

P for Pantomime

We are practicing for the Sunday School pantomime. We have to line up in the 'Big Room' so that Barbara can put us in size order. I'm tall for my age so I am next to Brenda who is two years older than me. The older girls are singing "*Right, said Fred*"; the piano is banging away and the girls in the 'chorus' are giggling. I'm supposed to be singing a solo. I've brought my teddy bear and my pale pink winceyette pyjamas. The second line of my song is "*have no worries, have no care*". Do I have no worries? My Mum is usually worried and people are always saying

"Don't worry, it might never appen"

On the night of the Pantomime I watch the big girls curling their hair. Pat has her fringe stuck down with sellotape and the sides of her hair are twirled into two fat 'kiss curls' secured by criss-cross clips. Some of the girls are crowded round the mirror plastering their faces with a stick of thick orangey make-up. They draw black lines round their eyes and put bright red lipstick on. My Nanny would say they were "*brazen hussies*" if she could see them. My Mum's make up is in the kitchen drawer. She has a gold powder compact with a mirror in the lid and a soft velvety powder puff. The only other thing in her flowery zipped bag is a red lipstick in a golden case. You swivel the bottom and the lipstick winds up. My Mum dabs her nose with the powder and smears her lips with red. It takes about 2 minutes; these girls are taking all night!

-D'yer want a bit of lippy, luv?-

Nora sees me watching her. She runs her finger, loaded with red lipstick, across my lips. It feels slightly sticky and I can smell a faint perfume. Better not let my Mum see me!

Mrs Mellor is gathering the little ones together. We have to wait in the "wings". On the stage some of the big girls are sitting in a line pretending they are on the back seat of a car. My cousin Colin is sitting in between the two prettiest girls. Another lad is sitting on a chair in front of them. He's wearing yellow string back gloves and a matching yellow scarf. He holds a cardboard steering wheel. The girls are singing in high reedy voices:

- *Keep yer snoopy eyes on the road ahead, 'cos we're having fun, sitting in the back seat, kissin' and a huggin' with Fred-*

I think it would be much more fun to sit up at the front of the car with the driver. I always feel sick in the back.

Suddenly I am right in the middle of the stage. The lights are dazzling. I can just see lots of dark heads below me and Mrs Hennings is nodding at me from behind the piano. I feel shy and my knees are shaking. I squash my Teddy to my chest and sing loudly:

- *Me and my Teddy Bear, have no worries, have no care*
- *Me and my Teddy Bear, just play and play all day –*

Everyone claps and Mrs Mellor beckons to me from the wings. I do my best curtsy, the one I've been practicing in case the Queen comes to our house for tea one day.

Now I have to change into my red tap shoes with the big black bows and short green satin skirt. Then we are back on stage, trying to keep in a straight line, tapping away. We jump into our final pose, arms held high and legs almost doing 'the splits'. But I hear people laughing; Brenda's skirt has fallen down. She is bright red. We run off stage with Brenda struggling behind, clasping her skirt to her waist.

My Dad is standing in the wings with Aunty Mary. I don't recognise him at first; he's dressed as a woman; he even has a handbag over his arm. Aunty Mary has a funny straw hat squashed on to her head.

Mum grabs my hand.

- *Quick, do you want to see dad on stage?-*

We squeeze on to the end of one of the wooden benches on the second row. Aunty Mary is nattering away and my Dad just stands there holding his handbag and looking a bit stupid. Every now and then, Aunty Mary turns to Dad and shouts at him as though he's deaf.

- *Where've yer been? Yer were sat, sitting somewhere., weren't yer?*

Dad just stands there without speaking...

-*she knows, yer know-* says Aunty Mary

Everyone seems to find this hilarious.

A group of ladies in long floaty dresses glide on to the stage held in the arms of varying sizes of gentlemen, all wearing suits and dicky bows. The couples waltz to "Some Enchanted Evening". Then the heavy red curtain falls and it's time for ice-cream, bottles of pop and cups of tea in the interval.
