

The Red Shoes

“Right, miss. We’re going to buy you some new shoes for school,” Mrs Shirley Jameson told her daughter, Matilda, standing outside a shoe shop.

Matilda moaned, “Do we have to?”

“Yes, we do.”

Matilda trudged behind her mum into the shop.

She disapproved of every shoe her mum showed her until she saw them: a pair of slightly heeled, red shiny shoes.

Perfect, Matilda thought, my class will be jealous.

“I want these,” she told her mum.

“They don’t look suitable for school. You could scuff them easily.”

“I want them,” Matilda demanded.

“OK. If they’re what you want, then I’ll find someone to help you try them on.”

“There’s no one here,” she stated.

“They’re probably out the back, so let’s wait,” her mum suggested.

After five minutes a bored Matilda said, “I can’t see anyone, so I’ll try these on myself,” and went to sit down.

As she bent to sit, a voice from behind asked, “May I help you, young lady?”

Startled, Matilda turned round to come face to face with a tall, stern looking lady with grey hair bunched on top of her head.

“Er...yes, my daughter would like to try on these shoes, please,” Shirley told her.

“Yes, madam. I see she’s already taken a seat. I’ll help her put them on.”

Matilda suspiciously watched the lady bend down in front of her, take off her old shoes and place her feet in the new ones.

Matilda got up and stood in front of the mirror to admire herself in them.

“Are you sure you want these?” the lady asked her. “We do have others in stock that are more suitable for children.”

“I want these,” Matilda told her. “Put them in a box.”

Intent on showing off her new shoes as she walked into the classroom on the Monday morning and chirpily greeted, “Hi,” Matilda didn’t see the raised eyebrows of the other children.

Matilda sat next to Sharon and whilst the teacher had her back to them, she pinched Sharon’s arm whispering, “You like my new shoes, don’t you?”

When no reply came, Matilda pinched Sharon again insisting, “You like them, don’t you?”

“Yes, they’re great,” Sharon relented.

“Thanks. I like your pen,” Matilda said, and went to grab it from Sharon. But as she touched it, Matilda felt a tingling in her feet.

She wiggled her feet under the table to get rid of the feeling. Her mum had told her that being new they’d probably hurt when she first wore them, so she took no notice of the pain.

During the rest of the lesson, Matilda didn’t feel any more pain and put it out of her mind.

It was now lunch time.

Matilda had already eaten her lunch, but was still hungry.

She spotted Sharon sitting on a bench, eating her packed lunch, and grinning, strolled over to her.

“What have you got today, Sharon?”

“Cheese and pickle,” Sharon replied.

“My favourite. Let’s try some,” and snatched half of Sharon’s sandwiches out of her lunch box.

“Yummy. You must thank your mum for making these for you,” and took another bite from the sandwich, licking her lips in front of Sharon, who was on the verge of tears.

She had eaten one triangle and was about to take a bite out of another, when she felt a tingle in her feet.

Intent on getting pleasure out of bullying Sharon, Matilda ignored the feeling, but with each bite, the tingling got worse and worse until Matilda felt really uncomfortable.

When she finished eating, she said, “Right, what else have you got? Chocolate digestives. I love those,” and grabbed them before Sharon could save them.

As Matilda bit into the biscuits, the tingling in her feet became sharp as though someone was sticking knives into her, and the shoes were starting to feel tighter by the second.

She was about to start the second digestive, when the pain got so bad that Matilda dropped the biscuit onto the ground.

She screwed up her face and hopped from one foot to the other.

“Ouch, ouch, ouch! They’re hurting me,” Matilda cried out.

Her cries were attracting attention and soon a crowd was looking her way. Some kids were smiling, others were pointing towards her and giggling.

Matilda wasn’t seeing any of this through the pain.

All she wanted was the pain to go away, so she dashed to the toilets, locked herself in and took her shoes off.

Ah, that felt better and wiggled her toes to free the agony.

Deciding it was just her imagination, Matilda returned to the class

She again sat next to Sharon, and behind the teacher’s back, stole Sharon’s pens and rubbers, and dropped them into her bag.

“Miss, Matilda’s just stolen my pens,” Sharon said.

“Give Sharon her things back, Matilda,” the teacher told Matilda.

“But, Miss. I haven’t got....,” Matilda was about to deny but couldn’t finish her sentence as a pain shot through her right foot.

“Ow, that hurt. Why’d you kick me?” she asked Sharon.

“I didn’t,” Sharon said.

Bending down under the table to rub the pain, she saw the pen sticking out of her bag which she was sure she’d put at the bottom.

Grabbing it, Matilda slammed it onto the table in front of Sharon saying, “Here’s your stupid pen.”

“Now Matilda, apologise to Sharon,” the teacher told her.

Matilda mumbled an apology but whispered, “I’ll get you back for this,” to Sharon.

And during break time, she found Sharon and demanded, “Right, I want to see what food you have in your bag. Tip it all out.”

Sharon hugged her bag close to her but Matilda pulled it out of her arms and tipped it upside down so everything fell onto the ground.

On seeing a bag of crisps fall to the ground, Matilda swooped on it and picking it up said, “Thought so. These are mine for kicking me in class.”

“But I didn’t,” Sharon said.

Matilda didn’t hear Sharon through her crunching away on the crisps.

But after eating just two crisps, Matilda felt a familiar pain in her feet,

With half the packet eaten, the pricking got so painful that Matilda hopped about in agony, and this time she heard the laughter. She saw everyone watching her and sniggering.

No, this wasn’t happening. How could they be laughing at her? She had to get out of here and ran through the crowd of girls and towards the toilets, where she locked herself in.

How could she face everyone now, being a laughing stock? What had caused her to make a fool of herself by jumping up and down in front of everyone?

She looked down at her feet. These shoes. They were the sole cause of her humiliation. They'd have to go.

She then heard the school bell ringing and groaned. She'd have to face her class now, knowing that they'd seen her act the fool.

She entered the classroom as quiet as a church mouse and didn't speak until spoken to for the rest of the day.

On the way home with her mum, Matilda got the tingling feeling in her feet again and wondered why.

She thought back to when it all started. And as she did, it slowly dawned on her what the shoes had been telling her.

She knew what she had to do then and said to her mum, "Could we go and see Sharon Watson, please?"

Thankfully it was Sharon who opened the door.

Matilda said, "Sharon, I'm sorry about bullying you and taking all your food. It won't happen again. Could we start afresh and be friends?"

Sharon looked at her uncertainly but gave her the benefit of the doubt and said, "OK, I'll give you one chance and that's it."

"Thank you."

When she got home, Matilda wrenched the shoes off her feet and chucking them into the cupboard said to her mum, "I'm not wearing those again. Could you take them back to the shop, please Mum."

"OK. We'll go at the weekend."

Only when they got there, there was an Indian restaurant instead, which was closed.

"We'll have to keep the shoes now," Shirley told Matilda.

"No, I don't want them."

Shirley walked into the next shop and asked the young lad behind the counter about the shoe shop.

He said, "There hasn't been a shoe shop there for twenty years. Not since my great-great grandmother died, who owned it."

Matilda went white when she heard this and croaked, "Was she tall and stern looking with bunched hair, your great-great granny?"

"Yes, that sounds like her. Why?"

Matilda felt sick and had a horrible lump in her throat. Surely she hadn't bought those shoes from a ghost?

She wasn't keeping them, that was definite. They were going in the bin.

But when they got home, the shoes were nowhere to be found and Matilda thought she heard laughter in the distance.