

## I for Ice-cream

I have to go to Alec Talco's for six ice-cream cornets. My Nanny told me that Mr Talco came from Italy. I know where Italy is on the map. Uncle John showed me in his atlas:

*"The Big toe of Italy,*

*Kicked little Sicily,*

*Right into the Mediterranean Sea"*

I take my little round basket and clutch the pennies tightly in my hand. I will have to run home before the ice-creams melt and drip all over my hands.

*"Don't forget, I want raspberry sauce on mine!"*

It's cool and airy inside the ice-cream factory with its steel fridges and stone floors. The big bottle of raspberry vinegar looks like blood. Mr Talco shakes the bottle and upends it to drip it on top of the cones. He takes my pennies, all hot and sticky.

*"Now mind the road, leetle one"*

We save our lolly sticks for popping tar bubbles that ooze up between the cobble stones on very hot days. I get tar all over my legs and hands. Dad is mad at me. He makes me stand up in the kitchen sink whilst he scours my legs with the hard scrubbing brush that mum cleans the floors with. He uses a sprinkle of pan-shine, shaking the white powder on to the bristles. My skin glows red and stings. I squeal when the train passes. All the people can see me standing in the sink in just my knickers and vest.

*"They're not bothered about a little 'un like you!"*

They only play "O Sole Mio" these days, more popularly known as the advertisement jingle for Cornetto ice-creams. Back then, each ice-cream van that visited our estate had its own unique tune. We responded like the rats that followed the Pied Piper, first rushing home to beg a few pennies from our Mums. Those met with disappointment gazed with envy at the lucky ones, sucking on their Vimto lolly or licking a large cone, dripping with blood-red raspberry sauce. Roland Evans leans from his van, ringing a bell. "Nicked from school", someone says. I like Vimto lollies; three sucks and the juice has gone, leaving an icicle on a stick. Levaggi's are an Italian family ice-cream firm who visit our estate on a daily basis, their tune filling the street with tinny music. Their crudely synthesised ditties herald a cornucopia of frozen treats.

My friends Dorothy and Joan persuade me to join them in hanging on to the side of the Levaggi's van as it moves off. We cling on as it gathers speed but, as the van rounds the corner, Dorothy and I fall off into the road. Joan is left clinging on for grim death but Mr Levaggi, realising he has an unwelcome passenger, stops the van. Joan hot-foots it across the field as he shouts Italian imprecations after her. Ice-cream treats are banned for some time after that little incident.

The chimes of the ice-cream van still summon up long summer days playing in the street or across the fields.

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