

HETTY. I don't think I heard the magic word?

CHILDREN. PLEASE.

HETTY. No. It's MAKE-BELIEVE. 'On your imaginary forces work.' Usherette, shine your torch on me, would you?

The light shines on her. The troupe watch in some terror as she pulls her coat over her head and transforms herself into a witch.

I am the Wicked Queen.

The CHILDREN boo.

This – (*She holds up her purse.*) – is the poisoned apple . . . Now where's Snow White? Is anyone home? Snow White? Where are you, dear?

Her cowardly troupe sink down in their chairs and look at the floor. HETTY needs help or the idea will collapse.

Snow White?

There is an awful pause and then a little girl's voice we have heard somewhere before.

HELEN. Why, it's a dear sweet whiskery old beggar woman. Come in and rest your legs.

HELEN has spoken as Snow White. She pushes ROSALIND to go onto the stage.

Go on, darling, she needs a Snow White . . . you've got the legs . . . you're supposed to be trained . . . think Shirley Temple meets Celia Johnson . . .

CHILDREN. Hooray!

ROSALIND stands there, speechless.

HELEN (Snow White). I'm afraid all the dwarves off to work have gone . . . so I'm just waiting for my prince to come . . .

ROSALIND (*takes over from HELEN as Snow White*). Oh you dear, sweet, old beggar woman, do take tea with me . . .

HETTY (Wicked Queen). No, I can't come in . . . but I brought you this lovely apple from my garden.

ROSALIND (Snow White). How very dear and sweet of you.

She goes to eat the apple.

CHILDREN. NO, IT'S POISONOUS! IT'S THE WICKED QUEEN! DON'T EAT IT!

HETTY (Wicked Queen). Farewell, Snow White. (*Cackles.*)

ROSALIND swoons and falls.

But who's coming down the garden path? Could it be the seven dwarves?

Her troupe all dive for cover in the audience. HELEN is thrilled.

IVY. Oh bloody bogger it.

CHARLIE. Oh God, no . . .

HETTY (Wicked Queen). YES! It's a good percentage of the seven dwarves. One, two, three, four, seven!

FLORA, CHARLIE, IVY, REGGIE and JOSEPH are volunteered.

HELEN. Hooray! . . . Let's hear it for those dwarves! . . . There's Wrinkly and Boozy and Deafy and Stinky . . .

They come onstage singing and kneel behind ROSALIND (Snow White). The CHILDREN cheer and sing along.

FLORA (Bashful). Whatever happened to Snow White, she won't wake up . . . Thingy . . . Grumpy . . . whoever you are?

IVY (Grumpy). Don't ask me . . . Bashful . . . ask . . . Sneezzy . . .

REG (Sneezzy). What? Oh . . . Aitishoo.

JOSEPH (Doc). Sneeze softly . . . wake her not . . .

FLORA (Bashful). Oh dear, there must be something we can do. Perhaps if all the boys and girls clapped their hands and said, 'I do believe in . . . in . . . ' What's that magic word? Mi . . . Mi . . .

HELEN. Midgets!

FLORA (Bashful). 'Miracles' – it might just break the cruel spell. Will you children clap your hands if you believe in miracles?

CHILDREN (*clapping madly as with Tinkerbell*). I DO BELIEVE IN MIRACLES.

IVY (Grumpy). She's still not breathing . . . she's not breathing . . . what can we do?

JOSEPH (Doc). Now boast thee death in thy possession lies a lass unparalleled.

FLORA (Bashful). Come on, darling . . . wake up angel.

IVY (Grumpy). Oh please don't let her die . . . please let a miracle happen.

JOSEPH (Doc). . . . Speak thou for my heart is full . . .

DOPEY. Perhaps if I . . . perhaps a kiss . . .

CHARLIE *leans down and tenderly kisses* ROSALIND.
GERTRUDE *plays 'waking-up' music on the piano*.

FLORA (Bashful). Oh how wonderful . . . a miracle . . . Snow White is coming back to life . . .

CHILDREN. HOORAY!

Everyone freezes except HETTY and FLORA.

HETTY. It was certainly the bonding experience we'd been looking for, wasn't it, Bashful? By the end of the show we had at least a hundred little volunteer dwarves happily singing 'Someday My Prince Will Come' and a delighted captive audience . . .

FLORA. And then the real miracle happened . . .

HELEN *steps forward*.

HELEN. Only eight days – and I want my own dressing room.

A surge of hectic activity as the sound of bombs falling.

HETTY (*reads*). 'My darling, who knows if we will be allowed to continue now that the Germans are intent on

bombing London, but 'we carry on, we carry on'. I think the Artemis Players might well give the Crummles Company a run for their money. We are about to be the full compliment so I'd like to say to whoever is up there deciding our fates . . . "for this relief much thanks" . . . and please keep watching over my own beloved soldier.'

Everyone in a rehearsal room busy making props, costumes, up ladders, etc.

HETTY. Right, these are general notes on yesterday's stagger so that when and if Miss Thrupp ever gets here, we can lead by example . . . Flora. Stop thinking and feel . . . It's about as moving as a broken fingernail . . .

FLORA. I'm sorry . . . It's just there was a full moon and I couldn't sleep . . .

HETTY. May I state here and now that I am having no truck with time-of-the-month excuses . . . on any front . . . otherwise this whole enterprise will be held hostage by our collective hormones . . . Ivy – stop looking down while you act . . . you seem to be playing every scene opposite Mickey Rooney . . .

IVY. Sorroy. Can I just ask . . . what does it mean 'Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped'? I've never got that bit . . .

JOSEPH. It means, Ivy, that the mother is dying before the baby is being born. So what can they do to save the baby?

IVY. What? You mean they cut the baby out of her? Bloody bogger . . .

HETTY. Now if I might . . .

JOCELYN THRIPP *arrives unnoticed*.

IVY. Sorroy . . .

HETTY. Charlie – stop all that palaver with your eyebrows . . . Helen – very good but concentrate on your own performance . . . and now all of you – stop pausing between words. We're not Americans . . .