

THE AUTHOR

Billy Bob Buttons is a young talented author. On top of being a secondary school English teacher, he is also a pilot.

Born in the Viking city of York, he and his wife, Therese, a true Swedish girl from the IKEA county of Småland, now live in Stockholm and London. Their twin girls, Rebecca and Beatrix, and little boy, Albert, inspire Billy Bob every day to pick up a pen and work on his books.

When not writing, he enjoys tennis and playing 'MONSTER!' with his three children.

He is the author of the much loved, The Gullfoss Legends, Rubery Award finalist, Felicity Brady and the Wizard's Bookshop, UK People Book Prize runner-up, TOR Assassin Hunter and TOR Wolf Rising.

I Think I Murdered Miss is his ninth children's novel.

BILLY BOB BUTTONS' BOOKS

FELICITY BRADY AND THE WIZARD'S BOOKSHOP

GALIBRATH'S WILL
ARTICULUS QUEST
INCANTUS GOTHMOG
GLUMWEEDY'S DEVIL
CROWL'S CREEPERS

THE GULLFOSS LEGENDS

I THINK I MURDERED MISS

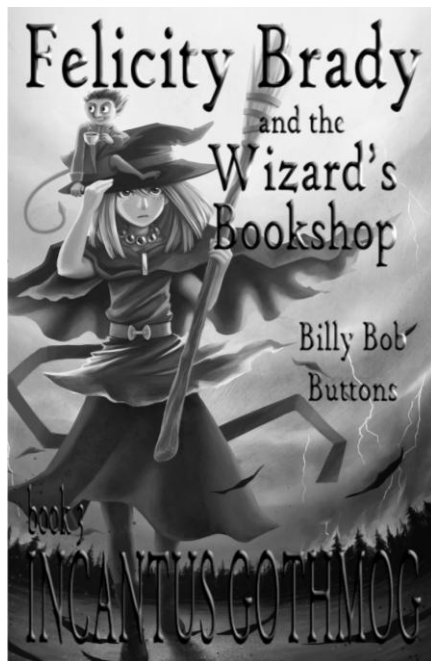
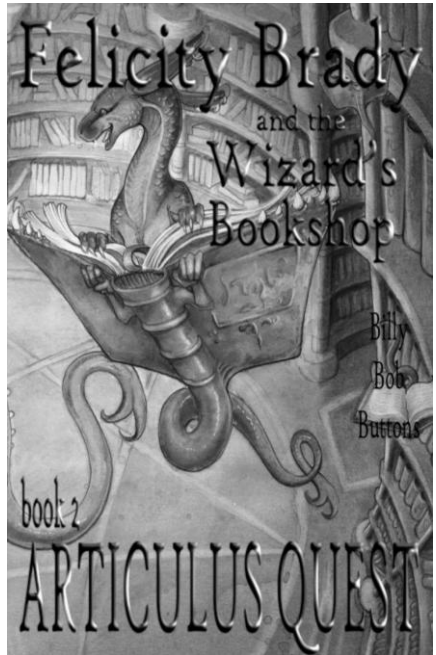
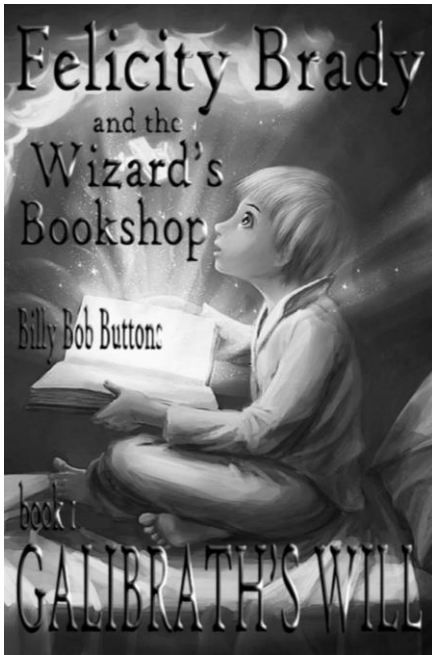
TOR
ASSASSIN HUNTER

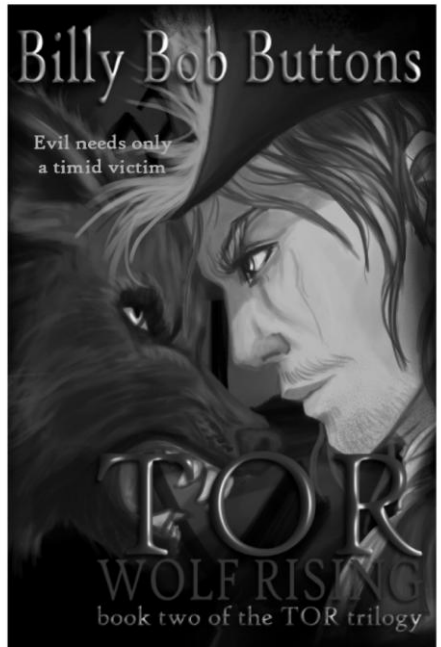
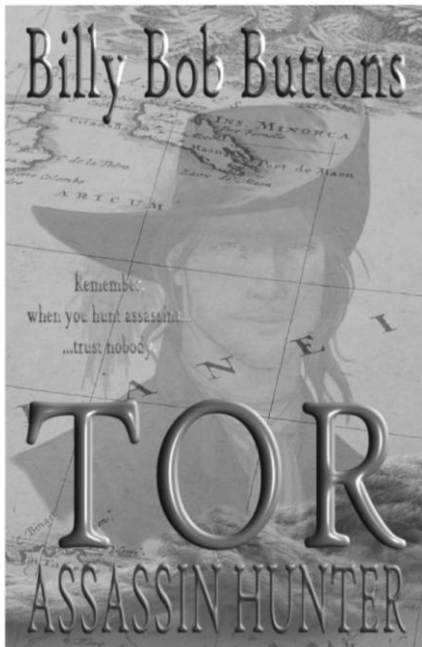
TOR
WOLF RISING

COMING SOON

TOR
MUTINY'S CLAW

MUNCHER CRUNCHER







THE WISHING SHELF PRESS

Copyright © 2013 THE WISHING SHELF PRESS, UK.
All rights reserved. 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the written prior permission by the author.

Published by THE WISHING SHELF PRESS, UK.

ISBN 978 0 9574767 8 3

www.bbbuttons.co.uk www.felicitybrady.co.uk

Printed and bound by BOOK PRINTING UK.

Edited by Alison Emery, Therese Råsbäck and Svante Jurnell.

Cover by Sarah Boxall. www.little-miss-boxie.com

Page 67/68. Quote from Star Trek II, The Wrath of Khan, Paramount Pics, 1982.

For Saleem and his wonderful family

NOTE

Simon, the hero of this book, has Asperger's syndrome. It is when a person finds it difficult to tell others what they need and how they feel. They also find it difficult to know how others feel and what is the 'normal' thing to do. Often, but not always, a person with Asperger's can be very, very clever and can have overly-strong interests. Simon, for example, is obsessed by Star Trek. Both children and adults can suffer from it.

Interested in Asperger's syndrome?

www.autism.org.uk



I Think I Murdered Miss

YESTERDAY



Chapter 1

A BIG SCARY NOTHINGNESS

MY NAME IS SIMON SPITTLE AND I THINK - NO, I KNOW, I murdered Miss Belcher. I don't carry a gun. Or a knife. Or even a toothpick, but yesterday, in French, I wished for her to be run over by a bus and, later that very day, she was. A big, red double-decker with yellow wheels and a picture of a clown on the bonnet.

Billy Bob Buttons

A Billy Smart's Circus bus.

I did not see it happen but Isabella did and she told me Miss left this world with an almighty 'SPLAT!' Up to sixty percent of a human body is water so I think 'SPLAT!' is probably correct.

My problem is, I don't like French. Or German. Or Spanish. Or even English. They upset me. The teachers tell me a rule; tell me how important it is to follow the rule, then they tell me when NOT to follow the rule. 'I before e,' they say. 'Jot this down in your book, Simon. I before e.' Then they say, 'Except.' 'Except after c,' they say. The word 'Except' exists simply to bewilder, puzzle and perplex. 'Except' upsets me terribly along with 'but', 'however', 'nevertheless' and 'willy-nilly'.

I like maths. And physics. And chemistry. $1+1=2$, $E=mc^2$, drop a spoonful of nitro-glycerine ($H_3H_5N_3O_9$)

I Think I Murdered Miss

on the floor and it will always, ALWAYS blow your foot off. No excepts, no buts, no however's and no willy-nilliness. Even history is OK. Lots of facts in history. The Battle of Hastings was in 1066. Thomas Crapper invented the loo. End of story. THE END! Lots of lists in history. I like lists a lot.

But French is messy and messy to me is like spiders to an arachnophobe. And Miss Belcher is - was, my French teacher. Not that she was from France. She was from Glasgow which is 896.21 kilometres from Paris. I know. I checked.

Anyway, I had French yesterday, my sixth class of the day, and she - Miss - was not in a very good mood. Isabella told me, so I knew. Isabella's smart, but in a different way to me, so she can always tell. I never can.

It was 2.15 on a Tuesday afternoon and this is what

Billy Bob Buttons

happened...

'Today we will work on verbs,' Miss Belcher barks, marching in. Everybody sits, stool legs scraping on the vinyl floor. Everybody but me.

'Kitty Maddocks, is that gum in your mouth? It is! Then swallow it, child. Anthony, sit up properly. PROPERLY!' She sniffs. She sniffs a lot. She's an habitual sniffer. Her eyes fall on me and she sighs. Then, in the French way, shortening the 'i', she says, 'Simon. Sit!'

Amid the sniggers and elbow nudging of the other kids, my bottom finds the top of the stool. But it is important she tells me or how will I know?

'Now! Pens down and TRY to copy my accent. After me. Chanter.'

'Chanter,' the class mutters back.

'No, no, NO!' She thumps her desk on the last

I Think I Murdered Miss

climactic 'NO'. 'With gusto, children. GUSTO! Now. Chanter.'

'CHANTER!' her students bellow.

Sullenly, I watch her. Not all of her, just her eyebrows. They always wriggle so and remind me of two furry caterpillars fighting on her brow. My eyes drift lower. She is very big-bosomed and very, very big-bottomed, and sort of reminds me of a bottle of Coca-Cola. A short bottle. I want to tell you how short but my ruler is only thirty centimetres long.

My gaze wanders to my desk and my...

Where IS my ruler?

'Simon!'

'SIMON!' the class howls back in unruly delight.

'No, no. Simon! Zip up your bag and put it on the floor.'

'I can't find my ruler,' I tell her. It is new; a birthday

Billy Bob Buttons

present from my dad. A Star Wars ruler with a Darth Vader sticker on it. I much prefer Star Trek to Star Wars but Dad will be upset if I can't find it.

Miss Belcher tuts and screws up her lips in such a way they remind me of a cat's bottom. 'You don't need your ruler. This is French, silly boy, not maths.'

'I wish it was maths,' I mutter into the murky depths of my satchel.

'Simon!' Blowing up like a bullfrog, she stomps over to me. 'Put your bag by your feet NOW! Or I will send you to Mr Cornfoot's room.'

Mr Cornfoot is the school janitor and his room is in the spidery cellar. Between 1751 and 1863, the school was a prison and they say murderers were kept down there.

But I just nod indifferently and glower at my desk. On it is my ink pen and two centimetres to the left of

I Think I Murdered Miss

my ink pen is my Starship Enterprise NCC-1701-shaped rubber. But two centimetres to the left of my rubber there is a

big

scary

NOTHINGNESS

And it's not in my bag. 'It's not in my bag,' I tell her.

The class starts to giggle and Kitty Maddocks, the girl who swallowed the gum, starts to wheeze.

I feel so cross, so - out of sorts. How can she be this stupid? Why can she not understand? I begin to

Billy Bob Buttons

rock on my stool, my eyelids fluttering. I can feel the anger welling up in me, flooding my belly like hot bubbling acid. 'I can't find my ruler.' I say it much louder now. 'And it's not in my bag.'

One desk over, Isabella whispers, 'Calm down.' And a girl at the front of the classroom bellows, 'Miss! I think Kitty's choking.'

With a python-like hiss, Miss Belcher turns her back on me. 'Stop being so silly, Bridget. And Kitty, stop coughing. It's annoying.' She sniffs, juts out her jaw and stomps back to her desk. 'Now, BEGIN! Chanter.'

'Chanter,' burble the class. A class full of expectant eyes.

'Manger.'

'Manger.'

'What you lost, Nutter?' I look over at Anthony, the

I Think I Murdered Miss

school bully. He is grinning away like a stowaway cat on a fishing trawler.

'I can't find my ruler,' I tell him, 'and it's not in my...'

'SIMON!' Miss Belcher howls, no longer in the French way, but with a strong Scottish lilt.

'MISS! HURRY! Kitty's all purple - and her right eye's sort of - bulging out.'

'BRIDGET!' she yells, her cheeks now all blotchy and red.

Then I begin to yell too, and when I yell I find it very difficult to stop. I growl and snarl. I kick over my desk. I even thump the wall. The class is no longer giggling. They just sit and watch me explode, chins to chests. The best show in town. Isabella is trying to pacify me. 'You probably just dropped it,' she is saying. 'Help me to look.'

Billy Bob Buttons

Then...

I do it.

It is 2.43 on a Tuesday afternoon.

'Go to hell,' I hiss. And I wish fervently for Miss Belcher to be hit by a bus.

At 5.39, that very day...

She is.

I Think I Murdered Miss

TODAY



Chapter 2

'OY! NUTTER!'

THE NEXT DAY, WHEN I STEP OFF THE SCHOOL BUS, I do not know of Miss Belcher's tragic accident. Everybody is staring at me, even Mr Parrot, who is on bus duty. But, to be honest, this happens to me pretty much every day. I think it's because I look a lot like a scarecrow, my mop of curls in need of scissors and a

Billy Bob Buttons

comb or, as Granny Spittle insists, a lawnmower or a power-saw.

Over by the gym, a boy prods his buddy in the ribs and flutters a hand at me. I begin to feel like a horse in a paddock and I wonder if anybody will ask to see my teeth.

To escape the looks, I lumber over to the bicycle shed and begin to count the tennis balls on the corrugated steel roof. I count twenty-seven - and $\frac{3}{4}$; the $\frac{3}{4}$ badly chewed up by a dog.

Shortly after, a second school bus crawls up and promptly vomits children all over the curb. 'GO ON! IN YOU GO!' howls Mr Parrot, ushering them over to the gate. The boys swagger. The girls strut. Fingers swish over telephone keypads and nobody bothers to look up.

I spot there is a new boy. He is ghostly pale and

I Think I Murdered Miss

wiry thin, his body lost in a well-starched coffee-brown shirt, his hands hidden by the cuffs. There is a sort of waxy, buffed-up sheen to his skin as if he'd slept under a dripping candle and he has the alert look of a tomcat who can smell a nest of baby mice. For a split second he looks my way and scowls, his eyelids twitching like a bull bothered by a fly. Then, abruptly, he turns his back on me and limps over to the recycling bins.

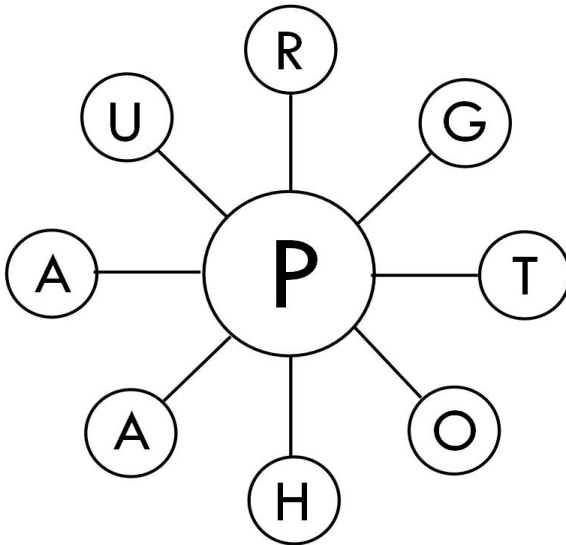
With a puckered brow, I eye the price label sticking up from the back of his collar and wonder what's up with his leg. Then I pull a rolled-up copy of the 'Devilishly Difficult Puzzle Book' from my back pocket. It is not so difficult; not devilishly so anyway, but my father insists on getting it for me along with 'Roy of the Rovers', a football comic I never open. He thinks I do, but I don't.

Billy Bob Buttons

It is crazily hot, so I unbutton my cardigan, top to bottom, button by button, and sit on a graffiti-scrawled bench in the shadow of the bicycle shed. There I thumb through my puzzle book to page six. This is what I see:

HOW MANY WORDS CAN YOU FIND?

The letter 'P' must be in every word.



I Think I Murdered Miss

Simple. And, a second later, I scrawl twenty-two words under it.

Then I see this:

	+		-		x		÷		x		=	50
--	---	--	---	--	---	--	---	--	---	--	---	----

USING THE NUMBERS 1 TO 6,
FILL IN THE GAPS

This is child's play and, instantly, I scribble this:

2	+	4	-	1	x	6	÷	3	x	5	=	50
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

A little while later, Isabella discovers me there. But, by then, every puzzle in my book's been filled in and I'm back to counting tennis balls and listening to jazz on my iPod.

Billy Bob Buttons

'Hi, Mop,' she calls, skipping over. She's so elegant and cool. I, on the other hand, am all elbowy and clumsy.

We only met in April when she and her family - mother, father, three brothers and a dog called Muffin - moved to the town. I helped her with her algebra homework; I still do and she, in turn, is sweet to me. She has freckly, apricot skin and gingery, corkscrew curls. It is summer now and she burns terribly.

'Don't stand in the sun,' I tell her sternly, switching off L Armstrong's husky tenor and standing up. 'You'll get cancer.'

'Hello Isabella,' she tweets. She's pretending to be me. 'How wonderful to see you.'

'It is?' she answers herself. 'Why Mop, how sweet of you to say.'

I Think I Murdered Miss

Isabella thinks it is very important to swap dull chitchat in the mornings. My dad thinks so too. 'It is important to show interest in others,' he often tells me. So, with a sigh, I say, 'Hello Isabella.'

'Hello Mop.'

'How, er - wonderful to see you.'

'It is?' She grins and twists her nose. 'Why Mop, how sweet of you to say.'

I eye her distrustfully. She has a big, moon-shaped scar under her left eye so it looks as if her cheek is always smiling. It is very disconcerting. 'But no hugs,' I warn her, shuffling back.

Isabella lifts her eyes to the sky and stuffs her hands in her pockets. 'I will try to resist. It'll be difficult. I'm always drawn to boys with scarecrow curls and big, floppy cardigans, but I will do my very best.'

Billy Bob Buttons

'Granny Spittle knitted me this,' I tell her snootily. I suddenly spy a button's dropped off, the third from the bottom, and now there's only a dangly bit of cotton.

'I know she did. Tell me, Mop, truthfully now, on a scale of 1 to 10, how blind is your granny?'

'She is not...' I stop. Isabella's trying to be funny; she's no fan of my woolly cardigan. I drop to my knees to hunt for the AWOL button.

'Get up,' mutters Isabella sternly. 'Everybody's looking.'

'I lost my button.' She's still in the sun and I begin to feel irritated. 'Cancer is not a joke,' I scold her.

She tuts and blows a raspberry at me. 'All right! Keep your shirt on. MUM!'

'I'm not your mum,' I inform her dryly, my cheek to the sizzling-hot cement, 'and shirts must be kept on,

I Think I Murdered Miss

even in the summer. It's a school rule.'

With a roll of her eyes, her silver-buckled sandals (not school uniform; Mr Parrot will throw a hissy-fit if he sees them) shuffle her over to the shadow of the bicycle hut.

'Happy?'

'I'm not unhappy.' I find the button under the bench. Peeling chewing gum off it, I slip it in my pocket and clamber to my feet. Then, briskly, I inform her, 'My Gypsy Boy rose grew 0.27 of a centimetre in the last thirteen hours.'

'Wow! That's er, brill'. But listen to this...'

'Why is it brill?'' I interrupt her. 'It is just a fact; and why do you always shorten your words? Do you need to rush off to the loo or...'

'Mop, this is important. Yesterday, Miss Belcher was hit by a bus. A Billy Smart's Circus bus. I saw it

Billy Bob Buttons

happen, after school just by the church. She was killed.'

She always calls me Mop. I think she thinks I'm scruffy. But combs do not interest me. Nor do barbers or gels.

'How odd,' I say thoughtfully. 'Only yesterday, I wished for her to be hit by a bus. But not a Billy Smart's Circus bus. Any bus, to be honest.'

'YOU DID!'

'Yes. The odds must be...' I frown and try to calculate them.

'Don't tell anybody.'

'I just told you.'

'Don't tell anybody, but me.'

The 'but' word! The horribly puzzling 'but' word. I try not to let it upset me. 'OK.' I nod. 'Why?'

'Why! WHY!' Her hands twirl like dizzy birds.

I Think I Murdered Miss

'Yesterday, you yelled at her. A lot. You even thumped your desk and told her to go to hell.'

'I kicked my desk,' I tell her wryly. 'I thumped the wall.'

'Whatever. The problem is, everybody will now think you cursed her.'

'Oh!' I feel as if a blindfold's been ripped from my eyes. Now I know why Mr Parrot and the other kids were eyeballing me when I got off the bus.

'But what they don't know is that you ACTUALLY DID!' Her eyes dart to the recycling bins and the new boy who is sitting just by them. A shadow seems to envelop her lips, darkening her words. 'They'll call you a witch,' she whispers.

'A wizard,' I correct her. 'I'm a boy.'

'That's not funny.'

'I was being funny?'

Billy Bob Buttons

She blows out her cheeks in a way I just don't get. I often see dad do it and, on Saturday, Mrs Radinski in the Spar did it when I asked her, for the two hundred and sixth time, or was it the two hundred and seventh, if she planned to sell Star Trek comics in her shop. In fact, pretty much everybody I meet seems to do it. It is, I think, a look invented just for me.

No, it WAS the two hundred and sixth. I remember now. She'd told me not to bother her at the end of a very long day. It had been 8.30 in the morning.

'By the way, Kitty's off today,' Isabella says. 'But don't worry, I think she's OK. Bridget told me in netball.'

Now I'm totally and utterly flummoxed. I know who Kitty is. I know she almost choked in French class. But what I don't know, what I cannot understand, is why Isabella is telling me this; and why she thinks I'm

I Think I Murdered Miss

worrying about it.

I ask her.

Isabella sighs (I have problems with sighs too) and returns to her 'cheek blowing'.

'OY! NUTTER!' I turn to see Anthony, my only enemy, clumping over to me. I say 'only enemy', but there is another. The evil Klingon Empire, the enemy of everybody in the Galaxy.

Anthony's torso is big, his shoulders bigger and his skull is topped with black steely wool just like a Brillo pad. He smells of battered cod too; his mum owns the Frying Nemo, the chip shop in town, and there's a splotch of jam on his shirt. Strawberry, I think.

He stops just short of me, his banana-fingered hands on his hips.

'Just let him be,' Isabella says to him. 'You know how upset he gets.'

Billy Bob Buttons

'Oh, I know. Everybody knows. Everybody in French anyway.' He titters hollowly and pulls a wooden ruler from his pocket. 'Tell me, Nutter, is this yours?'

I spot the Darth Vader sticker and nod. A crowd is now forming, the kids jostling for a better look. Even the new boy is there, no doubt keen to fit in and look cool. The school bell rings and I wonder with a nervy swallow where Mr Parrot is.

Anthony holds the ruler out to me and I go to grab it. But, then, with a snort, he snaps it in two.

My lips suddenly feel all dry and swollen and I begin to play with the strap on my satchel. Isabella, who knows me all too well, whispers, 'Don't tell him any flower facts.'

'A fossilised rose over 35,000,000 years old was discovered in the US,' I promptly tell him.

Next to me, Isabella sighs - I don't know why - and

I Think I Murdered Miss

the mob of kids begin to chuckle excitedly.

'But the oldest living rose is in Germany. It is over 1,000 years old and grows on a wall.'

'DORK!' yells a boy in the crowd, his anonymous foot finding my right bottom cheek.

'GEEK!' hollers another.

'The circus is in town,' Anthony says, a glint in his eye. 'And I bet they need a new act. You know the sort of thing. ROLE UP! ROLE UP! See the Volcano Boy blow his top.'

I can tell he's insulting me, so why, I wonder, is he smiling. My dad, Isabella too, they smile when they try to help me. Is he trying to help me then? Perhaps he thinks I want a job in the circus. Perhaps he wants a job too. Then, I will try to assist him. It is important to lend a hand. Dad told me.

'I don't want to work in the circus,' I say matter-of-

Billy Bob Buttons

factly. 'But if you do, I will try to help. Now, let me see, acrobats tend to be thin so probably not the best job for you. There's juggling. Stilts. Lion taming.' I frown, lost in thought. Then I snap my fingers. 'I know! A clown's chubby, and you don't need to be good at anything. You just need to be stupid. Perfect! You can be a clown.'

Anthony's top lip flips up in a snarl and he thumps his fist in his hand. 'You cheeky little...'

'Go away,' yells Isabella, trying to squeeze between us.

But he elbows her in the ribs, knocking her to her knees.

I want to help her up - I so want to - but the thought of laying my hand on her, on anybody, fills me with horror. I watch her clamber to her feet. Then, with fury simmering under my skin, I turn on the

I Think I Murdered Miss

bully.

'Don't let him upset you,' Isabella whispers to me, brushing dust off her skirt. 'That's what he wants.' She nods to the mob of heckling kids. 'What they all want.'

But today I do not go crazy, I do not blow my top. I'm a pot of bubbling water and I was just lifted off the hob. I simply say, 'I hope you get hit by a bus too.'

Anthony gawks at me and a hush falls on the crowd. It's as if I just told a joke but it turned out not to be very funny. Even Isabella seems speechless. 'What did you just say?' the bully growls.

I feel my newly-discovered bravery start to ebb, but I clench my jaws - and my bottom - and with only a tiny tremor, I say softly, 'Miss Belcher upset me and look what happened to her.'

With a wolfish snarl, the boy steps up to me, his

Billy Bob Buttons

fists up. I cower away but he just drops the broken shards of ruler by my feet. 'Y' a nutter and a loser,' he spits, 'and I need a new punch bag.'

'OY! YOU LOT!' Mr Parrot at long last. 'The bell's rung. Off to class.'

For a second, Anthony just glowers at me, and even I can tell now is not the moment to bring up the splodge of jam on his shirt. Is it strawberry? Difficult to tell.

He barks a laugh and turns to go.

Then I say it. I just can't help myself. It's as if there's a playful devil sitting on my shoulder, egging me on. 'There's jam on your shirt.'

By my elbow, Isabella throws up her hands in despair.

'I think it's strawberry. Is it?'

He stops and looks back at me, a sneer widening

I Think I Murdered Miss

his nostrils. 'No,' he growls, pincering the blemished cotton between his thumb and fingers. 'This here is blood, and by tomorrow there'll be blood on yours too.'

I swallow and watch him swagger off through the crowd.