

Cheat!

JUDY WAITE

Danny has won first prize in a painting competition, but feels terrible because it is not his own work. He has taken old Mr King's painting and passed it off as his own.



He hadn't felt guilty – not even the next day, when Gran showed him the entry form in the local paper.

'I think we'll enter that painting of yours,' she said. She cut the form out, and handed Danny a pen. 'You made such a good effort. It just shows how well you can do, when you try.'

Danny filled in his name – his age – his address. All the evidence, neatly written for the world to see.

That same afternoon he went round with Gran to
10 deliver a meat pie to Mr King. Mr King's house felt warm and cheerful.

'Have you always been blind, Mr King?'

'*Danny!*' Gran's voice was shocked, but Mr King just smiled.

'Don't worry, Dora. He's just a lad.' He turned to Danny. Even though his eyes weren't looking at him, Mr King still somehow seemed to see him.

'I was about your age. My eyesight was never good, but as I got older, it grew worse. Things got more and
20 more blurry. And then, one day, I woke up and the world was completely black.'

'Weren't you scared?' It was so hard to imagine. Danny thought of all the things he would miss: football, telly, computer games. Poor Mr King. He could never be really free. Even his house was only safe as long as nothing moved.

'I suppose I learnt to make the best of it. But it upset my father more than anything. He was an artist – a good one too. Most of these pictures were his. And he'd had
30 hopes for me. I'd shown promise once ...' The old man's voice trailed away, lost in distant memories.

Danny thought suddenly about the painting of the garden. He wished he could tell Mr King that he'd treasure it for ever. Maybe he'd find a way to tell him later. He couldn't say anything with Gran here.

He turned to ask another question, but Gran stepped in. 'That's enough, Danny! We really must be going. You're off home later today, and you've got packing to do!'

40 She got up and Danny followed, looking back just once. Mr King was smiling after them: that kind, gentle smile that lit up the blankness in his eyes.

It was the day of the presentation.

As Mum drove them to Blackport, Danny sat hunched in his seat. He kept hoping they would break down, or get stuck in an enormous traffic jam. Instead, the car zoomed along happily, and the road stayed clear.

They arrived with plenty of time to spare.

50 Danny saw the painting as soon as they walked into the town hall.

It was hanging at the front of the room. A tag with the words FIRST PRIZE had been clipped to the bottom.

Mum tried to drag Danny towards it, but he pulled away. 'I've seen it before,' he muttered.

Mum squeezed his arm proudly. 'You shouldn't be so shy about it.'

60 Danny watched her hurry towards the painting. He wondered if there was still time to get out of the presentation. Perhaps he could pretend to faint. Perhaps he could say he felt sick.

Mum came back, buzzing with excitement. 'It's brilliant. I never knew you had such a wonderful talent.'

Danny gave a groan of pain, and clutched his stomach. 'I don't feel very well.'

'I'm sure it's just nerves. You'll be fine once it all gets started.' Mum glanced up at the hall clock. 'We'd better go and sit down. The Mayor will be here soon.'

Danny trudged behind her. They squeezed in amongst
the rows of chairs that were already filling up with
70 people. He couldn't even try out the 'fainting plan'.
There wasn't enough room to fall over properly.

Mum nudged him suddenly, 'Look, Gran's here.'

Danny turned miserably towards the door. Gran was
walking in, her arm linked with someone else. Danny
hadn't known it was possible to feel any worse, but the
'rock' in his stomach hit a new low. The smiling, shuffling
figure coming in with Gran was Mr King.

The buzz of voices died. The Mayor of Blackport
strode importantly to the front and cleared his throat.

80 Danny didn't hear the speech. The presentations to
the runner-up prize winners passed over him like a blur.

'And now, could we have our Young Artist of the Year –
Danny Stokes ...' The Mayor's voice seemed to boom and
bounce through the hall.

Danny got up and made his way towards the front. He
couldn't look at Mum. He couldn't look at Gran. He
couldn't go through with it. Danny closed his eyes, and
counted to ten. As he opened them slowly, he looked
straight across at Mr King. Although Mr King couldn't see,
90 his eyes still shone with warmth and pride.

'Congratulations,' the Mayor said, smiling and shaking
Danny's hand. 'It's a wonderful entry, a very worthy
winner.'

Danny took the envelope. It felt bulky and exciting.
He imagined the notes inside. Fifty pounds – it was loads
of money. It could buy him a new computer game or
maybe a football shirt, but he knew, deep down, that he'd
never really enjoy them. They would never *really* be his.

100 He turned to face the audience. His voice was small,
croaky.

'I'm really pleased I won this. And ... and I want to spend it on something really special.' As he paused, he felt a rush of feeling flood through him. He knew with certainty that he was doing the right thing.

Suddenly his voice became clear and strong. 'I've decided to give it to the Blind Association. I reckon they might need it more than I need a new computer game.'

110 For a moment there was a stunned silence. Then all at once the clapping started. The Mayor was squeezing his shoulder. People were rising to their feet. Through the swell of faces Danny could see Mum dabbing at her eyes with a hanky.

Everyone was cheering as he battled his way back to his seat. Strangers reached out to shake his hand or pat his back. Warm voices called out praises and congratulations. He was everybody's favourite. He was everybody's hero.

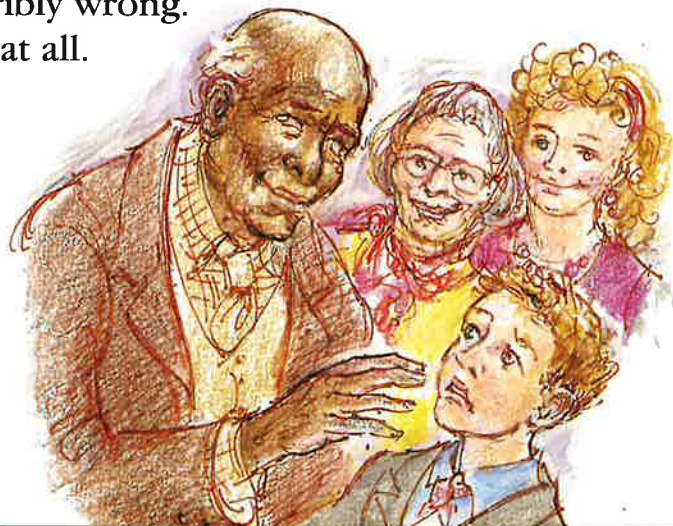
120 Mum hugged him tightly and Gran *almost* kissed him – although he managed to turn his head away just in time. It ended up as just a bit of slobber on his ear.

But the thing that really did it, the thing that made his heart do another crash landing, was Mr King.

The old man rose to his feet, stretching his fingertips to touch Danny's face. His eyes shone like lights. 'Not many lads would do that,' he said. 'You're even better than I first thought. You're something special, Danny. You're a really good lad.'

Danny stood, staring dumbly back at Mr King. It was all going wrong again – horribly wrong.

130 Danny didn't feel 'good' at all.



Illustrated by Beryl Sanders