

**THE GREEN INDIAN  
PROBLEM**



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*JADE LEAF WILLETTS*



RENARD PRESS

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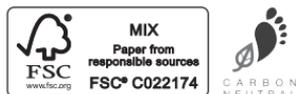
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**THE GREEN INDIAN  
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*For Scarlett*



**1989**



## TREES

Mrs R told us to make a family tree. She said a family tree is a type of drawing that is also like a map of our families. My family tree was hard to do, because some of my family are living with the wrong people. I drew a lot of trees. I put myself, my mum and my sister in the first tree. Then I put my dad in the second one. I put everybody else in the other trees.

Because I am in the top group and the teacher thinks I'm clever, she lets me write stories when I have finished my work. I don't think I'm that clever, because I don't understand how spaceships work, and I am still trying to do my Rubik's cube. My dad can do it really quickly, but I can only get one side the same colour. Orange. If I am not working on a story, Mrs R sometimes tells me to go and sit with Michael and help him with his work. She says that Michael needs extra help. I know this is true because Michael does not understand that  $2 \times 2$  is 4 or  $3 + 4$  is 7. Michael has also been writing his name wrong. He has been writing 'Micel'. Then the other day I showed him how to write it. He copied his name out loads of times and now he can do it right.

Michael is my best friend. He lives in the next street to me, and he is allowed to stay out on his bike when I am in bed. I can only stay out late if it's not a school night and if my mum is in the right kind of mood to let me. That's just sometimes.

Michael lives with his mum and dad, his brother, his sister and his dogs. He only drew one tree. There were too many people in it because he drew his whole family – even his aunties and uncles were dangling off the branches. He put the dogs at the bottom of it, too. It looked like the dogs had scared everyone, so they climbed away. When I had finished my trees, I helped him to spell out the names in his family. I know how to spell all the names in mine.

I live with my mum, my little sister Verity and a horrible man called Den. Den is short for Dennis. I didn't put Den in our tree because he does not really belong there. He is so horrible he should have his own tree with no other people in it. I wish he was stuck in a tree and could never climb down. There should be special trees for people like Den.

My dad is called Graham, but everyone calls him Gray or Grayo. My mum is called Linda, and people just call her Linda. I wrote down all my dad's names on the branches of his tree. I put his new family in the tree with him too. My dad lives with a woman called Tina and my two brothers, Aaron and Kai. When Mrs R was teaching us about families, she said that some people can have half brothers and sisters. She said half brothers and sisters only share a mum or a dad, not both. I think it means only having one parent that is the same as each other. It was a bit confusing. Michael kept saying, 'I dunno what she's on about.' If Mrs R is

right, that would mean my brothers and sister are halves, but I think that is just stupid, because you can't have half a sister. Sisters are not like fractions.

I wish my dad would live with us, but my mum said sometimes mums and dads can't stay with each other because they do not like to live together in the same house. I think they should check if they like to be around each other before they get married. I think that would save people from getting sad. I am sad because my dad does not live with us, but I am also sad because I am stuck.

Mrs R said if we get stuck we should try to work things out. She told us to do it on paper like we do in maths if we can't work out a sum. Then she gave us a spare workbook each, just for working things out. She said writing things down helps to work out problems. That is why I am writing this out. It's because I am stuck with things. When you are stuck, it is called a problem, or a puzzle, and it can sometimes be called a mystery. My problem is a mystery because something has happened to me that I don't understand, and I can't work out why it has happened. The teachers say if we try but still can't work out the answer to something we should ask somebody, but I don't know who will know the right answer. I want to work out the mystery by myself, but I think I will have to ask some questions to get some clues. That is what I am going to do. I am writing this down in my workbook, so it is going to be my clue book too. I'm going to take it home so I can keep working on the problem. I think it might take a long time to get the right answer, because it is a very mysterious mystery.

## INDIANS

When my dad asked me why I told the other kids in my class that I come from an Indian tribe, I didn't answer. I knew exactly why I said it, but I didn't tell him the truth, because even though I am seven and a half and he is 29, I know he doesn't understand because he keeps telling me a different thing is true. Instead of explaining, I decided to just be quiet. It was because I didn't know how to explain and also because I was afraid of crying in front of him.

'You're not a boy,' he said. 'You're not a bloody Indian, either.'

His voice wasn't shouting, but his face was.

I didn't say anything.

'You're my little girl,' he said.

In my brain I could hear screaming. It was saying, 'NO I'M NOT! NO I'M NOT! NO I'M NOT!'

I ignored the inside shouting and just let my dad say it. I didn't cry until he walked me home. I got sadder and sadder when I was watching him walk away down the street. Then he disappeared around the corner, and I cried, because I knew he couldn't see me. I was sad that he was angry about the lie because I always want to please him because he's my dad. I cried because I know I am a disappointment. Disappointed is when you wish something was different or better. It is very hard to spell. I also cried because I want to be happy and I don't want to wear the

skirt to school. The skirt is the reason I lied. The skirt is my nemesis. We learnt the word nemesis in class. It's easy to understand, because all you have to do is think about superheroes. Lex Luthor is Superman's nemesis, and Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's nemesis (even though really he's his dad).

The skirt is the thing I hate most in the whole world. I hate it more than Marmite and fish fingers. I even hate it more than Barbie dolls and *The Sound of Music*. *The Sound of Music* is a film, and it's the most boring one I have ever seen. I would rather not have a telly than watch it. I would rather look at the wall. The skirt means the other kids in my class think I'm a girl. I am not a girl, though. I keep telling them that I'm not a girl, but I don't think they understand, because they just look at me with goldfish-style faces. The teachers don't understand, either. They think I'm a girl too. It's because my mum and dad told them I am, and teachers never think that parents lie or get things wrong. When I tell the teachers I am a boy they give me a row, and say 'Don't be silly' and 'Behave' and 'Stop telling lies'. When I tell the other kids in my class, they just listen or stare. Sometimes they ask me lots of questions too.

'You can't be a boy because you've got long hair,' Gareth said.

I told him that lots of boys have long hair.

'Like who?' he said.

'Like pirates, wrestlers, Indians and Ozzy Osbourne,' I said.

'Who's Ozzy Osbourne?'

I told him that Ozzy Osbourne is a singer, and he has long hair, but he didn't know who I was talking about. I know Ozzy Osbourne because of my dad. I don't think Gareth's dad listens to Ozzy Osbourne, so I tried to think of someone he would know.

'Gazza used to have long hair,' I said.

Then Louise said, 'Well, why do you wear a skirt if you're a boy?'

That was when I made up the Indian lie. I told everyone I come from an Indian tribe. I am sticking to the Indian tribe story, even though it is a risk, and my dad might find out again and tell me off. I have to stick to the Indian story because it explains why I have long hair and why I am not allowed to wear trousers, and I can't tell the truth because I am seven and a half and I don't even know what the truth is – that is why I am trying to work it out, because it is a mystery. I don't even know why they make me do it. All I know is I am a boy, but everyone keeps telling me I'm not.

I don't think my mum cares that much about girl things. She doesn't keep on about it as much as *some* people, anyway. She does make me have some girl things, but she lets me have the most normal things and gives me a break from the skirt on the weekends. I love my mum and I want to please her, but I do less to please her than the others. I think it is because I am with my mum most of the time, and I find it hard to keep up pretending that everything is OK when I am at home. You can't pretend at home, it's too hard.

My mum always looks sad, but not as sad as some other people, like the poor Africans on the telly. When she smiles she looks very nice. Sometimes I think my mum is sad because of me. I know that she was sad when Mrs R told her about the Indian lie, and I know she was sad when she realised I was sad about the skirt, but sometimes I have seen her get quite happy. She is happy when her sister, my auntie Carol, comes to visit from London. They go crazy when they see each other. They do the same laugh, and anybody who is with them can't help laughing because it is very funny to hear two women doing a crazy hyena laugh at the exact same time.

## GREEN

Green is my favourite colour. When I had to choose a workbook, I chose green. There weren't many colours, so it was easy. You could pick either green or red. I like green because it is the colour of grass. There's lots of grass where I live, because there are a lot of mountains. I also like green because I am Green. That is what I want my name to be, even though it isn't really. I wish everybody would call me it, but they won't, especially the grown-ups. My friends call me Green because friends don't care about real names. I like to be called Green for lots of reasons. It feels comfy when people say it, and it feels like it's the name I was supposed to have. It matches up with me. Green is what my real name means, but I don't like to be called

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JADE LEAF WILLETTS is a writer from Llanbradach, a strange, beautiful village in South Wales. He writes about extraordinary characters in ordinary worlds and has a penchant for unreliable narrators. *The Green Indian Problem*, his first novel, was longlisted for the 2020 Bridport Prize in the Peggy Chapman-Andrews category. Jade's poetry has been published by *Empty Mirror*, *PoV Magazine* and Unknown Press. His short story, 'An Aversion to Popular Amusements' was shortlisted for the inaugural Janus Literary Prize. All his stories are available for adaptation, should Wes Anderson be interested. He is currently working on a coming-of-age sequel to *The Green Indian Problem*.

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