

Stig at School

"I can't hang out with you today, Stig. I've got to go to school. They'll ring my parents if I don't and then I'll be grounded forever." Miming talking into a phone, I realised how futile it was. Stig didn't even know typewriters and dial-up phones, let alone modern technology.

"Me come," he answered while grabbing my school bag from me. He flung it onto his back, dusted down his rabbit fur trousers and stood up straight. "School. Stig go, too." To my horror, he spat into his hands and reached up to smooth down his unruly hair. "Stig ready," he beamed, showing his stumpy, blackened teeth.

I knew that there was no arguing with him. (I had learned that the hard way.) "Wait there," I commanded in a tone that I hoped was masterful – though my voice shook with uncertainty.

Within ten minutes, I had dashed home and back, bringing with the blue jumper and grey trousers that were worn as the uniform of my school. He squeezed into the clothes (while I tried not to wince at the sound of a breaking zip. What a heap of trouble I'd be in!). I had even persuaded him to have a quick wash with a wet wipe. Flies still buzzed around him but I hoped that no-one would notice that.

Walking in, I explained the rules. "Listen to Miss Brown; don't hit anyone; sit on your seat; don't eat the pencils....."

"Me know. Eat Miss Brown, sit on the pencils, listen to seat," Stig grinned, obviously pleased with himself.

I sighed. This was not my best idea.

Despite my fears, the day started smoothly. Miss Brown seemed to accept that Stig was a long-lost relative who could not be left at home. Her face clouded over when he responded to the register with a resounding grunt that made the other children laugh but she didn't make a comment. She tutted under her breath when – during the lunch register - Stig asked for 'squirrel' rather than spaghetti bolognese. Her eyebrows raised when he pulled a piece of slate and chalk out of his bag, rather than his reading record. However, we seemed to get away with it. (Fortunately, Stig was at the back of the class so she didn't notice that he was squatting – rather than sitting – on his chair.)

English lulled me into a false sense of security. Stig was very taken with all of the stabbings and murder in our study of Macbeth and Miss Brown loved his enthusiasm for the play. "Stab, stab, kill, kill," he shouted out and the teacher seemed to overlook the lack of hand up (or complete sentences).

"Yes, Stig, that's right," she answered. "We could all learn from Stig's excellent grasp of the themes of Shakespeare," she added. The rest of the class rolled their eyes in our direction, which made me very uncomfortable.

Maths was not so easy. Stig's knowledge of number is limited to the amount of fingers he has. (Number bonds to ten are not so helpful when dividing with fractions.) I had to physically restrain my friend from eating his maths book and, at one point in the lesson, I caught him attempting to make fire by rubbing two pencils together.

"Does anyone smell smoke?" Miss Brown queried. Again, all eyes swivelled our way.

"Er..no..." I answered, scratching my head. "I think it's my packed lunch. Mum put some dodgy cheese in my sandwich."

It was during lunch play that things got out of hand.

I had tried to explain the rules of 'tag' to Stig but I could tell that he hadn't been listening. The first time he was tagged, he growled so menacingly at the child that they fell into a faint and had to be carted off to first aid. Then, it was his turn to be 'it'. He raced on all fours towards Lacy Grieves and – before you could say 'wild boar' – she had been caught, tied up with a skipping rope and dangled by her ankles from the basket ball hoop.

"Stig, untie her immediately!" I yelled.

He looked pained at the fact that I had not appreciated his great hunting skills but did as I asked. Fortunately, Lacy had enjoyed the thrill of it, saying that it had been like a fairground ride. I bribed with my favourite pencil from Butlins not to tell anyone and thanked my lucky stars that the teachers had been more concerned with a hoo-ha on the football pitch.

It was during lunch that the adults began to realise that all was not as it seemed with my long-lost cousin (or had I said uncle? I couldn't remember my own story....) Stig's hair was breaking free of the confines of the pot of gel that had been slathered on it; he had somehow managed to divest himself of his socks AND his shoes; all manner of beasties seemed to follow in his wake – not just flies, but small mammals as well. Without a doubt, he was looking more cave boy than school boy.

After lining up with the others, Stig grabbed a fork and dangled it from his ear as a piece of makeshift jewellery. He then grunted dismissively at the knife that he picked up and proceeded to sharpen it with a piece of flint that he produced from his pocket.

"Errr....Stig...."

It was too late. He had leapt over the canteen counter, scattering steaming trays of baked potatoes and bowls of wobbling jelly, and had pinned a large bag of raw mince to the floor with his knife. Ripping it open, he was cramming the contents into his mouth. One dinner lady was silently screaming into her apron, another was dialling Rishi Sunak - the bravest was waving a wooden spoon in the interloper's general direction.

In all of the chaos, I managed to drag Stig away from the kitchen, away from the school and away from an almost certain night in jail. After that experience, I made a mental note to stick to the dump.

