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opening extract from

The Boy in the Dress

written by

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David Walliams

The
Boy in
the Dress

Illustrated by Quentin Blake



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For Eddie,

What joy you have given us all.

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No Hugging

Dennis was different.

When he looked in the mirror he saw an ordinary twelve-year-old boy. But he *felt* different – his thoughts were full of colour and poetry, though his life could be very boring.

The story I am going to tell you begins here, in Dennis's ordinary house on an ordinary street in an ordinary town. His house was nearly exactly the same as all the others in the street. One house had double glazing, another did not. One had a gravel drive, another had crazy paving. One had a Vauxhall Cavalier in

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the drive, another a Vauxhall Astra. Tiny differences that only really pointed out the sameness of everything.

It was all so ordinary, something extraordinary just had to happen.

Dennis lived with his dad – who did have a name, but Dennis just called him Dad, so I will too – and his older brother John, who was fourteen. Dennis found it frustrating that his brother would always be two years older than him, and bigger, and stronger.

Dennis's mum had left home a couple of years ago. Before that, Dennis used to creep out of his room and sit at the top of the stairs and listen to his mum and dad shout at each other until one day the shouting stopped.

She was gone.

Dad banned John and Dennis from ever mentioning Mum again. And soon after she left,

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he went around the house and took down all the photographs of her and burnt them in a big bonfire.

But Dennis managed to save one.

One solitary photograph escaped the flames, dancing up into the air from the heat of the fire, before floating through the smoke and onto the hedge.



As dusk fell, Dennis snuck out and retrieved the photo. It was charred and blackened around the edges and at first his heart sank, but when he

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turned it to the light he saw that the image was as bright and clear as ever.

It showed a joyful scene: a younger John and Dennis with Mum at the beach, Mum wearing a lovely yellow dress with flowers on it. Dennis loved that dress; it was full of colour and life, and soft to the touch. When Mum put it on it meant that summer had arrived.

It had been warm outside after she had left, but it hadn't really been summer in their house again.

In the picture Dennis and his brother were in swimming trunks holding ice-cream cones, vanilla ice-cream smeared around their smiling mouths. Dennis kept the photo in his pocket and looked at it secretly every day. His mum looked so achingly beautiful in it, even though her smile was uncertain. Dennis stared at it for hours on end, trying to imagine what she

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had been thinking when it was taken.

After Mum left, Dad didn't say much, but when he did, he would often shout. So Dennis ended up watching a lot of television, and especially his favourite show, *Trisha*. Dennis had seen a *Trisha* episode about people with depression, and thought maybe his dad had that. Dennis loved *Trisha*. It was a daytime talk show where ordinary people were given the opportunity to talk about their problems, or yell abuse at their relatives, and it was all presided over by a kindly looking but judgemental woman conveniently called... Trisha.

For a while Dennis thought life without his mum would be some kind of adventure. He'd stay up late, eat take-aways and watch rude comedy shows. However, as the days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months,

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and the months turned into years, he realised that it wasn't an adventure at all.

It was just sad.

Dennis and John sort of loved each other in that way that they had to because they were brothers. But John tested this love quite often by doing things he thought were funny, like sitting on Dennis's face and farting. If farting had been an Olympic sport (at time of writing I am told it isn't, which I feel is a shame), he would have won a number of gold medals and probably received a knighthood from the Queen.

Now, reader, you might be thinking that as their mum had left, the two brothers would be brought closer together.

Sadly, it only drove them apart.

Unlike Dennis, John was full of silent rage with his mum for leaving, and agreed with Dad

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that it was better never to mention her again. It was one of the rules of the house:

No talking about Mum.

No crying.

And worst of all – no hugging.

Dennis, on the other hand, was just full of sadness. Sometimes he missed his mum so much that he cried in bed at night. He tried to cry as quietly as possible, because he and his brother shared a room and he didn't want John to hear.

But one night Dennis's sobs woke John up.

"Dennis? Dennis? What are you crying for now?" demanded John from his bed.

"I don't know. It's just... well... I just wish that Mum was here, and everything," came the reply from Dennis.

"Well, don't cry. She's gone and she's not coming back."

"You don't know that..."

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“She’s never coming back, Dennis. Now stop crying. Only girls cry.”

But Dennis *couldn't* stop crying. The pain ebbed and flowed inside him like the sea, crashing down on him, almost drowning him in tears. He didn't want to upset his brother, though, so he cried as quietly as he possibly could.

So why was Dennis so different, I hear you ask? After all, this boy lived in an ordinary house, in an ordinary street, in an ordinary town.

Well, I'm not going to tell you why yet, but the clue might be in the title of this book...