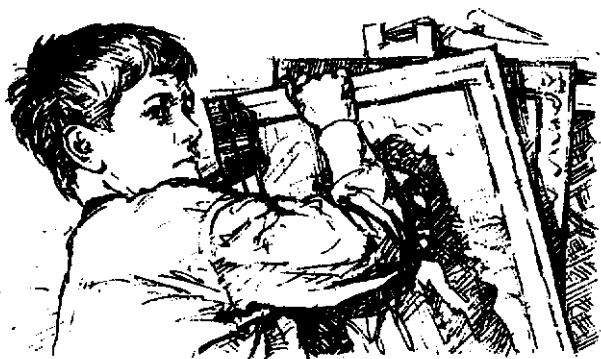
The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler

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CHAPTER 1



'What did the cross-eyed teacher say?'

'I can't control my pupils.'

We'd gone right through the school collecting the teachers' tea money and had got to the canteen door when Danny waved the ten-pound note at me. It took me a couple of minutes to realize what it was, 'cos it looked highly unlikely in Danny's grimy mitt. Then I pushed him into the canteen, sure to be empty on a Friday afternoon at five to three. The pandemonium of a wet school playtime died away, and we could hear the rain drumming on the roof instead.

'Where didja get that, you nutter?'

'Out of Bonfire's purse. She'd left it open. On

the desk. So I took it. No one saw me, Tyke.'

Only he didn't say it like that, for my friend, Danny Price, speaks worse than anyone I know. Speech defect they call it. When he counts he goes, 'Don, Dwo, Dee, Dour, Dive, Dix, Devon,' and so on. And there he stood in the canteen that smelled of boiled swede and cabbage, enough to make you throw up, saying:

'Do di dood id. Do don daw dee,' and ringing all manner of alarms inside me.

I shook him. The tea money rattled in its tins and at that moment a crowd of under-sized Chinamen streamed towards us, shouting, pushing, kicking, the second year doing *Aladdin* again, I suppose, unless it was everyday life in Red China for a change. I grabbed the ten-pound note and stuffed it up my sweater where it made a crunkly noise that I didn't like at all, and the boiled swede and cabbage smell stank so strong that I had to get out fast, so I pushed him into the corridor again.

'Don't you see? Don't you understand, you idiotic imbecile?' I shouted through the screeching din of 3H practising ten different tunes on recorders in the next classroom. Before he could reply the buzzer went for the end of play, so I headed for our classroom, 4M, with Danny running sideways trying to talk to me.

'Why you all mad, Tyke? Don't be mad at me, Tyke.'
I didn't answer.

'I got it for you. I want you to have half of it. You can buy anything you like, Tyke.'

I took no notice. He pulled at my arm. I shook him off.

'Get knotted.'

'Tyke. Tyke?'

We reached the classroom. Lorraine Fairchild and Linda Stoaaway were dancing in a corner, all flying skirts and hair, showing off to the boys who couldn't have cared less. Ian Pitt, Pitthead, was having a scrap with Kevin Simms, and Martin Kneeshaw was standing on the top of a cupboard shouting and giving orders as usual. I held tight to the front of my sweater in case the note fell out, and pushed Danny into the book corner.

'Listen, Danny. Don't you see? Don't you understand? You can't spend it, because they'll ask you where you got it from, and they won't believe what you say, and they'll want to ask your mum, and then you'll be for it.'

His face went sad, like my dog at home when she's caught raiding the dustbins. She can't stop doing it, but she has terrible sorrow when anyone catches her. Danny's the same, though it's money with him, not dustbins. And when he's found out, he gets this mournful look, like my dog, and everyone feels sorry for him, because of his look. What a lovely face, say the

old ladies in the street. All the people who come to see him at school to give him tests, the deaf lady, the talk lady, the shrinko chap, like him and take more trouble with him than anyone else.

'He looks bright,' I've heard people say. 'There must be a block.'

There is. I know that block. I've known it for years. It's his head. And something else I know, too. Even if he is as thick as two planks, he generally gets me to do the things he wants. But not this time. I wasn't getting mixed up in anything to do with this tenner. Not likely.

'It's no use, Danny boyo. You can't keep it.'

'I didn't think.'

'You never do, do you? Now, go and give it back to Bonfire.'

Red colour ran over his face, then flowed away, leaving it white. He began to tremble, like that dog of mine, called Crumble.

'I can't do that. You know the row I got in last time.'

'I'll take it back to her.'

'Oh, no. They'll know it was me what pinched it.'

'Just what are we going to do with it, then? Play Monopoly with it? Stick it up on the wall?'

'Hide it, and put it back later.'

'You must be joking!'

'Please, Tyke. You do it. You're clever. You can do anything.'

'Gee, t'anks!'

I felt sick. Boiled swede had followed me.

'Get stuffed, Danny Price . . . '

I would've said more, but Sir came in, and the noise died down. Sir is Mr William Merchant, and he's all right. I'll tell you more about him later. The end of Friday afternoon is ours to do what we like, make our own choice. For everybody but me, that is. As far as I could see I didn't have any choice. For any minute now, Bonfire would find out that she'd been robbed, and then along would come Chief Sir, the Headmaster, and we'd be searched. It's happened before. And so, before it happened again, I'd got to get this nasty bit of brown paper from under my sweater and stowed away somewhere safe, till I could put it back in Bonfire's bag. I went up to the desk.

'Can I take the tea money to the office, please, Sir?'

'Yes, Tyke.'

I suddenly felt sure the note was slipping. I held where I thought it was with one hand, the tea tin with the other.

'Anything the matter?'

'Nothing, Sir.'

'You look a bit green. Got a pain?'

I thought I heard voices outside.

'No, Sir.' I headed for the door as fast as possible to

be out of the room before the searchers arrived. There was no one in the corridor, so I heaved a sigh of relief and ran to the office, by the quickest route, which is round the outside of the school. The rain was belting down as if someone was upending buckets up there. I splashed through a puddle the size of a mini-lake, when suddenly the note slithered out and on to the water. There it lay, on top, with the heavy raindrops bouncing it up and down. That's it. The answer, I thought. I'll just leave it there for someone to find. All solved.

And mincing round the corner, boots on feet, umbrella over her head, came Mrs Somers, my last year's teacher and my deadliest enemy. She skimmed towards me over the shining tarmac. I scooped up the note faster than the speed of light.

'Oh, it's you, is it? What are you doing out here?'

'Taking tea money.'

'Don't mumble, child. And look up when a member of staff speaks to you.'

I looked up and got a mouthful of rain.

'Now, don't play about. Hurry along to the classroom.'

She used my real name, the one I hate, so I pulled my worst, most horrible face at her, the slit-eyed, yellow-tooth, ears-wiggling monster-from-the-centre-of-the-earth one. After she'd gone, of course. And I

practised willing her to drop dead by my fabulous will-power. But it didn't work. It never does. She was still alive, and I'd still got a ten-pound note under my sweater.

I was just about to let it fall in a puddle once more, when Sandra Hines from 4P, the parallel class to ours, joined me, jabbering all the way to the office. I didn't answer. What were all these slobs doing wandering about in the pouring rain? Where could I be alone to hide a soggy tenner in peace?

And the answer came to me, clear and strong. In the bogs, of course. So I web-footed along in that direction.

But I'll explain a bit.

Our school is one of the oldest in the country, state schools, that is. So old that it has beams in the roof, which leaks when it rains, and windows so high that you can't see out of them. And the bogs, well, you'd think they'd been built in Roman times except that Sir tells us that these Roman guys were fantastic plumbers, so it seems more likely that they date from the Dark Ages instead. Rusty, corrugated-iron roof, worm-eaten seats, flaking white-washed walls, wreathed in snaky pipes lagged in old sackcloth, and above all this a loft, high up and hard to get at, stuffed with books, chairs, scenery, costumes, papers, pictures. Old Buggsy, the caretaker, goes up about once a year on a ladder.

I've been up there, as well. I think I'm the only kid in the school that has. You see, I like climbing. It feels good.

So, bearing in mind that at any moment somebody might find out about the missing money, I clambered on to a cistern, over the pipes, up to a gap, swung across quite a wide space, climbed a bit more, and was suddenly there among all the junk. I didn't hang about. I pushed the tenner behind a picture of that sailor pointing out the Atlantic, or some other sea, to Sir Walter Raleigh.

And in no time at all I was back in the classroom, leaning over Danny who was colouring a bird with a blue felt pen.

'What's that? A kingfisher?'

'No, a robin.'

'They're brown and red, twit.'

'I like it blue.'

I bent nearer and lowered my voice.

'It's OK. I got rid of it.'

'What? What you got rid of, Tyke?'

I went to hit him, but then a look came over his face like Leonardo with a new invention, or Einstein solving a problem.

'Oh, yes. I know. The ten--'

'Shut up, you halfwit!'

Sir looked up.

'Leave Danny alone. He was working well till you disturbed him. And Tyke . . . '

'Yes, Sir.'

'Go and dry yourself. You're dripping everywhere.'

In the cloakroom I rubbed my hair and face with a scratchy paper towel and considered the unfairness of life. This is a very interesting subject, and one I spend some time on, especially at school, though there's a fair amount of injustice at home as well.

And when I got back to 4M, the Headmaster had arrived, with Miss Bonn, Bonfire, Buggsy, the caretaker, and Mrs Somers, yuck-yuck, she would have to push her nose in.

They all had faces as long as stretched elastic.

'Bonfire's bin crying,' hissed Linda Stoaaway. I looked. She was right. Bonfire's eyes were as red as her hair.

'I want you all to listen to me,' said the Headmaster. He told them about the missing money.

'Does anyone want to own up now, to save trouble and unpleasantness later?'

I looked around with interest to see if anyone would, and then remembered, with a horrible lurch in my stomach, that they weren't likely to, were they? After some moments of complete and beautiful hush, he turned to Sir.

'If the money has not been recovered by the time

I've seen all the classes, then I'll send a message to you that all desks, bags, pockets and coats are to be searched. No one will be allowed home till everything has been checked.'

Uproar broke out when he and the others had gone.

'Don't see why we should stay in. 'Tisn't fair.'

'It wasn't me took it . . . '

'Someone out of Bonfire's class . . . '

'She looked . . . '

' . . . as if she'd lost a tenner and found fivepence.'

'My mum says it's a temptation to others to leave your money lying about.'

'Your mum is an old boot.'

Sir told us to shut up at this point, and we sat quietly waiting to be searched. At least, the others were hoping they wouldn't have to be, but since I knew that the note was behind Sir Walter Raleigh and the sailor, I just waited. In due time the message came and Sir took us and our belongings to pieces. It took ages. Then Chanders, the music teacher, came in with Bonfire.

'As if wet Fridays weren't bad enough without this,' Sir complained, as he turned out three marbles, a packet of chewing gum, an Action Man battle-dress, two bus tickets, and a mini-bald koala bear out of Pitthead's pocket.

'I've sent mine home. It's after half past four,'

Chanders said. He's known as Champers because of his teeth, enormous they are.

'Hang on. I've nearly finished. I haven't found it, but then, I didn't expect to. Is the Head sending for the police?'

The boiled swede and cabbage came up with ferocious force. I wanted to rush out of the room.

'No,' Bonfire replied. 'He's leaving it over the weekend. I don't want to get anyone into trouble, and it's all my fault, leaving that purse on the desk.'

She looked as if she was going to cry and Sir suddenly roared:

'All right. You can go home now.'

Out we went into the rain that seemed never-ending. Danny ran and caught up with me and we walked on without speaking. The rain dripped down the back of my neck. Danny sang:

*Whistle while you work,
Hitler is a twerp.
He is barmy,
So's his army,
Whistle while you work.*

'I'll call for you if it stops raining,' he said.

'Don't bother. I don't care if you drop dead, Danny Price,' I shouted, and ran. He called after me but I didn't listen. I was a super being from the advanced

planet Nerandia, and I could zoom at a million miles a minute. Zooming is faster than anything at all, even faster than the speed of light. Danny can never catch me when I zoom.

Dog Crumble waggled all over when I got in, so I chased her all over the house, and rolled with her on the floor till Mum stopped us. Then we sat by the fire and she licked me. Sometimes I think Crumble is better than anything, though I wish she looked fiercer, as she couldn't frighten anyone at all. She rolled on her back and I rubbed her tum, which is a bit fat 'cos she's so greedy. Like I told you, she steals out of dustbins. She rolls them over and knocks the tops off and then gets at the old tins and all the rubbish.

'When's Dad coming in?'

'Late. He's got a meeting. Why?'

'Want to ask him something.'

'Eat up your tea.'

'I'm not hungry.'

'Beefburgers are your favourite!'

'I'm not hungry.'

'I'll finish it if nobody else wants it.' My brother Spud is always hungry. He's two years older than me and at the Dawson Comprehensive where I go next term. My sister Beryl's at the Sixth Form college. She's bossy but better than Spud. He's horrible.

I mooched round, restless. There wasn't much on telly. I didn't want to read or play with anything. Beryl was playing records in her bedroom, so I went in and watched her sticking false eyelashes on with adhesive in a tiny tube.

'You look stupid.'

'So do you.'

'Foolish fool.'

'Wretched wretch.'

'Don't get your knickers in a twist.'

'Don't get your nappie in a niggle.'

I gave up. I couldn't get any go into it. All I could think of was the tenner lying behind the picture up in the loft, and Bonfire who'd been crying. Funny for teachers to cry. You don't think of them as being human like that. Perhaps you don't want them to be human. Mum called up the stairs.

'Tyke, take the dog for a walk.'

'Spud can do it.'

'He's got his homework, whereas you're messing about doing nothing. Off you go.'

'Errrrrgggghhhhhugh. Yuck. Yuck.'

But I got out the lead and put it on her, while she jumped up and down, wriggling and waving all her fruffly bits on her legs and her chest. Outside a wind was blowing away a few last scuds of rain. We ran along the road where it follows the river.

On one side of the road is a sheer rock-fall, and on the other the two weirs, Walter and Blackaller, about a hundred yards apart. You can hear their roar long before you reach them. The water was high, rolling along at tremendous speed, beer-brown with churned-up mud. It levelled almost with the banks, then threw itself over the weirs, taking logs and branches and strange rubbish with it. Below Blackaller a wave was held motionless in a curve of the bank, caught by the force of the current. I stood and watched for a long time, Crumble pulling at the lead from time to time. The river in flood is the most powerful thing I know. All the mucky feeling about the money washed away as I stood there. Nothing mattered very much except the noise of the water and the wetness in the air and the willows blowing in the wind on the other side of the bank.

Crumble whined. She wanted to be off the lead, but I didn't dare with the river so near, and her so stupid. She'd be over the weir with the rest.

We moved farther along into the big fields and I let her loose and we ran and ran and ran.

As Dad came in I jumped on him from behind the door. 'You crazy fool. Are you trying to flatten me?'

We wrestled in the hall.

'Submit,' he said. I submitted.

'Dad?'

'Tyke.'

'Would teachers miss ten pounds if they lost it?'

'Yes. Now bed. The day's long enough without you at the end of it, horrible.'

I pinched his ear, then moved fast as he pushed me up the stairs.

'Good night, Tyke.'

'Night, Dad.'

I knew quite clearly what I had to do as I fell asleep.

On Monday morning I got to school early. No one was in the bogs. I climbed up into the loft and looked round.

It had all been changed. The sailor and Sir Walter Raleigh had gone.

So had the ten-pound note.