
The Other
Edie Trimmer

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To 'Dreezel' and her generous mum



Chapter One

My name is Edie Trimmer. I've wanted to be an actress ever since I was taken to see *Mary Poppins* on the stage when I was five. I acted it out in my bedroom for days afterwards. I pretended to be Mary and borrowed Mum's big bag and Dad's umbrella and made two of my Barbies be Jane and Michael in the nursery, though I'd never seen children with big chests and pointy toes.

It started to seem so real I believed I *was* Mary and launched myself off my bed, hoping I'd fly. I ended up in hospital, having ten stitches in my forehead because I cut my head badly on the end of my bedpost. Mum and Dad said I wasn't allowed to play Mary Poppins ever again.



My best friend Alexandra has always wanted to be an actress too. We act out all sorts of plays together, sometimes making up our own version. We were especially fond of *The Sound of Music* and watched it practically every day during the summer holidays last year. We pretended the Von Trapp family had twin girls called Dreezel and Teezel who were very naughty and pranked their brothers and sisters and played wicked tricks on Maria, the ex-nun who came to look after everyone. Sometimes we even used these names as nicknames for each other! Alex was Dreezel and I was Teezel. It's so great to have a best friend like Alex. She's so funny and kind and we both love art and writing stories – but we especially love drama.

We started going to Evelyn Day's stage school last autumn. It's not an actual school you go to every day. We go once a week on Saturdays, but it's very serious – it's not like Drama Club at school, where you mostly mess about. We do singing and dancing and act out scenes from plays and also do impro. Alex likes singing best. She's got a lovely voice, much better than mine. I like impro most. I'm good at making things up on the spot.

Everyone got very excited this spring, because the Pavilion Theatre on the seafront was putting on *Oliver!* as a summer



show for six whole weeks. Alex and I have seen it on television heaps of times. It's based on a brilliant book by Charles Dickens, a Victorian writer – we learned about him in English last term at school. They had TV soap stars playing Fagin and Bill Sykes, and the singer Maddie Spark playing Nancy – but the Pavilion producer wanted to come to our stage school to find children to play the workhouse kids, including Oliver himself!

'Imagine if we get chosen!' said Alex. 'Wouldn't it be incredible!'

'You and me in a real professional musical!' I said.

We talked non-stop about acting as the orphans in the workhouse.

'I don't think they're given names – well, apart from the Artful Dodger and Oliver himself. So we could make up our own names and our back story to make our acting more interesting. We could even be orphan twins like Dreezel and Teezel,' I said.

'That would be fantastic – though of course we *could* be chosen for the main parts, Oliver and the Artful Dodger,' said Alex. 'You're much better at acting than me. I bet you'll be picked for Oliver.'



'But you're much better at singing, and it *is* a musical. The Artful Dodger would be a wonderful character role. I'd like to play *him*. I think we'd be much better that way round,' I said. I didn't quite mean it. I desperately wanted to be chosen as Oliver, the leading role. I don't want to boast, but everyone seems to think I'm the best at acting at Miss Evelyn's.

Miss Evelyn started preparing us for the auditions. The boys moaned when the girls took their turn reciting Oliver and the Artful Dodger's lines.

'That's daft! They're boys' parts, aren't they, miss?' one of them shouted indignantly.

'Oliver can easily be played by a girl. Don't be so old-fashioned! Women often play men and men often play women on the professional stage,' said Miss Evelyn. 'When I was a drama student I played Hamlet and I happened to win a medal for my performance.' Miss Evelyn never has any qualms about boasting.

'Yeah, but the girls would still be rubbish pretending to be boys,' Liam insisted. He's twelve and thinks he's *so* cool and good-looking. Well, he is, actually, and lots of girls at our school seem to think that, but Alex and I think he's a royal pain.



Miss Evelyn isn't that keen on him either. 'Oliver sings a beautiful soprano song that's a real tear-jerker. Some of you older boys might well find your voices start to break by the summer,' she said crisply. 'However, you can audition for whomever you choose. I'm very happy if any of you boys want to audition to be orphan girls.'

'OK, then I'll audition for Nancy, miss, seeing as she's the main female part,' said Liam.

'Well, Maddie Spark has already been cast,' said Miss Evelyn, 'so it's hardly likely you'd get the part, Liam, even if you gave the most amazing audition. Now, let's stop wasting time, everyone. Those who want to audition for speaking parts should be word-perfect in a matter of days. Then you must all learn a couple of songs from *Oliver!*, and a lively dance routine.'

'Can we do the song rap style, Miss Evelyn? And do a bit of breakdancing? You did make it plain you don't want us to be old-fashioned,' said Liam.

'You can do that if you wish, Liam, but I don't think it would get you anywhere,' said Miss Evelyn. 'Come along, now! Stop pontificating and prevaricating!' She pronounced every syllable elaborately, her lips stretching this way and that. She's



very elegant but she sometimes sprays a little spit when she talks like that, so it's not a good idea to stand too near her.

We rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed. We even met up on weekdays after ordinary school was over. I made out I didn't care too much about getting a part in the play, even to Alex, but inside I still cared desperately. I was starting to find it difficult to get to sleep because the lines kept repeating in my head. I'd wake with a start in the middle of the night and act them out by torchlight in front of my mirror.

Mum heard me muttering in my bedroom and sighed. 'You're getting obsessed, Edie! I think you should be concentrating more on your schoolwork and not this wretched audition,' she said, tucking me back into bed.

Mum wasn't too thrilled about me wanting to be an actress, though she drives me to stage school while Dad goes to the gym. She thinks acting is a very insecure profession where you're often out of work. She's a lawyer and often complains of having too *much* work. She usually goes out before I get up and sometimes isn't home by the time I go to bed. Still, it's a great job and I'm proud of her.

Dad works mostly from home, so he looks after me during the week. He writes lots of different things, even advertising



copy – the words they use on adverts on TV. We often watch adverts together and sing the jingles and rate them out of ten.

If I don't make it as an actress I'd *quite* like to be a copywriter because I'm good at making up little songs. I'd made up a glorious variation of 'My Favourite Things' when Dreezel and I played our *Sound of Music* game.

'Toffee on apples and honeycomb Crunchies,
Haribo sweeties when we get the munchies,
Running in grass without nettles with stings,
These are a few of my favourite things.

Banana-split ice cream and lemon meringue,
Fireworks at night that sparkle and bang,
Pizza and chips and baked beans on toast,
These are the things that we really love most!'

Dad helped me just a little bit, but it was mostly me. I let Alex believe I'd thought of it all, and she said I was a genius.

I am *not* a genius, but it's great that Alex thinks I am. Mum seems to think I'm quite clever too. She thinks I could be a lawyer like her if I put my mind to it.



'You're good at writing essays and *very* good at winning arguments!' she said. 'But you should work much harder at your maths. It will help you develop logic, analysis and problem-solving – key issues when you study law.'

'Mum! I'm rubbish at maths,' I said truthfully enough. 'I want to be an *actress*.'

It would be so wonderful if I got the part of Oliver. It would prove to Mum and Dad that I had a bit of talent.

I got myself in such a state that I couldn't keep still the Friday we had the actual audition. Mum had deliberately booked a day off work to take me but her case overran and she had to go to court.

'Oh darling, I feel I'm letting you down,' she said, looking so sorry as she gave me a good-luck hug early that morning.

'No probs, Mum. Dad'll take me,' I said.

'Oh no, have I got to sit with the pushy mums?' said Dad, pulling a face.

We took Alex to the auditions at the Pavilion too because both her parents were out at work. Dad had to sit in the stalls between two mums he didn't know, but when I peeped out from the wings he seemed to be chatting away happily to them. One of them was Liam's mum. She actually cheered when



Liam came on stage to do his audition piece, which made him cringe. Still, he *did* do a bit of rapping for his Dodger speech. Miss Evelyn frowned, but it made the producer and the director laugh.

We auditioned in strict alphabetical order, so Alex went before me.

'I'm so nervous!' she said. 'Look, I'm shivering!'

When I squeezed her hand it was freezing cold. 'Good luck, Alex! You'll knock them dead!' I said.

We hooked little fingers, and then she took a deep breath and ran on stage into the spotlight. She looked very small and anxious, nibbling her bottom lip. Miss Evelyn had drummed it into us that we should march confidently on stage with a smile on our face.

'Smile, Alex, smile!' I mouthed at her – but she couldn't see me.

They asked for her name and she stuttered a little, and I practically died for her. Still, she managed her Oliver speech perfectly. She didn't quite remember all the gestures Miss Evelyn had taught us but she looked very sweet. She came into her own when she sang Oliver's solo about love. Her voice was a little quavery for the first couple of lines, but then it soared.



I could see the producer and director sit back, clearly impressed. Then she performed the dance routine very gracefully, finishing with a curtsy at the end.

'Well *done*, Alexandra!' they called out.

It was so difficult waiting until almost the end. I wished I didn't have Trimmer for a surname. I was second to last, before Jamie Underwood. He was a lovely boy but already way taller than anyone else and not that great at acting either. I couldn't help tingling all over. I was sure I was in with a chance!

'Next!' they called.

It was me. I walked on stage confidently, grinning from ear to ear.

'My name is Edie Trimmer!' I announced, and then I launched into Oliver's speech. I put in as much expression as I could, trying to show what it would really be like to be a hungry little orphan in a grim workhouse. I remembered every gesture – and at the end I hung my head.

Then I did my song, singing loudly to show them that people sitting right at the back of the Pavilion would be able to hear every word. Perhaps I wobbled once during my dance, but I didn't let it put me off, and when I finished I stayed in





character and bowed instead of curtsying.

'Well *done*, Edie!' said the producer and director – but perhaps with slightly more emphasis than before.

I joined the row of Miss Evelyn's children sitting onstage, glowing. I looked along the row at Alex, and she grinned at me and mouthed, 'Brilliant!' I craned round to see Dad and he gave me a thumbs-up sign. After Jamie skittered around on stage like a daddy longlegs and received his 'Well *done*, Jamie, we were all told to give ourselves a clap.

'We're going to confer with Miss Evelyn now and then we'll have a careful think. I'm afraid you'll have to wait a little while before we reach our final decision, and we might ask some of you back for another audition. But we'll let you know our choices as soon as possible, I promise,' said the producer.

'Please don't be downhearted if you don't get chosen. You might be an outstanding performer, but just not quite right for this particular show. You've all done your very best, and I'm sure you've made Miss Evelyn very proud,' said the director. 'Off you go now!'

I pushed my way to Alex and we had a big hug.

'You were incredible, Edie,' she said.



'So were you!' I said firmly.

'No, I was rubbish. I was so scared!' she said.

'So was I,' I said, but the moment I'd stepped on the stage I'd lost my nerves. I'd felt marvellous.

Dad made a big fuss of both of us and took us to the ice-cream parlour over the road from the pier. We had banana splits and they were heavenly.

Mum managed to come home early and asked straight away how the audition had gone.

'You see before you Master Oliver Twist,' said Dad.

'Really?' said Mum. 'Have they made up their minds already then?'

'Not yet – but it's obvious. She was outstanding. Little Alex was great too, but not a patch on our Edie,' said Dad.

'Dad! That's not true!' I said modestly, though I was thrilled. 'I think Alex should be chosen for Oliver.' I'm ashamed to say I didn't really mean it.

We had to wait a fortnight. Alex actually had to do another audition, which was a bit worrying. Maybe they thought she was too shy to act professionally? She wasn't usually quiet at all; she was generally very bubbly and bouncy.

Miss Evelyn wasn't giving anything away the next Saturday.



'You'll just have to wait patiently,' she said.

'But they must have given you a little hint, Miss Evelyn,' I said.

'Edie, my lips are sealed,' she said, and pretended she couldn't speak when I went on badgering her.

But the Saturday after, we knew as soon as we saw her that the Pavilion people had made their decision. Her eyes were sparkling and her usually chalk-white face was flushed pink. She clapped her hands for us to be quiet and then gestured us towards her. She was holding her phone.

'I've heard from the Pavilion management, my dears. They emailed last night. Now, don't get too upset if I don't read your name out. Money is tight and they can't have the large cast they'd ideally like. Only ten of you have been chosen – eight as orphans, chorus and general extras. And two for the speaking parts, obviously: the Artful Dodger and Oliver Twist.'

Alex and I held hands, squeezing tight. Her hand was very cold again. Mine was hot. I hoped it wasn't too sweaty – but Alex was too kind to complain.

'So, I'll put you out of your misery and announce the two major parts first. The Artful Dodger is Liam!'



'Yes!' he cried out and punched the air.

Liam! I so wanted it to be Alex! I squeezed her cold little hand harder in sympathy. It would have been fantastic acting together. It would be a nightmare acting with Liam. He'd muck about and do his best to grab all the attention. Why *Liam*? Miss Evelyn obviously thought likewise, but she was doing her best to look enthusiastic.

'They took a real shine to you, Liam. They thought you were made for the part. And it seems they were rather taken by your rapping,' said Miss Evelyn.

'Oh wow! Fantastic! So who's going to be Oliver then?' Liam asked.

Miss Evelyn swallowed. Her eyes flickered in my direction. My heart was thumping so hard I felt it was about to burst through my T-shirt.

'It's Alexandra!' said Miss Evelyn.

For an instant I thought she'd simply got us mixed up and said the wrong name. But she was smiling at her now and giving her a little clap, her bangles jingling.

Alex gasped. 'But – but there must be a mistake!' she said.

'No mistake, Alexandra dear. They were absolutely certain. You look perfect for little Oliver – and you sing like an angel.



Well done! You're a credit to my stage school,' she said.

I pulled myself together. 'Yes, well done, Alex! Fantastic! I'm so happy for you!' I said.

I *was* happy too. I meant every word. If I couldn't be Oliver then it was marvellous that my best friend Alex had the part. But it was such a shock. I was *sure* I'd be chosen. So now I wouldn't have any speaking part at all. I'd only be an unnamed orphan.

It was actually worse than that. Miss Evelyn read out eight names – and none of them was mine. Even Jamie Underwood had been chosen! He seemed as stunned as I was.

'Are you *sure* they picked me, Miss Evelyn?' he said, wrinkling his nose. 'Aren't I too big for an orphan?'

'Well, I did wonder, Jamie, but they said it would look great on stage if they had one very tall orphan with clothes much too small. And they really liked you!'

'Great!' said Jamie. 'My mum won't half be pleased.'

It would be agony telling Mum and Dad that *I* hadn't been chosen for anything. They knew how much it mattered to me. Alex knew too. She went boldly up to Miss Evelyn.

'Excuse me, Miss Evelyn, but I think there's been a mistake,' she said. 'I think our names have got mixed up.



I can't be Oliver!'

'No, you're definitely Oliver, dear – I promise you,' she reassured her.

'But it should be Edie. It's so unfair,' said Alex.

'Oh Alex!' I said, rushing up to her, feeling my cheeks flaming. 'It's OK. I know we can't all be picked. It wasn't a mistake, was it, Miss Evelyn?'

'No, I'm afraid it wasn't,' she said gently, putting her arm round me. I wished she wouldn't. I didn't want to burst into tears in front of the whole class.

'But Edie's the best at acting, everyone knows that. They must be crazy not to choose her!' Alex said fiercely.

'I thought they'd pick Edie too,' Miss Evelyn said.

'Then why didn't they?' Alex demanded.

Miss Evelyn looked at me carefully. 'Do you want a little feedback, Edie – or do you just want to forget about it right now?' she said, sensing I was near to tears.

I took a deep breath. 'I'd like to have the feedback, please,' I said.

'Sensible girl! All actors must learn to take suggestions. Well, they felt you were very accomplished, almost too much, in fact. They said you were a great little actress, but



you seemed rather too sure of yourself, whereas Oliver Twist is a timid little lad. You're a good dancer, and didn't let it bother you when you wobbled, which is great – and you have a nice singing voice, though, again, almost too strong – suitable for an anthem with a rousing chorus, not a soft melancholy little air,' she said. 'Don't be downhearted, Edie. They're going to put on a pantomime at Christmas and they'll need lots of child performers then, so your time will come.'

It was so difficult to hold back the tears now. Pantomime! I wanted to be a *serious* actress!

'Oh, I love pantos,' said Alex. 'In fact, I love everything about Christmas. It will be great if we're both in it together, Edie. I shall hate being in *Oliver!* without you!'

I gave her a hug, and then I thanked Miss Evelyn for being honest with me.

'You're such a sensible girl, Edie. Like any true actress, you're ready to take things on the chin and chalk it up to experience,' she said.

I nodded and sniffed hard, quickly wiping my eyes with the back of my hand. All that long day, I managed to act as if I didn't really mind. I even stayed relatively calm when I told



Mum. I talked non-stop about Alex and how fantastic it was – but when we'd taken her home and I was alone in the car with Mum I started howling.

There was a special celebratory tea because Mum and Dad had been so certain I'd be picked. We ate it anyway. In fact, I gobbled mine down, determined to try and make myself feel better. It didn't work. I was violently sick not long afterwards. Then I sat on the sofa between Mum and Dad while they did their best to comfort me.

'Never you mind, darling. We know you'd have been magnificent as Oliver,' said Dad.

'And all great actresses have had parts snatched away from them,' said Mum. 'I think this will make you even more determined. Good for you!' she said, though I knew she didn't want me to be an actress at all.

Well, I didn't want to be an actress now. Ever, ever, ever!