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 multicolored 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, “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 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 monk Miller, 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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