Mrs Khan lets us do all sorts of interesting things that we have never done before. In the first week of school, she helped us make musical instruments out of things we found in the school's recycling bin, and in the second week, she brought in a brand-new comic book to read to us that wasn't even in the school library yet.

Then in the third week, something happened that was so surprising and made everyone so curious, that even Mrs Khan couldn't make us focus on our lessons properly. And it all began with the empty chair.



It was on the third Tuesday after school had started, and Mrs Khan was taking the register. She was just about to call my name when there was a loud knock at the door. Usually when there's a knock on the door it's just someone from another class bringing a note, so no one really pays any attention; but this time it was Mrs Sanders, the Head. Mrs Sanders always wears her hair in the exact same way and peers over her glasses whenever she talks to anyone. Everyone is scared of her, because when she gives detention, she doesn't just make you sit in a room; she makes you memorise long

words from the dictionary and doesn't let you leave until you've learnt them all off by heart – the meaning AND the spelling. I've even heard of lower graders being stuck in detention for hours because they had to learn words that were as long as this page!

So when we saw that it was Mrs Sanders at the door, we all fell silent. She looked very serious as she walked up to Mrs Khan, and we all wondered who was in trouble. After she had whispered and nodded for a few seconds, she suddenly turned around and, peering over her glasses at us, pointed to the empty chair at the back of the class.

All of us turned around to have a look at the empty chair. This was the chair:



As I said, it was a pretty ordinary chair, and it was empty because a girl called Dena left our class at the end of last year to move to Wales. No one really missed her except for her best friend Clarissa. Dena had been a bit of a show-off and was always talking about how many presents her parents got her every week and how many pairs of trainers she had and all sorts of other things that

no one else cared about. She liked to sit at the back of the class because then she and Clarissa could pretend to be doing lessons when really they were drawing pictures of their favourite pop stars and giggling about someone they didn't like. Someone else could have taken the seat, but no one really wanted to sit next to Clarissa. That's why the chair had stayed empty.

After whispering for a few more seconds with Mrs Khan, Mrs Sanders left the classroom. We expected Mrs Khan to say something, but she seemed to be waiting, so we waited too. It was all very serious and exciting. But before we could start guessing about what was going on, Mrs Sanders came back, and this time she wasn't alone.

Standing behind her was a boy. A boy none of us had ever seen before. He had short dark hair and large eyes that hardly blinked and smooth pale skin.

'Everyone,' said Mrs Khan, as the boy went and stood next to her. 'This is Ahmet, and he'll be joining our class from today. He's just moved to London and is new to the school, so I hope you'll all do your very best to make him feel welcome.'

We all watched in silence as Mrs Sanders led him to

the empty chair. I felt sorry for him because I knew he wouldn't like sitting next to Clarissa very much. She still missed Dena, and everyone knew she hated boys – she says they're stupid and smell.

I think it must be one of the worst things in the world to be new to a place and have to sit with people you don't know. Especially people that stare and scowl at you like Clarissa was doing. I made a secret promise to myself right there and then that I would be friends with the new boy. I happened to have some lemon sherbets in my bag that morning and I thought I would try and give him one at break-time. And I would ask Josie and Tom and Michael if they would be his friends too.

After all, having four new friends would be much better than having none. Especially for a boy who looked as scared and as sad as the one now sitting at the back of our class.