

## ... Chapter Five ...

“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 . . .*”



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

shepherd and started machine-gunning the audience with his crook, Laura the angel gave him a quick poke.

And Maya saved the show.

Everyone said so after. She got off the chairs with the ears and the tail, and stood beside Timothy as he knocked at the inn door.

Eddie stepped out.

Timothy said loudly, "Innkeeper! I am Joseph and this is my wife Mary who is going to have a baby. Can you give us a room for the night?"

Eddie opened his mouth to answer.



Then Timothy gave him the look. The words flew out of Eddie's head.

All three of them stood staring at one another, on the stage, with everyone watching.

Then Eddie lost his temper.

He reached forward and grabbed Maya by the arm.

"*She* can come in," he said. "She's all right. But *you* can't because I don't like you!"

Maya looked across between the



curtains, to Mr Kelly. What should they do *now*? But he couldn't help her. He'd just put his head in his hands and was staring at the floor and muttering.

So Maya looked at the audience.

They were staring too.

Oh, poor Mr Kelly! After he'd worked so hard and for so long! And been the nicest, kindest teacher she'd ever had! And gone to all the trouble of knitting the wonderful shawl, just for her.

She would not let him down.

And she wouldn't let Eddie or Timothy let him down, either.

Maya stepped forward and smiled at the audience – a great big smile.

She reached one hand out to

Timothy, and the other out to Eddie.

“This is a time of Peace!” she declared, waving her arms about and saying the words loudly, so everyone at the back could hear. (They were Laura's angel words, from later in the play. But Laura wouldn't mind her using them first.)

Then she added some words of her own.

“So stop your silly squabbling!”





she told the two of them firmly. "Be friends!"

She turned to Eddie the Innkeeper and gave him a look of her own.

"Innkeeper," she said. "Don't you even have a nice warm stable we can sleep in, with an ox and an ass and some fieldmice?"

"Oh, yes," said Eddie quickly. "I've got one of those."

Then Maya smiled sweetly at Timothy and trod on his foot, hard.

"What do you say, Joseph?"

"Thank you," Timothy said to Eddie, not very loud. Then he saw the foot coming down again.

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr Innkeeper."

They all walked together through Eddie's door. Mr Kelly took his head out of his hands, and the play carried on.

And it was *brilliant*.

\*

On the way out, after, Maya had to go past Mrs Brown and Mr Kelly.

"That was wonderful!" Mrs Brown was saying. "I know it's just the same old story every year, but every year it almost makes me *cry*: the kings and the shepherds and the angels, and that sweet, sweet song by the fieldmice!"

"I'm not doing it again next year," Mr Kelly warned her.

"Oh, I promise you you'll never, *ever* have to do it again. I promise



I'll find someone else next year. I know how much work it can be. I wouldn't have asked you again this year, but you see, you are the *best*."

Mr Kelly smiled happily. Then he patted Maya on the head as she slipped past him.

"Well, of course, I had a lot of extra help this year," he said, giving her a big, big wink.

And, all the way home, Maya felt like an angel.