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opening extract from

The Boy with the Lightning Feet

written by

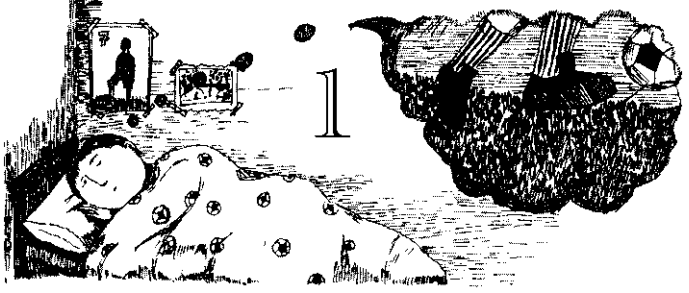
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1

Timmy Twinkle was, when all's said and done, a rather chubby chap. His great love in life was football, and his great dream was to be able to play. But oh dear! He was no good at sports: in fact he believed he was useless at everything except eating.

What Timmy Twinkle didn't know was that there was magic in his toes.

Timmy hadn't always been so chubby. It started after his grandma had dropped down dead while she was out shopping for birdseed. Then, out of the blue, his mum, who'd always relied on Gran and Gramps to help her look after Timmy, decided to up sticks and start a new life in Spain. To be fair, she hadn't said that was what she was doing. She just told Gramps Twinkle that she was going for a holiday to get a tan.

'I mean, Dad,' she said to Gramps, 'I was only a kitten cat when I had Timmy, and I haven't lived yet.'

'Yep,' said Gramps, who on the whole had given up talking in sentences and only said 'yep' or 'nope' like the cowboys in the old films he and his grandson liked to watch on television.

'So you won't mind having Timmy on your own for a couple of weeks?' said Mum, turning the note on the door of Kettle's Teashop to Closed.

'Nope,' said Gramps.

'I'll be back and then we can reopen the teashop and I shall have lost my itchy feet,' said Mum.

That was that. She put on her sparkly pink top and went off to the airport with a one-way ticket.

When, after two weeks, she hadn't come back, Timmy had felt hungry. After a year of her being gone, Timmy was never not

hungry. After two years, he was a very chubby little chap. He found that food filled the gap where once there had been a nice warm feeling of love and safety.

Timmy was seven then. All he had ever had from his mum was three postcards; one saying 'wish you were here, you'd love it,' the second to tell him she was working in a tapas bar and the third to say she was getting married. Timmy put all the cards in a shoebox along with the matador's hat she had sent him and a photo of her at her wedding. And every time he thought of his mum he just felt hungry.

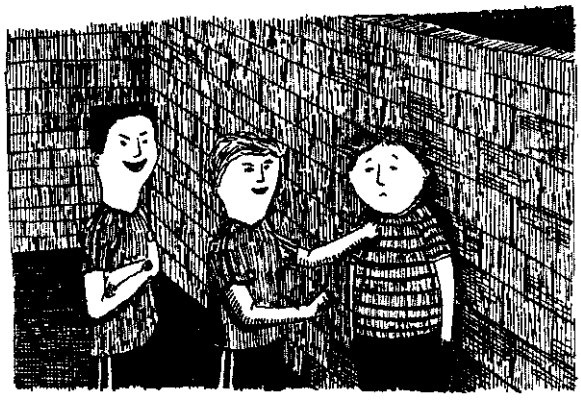


2

The bullying had begun in Year 2, when Mickey Morris, known to the rest of the class as Mickey the Moose, joined High Hope School. It stayed pretty much the same in Year 3. Everyone was a little scared of Mickey the Moose. He was the school's best striker, a star on the football pitch. He liked to think of himself as High Hope's secret weapon.

Then it got worse. Oh boy, did it get worse after Freddy Hammer joined the class in Year 4. They ganged up big time on Timmy and made him feel very lonely and miserable.

Timmy spent his days dreaming of being anywhere except school. He dreamt all through the lessons. He began to find it hard to keep up with his work. He dreaded breaktime, when Freddy Hammer and



Mickey the Moose would push him up against the school wall and punch and kick him, then trip him up and call him Dim Tim and Fatty Batty.

Twice Timmy even bunked off school and went down to the canal near the old playing field that hadn't been used for years and was all overgrown, even though he wasn't supposed to go there on his own. He ate his packed lunch and told himself stories about scoring a goal for England. He ate the chocolate bars he'd bought with his pocket money and longed for the end of the afternoon when he could go back to Gramps and a home-made cake.

Timmy never said how bad things were at school. He couldn't because his troubles needed a bit more than Gramps's usual 'nope' and 'yep'.

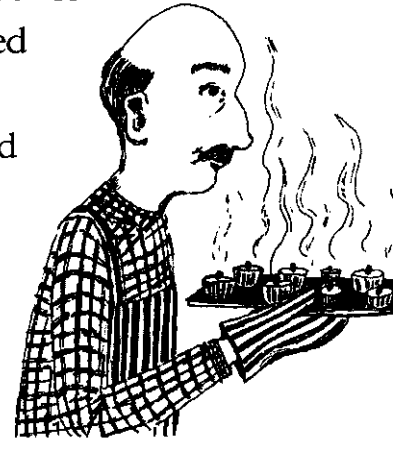
It seemed that things could only get worse. But then Timmy found a photograph album, and everything changed.



3

Gramps had been a baker. He used to make all the bread and cakes for Gran's teashop. Now Gran and Timmy's mum, who also worked there, were gone, and the teashop was closed. Gramps still spent his days baking cakes. It was all he knew how to do. The trouble was there was only one customer, and that customer was Timmy Twinkle and the one thing Timmy didn't need was any more cake to eat.

Every day Timmy longed for the moment when he would open the front door and a waft of baking would wrap itself round him. Gramps would serve tea: home-made scones with lashings of whipped cream and his own strawberry jam, followed by a sponge cake that



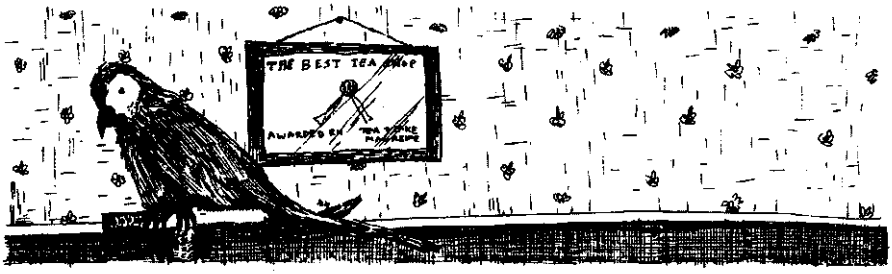
seemed filled with love and iced with hope.

They never said much, Gramps and Timmy. Even Sheriff the parrot was silent. He used to be the life and soul of the teashop, greeting the customers with 'Howdy-do, cowboy? Have you tied up your horse?' which made everyone laugh. But he too had given up talking after Gran's funeral and now refused to croak a word.

'Perhaps he'd start talking if we opened the teashop again,' said Timmy.

'Yep,' said Gramps.

Still, the teashop stayed closed. Sheriff gave up coming into the lounge of an evening and sitting on Gramps's shoulder to watch the old cowboy movies. Instead, he spent most of his time on his perch in the empty shop with his head under his wing.



'Do you think he's all right?' asked Timmy, when Sheriff's feathers began to fall out.

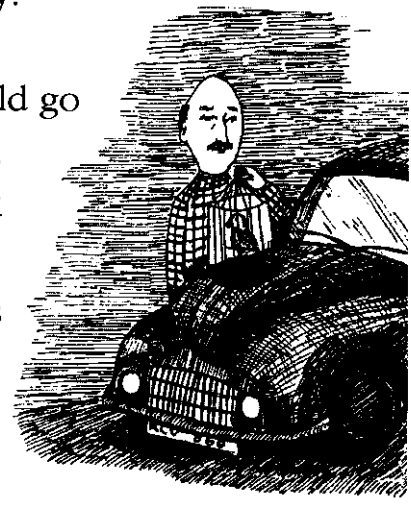
'Nope,' said Gramps.

'He looks more like a plucked chicken than a parrot,' said Timmy.

'Yep,' said Gramps.

'Do you think he should go to the vet?' asked Timmy.

'Yep,' said Gramps, and he put Sheriff in his cage and set off to town in his Morris Minor.



That was when Timmy spotted it, the old photograph album that the birdcage had been sitting on.

Its cover had got all dusty and was peeling apart, but inside the pictures were as good as new. They were all of the same young man. There were pictures of him with a handlebar moustache, dressed in



old-fashioned clothes, with his leather lace-up boots resting on a football. The one Timmy liked best was of him being carried on the shoulders of his team-mates. He had a big beaming smile across his face and was holding up a huge cup. Underneath was written 'Lytham St Anne's Champion League Winner 1912.'

Gramps returned with Sheriff. The parrot was not in a good mood and sulked on his perch.

'Is he all right now?' asked Timmy.

'Yep. Nope,' replied Gramps. He put the cage back where it belonged and sat down

in his favourite armchair. For some reason the cage wobbled unsteadily on the coffee table. Gramps looked at it, trying to figure out what was wrong.

'I think you need to put this under it,' said Timmy, showing Gramps the photo album.

'Yep,' said Gramps.

'I've been looking at it,' said Timmy. 'Can I keep it out? It's all football pictures.'

'Yep,' replied Gramps, finding an old Army and Navy catalogue to use instead.

'Who's this, Gramps?' asked Timmy, showing Gramps the picture of the young man. 'Is he someone important?'

Gramps put on his glasses and looked at the photo. 'Yep,' he said. Timmy felt a flutter of excitement in his tummy.

'Do you know him, then?' asked Timmy.

'Nope,' said Gramps.

'I wish I knew who he was,' said Timmy, staring at the photo album and not expecting

an answer. He was used to Gramps not talking. He knew he would just have to ask some more simple 'yep' and 'nope' questions if he wanted to find out who the man in the sepia photo was.

That was when Gramps spoke, which was something he hadn't done for a very long time. He said, 'He was Gran's Great-Great Uncle Vernon. Everyone called him Twinkletoes.'

Timmy was amazed. That, he thought, was more than a few words. That was a whole sentence.

