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To give you some inspiration we specially commissioned our Big City Read author Helen Cadbury to write her own flash fiction story, turn the page to read...

**The Red Bicycle, a Young Sean Denton Story  
by Helen Cadbury**

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Knowledge and Ideas for Everyone

# **The Red Bicycle, a Young Sean Denton Story**

## **by Helen Cadbury**

When Sean Denton set off for school, the bike was outside the back door.

'Nan! Who's left a bike out here?'

She came out, wiping her hands on a tea-towel.

'No idea,' she said. 'Why don't you ask around when you're at school? Meanwhile, I'll put it in the shed for safe-keeping. You'd better get going or you'll be late.'

At school, he mentioned the bike to all his friends, but nobody knew anything about it.

'Finders keepers,' Liam Jackson said. 'You've got yourself a new bike.'

Sean hoped he could keep it. He envied Liam his mountain bike. In Maths, Sean traced his finger along a graph, zig-zagging across the page, and imagined it was the track in the woods and he was chasing Liam through the trees. Then Miss Vernon was calling his name. He snapped back to the present and the bike faded away.

After school, Liam came home with him to look at the bike.

'It's mint!' he said. 'Proper off-road tyres and everything. Let's give it a try out!'

He went home to fetch his own bike and they set off. They rode fast through the woods and stopped near the quarry. Liam pulled two cans of pop out of his rucksack. Sean drank his down in one.

They rode on, racing round the tracks, until the light began to fade.

'We should be getting back,' Sean said. 'My nan's going to start worrying.'

Liam led the way across the main road, into the Chasebridge Estate, past the block of flats where Sean used to live with his dad, and alongside the playground where some big lads were sitting on the swings.

Suddenly, there was a shout: 'Oi, you thieving little toe-rag! That's my brother's bike!'

There were footsteps, people running, more shouts.

'Ride like the wind!' Liam screamed and whooped.

Sean followed him, his legs spinning round as fast as they could.

They skidded left at the bottom of the hill, turned right over the zebra crossing, and headed downhill to Nan's house.

They threw the bikes down and ran into the kitchen, panting.

'Come on!' Sean whispered, and led the way upstairs to his bedroom.

He didn't turn the light on, but crawled along the floor to the window, where he and Liam peeked out from beneath the curtain.

The street was empty. They watched, but nobody came.

'Sean?' Nan called up the stairs. 'Has Liam gone home yet? It's almost dark.'

Liam decided to leave his bike in Nan's shed, in case he was spotted, and hurried home on foot.

Ten minutes later there was a knock at the back door. Nan went to open it, while Sean hid in the living room. The voice he heard had a familiar ring to it, cracked with a cough and too much whisky. His dad.

Sean crept towards the kitchen and waited in the doorway.

'Why didn't you leave a note or something?' Nan was saying. 'Then Sean would have known it was from you.'

Sean stepped into the kitchen, cautiously.

'Do you like it, son? The little red bike?' Jack Denton said. 'I know I missed your birthday and I wanted to make it up to you.'

'Yes,' he said. 'It's ace. But where did you get it, Dad?'

'Off a bloke in the pub. Got it for a good price.'

Nan folded her arms and leant against the kitchen sink. She had a knowing look on her face.

'And where did he get it?' she said.

'Dad, some lads chased us from the playground. One of them said it belonged to his brother.'

His father stood up suddenly and the chair clattered to the floor.

'Are you saying I'm a thief?'

'No!' Sean cried. 'But maybe the man who sold it to you was.'

'I didn't come round here to be insulted by my son!'

His voice was full of menace and his hands were shaking.

'Come on, Jack,' Nan said, and took Jack by the arm, steering him towards the back door. 'We'll sort this out. Nobody's accusing you of anything. I'm sure Sean's very happy with the bike. It's the thought that counts.'

She put her hand in her apron pocket and pulled out a five pound note.

'Get yourself a couple of cans on your way home,' she said.

Jack took the money and grunted his thanks. He left without saying goodbye.

'Is it the thought that counts, Nan?'

'Well, your dad's not very big on thought. We'll have to do the thinking here and get that bike back without anyone getting hurt.'

In the morning they went out to the shed and looked at the bike. Sean noticed something he hadn't seen before. On the seat post, there was a yellow, smiley-face sticker, about four centimetres wide.

'I know,' he said. 'We'll put up signs by the playground and ask if anyone's lost a bike. They have to phone up and then we'll ask to describe any stickers they've added to the frame.'

'Distinguishing features,' Nan said. 'That's what's they say on the TV cop shows.'

After school, Sean walked down through the estate and saw Nan's hand-written signs on several lampposts. When he got home there was an older teenager, the one who'd chased them, talking to Nan by the back door.

'I'm Jake,' he said. 'Thanks for being so honest. Our kid will be made up to get this back.'

Sean nodded. He watched Jake wheel the bike out of the garden gate. He was sad to see it go.

'And thanks for the tea and jam tarts,' Jake said, over his shoulder, grinning at Nan. 'I've never had home-made ones before, they're mint!'

Sean and Nan looked at each other.

'Mystery solved,' she said.

'Maybe we should go into business,' Sean said, 'as private investigators.'

'Maybe you should get inside and get some homework done,' she said.

'Any jam tarts left?'

She ruffled his hair. 'One or two.'

'Thanks,' he said, 'I can't do my homework without them.'