

The Bogey Man

by [Sarah Das Gupta](#) (January 2024)



Boy with Hand to Face– Egon Schiele, 1910

Mum had been putting out the washing when Max followed her into the back garden. 'Why don't you play out here? It's too nice to be hanging about indoors.'

'Can I do some digging, Mum? I found my seaside spade.'

'Well, just mind you don't throw mud around, near my nice clean sheets.'

He watched as she walked back to the kitchen with the empty laundry basket.

At first Max tried the rose bed but the soil was too hard and the roses too thorny. Then he saw a freshly dug bed with small green plants in neat lines. To Max small green plants were weeds. After all they had to be. They couldn't be flowers. Carefully, systematically, he walked up and down the neat rows, collecting the 'weeds' in his Mickey Mouse bucket. He pushed them down hard with his podgy little hands. That was how Dad did the weeding.

'Max, do you want an orange juice? It's quite hot out there.'

'Coming, Mummy.' Proudly, Max picked up the bucket and spade to show Mum. She was always on at Dad about the garden. Just last Saturday, when Dad was watching the football on the telly, she'd shouted at him to finish planting out in the back garden. Max walked into the kitchen and dumped his bucket on the wooden table. Mum took one look at the wilting 'weeds' and slumped down in the old leather chair.

'Oh no! Max you've dug up Daddy's wall flowers! The ones he planted at the weekend. To Max's dismay, Mum was crying. Now Max was three he hardly ever cried. Dad had said he was too grown up to cry. Only girls and babies cried. Mum wasn't a girl, was she?

Mum spent a hot hour that afternoon digging the flower bed and resuscitating the wall flowers. Max stayed out of the way playing with his cars on the landing. What day was it? Thank goodness it was Wednesday. He had heard dad call out, 'I'll be late this evening, it's Wednesday.'

Max sat holding his favourite toy car. Dad had given it to Max when he fell down the front steps and fractured his arm. He'd been two years old then. He'd cried quite a bit. Lucky it wasn't Thursday 'cause Dad might be cross about the plants and Thursdays was when the Bogey Man came. Max thought about the Bogey Man a lot. He knew he wore a black knitted helmet, a sort of 'bala' something, Mum called it. Once Max had glimpsed his eyes as he knocked on the front door. They looked fierce like the tiger in the book Dad read to Max, when he was in a good mood. The Bogey Man's coat was black and baggy. Perhaps he hadn't eaten any children recently. He carried a battered case. Looking from behind the net curtains, Max had seen him take out an old exercise book and write something. Was it a list of naughty children? When he asked Dad, he said, 'You'd better behave when Grandma comes on Saturday. Don't say she looks like the wicked witch in your fairy story book.'

Grownups were so hard to understand. You were told to always tell the truth but when you did, you got sent to your bedroom for the afternoon!

Thursday afternoon arrived. Max sat upstairs with his cars and model train set. He had been given blackcurrant jam sandwiches and lemonade to keep him quiet, while mum and Auntie Alice gossiped. He'd enjoyed the blackcurrant as was evident from even a cursory glance at his purple face and crimson hands. Dad had just finished painting Max's room. Instead of cowboy wall paper with horses and men galloping madly, lassoing recalcitrant cattle, it was plain white, like the loos in the coffee shop. Then Max remembered. Last week while he was drinking his milkshake, Mum came from the toilets, grumbling about pictures on the walls. When Max went for a pee, he

looked with interest at the writing and sketches all over the recently painted toilets. There were hearts, arrows, other pictures and diagrams which he didn't quite understand. Max thought the 'decorations' made the bathrooms much more interesting.

He too could add pictures to his tempting, pristine walls. He would be helping Dad out. After all, it was Max's room. Even before he had begun to draw a large, green train across the wall, dark red smudges somehow appeared near the wainscoting. Undeterred, Max added Christmas trees and houses with winding paths. The sun was shining but despite this, each house had a chimney with grey smoke and blackcurrant smudges adding an artistic touch.

Max was so absorbed in his mural that Mum had to yell up the stairs. 'Well, you've been quiet. What have you been up to?'

'Just doing some drawing with my crayons.'

'Looks like you've been painting with the black currant jam!' She grabbed a tea towel and vigorously scrubbed his face and hands.

As the baked beans and burgers were being served, there came a loud knock at the front door. 'Oh, I'd forgotten, it's the Bogey Man. Mike, can you go to the door, it's Thursday and I'm just serving up.'

'Sorry, I'm in the shower,' Dad bellowed down the stairs. Max's heart was racing. Surely one of them would go?

'Max, see that envelope on the table, take it to the front door. Just give it to the man.'

Max's heart was thumping inside the red stained shirt. He dragged himself along the hall. Terrified he reached for the handle. He opened the door a crack, just enough to hold out the the package. Max looked at one muddy boot and a

disembodied hand which took the brown envelope. Slamming the door, he ran back into the warm kitchen.

'You paying the rent now? That's great my son.' Dad laughed loudly.

Max wasn't listening. He was already thinking of next Thursday and the mural waiting in his bedroom!

[Table of Contents](#)

Sarah Das Gupta is a retired teacher from Cambridge, UK who also taught in India and Tanzania. She started writing last October while in hospital, recovering from an accident. Her work has been published in magazines and journals in over 12 countries including, US, UK, Canada, Australia, India, Germany, Croatia and Romania.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)