

# **Gorilla Dreams**

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*Dedication*  
To Darcey Bussell



## Introduction

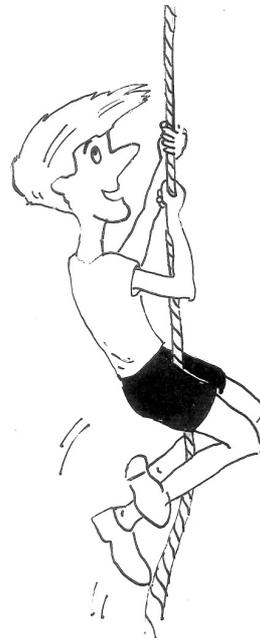
For everyone in his class, Mr Eden was much, much more than a teacher. In fact, he was an acrobat and actor, comedian and storyteller all in one. Ryan thought he might also be a wizard in his spare time. Anya said teachers didn't have spare time, but she thought he was a sweetheart and a hero. Ryan and Anya lived on the same street. The two children weren't best friends, but their mums were like sisters. And their mums both wished they'd been in Mr Eden's class, long ago.

"He's awesome," said Anya.

"He's a legend," said Ryan.

Mr Eden was very, very funny. He knew how to make thirty children laugh loudly and happily, until their eyes were warm and wet and their stomachs felt tight. But he also knew how to make them stop laughing, the moment he wanted them to.

Mr Eden was super-fit. He could slide up and down the ropes that fell down from the



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hall roof like a bead on an abacus. He was happy to be chased around the playground or football field, but no child ever caught him – unless he pretended to be a spider with a few missing legs. Or a jellyfish, or a Christmas pudding.

And in Dance lessons he taught Ryan, Anya and the others all kinds of different moves. He could jive. He could waltz. He could do the tango, the samba and the Charleston. But most of all, Mr Eden loved ballet.

“When we dance we tell stories,” he said, “without words.”

Mr Eden said that if the children listened carefully enough they could see colours in great music. He loved Story Time and sometimes he sang or hummed his own soundtrack to the books he read. At the same time he shaped his body, his face and his hands into the pictures.

“He’s so funny,” said Ryan. “He’s insane!”

Anya laughed too, just as loudly as Ryan, but she’d noticed something else about Mr Eden. Sometimes, when the story was sad, he very nearly cried. She could see it in his eyes when she was nearly crying too. Anya liked his tears (that didn’t quite fall) even more than she liked his craziness.

“He’s sensitive,” she told her mum. Anya liked that word because Mr Eden had used it to describe her in her report, along with ‘deep’.

No one said Ryan was sensitive but he was full of what Mr Eden called 'bounce'.

For Anya and for Ryan, Story Time was the best time of the day. One afternoon, after Mr Eden had finished reading a book (one that had lit up a whole month as brightly as Christmas) the children asked what the new story was going to be.

"Aha," said Mr Eden, and made his eyes extra-wide and very bright. "No book today," he added.

"Oh," groaned the children. No story! Mr Eden must be joking.

Mr Eden tapped the floppy, fair hair on the top of his head.

"I'm not going to read a story," he said. "I'm going to tell you one."

"Yay!" cried the children.

Mr Eden didn't have to ask them twice to tidy up and sit on the carpet. Ryan and Javeen had never cleaned the paint pots so quickly. Anya and Lucy had never wiped the tables so fast.

"Ready?" asked Mr Eden.

"Yes," called the children gathered on the carpet at his shiny, pointy feet.

"Steady," said Mr Eden, and wobbled like a tightrope walker over a chasm.

The children laughed. Mr Eden crossed his hands in front of his chest very quickly and the laughter stopped. He stood still for a moment, his