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Opening extract from

The Marble Crusher and Other Stories

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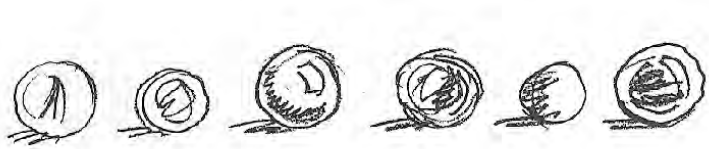
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THE MARBLE CRUSHER

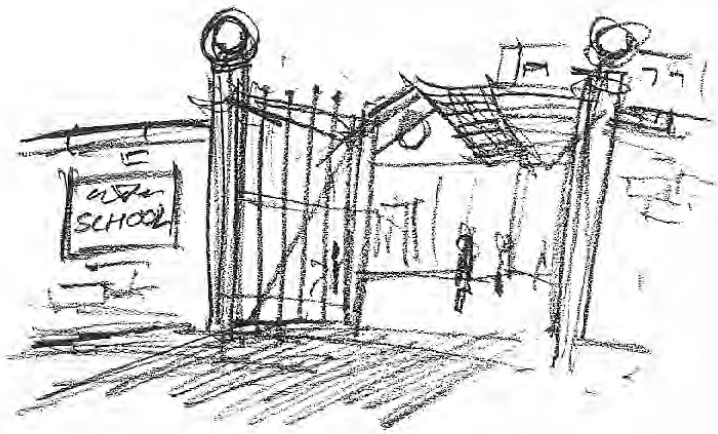
CHAPTER ONE



ALBERT WAS TEN YEARS OLD. HE WAS A quiet, gentle sort of a boy with a thatch of stiff hair that he twiddled when he was nervous.

He had moved to town from the countryside. 'We have to go where the work is,' his mother had told him, and there was work in the town.

So Albert came from his little village school to a new school, a school which was noisy and full of strange faces. The other children called him Bert, or Herbert, neither of which was his name. They kept asking him questions and they wouldn't leave him alone.



There was somewhere to get away from it all, behind the bike shed in the playground, but never for long. By the end of each day Albert felt like a sponge squeezed dry. He smiled so much that it hurt. He tried to laugh at everyone's jokes, and he believed everything they told him. He was naturally a trusting child, and now, in the first weeks of his new school, he wanted to please everyone, to make friends.

They teased Albert of course, and he was easy enough to tease, but Albert just smiled through it all. They called him 'Twiddler!' and Albert smiled and went on twiddling his hair. He did not seem to mind.



It was Sid Creedy who discovered that Albert would believe almost anything he told him. They were playing football in the playground in break when Sid turned to his friends and said, 'Watch this.' He dribbled the ball over towards Albert, and his friends followed him.

'My Dad,' said Sid, 'he played centre-forward for Liverpool. Did for years. Then they asked him to play for England, but he didn't want to – he didn't like the colour of the shirt.'