

# PRAISE FOR **THE DAD TRAP**

“Few writers balance tenderness and strength the way Ian Eagleton does. This book is **heartfelt, hopeful and utterly inspiring.**”

Hannah Gold, author of *The Last Bear*

“*The Dad Trap* is **clever, chaotic and completely charming** – the kind of book that makes you laugh one minute and tear up the next. If you’ve ever felt a bit awkward, over-imaginative, or just plain too much for school, then you’re going to love William Huxley. Underneath the rollicking humour, Eagleton packs a ton of heart into this really engaging story about family, growing up and figuring out how to be yourself. **The dialogue sparkles, the emotional moments hit hard, and the writing is full of warmth and wit.**”

Ramzee, author of *The Cheat Book*

**“Wonderfully funny, joyful and heartfelt.”**

Andy Shepherd, author of  
*The Boy Who Grew Dragons*

**“An essential voice in children’s fiction, Ian Eagleton tells stories about big feelings with enormous heart. *The Dad Trap* ensnared me with its hilarious and hopeful portrait of a blended family, brimming with joy, jokes and optimism. Truly heartwarming.”**

Richard Pickard, author of  
*The Peculiar Tale of the Tentacle Boy*

**“A gorgeous celebration of uniqueness. Ian’s writing is warm, funny, tender and hugely relatable. I loved it!”**

Mel Taylor-Bessent, author of  
*Race to Imagination Island*

**“I adore this book! It’s full of laughs, joy and empathy. William has my absolute heart.”**

Ashley Thorpe, author of  
*The Boy to Beat the Gods*

**“Packed with heartfelt moments and hilarious antics, *The Dad Trap* is a gorgeous character-led story with hope and inclusivity at its core.”**  
Harry Woodgate, author of *Grandad’s Camper*

**“*The Dad Trap* offers tons of giggles and heaps of heart in equal measure and children everywhere will love getting to know the wonderful William. I adored this book!”**  
Rachel Morrisroe, author of  
*Felix and the Future Agency*

**“A fabulously fresh twist on an old favourite, filled with pop culture references, pun-derful word play and Ian Eagleton’s signature humour and heart. I loved it!”**  
Robert Tregoning, author of *Out of the Blue*

**“A hilarious, heart-squeezing story about friendship, family and all the ways love can grow.”**  
Thomas Leeds, author of  
*Jayben and the Golden Torch*

# THE DAD TRAP

IAN  
EAGLETON

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*For Chris, who sparkled with love,  
laughter and mischief.  
Rest peacefully, my fabulous friend.*

*And for all the kids who dream of  
a different happily ever after.  
You deserve it. This one's for you.*

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The background of the page is a light gray, textured surface. Scattered across the top and sides are various mechanical components in shades of gray, including gears of different sizes, a pulley with a belt, and a cross-shaped part. The overall aesthetic is industrial and mechanical.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Pink Pony Club*

“Urgh. Move it.”

The girl looms over me, eyes narrowed.

She reminds me of someone. I can’t work out who. I’ll remember. It’s there somewhere.

Oh, yeah! Who’s that singer I caught Dad dancing to? Something about a pink pony and... ARGH! I can’t remember!

Dad was properly embarrassed. Mortified, you might say! That’s a good word. *Mortified*. I think it comes from the Latin word for “death”. Spooky! Yes, Dad was mortified when I caught him dancing in the kitchen.

Well, *he’d* call it dancing. But it wasn’t, let’s be honest. It was all gangly and awkward, and I definitely

heard his knees crack at one point. When he saw me gawping at him in horror, he tried to pretend he was doing some stretches and lunges.

“Just getting ready for a run,” he said sheepishly.

“You don’t run, Dad,” I replied.

“Fine! I’ve been busted!”

Dad laughed and said the song had just come on the radio and that it reminded him of his younger days – whenever they were. It was odd because it was an upbeat, peppy, happy type of song and Dad had been going through a phase of listening to surreal folk music.

He once took me to a folk festival in the woods. It rained the entire weekend and all the food seemed to be made from tofu and chickpeas and smelt like farts.

I spent most of the weekend trying to avoid getting muddy and holding my wee in, because have you *seen* the toilets at a festival? No? You’re lucky, then. Because let me tell you: they are gross!

Dad had a good time, though, which is the main thing.

Anyhoo, back to the dancing in the kitchen. Aside from being totally, hideously embarrassing, it was actually quite nice. It was kind of great to see Dad smile again.

“*I said,*” the girl huffs, “please can you move your stuff?”

Huh? What? Oh, the girl! Standing over me!

My mind wanders sometimes. Sorry.

The girl is acting like she’s been waiting by my desk for ever and that everything and everyone is beneath her.

Especially me. Like I’m a—

CHAPPELL ROAN!

Big, curly red hair! Fierce-looking! That’s who the girl reminds me of. The song Dad was dancing to was called “Pink Pony Club”. I asked Dad what it was about, and he said, “Running away and finding yourself. Feeling free! Going to a club and dancing the night away!”

Then he started blushing and turned off the radio. Yes! That’s who she—

Hang on. There’s someone *else* the girl reminds me of, though. It’s someone we learnt about at school.

It begins with a “B”. The girl reminds me of someone whose name begins with a “B”.

She tuts loudly. She seems furious with me, and I have no idea why. It’s the first day of Year Six and I’ve annoyed someone already!

This was not part of my plan. I can’t start another

year like this. That would not be good. Not good at all.

So I grin at the girl. Turn on the full William Huxley one-hundred-watt smile. *Ding!*

“Why are you grimacing at me like that, you weirdo?” the girl asks. “I was told to sit here, OK?”

She folds her arms and looks around, frowning.

Mrs Oliver and our teaching assistant, Miss Roper, are moving between the desks, settling everyone in. I’ve already hung up my new coat. Dad let me choose it because it’s a big year this year. The last year of primary school!

It’s a beautiful navy-blue trench coat. It’s just like one a spy would have. It’s got loads of hidden pockets so I can squirrel away my notepad and any disguises I might need if I ever get to investigate, and solve, a crime. Which I will do one day!

So far, I’ve only managed to crack the case of Jabari’s missing football in Year Four. It turned out he’d left it at home and never actually brought it to school.

Most kids look like they couldn’t care less about the start of a new year. They’re too big, too cool. This is Year Six, after all. We’ve danced this dance before.

Still, it feels odd. This is the last time we’ll be starting a new class at Westford Primary School.

Everything will be changing again soon. I don't like change. The start of a new school year has always been, well, difficult for me, to say the least. Everything just seems so noisy and chaotic. I feel it deep down in my body. Right in my chest.

I pat the photograph in my pocket and check out our new classroom. Jabari's putting his water bottle away. He smiles at me and waves shyly.

I look away and pretend I haven't seen him.

The classroom is a bustling hive of activity.

It's OK. I'm OK. Everything is OK.

I am a bit nervous, though. You can probably tell. Every year I feel like I just get used to the classroom and the teacher and then it's time to move on. All change! Like when you're—

The girl clears her throat.

*Eek!* I've lost focus again. She said something to me about moving my stuff, didn't she? Maybe she doesn't know I prefer to sit on my own. I need to gain control of this situation. That's what the detective Hercule Poirot would do. He never lets emotion get in the way of things! He never loses focus!

I take a deep breath and look at her again. She's tall and imposing, with fiery red hair, startling blue eyes and freckles all over her pale face. I notice she's

wearing grey shorts and clunky black boots. Who does she remind me of?

B...

B...

Barney?

No.

Bambi? Bo-peep? Batman?

No, no, no.

I feel bad for the girl because suddenly her “I’m very cool and grown up” mask slips and she just looks super angry – incandescent with rage, you might say. She also looks like she’s about to cry. Maybe I should—

“BOUDICA!” I say out loud, clapping my hands.

She reminds me of Boudica! FINALLY!

In Year Five we had to pretend to be Boudica and write a speech persuading the Iceni tribe to lead a revolt against the Romans. One kid – *it was so extra* – wore a bright red wig and a long tunic and performed their speech while standing on a chair.

That kid was me.

I laugh loudly at the memory and then suddenly realize the class has gone quiet and everyone’s staring at me.

We are officially in tumbleweed territory.

Boudica frowns. “*Please.*” She whispers it this time. “Can you just move your... What even is all this?”

I look at the chair next to me. It’s piled high with my books and stationery from home.

I’ve carefully placed the books in the order that I plan to read them over the next few weeks. I love reading. I get to escape from everything for a while. The noise. The looks and stares. Jabari.

Next to the pile, I have a GORGEOUS new set of pens and a brand-new notepad. Every time I read one of my new books, I’m going to create character sketches and maps of the settings. I’ll draw my own cover designs as well. I’m so excited!

Who needs friends when you’ve got books, fabulous felt-tips and a cool notepad, right? Much safer this way. Books over besties. Pens over pals.

I had assumed that I would be sitting on my own again after the whole debacle of last year. Whenever Dad says the word “debacle” he puts his hand over his forehead like he’s a dramatic diva. Someone like Miss Piggy. Love her! She always makes me crack up when—

*Sorry! Focus, William!*

Last year, I started off sitting next to the most popular girl in the class. Well, school, actually.

Maybe the whole world, come to think of it. It's like in those soppy romantic films from the Stone Age – the nineties – that Dad watches. In them, the popular girl walks into a room and everything sllloowwws down and there's a crown of radiant light behind her.

That's basically what happens when our school's it-girl, Millie Kitty Briggins-Foster-Jones, walks anywhere. Well, I don't know if that happens when she marches into the girls' toilets with her minions. That would be weird, wouldn't it? Like, you're on the bog – sorry, LOO – doing your business when suddenly birds begin to sing and you start to poop in slow motion, and then you're blinded by this glittering light, a red carpet gets unrolled and in comes Millie Kitty Briggins-Foster-Jones for her quarter-to-eleven morning dump.

Apologies. That was a bit much! Where was I?

Oh yes! So, I began Year Five sitting next to Millie and it did not go well.

You see, apparently, I hum a lot. And fidget. And talk. And, apparently, my legs are always jiggling up and down and my feet are always tap-tap-tapping. And I rock backwards and forward a lot too.

Also, apparently, I'm not good at sharing space.

Apparently, I'm always daydreaming and never know what's going on. APPARENTLY, I can't compromise and I'm not very good in group situations. Which is NOT true. Because I *am* good in group situations. As long as everyone agrees with me and realizes that my ideas are the best.

Personally, I think I'm a great person to sit next to. I don't wipe my nose on my jumper like Scarlett. I don't talk about *Minecraft* non-stop like Dinesh, and I definitely don't fart like Freddie and then blame it on someone else.

Apart from once – but if you'd smelt the fart, you'd have blamed it on someone else too.

Millie didn't think I was a good person to sit next to, though.

“URGH! Miss! I can't take it any more! I'm auditioning for a toothpaste advert and feeling very overwhelmed as it is, and William Huxley is a NIGHTMARE to sit next to. I can't concentrate! I want to move. I *need* to move. My entire acting career depends on it!”

I guess I'm not the only dramatic one in our class.

Miss Jennings eventually caved and made Luke sit next to me instead. It went on like that throughout the year.

Luke replaced Millie. Then Amrita replaced Luke. She said I gave her a headache with all my humming. Then Jabari replaced Amrita, but Miss Jennings said we mucked around too much, so Jabari was replaced by... Oh, I can't remember. The list went on!

All I know is that every child who sat next to me eventually asked to move to a different seat until Dad finally had to come in for a meeting with Miss Jennings. They decided that maybe it was best for everyone if I sat on my own.

“William is obviously very particular and likes to feel in control,” Miss Jennings had said to Dad in a surprising display of kindness.

So, I got my own space! With a place for everything and everything in its place. Just how I like things!

I call it high standards. Luke's mum called it “selfish” and “domineering” when she came in to complain about me.

But this arrangement has been working perfectly well.

Books and stationery to the left of me. Jokers to the right. Ha.

Up until now.

Because, without warning, Boudica shrugs, picks

up my things, dumps them in front of me on the table  
and then plonks herself down next to me with a loud,  
ungracious THUD!