

SPARKS

BY SARAH PENWARDEN

On the morning of Dillon's seventh birthday, I wake to the sound of him racing down the hall. I leap out of bed and follow him onto the verandah. There, leaning against the railing, is a scooter – a brand new scooter. And it's not just any scooter. It's one that shoots sparks.

"Harley! Look at this!" Dillon shouts, grabbing the scooter. Still in his pyjamas, he scoots up and down the driveway. Then he's out onto the footpath, making such a noise that the kids next door come to see what's happening. The oldest one asks for a turn, but Dillon says no. Not when he's just got it.

"When do you reckon I'll get a go?" I ask Mum.

Dillon sleeps with his new scooter under his bed. He'd sleep with it in his bed if Mum would let him. The next day, he goes to his friend's party. He begs to take the scooter with him, but Mum shakes her head.

Once Dillon's gone, I sneak into his room and slide my hand under his bed. I can feel the deck, cold and steely under my palm. Carefully, I slide the scooter towards me and wheel it outside. I scoot up and down our driveway, turning early, well before the footpath so no one sees. The air rushes past. I drop my foot, and sparks shoot out behind me. I can't stop smiling.

When I'm finished, I put the scooter back, exactly as I found it.



"That's the best present we've bought you in a while," Dad says that night at dinner, ruffling Dillon's hair.

"Yeah, it's awesome," Dillon says. "Thanks, Dad."

"I think maybe it's time Harley had a turn," Mum suggests.

There's silence.

"Andrew, don't you agree?" she says.

"Well," says Dad, "it's a birthday present. Dillon shouldn't have to share it just yet."

"It's been two days," says Mum. "Dillon should let Harley have a go. It doesn't have to be for long."

Dad keeps on chewing, and Mum drops her fork and looks him straight in the eye. "I want our son to learn to share. I don't want him to be selfish."

"He's not selfish. He's enjoying his present. Give the kid a break."

Mum and Dad glare at each other. Then Dad finally looks away. I eat my mashed potato. Dillon eats his beans.

Later, when I'm in bed, I hear raised voices in the kitchen. I can just make out what's being said over the angry rattle of cutlery and the banging of dishes. "You're always defending him," Mum says.

"Someone has to," says Dad. "He's just a kid. He doesn't have to think of other people all the time. He's allowed to enjoy his birthday present."

"He'll turn into a spoiled brat if you're not careful," Mum says. "Is that what you want?"

The dishwasher bangs shut, and Dad stomps past my door.

The next morning, Mum and Dad pretty much ignore each other. Mum makes a big deal of talking about soccer practice, about my game on Saturday. Dad kisses us on the head goodbye – but he doesn't kiss Mum. Although when he comes home that night, they smile at each other, and Dad gives Mum a hug.



I try not to mention the scooter. I try to forget about it. But on Sunday, after hours of watching Dillon scooting up and down the footpath and ignoring me each time I ask for a turn, I go and find Mum.

She sighs and puts her hand on my shoulder. "You've been very patient, Harley. It's time to do something about this."

Mum goes to the back door. "Dillon," she calls. "You need to give Harley a turn on your scooter."

"No," Dillon yells back. Then he scoots down the driveway.

I walk to the gate and watch Dillon getting smaller and smaller till he's at the end of our road. Dad comes out, and we wait. Eventually Dillon heads back. As he gets closer, I can see his eyebrows drawn together in a frown.

"Hey, Dillon," Dad says. "Off that scooter. It's Harley's turn." Dad reaches out to stop him.

"No," says Dillon. He begins to turn around, ready to ride off again.

"Not an option," Dad says ominously. "Either you give Harley a go, or I'll take the scooter off you."

"No!" Dillon screams. He throws a massive wobbly, something he hasn't done for ages. Dad pulls the scooter away, and Dillon kicks and screams till his face is flaming like a sunset. Then he stamps inside, slamming the front door.

Dad passes the scooter to me – a grim look on his face. "That thing's become nothing but trouble."

I take the scooter to the playground and back. The kids on the swings stop to watch me go past. Somehow it isn't as much fun any more.

When I get back, Dillon's still in his room. He sulks for a few days, slinking around the house, keeping out of our way. Then, one afternoon, he comes home from the playground crying. He can hardly talk between sobs. When he calms down, we find out that he went to the toilet and when he came out, the scooter was gone.

Mum puts her arms around Dillon. Dad raises his eyebrows at me. I raise mine back. Poor Dillon. I go over and put my arm around him. "Don't cry," I say, thinking we're better off without it. And in my mind, I see another kid on the scooter, flying down the footpath, sparks flying.



Sparks

by Sarah Penwarden

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