The Curse of the School Rabbit

Judith Kerr



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To my grandchildren,
Alexander and Tatiana,
with all my love

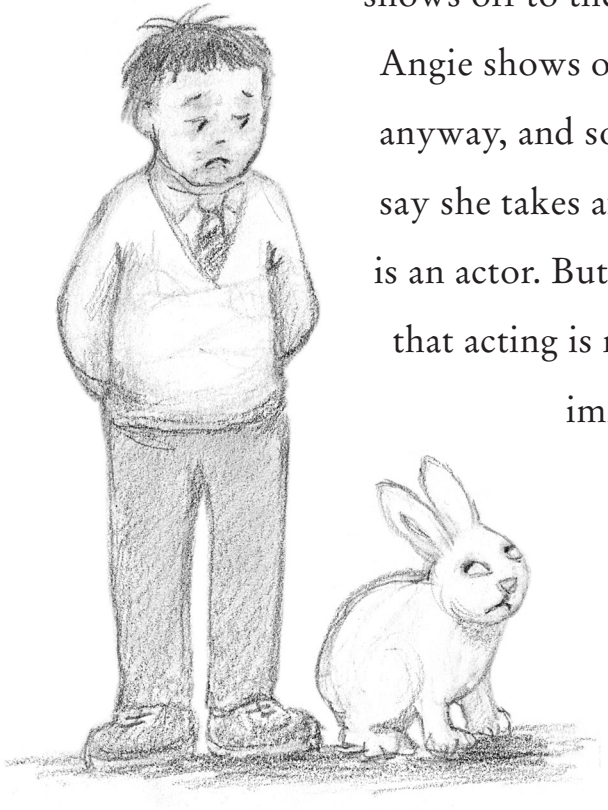


It was all the fault of the school rabbit.

The school rabbit is called Snowflake, and it belongs to Miss Bennet who teaches the Second Years. If Miss Bennet didn't have Snowflake, she wouldn't be able to teach the Second Years or anyone else. They write stories about Snowflake for English and draw Snowflake in Art, and for Arithmetic they weigh Snowflake and measure Snowflake in both centimetres and inches.

I never liked Snowflake because when I was in Miss Bennet's class and trying to measure Snowflake's length in centimetres, Snowflake peed on me. Miss Bennet said it was an accident, but I think Snowflake did it on purpose.

Now my little sister Angie is in Miss Bennet's class, and she thinks both Snowflake and Miss Bennet are wonderful. Angie does all the story-writing and drawing and measuring of Snowflake, and she has even invented a Snowflake dance with which she shows off to the grown-ups. Actually Angie shows off a lot of the time anyway, and sometimes people say she takes after our father, who is an actor. But Dad always says that acting is not showing off but immersing yourself in the character. I don't think Angie immerses herself in a rabbit.



Having a father who is an actor can be either a good or a bad thing. It's good when people have seen him on television and say nice things about him.

It's not so good when he is out of work or "resting", as they call it, and he wanders about the house looking sad, and we can't have new clothes or holidays away.



Dad had been having one of these "resting" patches for a while, and I was getting a bit worried because it was coming up to Christmas and I really need a new bicycle.

But then one evening Uncle Mike appeared unexpectedly while we were having our supper. We all like Uncle Mike. He and Dad were at acting



school together, but Uncle Mike didn't become an actor. He became a director, which is someone who gives actors jobs, so I was extra pleased to see him.

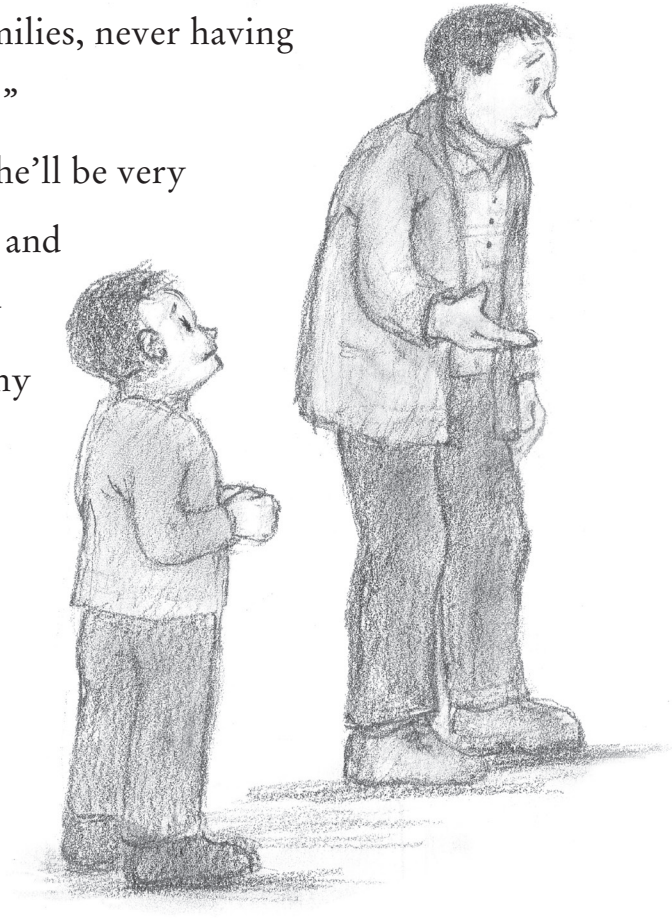
Uncle Mike was very excited. He said he had been asked to direct a film starring an actor called Gordon Strong, who used once to be famous. In the film Gordon Strong would play a dashing secret agent,



which is what he always used to do, but he would also have a partner. The partner would, of course, be less dashing, but it was work and the money was good, and it was up to Dad what he made of the part, said Uncle Mike.

Dad said, "Oh Lord! Gordon Strong!" and Uncle Mike said, "I know, but he's much better these days. In fact, I thought I might bring him round here. The family atmosphere, you know. He's very sentimental about families, never having achieved one himself."

Mum said, "Well, he'll be very welcome, of course," and Angie said (as I knew she would), "I'll do my Snowflake dance for him," but Mum said, "No, if Mr Strong comes to see us, he and Daddy will just want to talk."



Then Dad said, "He won't like me being taller than him," and Uncle Mike said, "Well, most people are taller than Gordon Strong, but it might be a good idea for you to crouch down a bit, so that it won't be so noticeable." Then they all said the usual stuff about Angie and me being very polite to Gordon Strong, which we would have been anyway, and in the end Uncle Mike said he would bring him to tea the next day.



Next day when I came home from school Uncle Mike and Gordon Strong had already arrived and they were talking with Dad in the living room. Dad was leaning forward in a way he doesn't usually do, so his head and Gordon Strong's head were more or less on a level because Gordon Strong was really quite short.

Uncle Mike said, “Tommy, say hello to Mr Strong,” and I said, “Hello, Mr Strong,” and Mr Strong said, “Well hello, Tomasso,” which I think is Italian.

There was a special tea waiting on the table with little sandwiches and cakes and I wondered when we



were going to eat it, but Uncle Mike and Dad and Mr Strong kept on talking and Dad was looking very cheerful, so that was good. Mum said that Angie was supposed to be dropped off by someone and they were late, but just then the doorbell rang. I could hear Mum's voice in the hall, and Angie's, and someone else's, which seemed to go on rather. Then there was a sort of thump, and then the door flew open and Angie just stood there. She was holding something in her arms and she shouted, "Traraa!" like someone in the circus and then she threw out her arms and the thing jumped across the room, and it was Snowflake.

