

opening extract from

billy wizard

written by

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Chapter 1

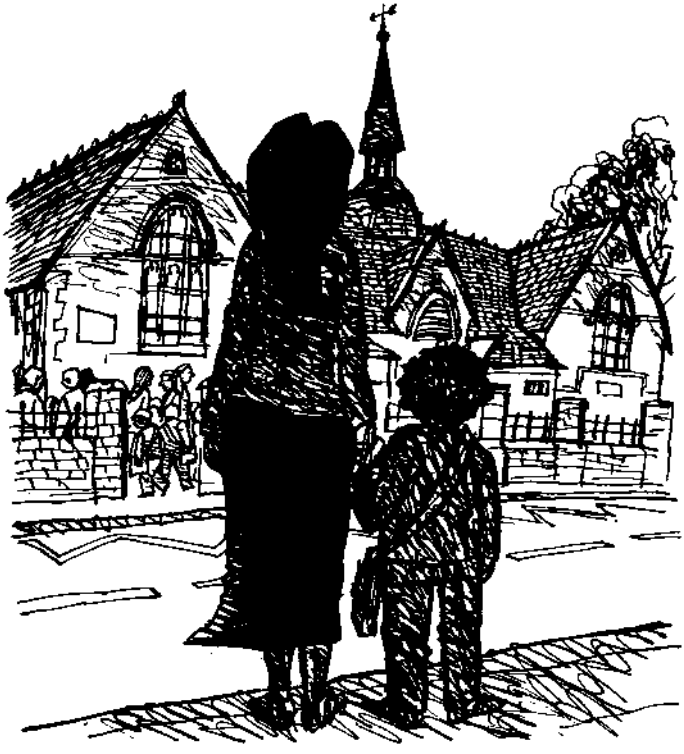
New Boys



"You'll be fine, sweetheart," said Joe's mother as they reached the gates of his new school. The playground was full of chattering children and their chattering parents.

"I know," said Joe grumpily. He wished his mum would stop making a fuss.

But even so, he did start to feel just



a little bit nervous. After all, when he and his mum and dad had looked round the school, the children had been in assembly. It had almost been like looking round an empty school.

Now the children were all grouped in huddles, talking and laughing.

Every now and then one of them would look across at Joe and then turn back to his or her friends and talk and laugh some more.

Joe looked up at his mother and she did her best to smile. She didn't know anyone either and the other parents were looking at her just like the children were looking at him. She leaned down and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"I hope Dad's getting on all right," she said. "It's his first day too."

Joe didn't say anything. He was cross with his dad. All this was his dad's fault. His dad's new job was the whole reason why they had moved to Little Hartley in the first place.

Once upon time the word "new" had seemed like a good word – new book, new bike, new car. Not now.

Now *everything* was new: new house, new job, new school and *no* friends. If Joe could have waved a magic wand, he would have turned everything back to how it was when they lived in Gaston. Everything had been fine then.

At that moment, one of the children waved at him, smiled and shouted, "Hi!" and Joe smiled and waved and was about to shout, "Hi!" back when he realized the boy wasn't waving to him at all but to someone behind him, and Joe pretended to scratch his head instead of wave and he could feel his ears going red. Then suddenly a teacher nearby rang a hand bell and Joe and his mum nearly jumped out of their skins.

"Well . . . bye bye, sweetheart," said his mother. "Have a lovely day."

"Bye, Mum," said Joe.



All the other children knew exactly what to do. They got into different queues and waited for their teachers to come out and lead them into the classrooms. The teacher they had met when they looked round the school –

Miss Parker – smiled at Joe and waved him over and he nervously joined the end of the queue.

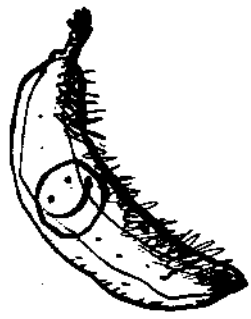
He looked round at his mother and remembered that she was starting a new job too. He wanted to shout, "Good luck!" but thought he had



better not. She blew him a kiss and Joe followed the children through the doors into his new classroom.

Inside, all the other children bustled about, hanging their coats on their pegs and putting their book bags in one plastic basket and their playtime snacks in another. Joe just stood there

looking lost until the classroom assistant, Mrs Michaels, came over and helped him.



Mrs Michaels showed him a coat peg he could use and he put his book bag with the others. Mum had given him a banana for his snack and had drawn a smiley face on the skin. Joe smiled but put it in the basket smiley face down, just in case the other children thought it was silly. You couldn't be too careful.

Mrs Michaels showed him through into the classroom and Joe sat down on the carpet in front of Miss Parker as she looked through some papers on her lap and got ready to read the register. A boy nearby stared at Joe until Joe looked back, and then the

boy looked away and pretended he had not been staring at Joe at all.

"Good morning, class," said Miss Parker suddenly.

"Good morning, Miss Parker!" boomed the children.

Joe tried to join in but was a little behind the others so that when everyone else had gone quiet, there was just Joe mumbling ". . . Miss Parker" all on his own. There were giggles and Joe tried to stop his ears going red again.



"Now then, class," said Miss Parker, clapping her hands together, "I wonder if any of you can remember what it was like when you first started school?" A boy nearby put his hand up. "Yes, Thomas?" she asked.