

Yellow

Lots of things scare me, not just creaky night-time things, but ordinary things. At least that's what mother says they are. "Tom, these are ordinary things." Metal cutlery, light switches, burglar alarm sensors. Tall trees on a windy day have a particular evil about them.

The first day at school I asked my mother the question "What is school for?"

She said it was so I could learn, and so I went. She got it wrong. There was no learning, just colouring in. I took my book about impressionist painters out of my bag to show Mrs Robson but she said I must not bring books to school, and to put it away and do the colouring in like all the other children until the bell went. And so I sat and did it, and it was all yellow. I like yellow. Mrs Robson said "Why have you done that? It's all yellow. Look at Livvy's picture. It's pretty, just like a rainbow". I sneaked a look at my book when her back was turned. Splashes of amber, apricot, aureolin, citrine, jonquil, and saffron spilled across the centre pages like a puddle of liquid sunshine. There was only daffodil yellow in the pencil pot. I asked Mrs Robson for more yellows but she told me to sit down. At the end of the day she put the colouring up on the wall. Livvy's was framed with a shiny silver cardboard mount and stuck in the middle. My picture went up too; in the far corner, right behind the easel with the flip chart.

The second day at school I asked my mother what school was for because I didn't learn anything the day before. She said, "Yesterday was your first day, today will be different."

She got it wrong again. There was no learning. We had to sit on the carpet at Mrs Robson's feet, and listen to a story about a puppy called Max who starts a new school and has lots of fun.

I said "Excuse me Mrs Robson, but a dog would not be allowed to go to into a school for health and safety reasons. There is a risk of Toxocariasis, someone might be allergic to the fur and come out in bright red hives and if it bit someone there would be a risk of rabies. Children could end up blind or dead." I thought she of all people would have known that. Livvy started to cry for her mum. Mrs Robson said I was a naughty boy and had spoiled the story for everyone.

The third day at school I asked my mother what school was for and she said it is so you can make new friends. I figured then that she really had no idea about school. The others stared at me when I pointed out in the playground that the school bell rang in the key of E. I thought if I showed them the precious thing they would stop shouting 'dweebhead' and so I showed them the big snail I found over by the bushes, all curled up. I said "Look, it has a coil on it like a Fibonacci arrangement." Joe stepped forward and crushed it with his boot. Just like that. Livvy started crying again. I felt the spirit of the snail leave its tiny body and rise up, gathering pace as an angry twister, whipping up the branches of the tall pines that fringed the playground. I flapped my arms wildly in time to their swaying to deflect their evil. Livvy started screaming.

I had to face the wall in the corner of the classroom until home-time for all the upset caused. At least I had a chance to look at my yellow picture.

The fourth day at school, I again asked my mother the same question and she said, "Look Tom, I'll level with you. It's so mums can have a rest. It's so we can meet other mums and slob about and drink coffee." Why didn't she say so before? At least I finally had the truth.

Now I colour my pictures just like Livvy and I dig my nails deep into the palm of my hand at story time to remind my mouth to be still. No one calls me 'dweebhead' because no one speaks to me anymore. The tall trees still sway scarily when it's windy, but these days I screw my eyes up tight and pretend that I no longer care.