



Category: Short Stories & Reflections
Winner: Timothy Stone
Title: Charlie

Charlie had had enough, he decided. His life was hell. He was, he declared to himself, an abused child and, if he could remember the phone number for that organisation which school made them learn, he would phone and get himself taken away to live a better life. The latest incident had occurred that morning and had ended with him storming out of the house yelling over his shoulder that he was never coming back. He was now in the den waiting for his mates.

The first to arrive was Davy who came through the hole in the bush on his hands and knees. It wasn't an easy entrance to make but it protected the den from rival gangs. However, it also left stains on the knees of trousers especially when the weather was wet and about which their mothers scolded them.

"We'll have to cut it back a bit" Davy said as the branches grabbed at his clothing. "I've torn my jumper and Mum'll go crazy again".

"My Mum goes crazy whether I've torn something or not" Charlie said glumly. "I've had enough, I'm leaving home, told them straight this morning"

Davy looked impressed. "Wow. What did they say?"

Charlie looked a bit awkward, "Oh they begged me not to go, but I told them enough was enough. It's just one continual moan. "Do this do that, why didn't you do this when I told you to". I'm sure slaves were treated better than I am."

Davy nodded. "I'm with you there. I wish I'd told mine the same thing this morning."

Charlie's face brightened up. "Why should you have to tell them. Just do it. We can do it together."

Davy was a little concerned but then brazened it out. "You're right. I think it will teach them a lesson and make them do things for themselves. You know what, my mum told me to get the washing off the line this morning and when I did, I was told off for just piling it into the washing basket." He added in a falsetto voice "You've creased it, can't you do anything right."

Just then, they heard talking and fell silent. Charlie recognised the voices. "It's alright, it's Splodge and Mick." Why he was called Splodge no-one knew, but it suited him. Slightly heavy, he always seemed a bit messy.

They crawled through the gap. "Blimey that's a squeeze Splodge said puffing exaggeratedly. "Time we did some tidying up around here."

“Oh don’t you start” said Charlie with feeling. “I get enough of that at home. In fact, Davy and me have decided to leave home.”

Mick was the timid one. “Leave home? Won’t your parents object?”

Charlie now more confident, laughed. “Oh they wouldn’t care, except they’d have to do more work themselves. I would at least get some peace instead of the continual moaning at me.”

Splodge was nodding. “I know what you mean. Can you believe my Dad made me clear the breakfast things off the table. I mean they all ate, why should I be the one. I think I might join you” He said with a confident smile.

“It’s down to you now, Mick” said Charlie turning to the smaller boy.

“Well I don’t know...” Mick said, hesitating.

“Oh don’t be a wuss. If we’re going to, you should too” Splodge coaxed.

“I mean, my parents make me do things but...”

“Oh typical mummy’s boy defending them and their fascist ways” Davy said nastily

“I wasn’t defending them” Mick said defending himself, “It’s just...”

“Are you with us or not” Charlie asked. “If not, you can leave. This camp is for the strong, not wimps.”

Mick’s defence crumbled. “Well if you put it like that, I’ll join you”

An hour later the boys were bored. They shared the sandwiches, which everyone but Charlie had brought, because he had stormed out and forgot to pick his up. Normally they would be partaking in a game of soldiers or climbing trees, but today they couldn’t find the energy for such things. The afternoon dragged on with the odd grumble from Charlie about his parents not moving to a city so he could watch live footie or having to have his haircut because his Nan was visiting. “I’d grow it down to my waist” he boasted.

By four o’clock the boys’ determination was wearing thin. Suddenly Davy gave a loud exclamation. “Oh no” he said with perhaps just a touch of overacting. “I’ve just remembered, I must be home at all costs tonight to look after the littl’uns as mum and dad are going out. I can’t let the babies down” and before anyone had a chance to say anything, he was through the rabbit hole and gone. It didn’t take Splodge long to make his own lame excuse and to burrow away quickly. Now only Mick and Charlie sat there, in silence.

Mick lasted until five before he apologised. “Sorry Charlie but I couldn’t put mum and dad through the worry, and suddenly Charlie was alone. It didn’t seem so much fun with no one else there and he was starting to feel cold and hungry. He knew there were no wild animals in the woods, but what about mad men?

Not long after Mick had left, Charlie crept away towards home, where he bumped into his mum by the back door.

“Tea’s not for another half an hour” she said “Take a couple of slices of bread with jam. Your brother and dad have gone down to the shop to get your Saturday night sweets.”

Nothing was said about the morning’s tantrum, no punishment seemed on the horizon.

He walked into the sitting room with its old but comfortable furniture. His mum had lit the gas fire giving a lovely warm glow to the room. He bit into his bread and jam as he switched on the telly and he smiled. It was good to be back home.