

THE MOST BRILLIANT IDEA

Tom was into hanging out with his gang. His best mates Lewis and Jamil were in the gang too. Jamil walked like a hip-hop artist and everyone said Lewis could be in the England squad, that he could even be the next John Bellingham.

Sometimes the other kids picked on Lewis. They said it was because Lewis talked funny. But Lewis couldn't help it if he had a lisp. Tom quickly told *them*. He always stuck up for kids who were being hassled and people listened to him. That was why he was the leader.

Tom wasn't into bullies. He wasn't into steak and kidney pie. He wasn't into school and he definitely wasn't into literacy.

'I want you all to write a story about going on a journey,' Mr Peterson said and handed out worksheets to the class.

When Tom looked at the words on the page, they swam around like the tadpoles in the pond on the wasteground. He tried to write a story. He really tried. He had ideas but they seemed to get lost somewhere between his head and the paper. It was like the words were locked up inside him and he couldn't find the key.

Tom scrunched up his piece of paper and threw it on the floor in anger. Then the bell rang. 'Finish your story off for homework. You can share them with the rest of the class tomorrow.'

Tom's head ached. He slunk across the classroom. Mr Peterson stopped him at the door. 'Just write what you can Tom.'

All the way home, Tom worried about his story. Perhaps it would snow so much that school had to be cancelled. No, it didn't snow in June. Perhaps none of the teachers' alarm clocks would go off and there would be nobody to teach them.

He sat down to write his story but his mum was watching Edward and Julie and the noise was putting him off. Tom chewed his pencil and tried to think.

Ten minutes later, his page was still empty.

Perhaps giant mutated ants would take over the country and the Prime Minister would tell people, 'Under no circumstances should you leave your homes'. Perhaps a volcano would push its fiery head through the school floorboards in Class 5. And there would be nowhere except the hall to work so they would all have to do PE instead.

'Dashed,' 'dissed,' 'danger'. The words floated to him from the telly. Tom looked up. The man on the telly looked quite cool. 'Stealth', 'stewed', 'suuucked,' the man said and a strange sensation took over Tom's body.

Tom felt like he was being stretched out of his seat and towards the TV. It wasn't a horrible feeling exactly but...

...But before he had a chance to decide what kind of feeling it was, Tom was sucked right out of his seat, whirled through the glass screen, through a million coloured cubes, through a noise like an electric tornado until he landed...on the floor beside the man on the telly.

The man didn't look surprised at all to see Tom standing next to him. 'Jimmy,' the man said, holding out his big hand, 'pleased to meet you'.

'Tom' he said and shook Jimmy's hand. He followed Jimmy to the side of the studio where it was quieter, pleased to see that the camera operators were packing up their equipment. His mum would go off her box if she saw him on the telly.

'When I was at school,' Jimmy said, 'I thought creative writing was boring. Most of the stories we read were about posh Victorian children and I felt as if they had nothing to do with me and my life. Then when I was a teenager, I was really angry and I started writing for something to do. I wrote about things I was interested in, told stories about places I'd like to go and people I'd like to meet. I didn't use language like they used in those old-fashioned books and my spelling wasn't brilliant - it still isn't. I used the stuff I heard on the streets. And the weird thing was, people liked it.'

'So you write like you speak?' Tom asked.

'You've got it,' Jimmy said and gave Tom a high five.

As their hands slapped together, Tom felt himself being sucked away, whirled through the glass lens of the camera, stretched through electric wiring, through a million coloured cubes, through a noise like an electric tornado... and into his seat at the table.

Tom looked around him in disbelief. His mum was watching the News now and she hadn't even noticed he'd gone.

Tom didn't care. He was brimming with ideas and couldn't wait to get started. He wrote down some words. It took him a long time and they didn't quite seem to tell the story he wanted them to tell. What was he supposed to do now?

But then he had the most *brilliant* idea.

Tom pressed the stop button on his older brother's tape recorder and put down the mic. He had done it!

But then he remembered Mr Peterson's words and his headache came back. Mr Peterson meant he should read his story not play it on a stereo. Tom wondered what Jimmy would do. And then he knew.

Tom listened to the tape five times. Finally he could remember his story.

After lunch it was time to read out their stories. Lewis's story was about a trip to the seaside. Lorna's story was about a trip to the mountains and Jack's story was about a day in London.

Tom told his story without looking at a piece of paper. His story was about a journey into television sets, through tunnels of time and space to other galaxies. It was a voyage to planets made from candyfloss where thunder sang to rain's wicked beat. It was a journey to a place where nobody ever dissed anyone because of what they looked or sounded like or found difficult. It was a trip to a place where people only saw good in one another and alien teachers rapped in maths.

Afterwards Mr Peterson said he would help Tom with spelling and punctuation so he could write up his story.

Everyone's story had got a clap but the clap for Tom's was the loudest of all. Tom's grin grew so big that for a moment he thought it might take over the whole of his face. He still didn't like bullying and he still didn't like steak and kidney pie. But perhaps literacy wasn't so bad after all.

Story by Becky Cherriman and inspired by John Dixon's experiences of dyslexia.

See 'In the Picture' for an [animation](#) of this story by Carmel Brown.