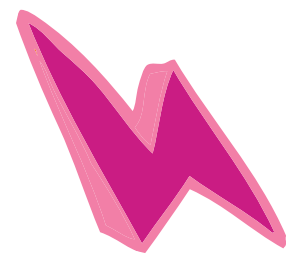


Guilty as charged

by Michael Mann



"Which one of you did it?"

I'm her favourite. I never do anything wrong. But this time, somehow, I know it's me.

"The wall," she says. "It's someone in this class."

We've been called to the carpet. She stares down from The Chair. We're silent, cross-legged, but inside I'm shaking.

"Look at me, all of you. I want to see your faces."

We look. Her skin reminds me of camels: hard, tanned and old. Her eyes are furious. I don't want to look, but if I look away, she'll know.

"Mark. Mark Baron. Do you know what happened?"

"Don't know miss," he says.

It's always Mark. He's guilty too. But for the first time ever, I know how he feels.

And it feels TERRIBLE.

"I'm waiting," she says.

It started by accident.

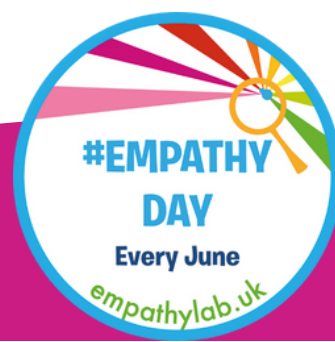
We were coming in from lunch and Mark's hood got caught on it. A little metal ball on the end of a chain. It hung down from the red box for the fire alarm - it was for breaking the glass. I helped him untangle it, and when he was free, I let it go and it bounced and made a dent in the wall.

It was a smooth, curved imprint. It made a nice sound too - a quiet crunch. The wall looked so solid. It seemed strange that such a small thing could break it.

So we told people. And they tried it. Everyone did. And soon the wall was covered with tiny craters. Our little piece of the moon.

I'd just been showing Melissa how when we were called in.

#ReadForEmpathy



Guilty as charged

by Michael Mann



"Helena. Was it you?"

"No Miss."

Miss taps her nails on the register. Tap tap tap.

Then she looks at me.

"Michael. What was assembly about today?"

"It was about Peter, Miss. He denied knowing Jesus. Three times."

"And then what happened?"

"The cock crowed. And he went outside and cried."

"He cried bitterly."

I look down at the floor.

"Year 6. This is not Jerusalem. I will not stop at three. I will keep asking until I find out who is responsible. Do you hear me?"

Silence.

"Now. Where was I? Melissa - who did it?"

"I don't..." she starts, but then something happens. Under the weight of St Peter, she crumbles like the wall. "I... I think I saw Michael do it."

I want the ground to swallow me. I want to shout at Melissa: Why? But then I remember last week, how I dobbed in Mark for the trainers. Now I know how he felt. And it feels TERRIBLE.

Miss gives me The Stare. I confess at once. I am made to stand up, bright red, in front of everyone... but before the tears come, I hear a sound. I turn to see Mark standing too.

Then Carl. Tate. And Lucy B. Until a dozen kids are stood there with me. Even Melissa.

Mark gives me a wink.

And I don't feel quite so terrible anymore.

#ReadForEmpathy

