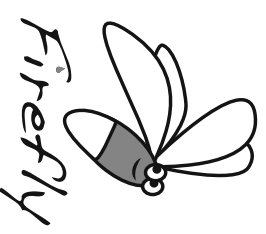


Mr Mahli's Shed
and the ghost of
Dylan Thomas

by

Laura Sheldon



One

Mr Mahli

Everybody likes Mr Mahli. Some old men can be grumpy and disagreeable; they scowl at noisy children and bark back at yappy dogs. Some old men are nice enough but no one really notices them. They shuffle along in flat caps and beige jackets like slow-moving milk floats. I bet you know a few of these. Perhaps one or two even live on your street. But I'd be very surprised if you know their names.

Mr Mahli is different. If you have a Mr Mahli on your street then you are one lucky person, because (as you may have heard people say before) everybody likes Mr Mahli.



Why? I hear you ask. Well, let me tell you. You know when you're walking down the street with your mum and you meet another grown-up that you know. They stop and say 'Hello' and they chat to your mum. They might look at you and say 'Hello there!' and you notice that they change their voice ever so slightly (usually make it just a bit higher) and they smile with their mouths and then go right back to talking to your mum? Well, Mr Mahli is the total opposite of this. When he meets children he knows, he doesn't just think 'small person alert: must smile, nod and ignore', he actually knows their names, what they love doing best, what they are totally mega-brilliant at and sometimes the things they may be a teensy bit rubbish at too. So he talks to the kids just like he talks to the adults, and some adults would be surprised at how this makes him stand out.

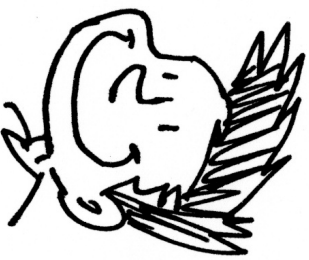
He also knows tricks, magic tricks. You can be walking past his house, minding your own business, when you might spot something very strange like a tiny bright-red rabbit or something hopping out of

the gate. You tip-toe up to it, put out a cautious hand to stroke it and POUFF! It turns into a silky red handkerchief and Mr Mahli is leaning over his fence, chortling merrily at you.



Sometimes he makes you laugh when you least expect it. Take last March for instance. It was the St David's Day Eisteddfod down at the town hall and it was all getting a bit boring. Dafydd Holmes had the microphone and had just discovered how soothing yet exciting he found the sound of his own

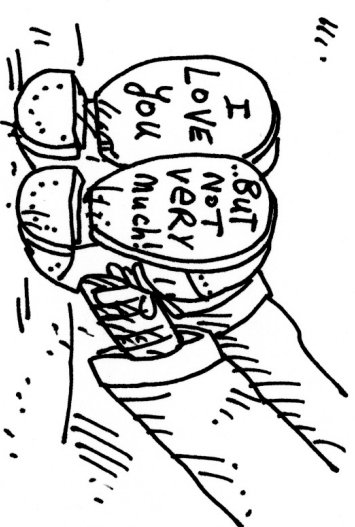
voice. Nine-year-old Tomos Brown was sitting next to his Nan Taylor (whom Mr Mahli always describes as a bit of a hottie) and Mr Mahli was sitting opposite them on a chair next to the stage. He was waiting to present the cup to the winner in the over-90s' category.



Tomos looked over at Mr Mahli who winked, then widened his brown eyes and nodded towards Tomos' Nan. Tomos gave her a nudge and pointed at Mr Mahli. As she turned her head to look at him, he

stretched out one leg and flexed his foot at Nan Taylor. On the soul of his shoe he had written in black biro the words 'I love you'. Nan chuckled quietly, blushed and shook her head. Satisfied, Mr Mahli lowered his leg. But before Nan could turn back to the stage he had lifted his other leg, baring the sole of the other shoe, on which was written '...but not very much'. Tomos heard his Nan breathe in quickly

and when he looked at her face he saw she was trying desperately not to laugh.



Two

The Shed

Anyway, that is just what Mr Mahli was like. Fun. He lives on Hillside Crescent and always has done since his parents moved to Swansea from India way back in Prehistoric Times. He told his young neighbour, Alys, that if he had been born in India he would have been a prince, but that gypsies had tried to capture his mother and she and his father had decided to flee the country and live in anonymity in South Wales.



His house is one of the neatest in the street. In the little front garden he has shaped the bushes into wild animals. He has a giant eagle, an African

elephant and a cat (which was supposed to be a panther). But the back garden is the best. He grows rows of plump shiny vegetables and fruits that smell amazing and fill the pockets of the children who come to play. He has a massive climbing tree that you can climb up then swing down, off a huge bendy branch. Right next to the house is a really deep pond with super-friendly fish that come up to the surface when the children throw food at them, gaping and snapping their little fishy jaws.

The only slightly spooky thing about the garden is the shed. Not the tool shed where Mr Mahli keeps his lawn mower and banana boat and things like that, but the old shed behind it. That was the only place where Mr Mahli had forbidden the children to play. A couple of times they had dared each other to stand on someone's shoulders and peek in, but they always came down disappointed and confused. That was the weird thing you see. The shed had nothing in it. There weren't even any tools or old flowerpots or spiders or anything else that people keep in their garden sheds.

It was totally

completely

empty.

So why did Mr Mahli have an empty wooden shed in his garden? Well, he actually had many explanations for this. That's what was so confusing. Every time somebody asked Mr Mahli about the shed he gave them a different story to explain why it was there, why nobody was allowed in and why it was always empty.

Here are two of my personal favourites:

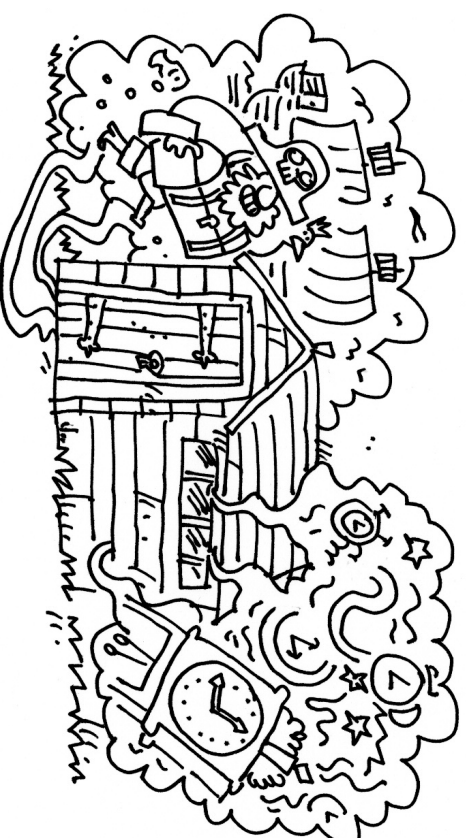
1. The Pirates' Shed

It actually belongs to the pirates who smuggled Mr Mahli's family out of India and he is honour-bound to keep it in his garden forever. Now and again the pirates bring treasure to hide in the shed, which is why no one must go in. The pirates are a ruthless

bunch and they would happily slit the throat of anyone they found in their secret shed.

2. The Time Machine

It is not actually a shed but a highly sophisticated time machine, painted to look like a shed. It looks like there's nothing in it because Mr Mahli used magic paint on the window to paint an 'inside-a-shed' scene in case of nosy parkers. He painted it empty so thieves wouldn't break in. If anyone steps inside the shed without the proper training and health and safety instructions they would instantly find themselves in India in 1923, which is where

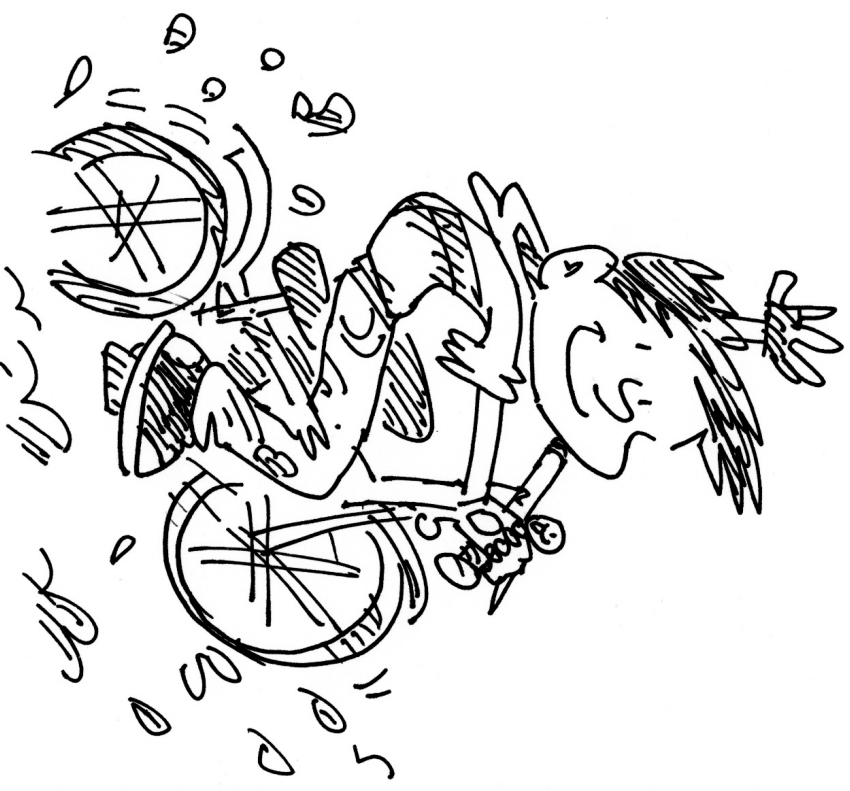


Mr Mahli came from. He flits between these two time zones because they are his favourite and the best and he should know because he has travelled throughout the Whole of Time.

Believe it or not neither of these stories were true. Tomos Brown found out the real reason for the shed the day after Mr Mahli went on holiday. And the truth was just as strange as the tales.

Three

TB



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