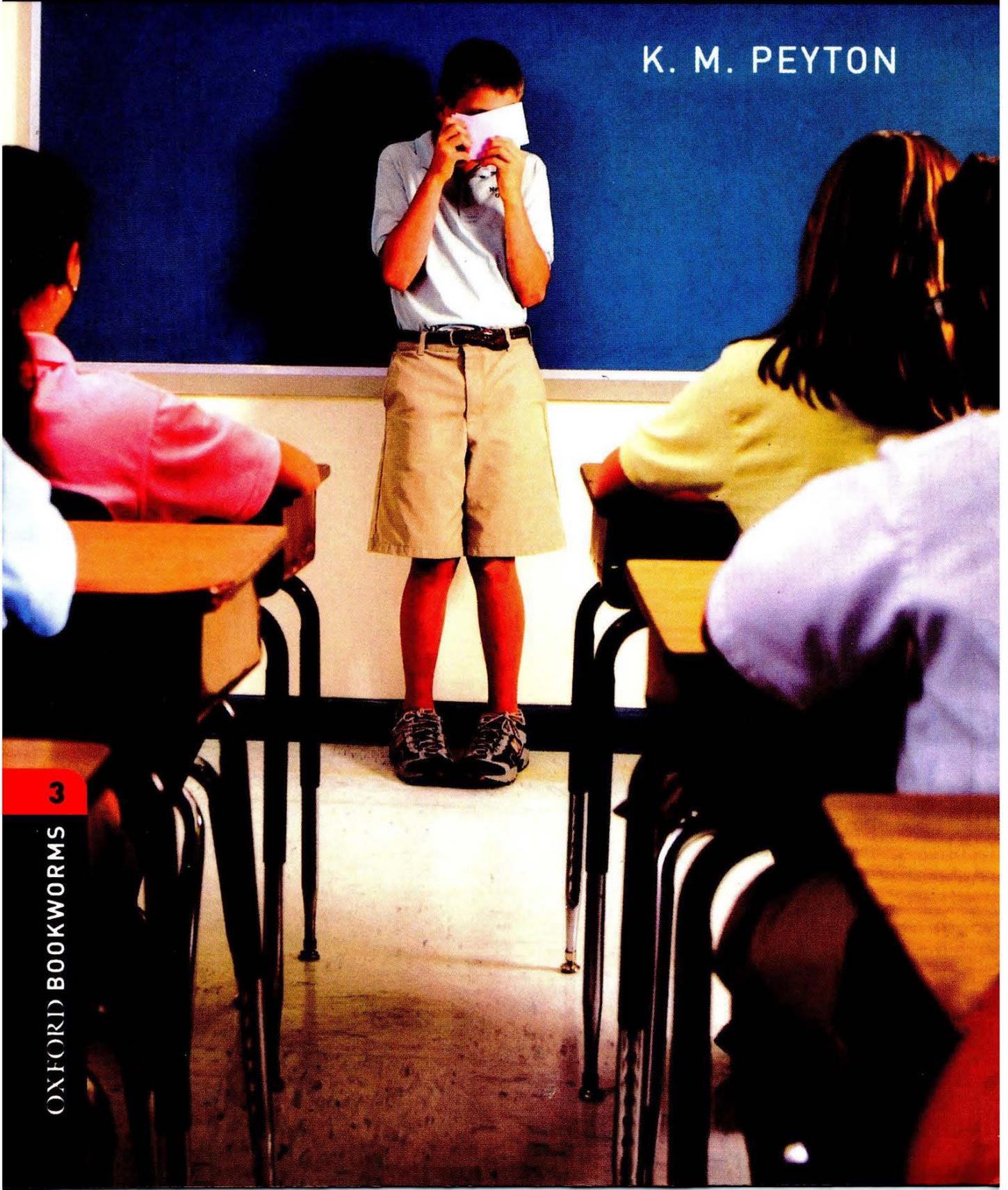




'Who, Sir? Me, Sir?'

K. M. PEYTON



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OXFORD BOOKWORMS

‘WHO, SIR? ME, SIR?’

‘The trouble with you lot,’ Sam Sylvester says to his class at Hawkwood School, ‘is that you don’t care about anything. I want you to have ambition – to *do* things, to *want* things.’

So Sam enters a team from his class for a competition in running, swimming, shooting, and cross-country riding. His team can’t believe their ears. They’ve never ridden a horse or fired a shot. Some of them can’t even swim, and none of them ever runs further than the bus-stop! They haven’t got a chance . . .

Or have they? The final team – Nutty, Hoomey, Jazz, and Nails – make a very strange group, it’s true. They argue and fight with each other, learn to get up at six in the morning, work harder than they’ve ever done in their lives – and sometimes wish they were dead!

But who says they can’t win?

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Human Interest

‘Who, Sir? Me, Sir?’

Stage 3 (1000 headwords)

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Series Editor: Jennifer Bassett
Founder Editor: Tricia Hedge
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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
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Original edition © K. M. Peyton 1983

First published by Oxford University Press 1983

This simplified edition © Oxford University Press 2008

Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published in Oxford Bookworms 1995

12 14 16 18 20 19 17 15 13 11

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ISBN 978 0 19 479136 6

Printed in China

Typeset by Wyvern Typesetting Ltd, Bristol

Word count (main text): 10,295 words

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How it all began



It was Sam Sylvester, a teacher at Hawkwood School, who started the trouble. Just along the road from Hawkwood there was another school called Greycoats. Parents paid a lot of money to send their children to Greycoats, and the children there were clean and tidy, wore expensive clothes, and did well in examinations.

At Hawkwood the parents did not pay any money and the children were much better at fighting than at passing examinations. They were happy about that. Passing examinations meant hard work, and who wanted to study every evening?

But Sam Sylvester was worried about the difference

between the two schools. He wanted Hawkwood to be as good as Greycoats, and he was always telling his class to work harder, to try and make a better life for themselves.

‘That’s the trouble with you lot,’ he said to his class one day. ‘You don’t care about anything.’

‘What do you want us to care about, sir?’ asked Hoomey. He was a thin, serious child, who was too small for his age. His real name was Rossiter, but when someone spoke to him, he always said, ‘Who? Me?’, so everyone called him ‘Hoomey’.

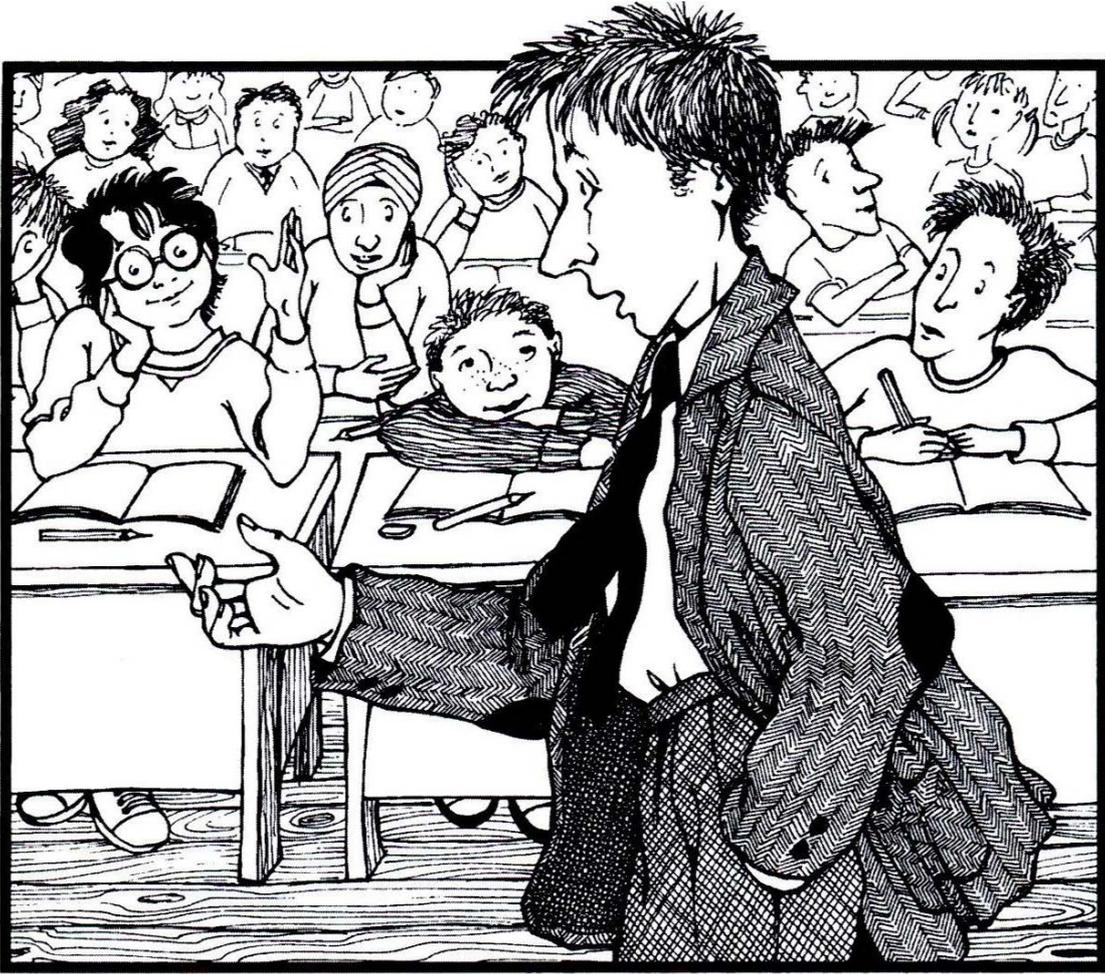
‘I want you to have ambition,’ said Sam. ‘To *do* things. To *want* things.’

‘What kind of things, sir?’ said Nutty. Her real name was Deirdre McTavish, but everybody called her ‘Nutty’. She was thirteen, had a broken nose, thick glasses, black hair and a big smile. But you had to be careful with her. She was a good fighter too.

‘Anything,’ said Sam. ‘Anything at all. Now come on, tell me what you want in life.’

Nutty put up her hand. ‘I want to be a rider in the Olympic Games before I’m twenty-one,’ she said.

Nutty loved horses and riding and had her own horse, called Midnight – a present from her Uncle Bean. Midnight had been on his way to the knackers, where horses were turned into dog food. But her uncle, who worked there, had bought Midnight and given him to Nutty. She had cared for the horse, taught him to jump, and now she and Midnight often won competitions.



'Now come on, tell me what you want in life.'

Hoomey put up his hand too.

'Yes, Rossiter?'

'I want to go and watch Northend United play football on Saturday, sir.'

'And that's your life's ambition?' said Sam crossly. 'Well, why don't you? It isn't very difficult.'

'It's too far. And my bicycle's broken.'

'You can catch a bus, can't you?'

'It's a long walk from my house to the bus-stop, sir.'

Sam covered his face with his hands, and the class laughed.

'All right, Rossiter,' Sam said. 'I'll take you in my car. You and three friends.'

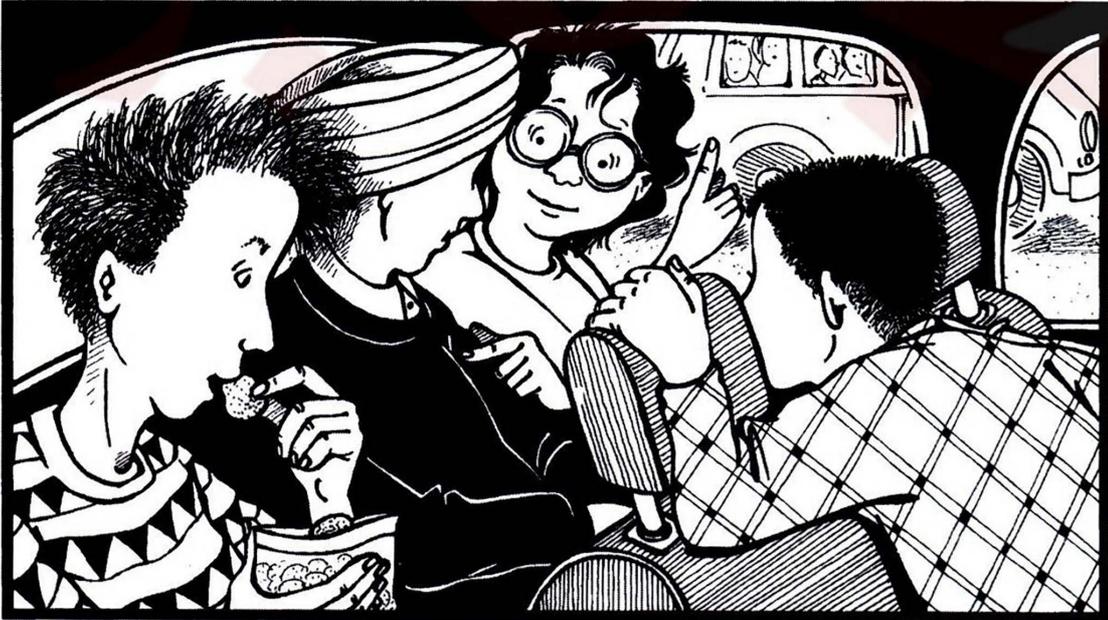
'Oh, thank you, sir!' said Hoomey.

And that was how it all started, because on the way home from the football match on Saturday, Sam stopped the car at a café. 'I'm going in here for a drink,' he said. 'I'll bring you out some cokes if you want.'

'Yes please, sir.'

The three friends with Hoomey were Nutty, Nutty's cousin David Bean and a Sikh boy called Jazz. Hoomey hadn't invited Nutty. She just said, 'I'm your friend. I'm coming.' Nobody argued with Nutty.

The Greycoats School bus was also in the café carpark. Inside it there were four boys, drinking cokes. 'Well, that's



*The three friends with Hoomey were Nutty,
David Bean and a Sikh boy called Jazz.*

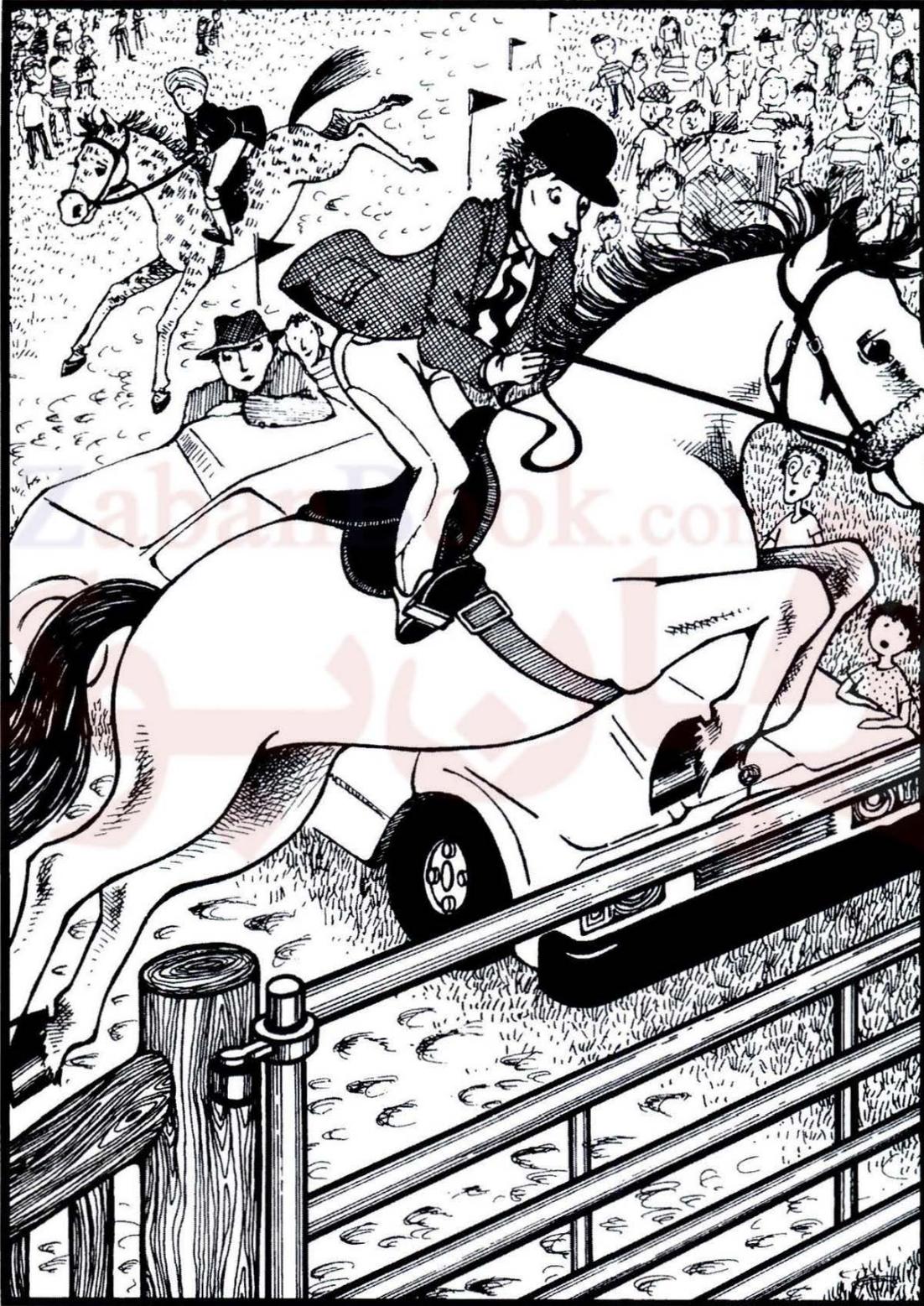
They reached the wood safely, and from the top of the hill Nutty saw Nails going fast towards the finish. They could still win.

As Nutty came out of the wood, she saw the ambulances and cars and a crowd of people looking down the hill. She had no time to see what was happening, and turned Spot towards the next jump. Then Bones and Hoomey suddenly appeared, coming *up* the hill from the main road, and galloping very fast towards the jump in front of her. Bones flew over the jump, clearing it by about two metres, and Hoomey went up in the air and came down again, still on Bones's back. Now they were racing towards the gate, and Nutty, not far behind, could see that Bones wasn't going to stop until he won the race.

The official was standing near the gate, but when she saw Bones and Hoomey racing towards her, she ran back to her car. Her son, who was sitting in the car, ready to play 'God Save the Queen' for Spot, was frightened to death. He forgot how important it was to start the music, and hid under the seat! Nutty got off Spot, went through the gate, and was away before the official and her son had climbed out of their car. Hoomey had already disappeared.

Nutty rode on, a wild hope growing inside her. But she had forgotten that Jazz's parents were there with Bidy and the other parents. They would know that she wasn't Jazz! But she couldn't stop to explain, and rode on past them. She could feel Bidy's glassy stare and saw the mouths of the others fall open, but she kept going and finished with

Winners and losers



Bones wasn't going to stop until he won the race.

‘Who, Sir? Me, Sir?’

a clear round. She rode straight to the truck where the others were.

Inside the truck, Nutty heard that Nails had had a clear round too. ‘We’ve done it!’ she shouted. ‘We’ve beaten them!’

Jazz, putting on his turban again, was laughing. ‘Have you heard? Hoomey rode two miles down the main road!’

‘Not two miles!’ said Hoomey.

‘And because it was a main road, he had to go down to the roundabout before he could come back.’

‘What! Hoomey, you didn’t!’

‘Bones jumped over on to the road. I couldn’t stop him.’ Hoomey was white and shining when he spoke.

‘And you went round the roundabout?’

Hoomey looked a bit uncomfortable. ‘I thought it was the right thing to do, but the traffic was a bit cross. But Nutty, Bones was wonderful!’

By now, Nutty had cleaned her face and she felt wonderful too. ‘We won!’ she cried. ‘We won!’

‘We cheated,’ Nails said.

‘So did they. It’s fair, if you all cheat.’

Nutty looked at Nails. He was smiling, actually *smiling*. It had been a great day for all of them, Nutty decided. Then she saw everybody walking towards them. There were all the parents, Bidy, the Greycoats teacher and Sam Sylvester – and Seb and his team.

‘You cheated!’ Seb called out to Nutty.

‘Oh yes?’ Nutty said. ‘Who cheated?’

‘You rode twice.’

Winners and losers



'And you went round the roundabout?'

'And Colin didn't swim.'

'You can't be sure about that. Nobody will believe you.'

'Well, you can't be sure that I rode twice.'

'Everybody could see it was you. It's the way you ride. We'll tell the competition officials.'

'And we'll tell them about Colin not swimming. And we'll get someone to look at "God Save the Queen" in Antony's mum's car by the gate.'

'Have you all gone crazy?' Biddy asked sweetly.

The adults were all staring at the two teams, some amused, some not understanding. The Greycoats teacher looked cross. 'If there's been some cheating, then there are no real winners or losers,' he said, 'and you'll all have to do the competition again next year.'

'Who, Sir? Me, Sir?'

'That's just what I think,' said Biddy.

The eight competitors looked at each other and fell silent in horror. Nutty couldn't believe it. The pain of all that running and swimming when you were half-dead . . .

But the adults loved the idea. They had had a nice day out, and thought that tetrathlon sports were very good for young people. They all began to make plans. Sam Sylvester said that the school would help next time, and Biddy told Nutty to forget about the money for the riding lessons.

The talking and laughing went on for some time as the adults discussed the day. 'And did you see old Bones,' said Uncle Bean, 'galloping down the main road? Even the police car couldn't catch him! What a horse!'

And that was how it all ended. No winners, no losers.



'You'll all have to do the competition again next year.'

Except that Jazz was invited by the Greycoats teacher to join a competition swimming team. And Jazz was very pleased about that because he really liked swimming. And Bidy offered Nails a job riding her horses, a room to sleep in, and a home for Firelight and her foal. Nails didn't say much but he smiled. And Nutty knew that she had been a good captain. Perhaps one day she would be the captain of an Olympic riding team. And Hoomey – well, Hoomey knew what he wanted in life now. Who said he had no ambition? The dreamy look was back in his eyes. He could be a famous rider, flying over the jumps on his horse like a bird of freedom . . .

Perhaps tomorrow everything would seem different. But today . . . today was all right.



STAGE 3 • 1000 HEADWORDS

... *should, may* – present perfect continuous – *used to* – past perfect –
causative – relative clauses – indirect statements ...

Of course, it was most important that no one should see Colin, Mary, or Dickon entering the secret garden. So Colin gave orders to the gardeners that they must all keep away from that part of the garden in future. *The Secret Garden*

STAGE 4 • 1400 HEADWORDS

... past perfect continuous – passive (simple forms) –
would conditional clauses – indirect questions –
relatives with *where/when* – gerunds after prepositions/phrases ...

I was glad. Now Hyde could not show his face to the world again. If he did, every honest man in London would be proud to report him to the police. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

STAGE 5 • 1800 HEADWORDS

... future continuous – future perfect –
passive (modals, continuous forms) –
would have conditional clauses – modals + perfect infinitive ...

If he had spoken Estella's name, I would have hit him. I was so angry with him, and so depressed about my future, that I could not eat the breakfast. Instead I went straight to the old house. *Great Expectations*

STAGE 6 • 2500 HEADWORDS

... passive (infinitives, gerunds) – advanced modal meanings –
clauses of concession, condition

When I stepped up to the piano, I was confident. It was as if I knew that the prodigy side of me really did exist. And when I started to play, I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that I didn't worry how I would sound. *The Joy Luck Club*

BOOKWORMS • HUMAN INTEREST • STAGE 3

Tooth and Claw

SAKI

Retold by Rosemary Border

Conradin is ten years old. He lives alone with his aunt. He has two big secrets. The first is that he hates his aunt. The second is that he keeps a small wild animal in the garden shed. The animal has sharp white teeth, and it loves fresh blood. Every night, Conradin prays to this animal and asks it to do one thing for him, just one thing.

This collection of short stories is clever, funny, and shows us 'Nature, red in tooth and claw'. In other words, it is Saki at his very best.

BOOKWORMS • CLASSICS • STAGE 3

The Wind in the Willows

KENNETH GRAHAME

Retold by Jennifer Bassett

Down by the river bank, where the wind whispers through the willow trees, is a very pleasant place to have a lunch party with a few friends. But life is not always so peaceful for the Mole and the Water Rat. There is the time, for example, when Toad gets interested in motor-cars – goes mad about them in fact . . .

The story of the adventures of Mole, Rat, Badger, and Toad has been loved by young and old for almost a hundred years.

'Who, Sir? Me, Sir?'



Sam Sylvester is a teacher who wants his class to have ambition, and to do great things in life. So he enters them for a sporting competition against the rich students of Greycoats School.

The team that he has chosen for the competition think Sam has gone crazy. 'Who, Sir? Me, Sir?' says little Hoomey, his eyes round with horror. 'We'll never beat Greycoats,' the others cry. 'Never in a million years!'

But you don't know what you can do – until you try ...

[Word count 10,295]



Text adaptation by Diane Mowat
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