

and suddenly Tilly was standing in the school playground with all the other children, and Mrs Higginbotham was ringing the handbell and telling them all to line up in their classes, ready to go in.

Tilly couldn't believe her eyes.

'What's the matter with you?' said Jack, who was standing next to her. 'You look very surprised.'

'I can't believe I'm here,' said Tilly.



‘I know – it’s horrible, isn’t it? Still, it’s the last day of school before half-term. We don’t have to come next week. Me and my family are going to the Dong-di-doyne in France. Are you going away on holiday?’

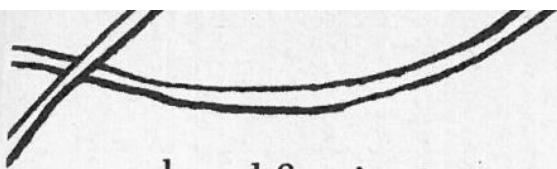
‘I think we might be going to the dark side of the moon,’ said Tilly.

‘Why do you want to go there?’ asked Jack. ‘If it’s dark, you won’t be able to see anything. You should go to the light side of the moon.’

Mrs Higginbotham blew her whistle and all the classes filed into their classrooms. Tilly and Jack stood at their table, and Miss Scarborough explained that today they would be doing more work on their project about the Victorians.

Tilly quite liked the Victorians. Her table had been finding out about the food the Victorians used to eat. Tilly was very pleased when Miss Scarborough gave her a special task: to find out all about something called ‘Afternoon Tea’.

In Victorian times rich people used to have a big



breakfast in the morning, a very small lunch, and then they wouldn't eat again until they had a big dinner at eight or nine o'clock in the evening. A rich lady called the Duchess of Bedford found she got a bit hungry in the long hours between the small lunch and dinner, so she invented afternoon tea.

Afternoon tea wasn't just a cup of tea in the afternoon. Afternoon tea was a cup of tea and lots of other things. It was all served on a pretty stand, which was made of three plates fixed one above the other, with big gaps in between.

To show what afternoon tea was like, Tilly drew a picture of the three plates fixed one above the other, showing exactly what would have been on each one.

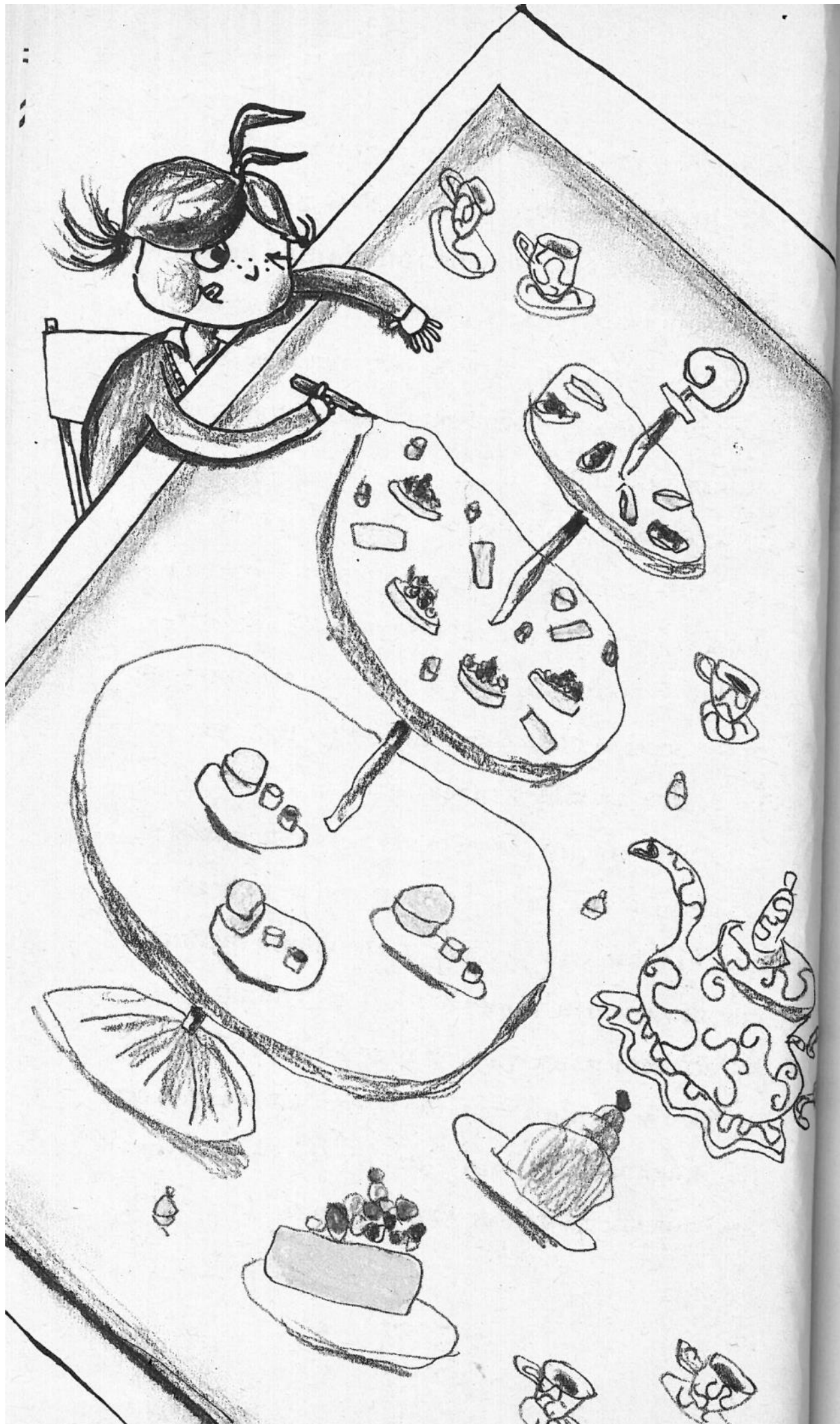
On the top plate she put 'finger sandwiches'. These weren't sandwiches with fingers inside, as she'd first imagined. They were sandwiches with the crusts cut off that were cut quite long and thin, so they looked a bit like long white fingers.

Tilly drew some with a filling of yellow and green; these were egg-and-cress sandwiches, which

she really loved. Her mummy had often made her egg-and-cress sandwiches. She drew some with a brown filling for beef, and some with a green filling for cucumbers. She decided not to draw the smoked-salmon one Miss Scarborough had told her about because she didn't really like smoked salmon – it was a bit slimy.

On the second plate she drew small individual tarts with real fruit on top, miniature Victoria sponge cakes, shortbread biscuits and lots of brightly coloured macaroons. There was nothing on the second plate that Tilly didn't like. She would have quite happily scoffed the lot.

On the bottom plate she drew freshly baked scones with little pots of cream and strawberry jam. Oh, the very thought of the cream melting into those warm scones made Tilly's mouth water. In fact her mouth watered so much that a little bit of dribble escaped from the corner and landed on the drawing. Tilly hoped that no one had noticed and quickly used some paint to cover the mark the



dribble had made. Luckily she'd dribbled on to the pot of strawberry jam.

Tilly thought the only thing that could have made afternoon tea any better would be party sausages on sticks, but Miss Scarborough said that they didn't have party sausages on sticks in the Victorian era. This made Tilly like the Victorians a little less than she had before.

Jack, who was sitting next to her, had been finding out what Queen Victoria used to eat. He discovered that she loved to eat meat more than anything else, but the funniest thing was that she used to eat her food extremely quickly. She ate quite a lot, and she really gobbled it down. And as soon as *she* had finished eating, she expected the servants to clear *everyone's* plate away, even if they hadn't finished! It sounded very funny.

There were several pictures of Queen Victoria on the classroom wall. In each one she was wearing black clothes. All her clothes were black, and she never seemed to be smiling.



‘Why is she wearing black clothes and not smiling?’ Tilly asked Miss Scarborough.

‘Because her husband, Prince Albert, had died,’ said Miss Scarborough.

‘When my mummy died, my dad wore black clothes,’ said Tilly. ‘But my aunty Helen said he was wrong, and that we should all wear our most colourful party clothes because that’s what my mummy would have wanted.’

But Tilly didn’t actually get to the end of her sentence. She’d only just managed to say, ‘But my aunty Helen said he was wrong, and that we should all wear our most colourful party clothes

because —' when suddenly she found herself back in the booth in the shed. She had travelled forward through time to where she'd been when she pressed the big green button marked GO.

*Well, that was a very odd experience,* Tilly thought to herself.

She felt a rumble in her tummy. All the time travel and talk of afternoon tea were making her peckish. She went back into the kitchen to find something to eat. She wasn't in a massive hurry, like she'd been before school this morning, so she had time to have a good rummage around. There wasn't much in the way of afternoon tea in the cupboards.

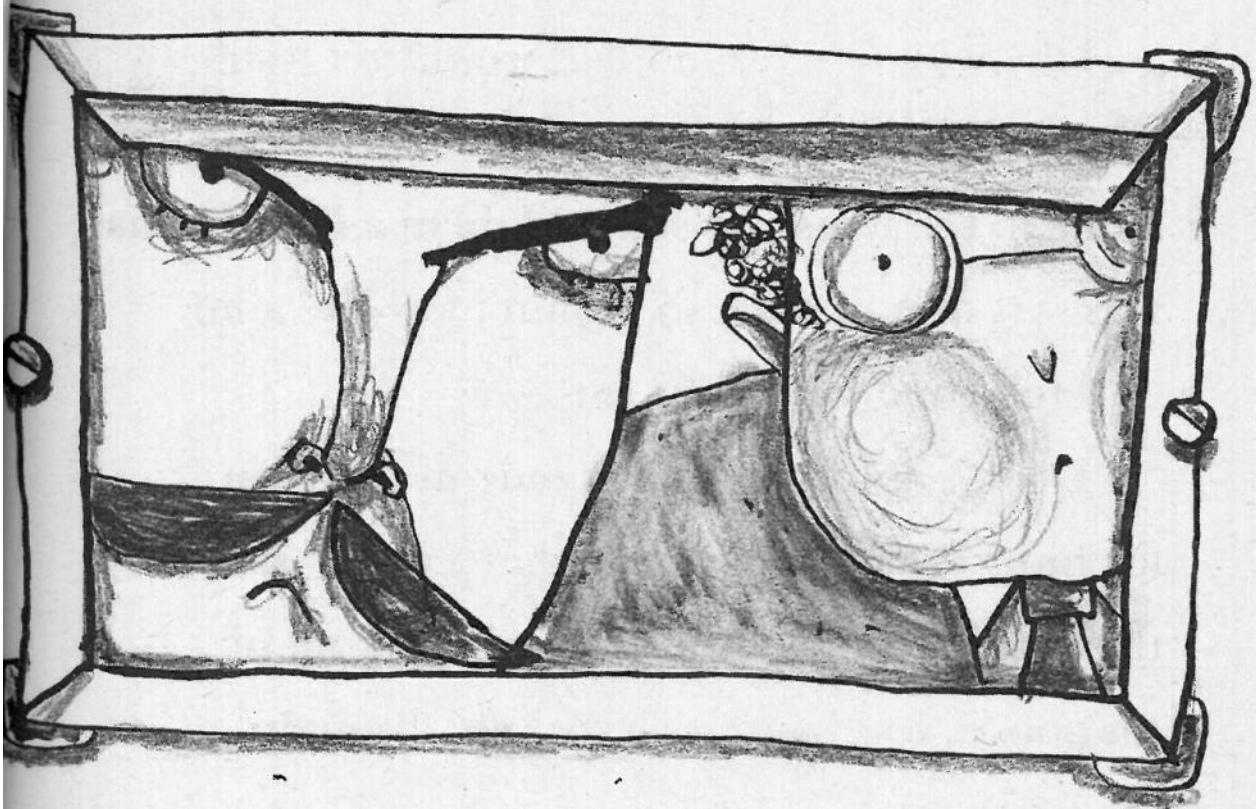
Ten minutes later she sat down at the kitchen table with what she had found. It was a slab of raw jelly, straight from the packet — before it had been made into normal jelly by mixing it with boiling water and letting it set in the fridge. Sometimes when her mummy was making jelly she would let Tilly have a single raw cube.

Tilly loved it – it tasted like concentrated jelly – and now she had a whole packet all to herself. She put the raw jelly on the table and cut a chunk off with a spoon. She had just put it in her mouth when there was a knock at the front door.

Tilly got off her chair and went down the hall. She opened the flap where the letters came through and peered out. She could see two raincoats and two pairs of hands. One of the hands was holding an important-looking briefcase with a small picture of a crown printed on it in gold.

‘Hello,’ she said. Well, she didn’t actually say ‘Hello’. What she actually said was ‘Erroow’ because her mouth was full of jelly. She knew it was rude to talk with her mouth full, so she swallowed the lump of jelly in one go and then said ‘Hello’ properly.

The two people crouched down to look through the letter box. They were both men of about her dad’s age, though they were much more



smartly dressed. They both wore suits and ties, and one of them had a very neat moustache.

‘Hello, little girl,’ said the man with the moustache.

‘I’m not little. I’m seven and a half, and I’m average height for my age,’ said Tilly.

The man smiled. ‘I’m sorry, I couldn’t quite tell how tall you were through the door. Is your father in?’

‘No.’

‘Do you know where he is?’

Tilly wondered if her dad would get into trouble if the men found out that she was all alone in the house, so she told them a little fib that was sort of half true, so it didn't feel like a fib.

'He's gone for a run,' she said.

'Do you think we could come in and wait for him? We're from your father's work,' said the man, getting a little piece of card out of his pocket and handing it to Tilly through the letter box.

Tilly read the card. It said:



'Oh,' she said. 'Are you one of the complete idiots?'

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘My dad says that all the people at work are complete idiots.’

‘Oh, he does, does he?’ said the man with the moustache, looking rather cross.

‘Yes. And, anyway, my dad doesn’t actually work there any more – they had to let him go.’

The man with the moustache suddenly looked as if he was sweating, even though it wasn’t a hot day. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I’m afraid there’s been a little misunderstanding. Are you sure we can’t come in and wait for him?’

‘Absolutely sure. My mummy said you should never open the door to strangers.’

‘Oh. Is your mummy in?’

‘No, she’s dead,’ said Tilly.

The man with the moustache didn’t know what to say. He looked like he’d suddenly swallowed a whole hard-boiled egg in one go. He and the



other man stood up and whispered something to each other. Then the man with the moustache bent down to look at Tilly through the letter-box flap and said, ‘We’ll be back later.’

