

T for toilets

I am afraid of Aunt May's toilet. It's called a Tippler and when my cousin's goldfish that she won at Daisy Nook Fair died, they threw it down the toilet. I have to go, I can't wait a minute longer but all I can think of is the goldfish, or something worse, swimming up to bite my bottom.

My granddad only has one toilet. It's in the back yard across the stone flags. It's whitewashed every summer and you have to be careful not to brush against the walls otherwise your clothes are covered. The chain is lengthened by a piece of string attached to a box of water high above my head. I have a little job, cutting squares from "The Farmer and Pig Breeder" and threading the squares on to a piece of string to hang on a nail by the toilet.

Where we used to live we had to share four toilets in a block with our neighbours. My Mum was always cleaning and bleaching those toilets. The walls were white washed and the wooden doors had latches but no locks. I would sing so that others would know the toilet was in use. The state of our bowels was of daily concern and, if we missed a day, we had to take a dose of 'California Syrup of Figs'. The toilet block was at the top of the communal yard and I hated going after dark. I had a little night light but it was still scary as the spiders scuttled away from the light and the trains clattered over the bridge into the nearby station. At night we used the little enamel potty under the bed.

Our new house has two toilets, one upstairs next to the bathroom and one by the coal shed. Our outside lavatory smells differently to the one upstairs. The paraffin lamp that my Dad puts in there to stop the pipes from freezing along with the disinfectant smell of the hard shiny Izal toilet roll gives the smallest room its distinctive aroma. It's nice to have a proper bathroom although I did love having my bath in front of the fire. My dad would bring in the tin bath from where it hung on a nail in the yard and fill it with warm water from the kettle. Pears soap with its almost transparent brown-gold colour and Vosene shampoo were at the ready. Then, in my nightdress covered with my school gabardine raincoat, I am allowed to stay up till 8 o'clock to listen to "Top of the Form" or "Jimmy Clitheroe". I can make my supper of a Nice Biscuit or chocolate teacake last a long time by picking off the chocolate topping very slowly as the Head Girl of a Scottish Academy makes a speech to the losing team. One evening I was having my bath and my cousin Eric arrived with some of his teenage friends. My Mum had to run for a big towel to wrap me in and I was ushered into the cold kitchen to be dried.

-Bed-time. Up the dancers, young lady-

My Dad has woken from his forty winks

-I was just resting my eyes- he protests when we chorus "But you were asleep, Dad"