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MY MUM TRACY BEAKER

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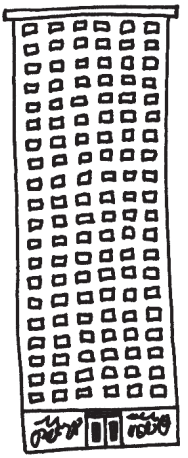
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HAVE YOU HEARD of my mum Tracy Beaker? You'll know her if you live in Marlborough Tower. The whole of the Duke Estate knows my mum. *Everyone* knows her – in the shops and down the market, in the library and the fried-chicken place and the chippy and at my school.



When we first moved I called our block *Marble* Tower by mistake. That made Mum crack up laughing.

'You make it sound like a palace!' she said, and blew a raspberry. 'I *wish*!'

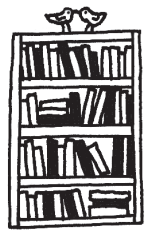
The towers aren't made of shiny white marble, they're just ordinary

brick, and near the ground they're covered with graffiti tags and very rude words. Everyone says the Duke Estate is a rubbish place. Our tower is often ankle-deep in real rubbish, and the boys keep setting fire to the waste bins, which doesn't help. But it's our first proper home together, just the two of us. Before that we lived with Cam, but lots of big girls live there too so it got a bit squashed. Cam's a foster mum. She looks after them all. She looked after us as well, but Mum wanted us to have a proper home, just her and me.

Marlborough Tower is a dump outside but we've made our flat really lovely. Mum painted the living-room walls red so it looks really cosy, and got a purple sofa with red cushions. Mum sits at one end, I sit at the other. Sometimes I put my feet on Mum's lap and she tickles them.



We've got a television and a bookcase, because we both love reading, and on the wall we've got a picture of a mother cuddling her daughter. We found it at a boot fair for only a couple of pounds and we both loved it straight away. It's by an eighteenth-century French





painter – a woman, which makes it even more special. The mother and daughter look a bit like us, with our curly dark hair.





We have all sorts of great boot-fair and junk-shop finds. We have mother-and-baby china dogs going for a walk along the windowsills, and a little cluster of china ladies with balloons chatting together on the side table. Sometimes we pretend they have a sing-song and warble 'Feed the Birds' from *Mary Poppins*. There's a pretend parrot in a cage, three plaster ducks flying up the wall, and little bluebirds kissing beak-to-beak on top of the bookcase.







The kitchen is yellow, so it feels sunny even if it's pouring outside. We have Toby jugs all along the windowsill, grinning at us. We got them cheap because most are cracked and a couple have lost their handles. We keep spoons in one, forks in another and



knives in a third. During the summer I pick daisies and dandelions to put in our lady Toby jug, and in the winter there are plastic daffodils. On top of the kitchen cupboard we have a circle of tiny teddy bears having a picnic around a huge jar of honey, and a very fat pot-bellied teddy clings to the fridge handle.





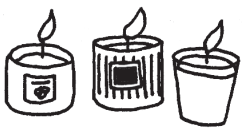
Our bathroom is green. I used to spend ages kneeling beside the bath playing mermaids with my old Barbie dolls. I wrapped silver foil around their legs to look like fish tails. I have my own bedroom, though it's not much bigger than a cupboard. It's blue like the sky, and crammed with all my old toys and cuddly teddies. Mum is brilliant at winning them down the amusement arcade. Cam says I'm spoiled. I *know* I am, and it's lovely.



I don't always sleep in my bedroom though. If I'm worried about something I go into Mum's bed. I take Woofer with me. He's my favourite cuddly toy. He's a bit droopy now and doesn't look much like a dog any more, but I still think he's special. We're not allowed *real* dogs on the Duke Estate, worst luck.

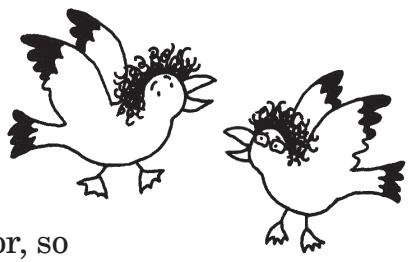


When Mum first got fostered by Cam, she painted her bedroom walls black so it looked like a bat cave. Mum's always been a bit weird. I'm so glad that her



room now is a deep rose colour. She often has rose candles burning so it smells like roses too. Her bed's bigger than mine, and she has a pretty white bedcover made of broderie anglaise – that's material with little holes in the shape of flowers. When I curl up with Mum, I run my finger along the pattern.

So, you see, our flat really *is* like a little palace, though it's a bit damp. Mum's been down the council heaps of times about it, but they never do anything. She has to keep repainting the walls herself to hide the dark patches. The windows always get covered in condensation too. Mum made me Puddle Monitor, so I have to whip round every morning and wipe all the sills with a j-cloth. They go black and gungy if you don't. I have to mop every paw of the china dogs too, which takes a while. But we're on the fourteenth floor, so there are fantastic views. We pretend we're seagulls flying high in the sky. We spread our arms and make that funny squawking noise.



We once saw Tyrone way down below us. He didn't look big and scary at all, he looked very small and silly.

'OK, little seagull, let's poop on him!' Mum said to me.

We didn't *really*, it was just pretend, but it was fun. We like it at Marlborough Tower. Like I said, everyone knows us. Well, they know my mum, and so they know me too. I look very like my mum (apart from my glasses) – little, with black eyes and mad curly hair – but Mum's loud and funny and isn't scared of anything. I'm much quieter and I worry about things.

'You're a girl in a million,' says Mum. 'You're *my* girl.'

That's what a lot of people call me. Tracy Beaker's girl. They don't always remember my name. I'm Jess. Jessica Bluebell Camilla Beaker. Jessica because Mum just liked the name. Bluebell because that was the name of Mum's doll when she was very little. Camilla because that's the name of my foster granny, Cam, and she's lovely. And Beaker because that's my mum's name.



I don't see much of my dad, but he knows my mum too, obviously. People know my mum at all the other places she lived before I was born, and all the places she worked, and all the different homes she was in when she was a little girl. My mum was in care until Cam came along and fostered her. I think there was once an actual television programme about her. Yes, my mum used to be a little bit famous!



My mum's boyfriend actually *is* famous. Well, he is if you're into football. He's called Sean Godfrey – does that ring any bells? You know, he's that big guy with the fancy hairdo and the six-pack and the flash clothes. He used to play for a Premier League team. He was one of the stars. People still make a big fuss of him when he walks down the street. It's 'Hi there, Sean,' and 'How are you doing, mate?' and 'You still look pretty fit!' and 'My lad's football daft – have you got any tips for getting him into a team?'

Mum just rolls her eyes. She makes out she's not impressed by his football and his looks and his money, but she is really. He runs his own gym now, and it's doing really well.

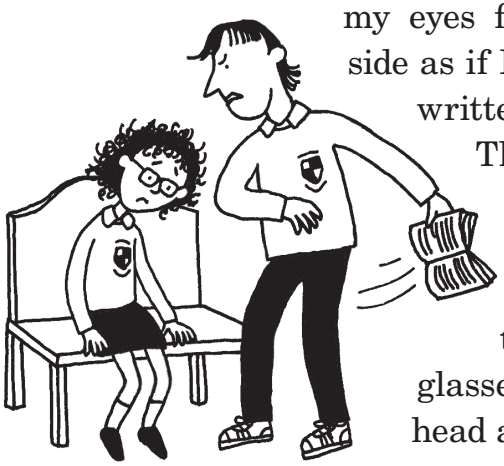
That's how they met. Mum joined the gym because she wanted to learn kick-boxing. She thought it would be fun. And a good way of dealing with her Anger Issues.

My teacher, Miss Oliver, said Mum had Anger Issues. It was when Tyrone and his mates started picking on me at school. At first it was just calling me silly names like Curlynob and Four Eyes and Geeky Beaky, and then they started flicking me with their fingers, which is surprisingly painful, though I tried not to show it.

They couldn't do too much to me in lessons, and I hid from them in the playground. I haven't made many friends at Duke Primary, so I went to the Peace Garden to read. It's my favourite place. It's got a hedge all round it so you feel safe. There are flowers and a small fountain and a bench and a little winding brick path. Best of all, hardly anyone goes there.

But one lunchtime Tyrone came looking for me. He barged right into the Peace Garden, his mates following, and my tummy went tight, but I tried not to show I was scared. I just went on reading.

'Why do you always have your head in a book, Geeky? Hey, I'm talking to you!' said Tyrone, standing right beside me. I kept my head bent, making out I was too engrossed in my book to hear him. Then he snatched the book away, though I kept looking down, my eyes flicking from side to side as if I was reading a story written on my school skirt. That really annoyed him, so he suddenly shoved me right off the bench, onto the brick path. My glasses fell off, and I hit my head and grazed my knees.



I didn't cry. I just lay there.

'It's your own fault. You shouldn't just ignore people,' said Tyrone. 'Don't make out you're hurt!'

I *was* hurt, but I managed not to cry. I throbbed all through afternoon lessons, and by going-home time I had a big bump on my forehead and my knees were still bleeding.



'What on earth's happened to you, Jess?' Mum asked as I limped across the playground. She gave me a great big hug.

'I just fell over, Mum,' I said. I was scared I might burst into tears and I didn't want the other kids to laugh at me.

'Don't give me that!' said Mum, holding me at arm's length. 'Some kid's beaten you up! Who was it, Jess?'

I pressed my lips together. I couldn't tell her in case Tyrone stamped on me for being a tell-tale the *next* time he knocked me over. He was standing with his mates watching me. He had his hands on his hips as if he wasn't the slightest bit worried – but all the same he looked a bit trembly. Like I said, everyone knows my mum. She's very small – Tyrone's already bigger than her – but she can be very, *very* fierce.

'Oi, you!' Mum said, seeing him staring. 'Did you do this to my Jess?'

'Nah!' said Tyrone, shaking his head, and his mates shook their heads too.

'Don't stand there lying your heads off! It's written all over your faces! How dare you pick on a little kid half your size! I'll show you!'

She went charging up to them, fists clenched.

'You're not allowed to hit us! We'll report you!' said Tyrone's best mate, Piotr.

'And *my* mum will come and sort you out. And my brothers!' said Tyrone.

I don't think Mum would have actually thumped them – but she certainly looked as if she might. She didn't stop running, and Tyrone and his mates started running too, charging right out of the playground and down the road.

'I'll get you! I know where you live, you big bullying toerags!' Mum yelled.





Then she came running back and gave me a quick hug. 'Didn't Miss Oliver tell them off?'

'She didn't see,' I said.

'What sort of a teacher *is* she? Useless old bat! Come with me,' said Mum, and she pulled me across the playground, back into the school.

'Oh, Mum, please, don't make a fuss,' I begged. 'Miss Oliver wasn't on playground duty at lunchtime so she wouldn't have seen anything. And anyway I was hidden away in the Peace Garden.'

'*Peace* Garden!' Mum practically had steam coming out of her ears. 'I'll tell Miss Useless Oliver she should be looking after the kids in her care.'



'*Please* don't, Mum,' I implored, but when Mum goes off on one she won't listen to anyone, not even me.

Miss Oliver was in the classroom sticking our pictures on the wall. We'd done a painting in the style of Van Gogh. He was a Dutch painter who used wonderfully bright colours in his swirly paintings. His favourite colour must have been yellow because he painted yellow beds and yellow chairs and lots of yellow flowers too.

I did a picture of Mum and me. I dressed us both in yellow T-shirts and jeans, though we haven't actually got any that colour, but I drew us too small,

and there was too much blue sky and green grass above and below us. We looked like yellow ladybirds. You practically needed a magnifying glass to see us. I knew Miss Oliver wouldn't put mine up.

'Hello, Jess. Hello, Ms Beaker,' said Miss Oliver. She peered at me through her little round glasses. 'Oh, Jess, it looks as if you've been in the wars.'

'Yes, in your blooming Peace Garden at *lunchtime*,' Mum exploded. 'She's been sitting in your classroom all afternoon with a huge great lump on her forehead and two bloody knees and you haven't even bothered to stick a plaster on her. What's the matter with you?'

Miss Oliver went red. She has white-blonde hair and very pale skin so it looks odd when she blushes. She hardly ever does. Even when she's cross she stays very calm. 'I'm so sorry, Jess. I didn't see you properly, dear. You should have come and told me.'



'You didn't *see* her? You need new glasses, mate,' said Mum.

I just about died. You don't call a teacher *mate*. And it wasn't Miss Oliver's fault. I sit right at the back of the class, and I was leaning forward to do my painting so she wouldn't have seen my forehead, and my knees were under my desk, blood dribbling down into my socks unseen.

'I've said I'm sorry,' said Miss Oliver, with an edge to her voice. 'I'll fetch the first-aid box.'

'Sorry isn't good enough! It's your duty to look after the children in your so-called care! I was brought up *in* care, and the care workers did their level best to keep a proper eye on us all the time. My mum wasn't around and I didn't have anyone to fight my corner – but *I'm* here for Jess. I won't have my little girl beaten up by young thugs twice her size while you sit here playing with pieces of paper, as calm as custard! You need reporting. I won't have it. I WON'T HAVE IT!!!'

By this time I wanted to crawl under the table.

Miss Oliver sat very still, her hands clasped. 'Please try to keep your voice down, Ms Beaker,' she said. 'I understand your concern, but I don't think we'll get anywhere by shouting at each other. Come here, Jess, and let me look at the bump on your forehead. Do you have a headache?'

I had a *terrible* headache, but it wasn't because of the bump, it was because my mum was yelling so loudly. I shook my head.

'Your knees look very sore too. Shall we clean them up a bit and put on some antiseptic?' Miss Oliver asked.

'*I* can do that when we get home. I'll take responsibility for my daughter now, thank you very much,' said Mum, pulling me back to her side. 'I just

want you to control the kids in your care like a *proper* teacher, and punish those boys who thumped my Jess. Especially the big brutish one.'

Miss Oliver quivered at the word *proper*. 'Was it Tyrone, Jess?' she asked quietly.

'It might have been,' I mumbled.

'It wasn't just one boy. I saw them in the playground. I'm sure the big ugly one and all his horrible mates beat up my little girl – it's a miracle her glasses weren't broken,' said Mum. 'Don't you have a no-bullying policy at this dump of a school?'

'We do indeed. So, did Tyrone and Piotr and Jack and Simon and Raj *all* beat you up, Jess?'

'Of course they did! I just *said*!' Mum insisted.

'Jess?' Miss Oliver asked quietly.

I'd bent my head so low my chin was digging into my chest.

'No, it was just Tyrone. And he didn't actually beat me up. He just pushed me off the bench,' I whispered.

'Oh dear. Well, I'll have a serious talk with him in the morning,' said Miss Oliver.



She looked at Mum. 'I'm sorry this happened to Jess. I'll do my best to make sure it doesn't happen again.' She gave Mum a dismissive nod, and went back to

sticking another painting on the wall. A blue-and-green picture with two little yellow ladybird blobs in the middle.

'Don't you treat *me* like a little kid!' Mum said. 'It's not good enough. I won't be fobbed off like this! I WON'T HAVE IT!'

'And I won't have you barging into my classroom and shouting at me,' said Miss Oliver. 'You need to deal with your Anger Issues, Ms Beaker.'

'Anger Issues! Don't give me that care-worker rubbish! And I'm *Miss* Beaker, not Ms, and proud of it. It's just me and my daughter, and I'm not letting you tell me what to do, you bossy old bag,' Mum shouted.

I took hold of her hand and pulled. 'Mum, please, let's go home,' I begged. 'Please please please!'

She looked at me and saw that behind my glasses my eyes were blurry with tears. She squeezed my hand tight and let me pull her to the door.

'I won't have it,' Mum repeated, but more quietly now. Her voice was a bit shaky.

Hand in hand we went down the corridor and out through the doors. Mr Smith, the school caretaker, was sweeping up rubbish. He saw Mum's fierce face and the tears rolling down my cheeks.

'Oh dear, have you been a naughty girl, Jess Beaker?' he said, shaking his head and clucking, pretending to be shocked. He was just teasing. He's a

gentle, smiley man who's friends with everyone.



I gave him a wobbly smile. Mum ignored him. She clung onto my hand and we walked quickly down the street, not speaking. I kept glancing up at her anxiously. She saw, and tried to give me a smile, but hers was wobbly too.

We were almost running now. My forehead throbbed and my knees stung, but we were both desperate to get home. Then, when we thought we'd made it, we couldn't use either lift. One broke yesterday and the engineers were still struggling to fix it. The other had been working OK that morning, but now someone had deliberately jammed it between floors. So we had to walk up the stairs. Fourteen flights.

It took us a long, long, long time. Especially as we came across Mrs Alfassi sitting on the third-floor steps, gasping. She's always been big, but now she's even bigger because she's going to have a baby. She can't speak much English yet, and we don't know her language, but it didn't matter. Mum heaved her up as carefully



as she could, and we took an arm each and helped her up the stairs to the sixth floor.



Then we found old Mrs Reynolds from the ninth floor struggling up the steps with a bulging Lidl carrier in either hand. We carried them for her, and she gave me a mini Bounty bar from her big handbag. I don't actually like coconut but it would have been rude to refuse.



And when we reached the eleventh floor, there was our friend Fadwa trying to carry her little boy *and* his scooter, so Mum took him and I took his scooter – and had a little go on it as we walked along to their flat on the thirteenth. I had to bend right down because it's a very small scooter, but it was good fun, even though it made my knees start bleeding again.

'It's like we're going up the Faraway Tree,' I said, dabbing at them quickly. 'We might meet Moon-Face or Silky the fairy next.'

Mum smiled properly then, and I hoped she'd calmed down – but when we reached our flat she took me to the bathroom and looked at my big bump and my bloody knees, and screwed up her face as if she

was going to burst into tears too, even though Mum never cries.

'It's all right, Mum! They don't really hurt that much now. I don't mind,' I said, putting my arms round her.

'You poor little kid,' she said, sniffing. 'Maybe we should take you to A and E to check you haven't got concussion or blood poisoning.'

'I'm fine, Mum. Really,' I insisted.

'Well, I suppose it would be a bit daft to trail all the way downstairs and get the bus to the hospital and wait five hours, and then come back and climb all the way up here all over again,' said Mum. 'I'd better be Nurse Beaker then.'

She sat me on the toilet while she bathed my bumpy head with cold water, and then carefully mopped my knees with soap and hot water to get all the dirt out.



'I'd better wash my mouth out with soap while I'm at it,' she said. 'I went a bit over the top with your Miss Oliver, didn't I?'

'Yes, you did,' I said. 'You were awful! Mum, people don't *really* wash their mouths out with soap, do they?' My tongue curled up in my mouth at the very thought.

'Doesn't it taste disgusting?'



'That's the point. My teacher did it to me once when I was really cheeky. It tasted awful, but I didn't let on to Mrs Vomit Bagley. It frothed all over my lips, so I licked them and said, "Yummy, yummy, yummy," like it was a big treat. It didn't half annoy her.'

'Didn't Mike go and tell the teacher off?' Mike worked at the children's home where Mum lived. He was the care worker she liked best.

'I didn't tell him. He'd have gone nuts if he'd heard what I said to Mrs Vomit Bagley,' said Mum. 'But don't you worry, Jess – you can say even worse things to Miss Oliver, and I'll still come and stick up for you. I just want to be the best mum ever for you.'

'I know,' I said, hugging her. Mum's own mum, my Granny Carly, wasn't around much when she was young. She's not around much now. Last year she even forgot my birthday. Cam's like my *real* granny. She never, ever forgets. 'You *are* the best mum ever.' I keep having to tell Mum this, but I don't mind, because it's the truth.

She pulled a face. 'Sorry I embarrassed you, yelling at Miss Oliver. I was just so mad about that big bruiser. Wait till I get hold of him. Tyler, isn't it?'

'Tyrone.'

'He doesn't live in Marlborough, does he?'

'No, he lives in Devonshire, but you can't have a go at him, Mum. He's got two big brothers, and his mum's much bigger than you and ever so tough,' I warned her.

'I'm not scared of them,' she said.

'*I'm* scared of them. They'd *really* beat you up. Then what would I do?'

'I'd beat them up worse,' said Mum, her chin jutting.

'Oh, Mum.'

'And I'll beat up Miss Oliver too if she doesn't look after you when you're at school,' said Mum, but I hoped she was just teasing now.

I rolled my eyes. 'I wish you wouldn't always have a go at my teachers, Mum. I quite *like* Miss Oliver.'

'She looks like a mean old bat to me,' she said. 'She doesn't exactly make a fuss of you, does she? Weren't you moaning that she never puts any of your paintings up on the wall?'

'She put my painting up today, when you were having a go at her. She stuck it right up on the wall for everyone to see!'

'Oh no! I wish *I'd* seen it! What was it of?'



'You and me,' I said.

'Oh, Jess!' Mum looked really upset. 'If I hadn't been in such a royal

strop, then you'd have shown me. Why do I always have to lose my flipping temper, eh?'

'Perhaps you can't help it, Mum. You've got Anger Issues,' I said.

She gave me a look, and I wondered if I'd gone too far. But then she burst out laughing. 'OK. Well, I'm going to have to deal with them, aren't I? I promise I won't lose my temper like that again, OK?'

I stared at her. 'Yeah, right,' I said. Mum can't *help* losing her temper. She's famous for it.

But the next day she enrolled for kick-boxing lessons at Sean Godfrey's gym.

'It'll give me an outlet for my Anger Issues,' she said.

And that's how Sean Godfrey became her boyfriend.