

## TROUBLE BALLOONS UP

By Viv Seaman

“The inspector will be in to see you soon. Make every lesson a winner!”

The headmistress’s words punctured my thoughts. Week five of my new career... a qualified teacher of ten-year-old characterfuls! Gerald, (Bobby) chubby and posh who stripped butt naked in protest at poor quality exercise books. Dillon (Kermit) who dressed in green tights or Granddad’s trousers. Martin, who later did a great assembly performance as Mrs. Thatcher, said his mum was a witch and on meeting me she confirmed she was a white one! Tony who sat all day underneath his desk. Edward who refused to remove his anorak even for PE and girls wearing earrings and hiding make-up bags.

Maths, science and English I’d planned, now to sort art.

“I shall give you each a balloon to blow up then I want you to tie string round it three times each way,” I explained. “Then we’ll dip each balloon into plaster of Paris and let them set hard.”

I had the attention of intrigued children.

“Then what?” Melanie asked.

“We’ll pop the balloons and have a set of hard, string cages to paint brightly and hang from the ceiling.”

Satisfying the inspector was paramount.

Everyone set to work blowing up balloons and tying them tightly so the air could not escape while I mixed up a bucket of plaster with a ruler, being careful not to splash my new black dress worn specially for the inspector.

“Gather round the bucket,” I called. “Now in turns dip your stringed balloons into the plaster.”

Sam was first. He bent forward and did as he was told. As the balloon dipped beneath the surface of the plaster, there was an enormous BANG! The weight of the plaster and the air pressure in the balloon were by nature, mutually exclusive. They could not survive together. The balloon exploded. In that split second our world turned white.

Sam was a soggy, ghostly creature, white from head to foot except for his piercing blue eyes. White blobs dripped from the end of his nose and his mouth seemed incredibly red as he opened it to speak. Those closest to the bucket, three girls and two more boys weren’t much better off. No-one escaped some whitening damage as plaits and socks were hardening by the minute. My dress, no longer black, assumed zebra style.

I attempted a head to toe water treatment of varying degrees on thirty-two children but as we only had cold water, I was unable to hide the evidence. The kids copied, from the blackboard, notes of apology for their parents which I was to sign. We all attempted to wash down surfaces, chairs, desks and walls but the results of our labour were definitely streaky.

As we sat down to get our breath back, the classroom door opened and the head-teacher entered followed by a tall, grim-looking, dark suited man.

“Mr. Rose, the inspector, to see you,” she said.

I swear she had a smirk on her face.