

knitting. Maya couldn't bear to bother him all over again about the bright pink doll.

Oh, what did it matter what colour it was anyway? What did it matter what colour anything or anyone was?

It didn't. What mattered was that the baby doll was there – not lost under the paints at the bottom of the cupboard, but safe on the tray in the manger.

And soon she'd be standing on a stage, with everyone watching, waving her arms about and saying her words, loudly, so everyone at the back could hear.

She couldn't wait.

## ... Chapter Four ...



**M**aya stared at the pile of dolls on Mr Kelly's desk. She felt so happy she almost hugged herself. She'd only been in the school for a short time, but look how many friends she must have already! Almost everyone in the class must have been thinking about her and

her little problem this morning when they were getting ready to come in for the Christmas play.

Because almost everyone had brought in a doll, hoping it might be the right one for Maya.

There were all sorts: cloth, plastic, rubber, wood. Even Timothy had brought in one woven out of straw. And they were all sorts of colours. All shades of white and pink. All shades of tan and brown. Brick-red and pale yellow. Why, there was even a green one! (“I know it’s a turtle baby,” said Eddie. “But it is *sweet*.”)

“Take mine,” Misao begged. “I know she’s a girl, but she has the nicest smile.”



“Mine’s more cuddly,” said Robert.

“Mine’s eyes close properly,” said Laura.

Then they all started. “Take mine.” “Choose mine, please, Maya.” “No, choose mine.”

“Choose quick, before Mr Kelly comes.”

Oh, no! How could she ever choose? All of them had something right with them. But all of them had something wrong, too. Some were too old. Some were too small. Some were dressed in too fancy costumes. Some –

As usual, it was Mr Kelly who rescued her. He strode in the classroom and the first thing he did was toss something big and bright and knitted and woollen over the room at her.

“There! That’s for your baby!”

Maya spread it between her hands to have a look. It was a shawl. A shawl of brightly coloured

squares. The squares were red and blue and green and gold and brown and yellow and pink and black and purple and silver and violet and cream and white and turquoise, and every other colour she’d ever seen.

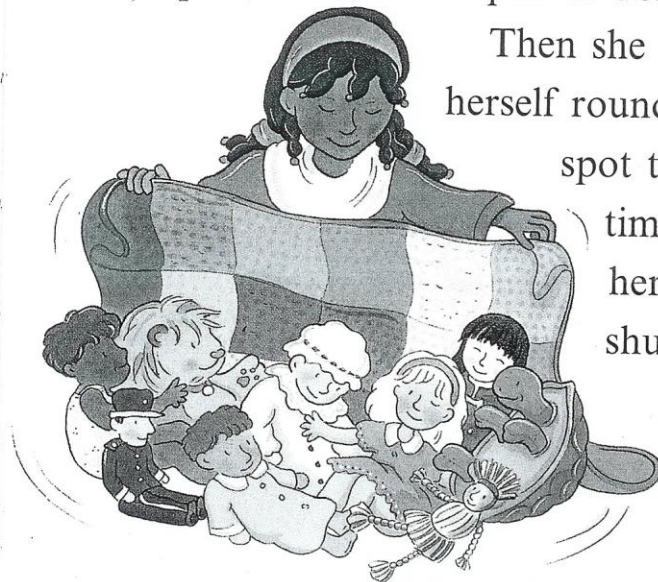
And it was beautiful.

All at once, Maya knew exactly what to do.

As everyone stood round her, watching, she lifted the shawl and spread it over the pile of dolls.

Then she turned herself round on the spot three

times, with her eyes shut.



## ... Chapter Five ...



The play was wonderful. None of the angels fell off the stage and showed their knickers. The donkey didn't fall in half. None of the fruit gums fell out of the kings' crowns while they were speaking. The fieldmice sang beautifully. And when Wayne forgot he was a

"Remember," he said. "All the words are safe in that head of yours. Don't worry, and they'll come out right."

He grinned at all of them.

"Right," he said. "Off we go."

Quietly, they all crept down the corridor to the back of the stage. They found their places behind the curtain. Then Mr Kelly pushed Laura out in front.

"*Long, long ago . . .*" he prompted her.

Laura took a deep breath. She pulled her tinsel crown straight, and spread her giant tinfoil wings, then started loudly and clearly:

"*Long, long ago . . .*"

