

# badboy Miller

By Richard McKinnon



Illustrations Claudia Frey

Every day Miller Morford would wake up with a smile on his face, knowing he was the toughest boy in his neighborhood.

He enjoyed scaring the other kids into giving him their pocket money: even more, he loved spending it on lollies. Rich chocolate bars, sweet sticky toffees and sugary blueberry bubblegum, which he rudely popped in people's faces.

Today Miller was feeling particularly mean, so he ate a huge breakfast, for strength to bully other kids. On his way to school he saw little Pete Greene leave his house. Pete was new on the block and Miller saw it as his right to teach him who was boss.

"Hey, Peewee Pete," Miller yelled.

Pete swung around. The other kids had warned him yesterday about Miller. They told him to look out for the big bully with the dark hair and the flash orange sunglasses. He started to run.

Miller dropped his school bag – full of homework he hadn't done – and started off after little Pete, who took a sharp turn down a side alleyway, nearly tripping over someone sleeping under some newspapers. He hid himself behind a big green garbage bin.

"Please, please, please," Pete told himself, "Don't let Miller find me."

But there was Miller, standing at the entrance of the lane. "It's no use, Pete. I can see you wherever you try to hide." He walked slowly forward, singing in a chilling tone, "Come out, come out, wherever you are."

Pete huddled next to the big smelly bin, his arms cradling his legs. He felt a great sickening fear move around his stomach. The footsteps grew closer and louder; Pete could almost smell Miller's foul breath – his teeth were going green and rotting because of all the lollies.

Oh no! Pete felt a warm, discomforting trickle down his leg, a further reminder of his helplessness.

Miller towered over little Pete. It excited him to know that he had frightened the small boy to the point of wetting his pants.

"Had a little accident, have we, Pee 'wee' Pete? Mummy never toilet trained you?"

Pete's whole body started to shake and an ice-cold chill shot up his spine. He looked up at Miller and pleaded, "Please,

don't hurt me."

Miller snickered, "Well, in that case, what am I going to do with you?" A spark of wickedness shot into his mind.

He bent down, picked up little Pete by his shirt collar, threw him head first into the garbage bin and slammed down the lid. This was the dumpster of the nearby fish shop, full of stinking fish heads and octopus guts.

From inside the putrid bin, Pete heard Miller's muffled laugh, "If you so much as even stick your ugly head out – I'll beat you up."

Pete shut his eyes but the pain of what happened was too strong. Gentle tears began to fall like stars down his cheeks.

After a couple of minutes, Miller got bored. He glanced up the alleyway. A grubby foot was sticking out from under the newspapers. It belonged to the homeless person Pete had nearly tripped over. A bolt of excitement whirled up in Miller's brain.

"I'll have some fun with this loser," Miller mumbled. He pulled the papers away from the old woman's body. She was unwashed and wearing matted, dirty clothes. Miller didn't feel



any compassion for such an unfortunate person; instead he kicked her as hard as he could in the leg to wake her up.

**The old woman's eyes opened and closed like a camera shutter.** A gush of wind blew up the alleyway, whirling around Miller and the woman on the ground. The newspapers flew about in a mini twister. Debris whooshed everywhere. Soda cans, candy wrappers and bits of fish gizzards flew about Miller's head.

Then the wind dropped, and the debris began to transform. The soda cans turned into beautiful lotus flowers with multi-colored petals. A golden throne, held up by four magnificent snow lions with green manes and long red tails, grew up from the ground. The throne lifted. The woman was sitting high up on a sparkling silver moon cushion. Her matted clothes fell away from her tired old frame. Now she was wearing the maroon and yellow robes of a Buddhist monk. Her face had changed. She had become a young man.

Miller's eyes boggled, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. The young man's face was very beautiful, his narrow eyes smiled compassionately at Miller. Golden light filled the alleyway, radiating from the monk's open hand.

Miller could hear the snow lions murmuring. They had bright soothing eyes that made him feel very peaceful inside.

Miller, struggling to speak, asked in astonishment, "Wh ... who are you?"

The monk's voice was firm and clear, but also extremely tender. "I'm here to ask you, Miller, to think about the way you treat other people and the way you cause them suffering."

Miller felt an absolute sense of calm come over him. It had something to do with the golden light, which was bright, but not blinding.

"But who are you? Are you magic?"

The monk slowly placed his hand on Miller's head. Miller felt a rush of energy go through his body from the crown of his head to his toes. He felt tired and relaxed and soon fell into a deep, deep sleep.

**Miller slowly woke up with a dazed, fuzzy feeling in his head.** He was lying down where the throne had been, but the throne was nowhere to be found and neither was the old lady. The man in the robes had completely vanished, exactly the same way he had appeared. Like magic, Miller thought.

Then a strange feeling came over him. He remembered little Pete in the bin. He felt ... what did he feel? For the first time in his life, Miller felt sorry about what he had done. A great sensation of regret went through him as he ran over to



the bin. He flipped the lid open, but little Pete wasn't there, nor were the foul-smelling fish heads.

Inside the now clean bin was a note. Struggling to read it – because remember, Miller never did his homework – he managed to make out the sentence:



**"There are two paths one can walk, in dark or light, with love or fright. Decide here, if you wish to live with fear."**

Looking down, he saw his own hands, but they weren't his own hands. They were an old man's hands. Frantically he searched over his body. He wasn't wearing his school uniform or his special orange sunglasses. He was in dirty, old, grungy clothes. He wasn't an eleven-year-old boy any more; he was an old man with wrinkles.

"I must be dreaming," he said. The reflection in a pool of water next to the bin proved his dread: he was trapped in an old man's body.

He left the alleyway in a fearsome hurry, heading down the main street toward his house.

**But things had changed. Some buildings had been knocked down** and new ones had replaced them. The fish shop was now a trendy clothes shop. Little Pete's house was now a playground and a pre-school. Cars didn't have wheels anymore: they hovered in midair, then shot off with a jet-thrust, just above the ground ... he was in the future.

The trees around his house had grown bigger. Other than that it looked the same, he thought. Same steps leading up to



the front door, same color, but his bike, normally chained to the porch, had gone. In its place was a sign. In big colorful letters it said *Morford Buddhist Center*.

"That's my surname," whispered Miller in utter confusion.

He walked up the steps, finding it hard in a stiffer, older body, and stepped inside. Soft chanting and singing came from down the passageway. Paintings had been taken down and replaced with new ones. His favorite picture of a dog riding a motorbike had been swapped with a picture of ... what on earth? Miller looked closely again, and written under it were the words *Shakyamuni Buddha*.

"That's him," thought Miller. "It's the guy who appeared from nowhere in the alleyway and made me grow old."

A little old lady appeared from one of the rooms.

"Are you here for the meditation class?" she inquired in a very sweet, kind voice.

There was something familiar about her too, and then the



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penny dropped. Miller saw that she was the homeless old lady in the alleyway, the old girl whom he'd kicked in the leg. She was bathed, and dressed in nice, clean, ironed clothes.

"My name is Miller Morford, I live here," Miller said, bluntly. It was the only thing he could think to say.

The old lady smiled and answered, "Well, there can't be two Miller Morfords."

Miller moved toward where the lounge room used to be, stepped around the corner and looked in. He saw a bowed figure chanting and placing incense upon an altar. It was himself, the old Miller Morford he'd seen reflected in the puddle, but he wasn't wearing dirty clothes now. He was in beautiful saffron robes. Miller closed his eyes. How could he be young one second, then old the next, but then also be old in two different bodies? It made no sense.

"His name's Miller Morford, too?" asked Miller. The old lady who had followed him replied, "Yes. He is a very kind man who became a Buddhist monk and set up this center in his childhood home. He teaches the homeless people about the Buddha, and love, and the nature of your mind, through songs and chants. He gives us food, clothes us and lets us stay for as long as we like."

In the room where Miller could so clearly remember watching all his favorite cartoons on television, sat another older self, teaching the Dharma to a dozen homeless people.

The older Miller, this monk Miller, looked up and saw the older homeless Miller. Their eyes met and there was a sharp flash of silver light as bright as a million suns. The homeless Miller felt really tired. So did the monk Miller ... and they both fell into a deep, deep sleep.

**Miller woke up.** This time his head was clear. He immediately looked at his hands. They were young again, unwrinkled, with smooth veins, and no age spots – and he was back in his eleven-year-old body. He was lying next to the old homeless lady, but now he felt a great deal of compassion and kindness toward her. Poor thing. What had led her here? Why was she alone sleeping in the rubbish in an alley? He wanted to help her, not kick her.

He ran out onto the main street. The fish shop was there, and everything else was back to normal. Looking down, Miller saw he was wearing his school uniform, not grubby torn rags, and he felt relief wash over him. Then, in horror, he remembered little Pete in the garbage bin. As he ran over to it he could hear the faint sound of crying. He opened the lid and pulled Pete out gently.

Pete looked at him with big, blue, tear-filled eyes. Miller stared back at him. He felt so bad about what he'd done, but more than that; he felt a huge warmth in his heart.

"I'm so sorry," said Miller, and gave Pete a big hug. Pete didn't know what to do or how to act in return. Then Miller said, "Here, take my orange sunnies. It's a sorry present." Pete held out his hand and accepted them, suspicious at first. Then he smiled at Miller and ran off toward school.

Miller also smiled. For the first time in his life he had helped somebody and it felt really good. As he walked passed the homeless lady, he stopped, reached into his pocket and gave her all the change he had stolen. She could use it more than him, and he would only spend it on junk food anyway.

Miller had seen a buddha. The Buddha gave him two options. He was shown two different futures. If Miller kept on doing what he was doing, not doing school work, bashing kids, stealing money and causing suffering to others, he was going to end up miserable and homeless himself.

But now Miller had seen that this was the wrong way to live and, by helping others, he could become much happier and who knows, maybe, like his strange vision, one day he could become a monk himself and run a place that would help people.

If you see a boy on the street, yelling, "Extra, extra, read all about it," that's Miller doing his after-school job. He's selling newspapers so he can repay all the money he stole from kids over the years. ☸

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Richard McKinnon, 23, is a freelance writer who lives in Geelong, Australia. He is currently a writer for an international film and television company that produces the children's documentary series, *The Big Planet*. A student of Buddhism for the past four years, he thinks he has a long way to go before he experiences emptiness.