

BILL'S NEW FROCK

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**CHAPTER 2 AND 3
A PRIMARY 5 NOVEL STUDY**

The wumpy choo



Outside in the playground a few boys were already kicking a football about. Bill Simpson was just about to charge in and join them when he remembered what

he was wearing. He'd look a bit daft if he took a tumble, he decided. Maybe just for once he'd try to think of something else to do during playtime.

Each boy who ran out of the school joined the football game on one side or another. What did the girls do? He looked around. Some perched along the nursery wall, chatting to one another. Others stood

in the cloakroom porch, sharing secrets and giggling. There were a few more huddled in each corner of the playground. Each time the football came their way, one of them would give it a hefty boot back into the game. There were two girls trying to mark out a hopscotch frame; but every time the footballers ran over the lines they were draw-

ing, they scuffed the chalk so badly that you couldn't see the squares any longer.

But it was rather chilly just standing about. The dress might be very pretty, but it was thin, and Bill's legs were bare. He decided to join the girls in the porch. At least they were out of the wind.

As he came up to them, Leila was saying: 'Martin bets

no one dares kick a football straight through the cloakroom window!

The girls all looked at the cloakroom window. So did Bill. As usual, the caretaker had pushed up the lower half of the window as far as it would go. It made quite a large square hole.

'*Anyone* could kick a football through there,' scoffed Kirsty.

'I could,' said Astrid.

'Easy,' agreed Leila.

'What do you get if you do it?' Bill asked them.

'A wumpy choo.'

'A wumpy choo?'

Bill Simpson was mystified.

'Yes,' Leila told him.

'A wumpy choo.'

Bill glanced round the little group of girls. Nobody else looked in the least bit baffled. Presumably they all knew about wumpy choos – what-

ever they were.



'I didn't know you could get wumpy choos round here,' said Flora.

So they were rare, were they? Like giant pandas.

'I'd *love* a wumpy choo,' said Sarah. 'But I'm not allowed because I'm allergic.'

Definitely an animal, then. A furry one. Bill's next-door neighbour was allergic to furry animals, too.

'What colour is it?' asked Astrid. 'Is it a pink one?'

If it was still pink, thought Bill, it was probably a baby and hadn't grown a lot of

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The news, he noticed, spread like wildfire all along the line of girls perched on the nursery wall, and into the little huddles in the corners of the playground. All the girls turned to watch someone have a go at kicking a football straight through the cloak-room window.

‘What’s the bet?’ they asked one another.

‘A wumpy choo.’

Right then, thought Bill. No reason to hang about. It was a simple enough shot. All he needed was a football.

He walked towards the footballers in order to borrow theirs for a moment. Just as he did so, the game happened to swing his way and several boys charged past – knocking Bill flat on his back on the tarmac.

‘Get out of the way!’
‘We’re playing here!’

Bill picked himself up. He was astonished. Usually if anyone walked into the football game, the players just thought they’d decided to join in. ‘Come in on *our* side!’ they’d yell. ‘Be our goalie! Take over!’

This time it was as if they weren’t so much playing football around him as *through* him.

‘Get off the pitch!’
‘Stop getting in our way! Go *round*!’

It was the frock again! He knew it!
‘I want the ball,’ yelled Bill to all the other players. ‘I just want to borrow it for a minute – for a bet!’

Games always stopped for bets. It was a rule. But they all acted as if they hadn’t even heard him.

‘Out of our way!’

‘You’re spoiling the *game*!’

The ball happened to bounce Bill’s way again, so he leaped up and caught it in his hands.

‘I *need* it,’ he explained. ‘Just for a moment.’

The footballers gathered in a circle round him. They didn’t look at all pleased at this interruption of the game. In fact, they looked

rather menacing, all standing there with narrowed eyes, scowling. If this was the sort of reception the girls had come to expect, no wonder they didn’t stray far from the railings. No wonder they didn’t ask to play.



‘Give the ball back.’

Rohan was really
glowering now.

‘Yes,’ Martin agreed.
‘Why can’t you stay
in your own bit of the
playground?’

Mystified, Bill asked
Martin, ‘What bit?’

‘The girls’ bit, of
course.’

Bill looked around.
Girls were still
perched along the
nursery wall. Girls
were still huddled in
the porch. Girls still
stood in tight little

groups in each corner.
No girl was more
than a few feet into
the playground itself.
Even the pair who had
been trying to mark
out the hopscotch
game had given up
and gone away.

‘Where’s that,
then?’ asked Bill.

‘Where’s the girls’ bit?
Where *are* the girls
supposed to play?’

‘I don’t know,’
Martin answered
irritably. ‘*Anywhere.*

Just somewhere we’re
not already playing
football.’

‘But you’re playing
football all over
every single bit of the
playground!’

Martin glanced up
at the clock on the
church tower next
door to the school.
There were only two
minutes left before
the bell rang, and his
team was down by
one tiny goal.

He spread his hands

in desperation.

‘*Please* give the ball
back,’ he pleaded.

‘What’s it worth?’

For the life of him
Bill Simpson couldn’t
understand why, if
Martin wanted the
ball back so badly,
he couldn’t just step
forward and try to
prize it away from
his chest. Then he
realised that Martin
simply didn’t dare.
The two of them
might end up in a bit

of a shoving match,
and then a real fight
– and *no one* fights
someone in a pretty
pink frock with fiddly
shell buttons.

So he said cunningly:

‘I’ll tell you what
it’s worth. It’s worth
your very last wumpy
choo!’

To his astonishment, Martin looked delighted.

‘Done!’ he said
at once, and began

digging deep in his
trouser pocket.

He handed a tiny,
wrapped rectangle
over to Bill.

‘There you are,’ he
said. ‘Here it is. Now
give me the football
and get off the pitch!’

Bill Simpson looked
down.

‘What’s this?’ he
asked.

‘It’s what you
wanted,’ Martin said.
‘My very last 1p chew.’

In silence, Bill

Simpson handed over
the football. Where
he’d been clutching
it tightly against his
chest, there was now
an enormous brown
smudge.

In silence, Bill
Simpson turned and
walked away. If all

the girls had not been
standing around the
edges of the play-
ground watching
him, he would have
cried.



CHAPTER 2

Why did Bill decide not to play football?

How did Bill get knocked to the ground?

What happened when Bill tried to borrow the ball?

What area of the playground did the girls have to play on?

What did Martin give Bill?

Pink, pink, nothing but pink



After break, it was art. Everyone helped to unfold the large plastic sheets and lay them over the table tops, and spread old

newspapers over them. Then Mrs Collins sent Leila into the dark cupboard at the back of the class-room to see what was left in the art supplies box.

‘Are there any coloured chinks left?’

‘No, they’re all gone.’

‘Pastels, then.’

‘They’re still too damp to use after the roof leak.’

‘What about clay?’

‘It’s all dried up.’

‘There must be crayons. *Every* class has crayons.’

‘The infants came and borrowed ours last week, and haven’t brought them back yet.’

‘Right, then. It will just have to be paint, as usual.’

So Leila dragged the heavy cardboard box full of paint tubs out of the cupboard, and everyone crowded

round to choose their colours.

‘Here’s a pink.’

‘What’s that one?’

‘Pink.’

‘More pink.’

‘Pink.’

‘I’ve found some blue – no, I haven’t. It’s empty.’

‘I thought I’d found some green, but it’s dried up.’

‘There’s no white. There’s never any white. We haven’t had white for years and

years.'

'There's some pink here.'

'And this one's pink.'

'Pink, pink, nothing but pink!'

Everyone stood up, disappointed. Kirsty voiced everyone's disgust.

'What can you do with pink?' she demanded. 'You can't paint pink dogs or pink space vehicles or pink trees or pink bat-

tlefields, can you? If you can only find one colour, it's difficult enough. But if you've only got pink, it's practically *impossible*. What is there in the world that's all pink?'

'Yes. What's all pink?'

Everyone gazed around the room, looking for something that was all pink so they could paint it. Some of them stared at the pictures and

posters pinned on the classroom walls. Other gazed out of the window, across the playground to the street and the shops. One or two of them glanced at one another –

And Kirsty looked at Bill.

'No!' Bill said. 'No, no, no! Not me! Absolutely not! You can't!'

Now everyone turned to look at Bill.

'No!' Bill insisted. 'I

am *not all pink!*'

Now Mrs Collins, too, was inspecting Bill closely.

'Pink frock,' she admitted slowly. 'And fiery hair. Rich rosy freckles and a nice deep blush. Yes, you'll do beautifully, dear. You're all pink.'

'I am *not pink*.'

But he was getting pinker by the minute. And by the time everyone had wandered back to their seats

clutching their little plastic tubs of paint, you wouldn't have needed any other colour to do a really fine portrait of him.



'Perfect!' said Mrs Collins.

And taking Bill Simpson firmly by the hand, she tried to lead him over towards

a chair in the middle of the room, where everyone would be able to see him clearly while they were painting him.

Bill tried to pull back. Mrs Collins turned in astonishment at his unwillingness, and let go of his hand quite suddenly. Bill staggered back – straight into Nicky who had just prised the top off his paint tub.

A huge glob of pink paint flew up in the air and landed on Bill Simpson's frock. As everyone watched, it gathered itself, all fat and heavy at the bottom. Then, slowly, it slithered down between the folds of material, leaving a thick pink slug trail.

Bill Simpson watched in silence as a small pool of pink paint appeared on the floor, beside his left

foot.

Grubby fingerprints round the hem; a huge muddy smudge on the front; a great slimy paint smear down the side. What next?

Mrs Collins inspected the damage, and shrugged.

'Well, never mind,' she said. 'It's only poster paint. I'm sure the frock will wash out beautifully.'

And, once again,

she took his hand.

There was no fight left in Bill Simpson. Meekly, he allowed himself to be led to the middle of the room.

Mrs Collins arranged him neatly and comfortably on the little wooden chair.

'There,' she said triumphantly, placing a cherry-coloured exercise book in one of his hands as a last

touch. 'All pink!'

She stepped back to admire her handiwork.

'Perfect!' she said again. 'Now is everyone happy?'

Bill Simpson could have tried to say something then, but he didn't bother. He reckoned there was no point. He knew that, whatever he said and whatever he did, this awful day would just keep sailing on

in its own way, as in a dream. A curse was on him. A pink curse. He was, of all things, haunted by a pretty pink frock with fiddly shell buttons. He might as well give up struggling. Like poor Rapunzel trapped in her high stone tower, he'd just sit quietly, waiting to see what happened, hoping for rescue.



Meanwhile, the rest of the class had begun to complain.

'If we've only got pink to paint with, how are we supposed to do that great big football-shaped smudge on the front

of the frock? It's
brown!'

'I can't paint all
those grubby little
fingerprints right
round the hem of the
dress, because they're
grey.'

'Those shell but-
tons are a bit fiddly to
paint!'

'I've done far too
many freckles. What
shall I do?'

'Wait till they're
dry, then chip some
off!'

Bill ignored every-
one. He just sat there,
waiting for time to go
by. Even a bad dream
couldn't last forever.
His torment had to
end some time, surely.

After half an hour
or so, Mrs Collins
came by, carrying a
fresh jar of water over
to table two.

'Do try not to look
quite so *gloomy*, dear,'
she murmured in
Bill's ear as she walked
past. 'You're spoiling

people's paintings.'

And Bill was too
miserable and de-
feated even to bother
to scowl at the back
of her head as she
moved off.



CHAPTER 3

What lesson was it after Art?

What did they find that was all pink?

What left a thick pink slug trail?

What did the class complain about?

Why was Bill "spoiling people's paintings"?