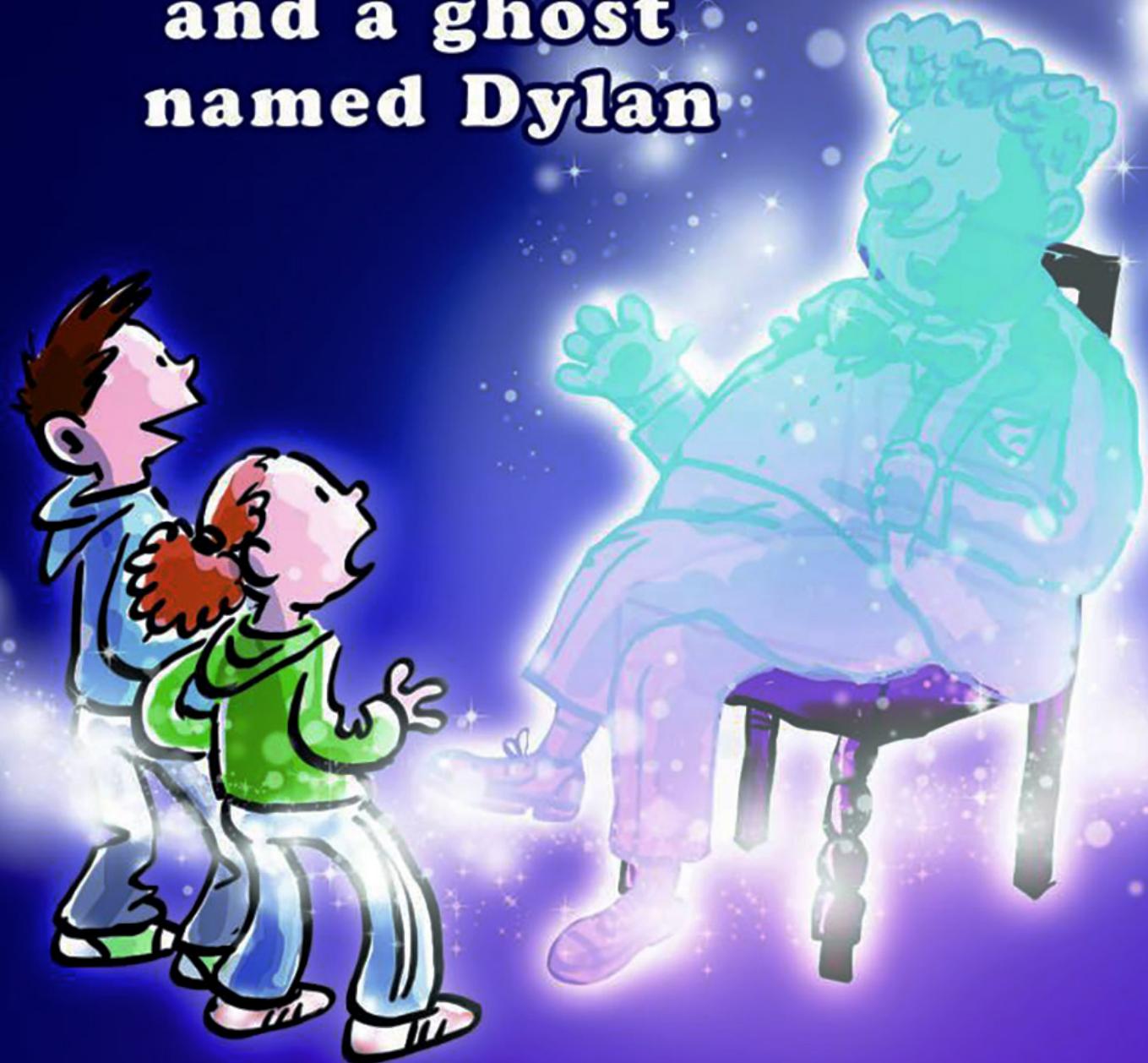




Mr Mahli's Shed

and a ghost
named Dylan

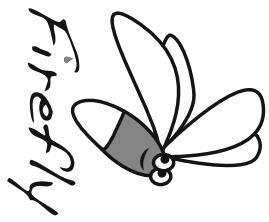


by Laura Sheldon
illustrated by Huw Aaron

Mr Mahli's Shed and the ghost of Dylan Thomas

by

Laura Sheldon



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Contents

Mr Mahli	1
The Shed	6
TB	11
Mr Mahli's Holiday	15
Breaking in	20
Dylan	26
A Very Strange Chat	35
Waitress Service	40
A School Trip	44
A Tiger Onesie	51



Toilet Monitors	59
A Little Close For Comfort	63
When you gotta go...	78
Mr Mahli's Return	82
Whatever's Happened to Mrs Best?	91
The Best Plan	98
Operation 'Dylan'	103
A Shed Load of Trouble	110
A Disgruntled Guest	116
A Welshman's Home is His Shed	122
Mr Mahli's Shed	131
Epilogue	136

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Eleni came back on her own. ‘Mrs Best, there’s no loo roll! Gemma’s well upset, she says she’s been sitting there for ages but she can’t get up ’cos she needs to wipe and she’s got no...’

‘Toilet paper, yes I understand, Eleni. Hang on,

I’ll get some out of the cu...’

‘I’ll get it, Mrs Best!’ called Alys, as she flew across

the room and barged through the cupboard door.

She presented the fresh roll of toilet paper to Eleni, who took it straight to her poor, stranded friend.

Alys saw her moment. Much to Mrs Best’s surprise Alys and then TB proudly volunteered to become Singleton School’s First-Ever Toilet Monitors.

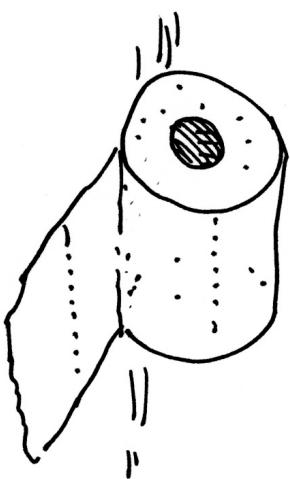
Playtime was the best time of day to collect fresh toilet supplies from the cupboard. Mrs Best always went to the staffroom for ‘medicinal purposes’ (coffee) and Alys was given the classroom key. On their first day in the job, Alys and TB ducked into the classroom and shut the door firmly behind them.

‘Dylan? It’s OK it’s us,’ stage-whispered TB, opening the cupboard.

‘Oh the bog monsters is it?’ came back the deep voice. ‘Feeling a little *flush* are we? Just a *wee* bit smelly aren’t you? Look at the state urine!’ Dylan laughed heartily at himself. The children just sighed.

Twelve

A Little Close For Comfort



'None of that makes any sense, Dylan. You're hysterical,' commented Alys, 'and not like *ha ha*.'

'Look Dylan, it's only a matter of time before you blow your cover,' said TB. 'I think we've got to make a plan to get you out of here.'

Dylan stopped chuckling straight away and folded his arms tightly across his chest. 'I'm not ready to go,' he announced, 'I like it here and I've not been any trouble. I'm actually starting to feel a little bit more ... substantial in this cluttered cupboard. I may want to stay.'

'But you can't stay!' cried Alys. 'You can't possibly stay in school forever. What about Mrs Best? What about the summer holidays?'

'And what about Mr Mahli?' finished TB.

The children stared at Dylan, waiting for his response. They fully expected an argument. But Dylan lowered his arms (or raised them as he was upside-down in his chair on the ceiling) and suddenly looked sad.

'Mr Mahli,' he repeated. 'Yes, I suppose I'd almost forgotten about him. He's been a good friend to me

that man. A good host. A man with no questions you know? A comrade.' Dylan nodded to himself as he thought about what he should do. After a couple of seconds he brightened. 'Well, we've got a week left haven't we? If the date on that board is correct, Mahli won't be back 'til then. So, we may as well keep me here for now. You two can come and check on me when you collect your ... supplies, and I'll stay quiet as a spider the rest of the time.'

Alys and TB had to agree with this. One more week seemed perfectly reasonable. And if either of them were faintly suspicious of Dylan's promise, they didn't share it with the other and the pair left the cupboard and the classroom and went out to play, feeling ever-so-slightly uneasy for the rest of the day.

It was during English the next day that things started to go wrong. Mrs Best was out for the morning doing some sort of training and a supply teacher called Miss Terry was teaching instead. Danny Gerard had found this very amusing and tried calling out, 'It's a Miss Terry!' as the answer to

every question but Miss Terry was more stern than mysterious and had quickly threatened him with a trip to the head teacher if he ‘continued with that nonsense’.

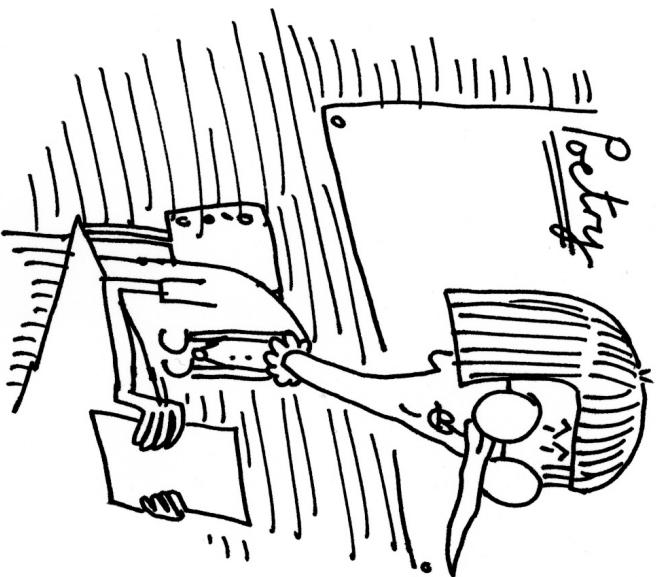
‘What are adjectives?’ began Miss Terry. Polly Peter knew. She always knew stuff like that.

‘Describing words, Miss,’ she announced.

‘Correct,’ affirmed Miss Terry. ‘Because you are looking at our solar system in your topic work, I’d like you to write a poem, using adjectives, to describe a planet. You write the name of the planet in capital letters down the side of your page, like this.’ She demonstrated writing the word SATURN vertically down the page. ‘Then you have to think of a word beginning with each letter, to start a sentence to describe the planet. Off you go now please. And do it without a sound.’

After this, she sat down and pulled the pile of maths books in front of her and began to mark them swiftly, with harsh red pen.

Polly had already started, as had Amelia and David. But the rest of the class looked a little



stumped. Alys leant over to TB and whispered, 'How am I supposed to describe a planet when I have no idea what it looks like or anything?'

'I know,' replied TB. 'I haven't got a clue. And look at Katie!' The children glanced over to where Katie was sitting to see a big fat tear land 'plop!' on her book. Katie couldn't do stuff like this on her own, Mrs Best always helped to start her off.

Dylan watched from the cupboard. He shook his head at the stern teacher, who seemed unaware of the crying child, and at the sight of the silent classroom where the children struggled to think of anything to write. The more he watched, the angrier he became. He stared at the word 'Poetry' boldly written on the board, giving a bad name to his favourite thing. He heard the boy nearest to the cupboard mutter to his friend, 'I hate poetry.' And that was that. Dylan squeezed his body out of the crack in the door and walked to the front of the class.

TB and Alys looked up in shock. 'No, don't!' cried TB before he could stop himself and Alys leaped to

her feet. Miss Terry jumped up in surprise too, but her surprise was at the children, she didn't see the man standing by her side.

'What on earth are you two doing?' Miss Terry demanded. It took TB a couple of seconds (wide-open mouthed ones) before he could answer. Desperately looking around the class, he saw that all the other children were looking at him not at Dylan. His eyes stopped darting about and landed on Katie. 'It's Katie, Miss Terry. We were worried about her and thought she might be sick.'

Miss Terry frowned and turned to face Katie who, (luckily for TB and Alys) was still sniffling and dropping tears on her book. 'Are you going to be sick, Katie?' Miss Terry asked with a grimace on her face. Katie saw a way out and nodded. 'Well then, take yourself off to the toilet, girl. Goodness me, we don't want a classroom full of sick people do we?' snapped the teacher. And poor Katie pushed her chair back and legged it.



Dylan stood very close to Miss Terry as she stood before the class. 'Everyone else get back to work,' she ordered, 'and no more rude disruption from you two.' She pointed the pen she was holding directly at TB and Alys and scowled at them. They sat down slowly, watching Miss Terry and Dylan all the time.

Dylan cleared his throat loudly. Alys and TB gasped quietly at the sound of Dylan's cough and a few children looked up sharply. Miss Terry shivered suddenly and turned towards the open door. As she got up to close it, Dylan seemed to muster all his

strength and swung his arm round like he was bowling in a cricket match. To Alys and TB's surprise the pen shot straight out of Miss Terry's hand with such force that it hit the ceiling before falling to the ground.

'What ... what?' Miss Terry looked at her hand, then at the pen on the floor, then back to her hand several times. 'Who did that?' she demanded, and narrowed her eyes at the children closest to her. Dylan smirked and moved closer to her again. He took a deep breath and blew, as hard as he could, on the back of her neck. Miss Terry's dark hair flew forward over her face and she screamed sharply as she ducked behind the desk. The children were confused and surprised but they couldn't help laughing at the sight of Miss Terry cowering behind her chair.

'Stop it at once!' she shrieked. 'Whoever is doing that, just stop it at once!' This wasn't the best thing to say to Dylan, who was really enjoying Miss Terry's reaction. With an elaborate sweep of his arms he pushed the books and papers off Mrs



Best's desk. Miss Terry screamed again and the children jumped out of their chairs to get a better look. They watched in amazement as Miss Terry flapped around amongst the books, trying to get to her feet. The ones who were looking also saw a whiteboard pen lift up from the desk all by itself and hover over to the board. They were too surprised to call out to the rest of the class and just watched with open mouths and held breath as the pen put a wobbly line straight through the word 'Poetry' on the board.

Alys watched Dylan run to the other end of the classroom, holding his side and laughing like a moped engine. Suddenly he stopped and his face lit up. I don't mean like your face lights up on Christmas morning when you see your stocking, but really and truly lit up, as though a hundred tiny LED lights had been turned on underneath his skin. Alys pulled TB towards her,

'Look!' she urged 'look at him!'

TB pulled his gaze away from Miss Terry. The rest of the class were transfixed by her and were torn

between helping, laughing or running to the toilet because the laughing had got too much.

'Woah!' exclaimed TB 'what's he doing?' Dylan's glowing expression had turned quite serious. He seemed to be concentrating really hard on something. His body was crouching slightly and his hands were bunched into white fists. 'Oh no. What if it was all too much?' TB hissed in Alys' ear. 'What if something's happening to him? Should we go over?' 'No! Just stay put TB. He doesn't look upset or anything. He just looks as though he's ... I dunno ... trying to do something.'

'Uh, oh.' TB said quietly.

Miss Terry had finally managed to stand up and was ordering some of the children closest to her to pick up her books and pens. Her dark hair flew around her face wildly and her glasses sat at a jaunty angle on her hooked nose. She straightened her clothes and looked around for her left shoe. She was about to send someone to fetch the head teacher when there was a shout from the back of the classroom where Aled Phillips was sitting.

'Hey!' he called, 'check this out!' He held up a small piece of white paper. 'It just landed on my head! It says "kel... cel... celestial serenity", Molly! You've got one too!' Molly reached up to the crown of her head and picked up the paper she found there.

'Mine says, "Spiralling in the deep and silent darkness"!' she exclaimed. The children looked up at the ceiling and were amazed to see - with the slow-motion mistiness of a dream - little pieces of paper floating down like snowflakes all around them.

Soon the classroom was full of shouts of delight as the children read their paper flakes aloud and ran through them, holding out their arms and kicking the ones that had made it to the floor. Miss Terry took off her glasses and stared. Dylan had stopped glowing and sat with his arms on his bent knees, smiling like a child at the scene before him.

'Where did they come from?' people were shouting.

'What's happening?'



'Is it magic?'

'Magic,' repeated TB 'yes, it's certainly that.' Miss Terry closed her mouth (it was feeling a little dry as she'd been holding it open for some time now) and started to clap her hands and call to the children to sit down and calm down. But the noise was too great and the children didn't really hear her. Suddenly Molly ran over to the board and stuck her paper as high up as she could reach.

'It's a poem!' she shouted 'look, I've started it. They're little pieces of poem. I think we have to put them together.'

The children started to move back towards their seats, their little bits of paper gathered in their hands like pirate treasure. Joseph was next to get the idea. He stuck his paper next to Molly's, 'Listen to this,' he called and grandly read the beginning of the poem to the class. 'Who's next?' he asked. 'Miss Terry, this is brilliant.'

Miss Terry stood up and began to speak but she was drowned out by Alys who ran to the board with a piece of paper she'd found on her shoulder.

'Floating sphere of perfect symmetry,' she blurted as she added the paper to the poem.

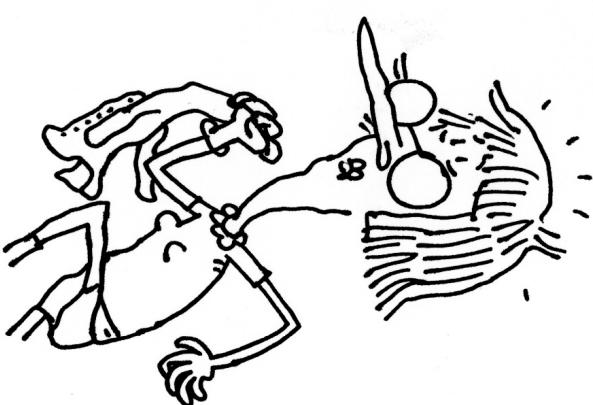
'Woo-hoo!' called TB and clapped his approval loudly.

'Miss Terry,' said TB, 'this is the best poem lesson ever. Clap for Miss Terry everyone!'

The class joined him in a muted round of applause. Miss Terry had never had a clap before. She'd never had anyone say her lesson was 'the

best' before. She pursed her lips and nodded tightly.

The class continued to build the poem. They kept reading it and adding to it and moving it about until the bell went for lunchtime. Miss Terry watched them go, then ran, out of the classroom, out of the school and all the way home to cwtch her old teddy under the bed covers for at least twelve hours.



Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs

About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,

The night above the dingle starry,

Time let me hail and climb

Golden in the heydays of his eyes,

And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns

And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves

Trail with daisies and barley

Down the rivers of the windfall light.

