

How green you are!

There was a kid in our street called Julie. None of the others could stand her. She went to a different school from us, a convent school, where they had to wear uniform. The first day she went to that school, I remember, we all followed her up the road to the bus-stop, laughing at her. She looked daft. She was wearing a green school coat that was too big for her, so that her little pink hands stuck out all chubby from the sleeves, and she was weighed down with all sorts of rubbish – a shiny brown leather satchel, and a shoe-bag with a bunch of roses embroidered on it, and a hockey-stick. And she had her hair done in pigtails with green ribbons, and a stupid green hat stuck on her head.

She went bright red when she came out of her house and saw us all waiting on the other side of the road for her. She looked as if she wanted to go back in but her mum kissed her goodbye and shut the door flat in her face and went off back to bed. So Julie smiled at us, in a half-proud, half-scared sort of way, that made her look more as if she was going to burst into tears, and marched up the street, pigtails bobbing, and over the main road to the bus-stop, and stood there gazing across at us with blank eyes while the traffic trundled backwards and forwards between us.



I wanted to shout 'Good luck Julie!' to her, but I daren't, in case the others laughed at me too. So I just stood there while they shouted 'Jolly hockey sticks,' across at her, and then Kevin started them off singing, 'How green you are, how green you are, how green you are, how green....,' ever so softly, to the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne' till her bus came, and then they sang it at the tops of their voices as she staggered onto the bus and moved down to the back seat. She just sat there, staring out at us with her face all blank and closed up, as if she couldn't see us any more, and as the bus lurched forward we all waved and ran off to our big school up the hill.

But I felt a bit sad about all that. Julie had been my friend, sort of my best friend, up till then. We used to play marbles in the alley-way together, and sail paper boats down the gutter when it rained, and we'd spent all our hot summers together playing rounders on the field over the railway line and helping with the donkey-rides on the beach. It felt as if none of that had ever happened. I trailed up the hill after the others, thinking how different she looked wearing that stiff new uniform instead of her tatty little cotton dress and gym shoes. Marie was waiting for me and when I caught up with her she linked her arm in mine.

'That's her gone, the snob!' she said. 'Will you be my best friend now, Bee?'

She'd been wanting to be my best friend for ages.

And I had to say yes, because I didn't want to be called a snob too.

But I kept thinking about her during the day. It was a new school for us too, but at least we were all there together, and had been in Junior School together. It must have been really strange for her, going to a new school all on her own, and a convent school at that, with nuns like great black crows floating down the corridors and carrying her off to chapel. I was dying to know what it was like. So on my way home from school I bought a bar of Cadbury's, and I dashed to her house after tea, when none of the other kids were around. I thought we'd sit on her step, like we always did, and share out the Cadbury's, and I'd tell her about our school and she'd tell me all about the nuns and everything, but when she opened the door she just stood there, all clean and different in her stiff long uniform still, and said, 'I can't possibly play out tonight. I've got Latin homework to do.'

That did it. I ran off round to Marie's and we shared out the Cadbury's bar and then we went and played ball against Julie's house.

Adapted from *How Green You Are!* by Berlie Doherty

