

Exiled from English

by JM Prescott

Mrs Tomlin started to erase the board and Scott slid down in his chair. Maybe she'll forget today. Maybe she won't call him. He closed his eyes and tried to disappear.

Ever since they made him take that test. That stupid test that lasted five days. It all started when he failed this history test. Mrs Tomlin sent him to Ms Harrington's small classroom in the portapack, where Demetri — the kid with the funny accent - went during French class. He had to talk to Ms Harrington about how he felt. Then they started testing him.

Everyday during English he went to Ms Harrington's class, where he was forced to sit between her and another teacher Scott had never seen before with five bags, each one made from a different old carpet. She kept saying "Read this to me, Scott." "Now, tell me what you read, Scott." As she flipped coloured pieces of plastic out of her bags and putting them over his book. Blue. Pink. Yellow. "Do you see rivers in your paper, Scott?" What did that even mean?

Then they made him stay after school and met with his parents. Mrs Fargo-Krisp - the principal, Mrs Tomlin, Ms Harrington and the coloured-plastic teacher all sat down with Mom and Dad while Scott was sent outside to play in an empty playground. He didn't feel like playing. He sat on the steps outside the classroom and listened to his Dad shouting through the plastic walls. At least Scott thought they were made of plastic, his sister's doll house seemed to be better built than the portapack.

"My son is not stupid."

"Of course he isn't," said Ms Harrington. "He has a learning difference."

"I don't care what you call it. You aren't putting my son in the sp-ed class. That's for retards and immigrants." Scott could hear his Mom crying. "It's freezing in here," his father shouted. "No wonder the kid can't concentrate. Who could concentrate in this piece-of-crap building. We'll take Scott out of this third-rate school and put him in private school where the teachers didn't get their degrees out of cereal boxes." Scott shuddered and hugged his arms to him. He didn't want to change schools. He sniffed but refused to cry. He couldn't let Dad see him cry. "I'm not stupid," he whispered, "you tell them Dad." Then he added even quieter: "I'm not stupid." Mrs Tomlin was crying to, "Please don't do that, Scott's a good kid. He just needs a little help with his reading."

The coloured- plastic lady: "It's just the way his mind works, the school system is designed for one kind of learning and the kids that learn differently need to be taught differently."

Dad: "So we find a school that teaches every way."

Mrs Fargo-Krisp: "You won't find one — this is the best system we have for Scott. Ms Harrington is at the top of her field and is the best chance Scott has to catch up to his peers. Please let her do her job."

Finally they opened the door. "Scott," Ms Harrington said.

"I'm not stupid." He'd never yelled at a teacher before, but the anger was too much. He wanted to put his fist through the plastic wall and tear the whole room down. Hot tears burned his eyes and he roughly brushed them away on his sleeve.

"I know you aren't."

"I don't need special-ed."

She sat down next to Scott with some difficulty, she was older than Mom and even Mom had trouble sitting on steps. Their bodies didn't like to get down that low. Ms Harrington put her arm around Scott's shoulders. She smelled like too many flowers. "Scott, I want you to listen to me. You are a really bright kid. Remember when you told me about the medieval castles and the knights." "Yeah," the knights were cool. And he'd liked building his castle. It was the best in the class, even Mrs Tomlin said so.

"But you got a D-minus on the test. You knew that stuff, Scott. You knew it better than anyone, but you didn't do well on the test. What does that tell you?"

"Mrs Tomlin asks trick questions."

"Well, I'm going to teach you the trick if you let me. I'm going to help you with your reading and whenever you have a test you'll take it with me, and I'll read you the questions if you like. And you can ask me how to spell anything you want."

Scott sniffed and looked at her. "Really? Isn't that cheating?"

Ms Harrington smiled and shook her head. "Nope, so long as you are in my class, those are the rules."

Scott sniffed again. "Alright."

It wasn't so bad. He actually liked Ms Harrington and it turned out Demetri was a cool guy, even though he talked funny. And he'd taught Scott all sorts of bad words in Russian that the teachers didn't know. But no matter how nice everyone was, Scott still hated the end of Math period when they switched to English and

Mrs Tomlin called out his name. She never forgot.

She turned from the board and smiled at Scott. "Scott," she said so everyone could hear her. "You can go to Ms Harrington's room now"

Demitri got to stay until French started, so Scott had to stand and gather his books. All by himself he walked to the front of the class and out the door.

