

MELDY'S PLAY (with acknowledgements to Book Club)

Ms Garrick had recently started at Meldy's school. One day she came to class with a broad smile on her face.

"Good morning, students!"

"Good morning, Ms Garrick," they chorussed.

"I have good news. We will be putting on a play at the end of term!"

If you've ever seen a firework lit, you will understand what happened next. First the silence, then the bang or rather, in this case, the fizz of excitement!

"A play! A play! We're doing a play!" They wanted to dance around the room.

"I want to be the princess!" said Clemency. She thought she had better get her request in quick as you never knew what the others were thinking.

"But that's not fair! You had a leading part last time! It's my turn!" said Candida.

"Now, now! We haven't decided yet what the play will be. What would you like to do?"

There was silence. The whole class looked around, thought, then the ideas started coming.

The girl's suggestions included 'Sleeping beauty', 'Cinderella', 'The Princess and the Pirate', 'Rapunzel' and 'Frozen' while the boys came up with plays involving monsters, robots, ninjas and zombies.

One boy thought for a bit before calling out, "Dragons and Knights!"

"Now, these are all good ideas but what about an environmental theme?"

"Oh! I know! Save the rainforests!" cried Meldy.

"That's a good idea, Meldy," said Ms Garrick. "But all forests are important, what about the forests closer to home? We should get an environmental message across to the audience."

"Well, it could be in a kingdom with a princess who loves the animals and wants to stop the trees being cut down!" said Tamzin.

Ms Garrick realised at this point there would have to be a princess. Suddenly she had a brainwave.

“What about two princesses? Would you like that?”

Of course they did, but as there were eleven girls in the class they would have preferred a lot more! As the boys didn’t want to be princesses most were content to be forest animals and trees.

“If there are two princesses, there could be two kingdoms,” said Meldy.

“I know! We could have one on one side of the stage and one on the other!”

“I don’t think ... Wait a minute! That’s a really good idea,” said Ms Garrick. She could see the stage divided with a princess on each side.

“And the princesses would need ladies-in-waiting!” said Tamzin. She had recently read this in a book.

The boys had been a bit quiet and had not said much. Ms Garrick thought about the best way to involve them all.

“We need a play with twenty parts, one for everyone. First of all, how many of you would like to play the part of a princess?”

You won’t be surprised to hear that a lot of hands shot up. Ms Garrick began to wish she had chosen another play but she would carry on since she had said it was a good idea.

At lunchtime Meldy and Becca chatted about the play.

“We should sell tickets and raise money for the forests,” suggested Becca. “I can get the tickets printed!”

Meldy liked this idea but was thinking about the lesson with Ms Garrick. Just then Tamzin and Clemency appeared.

“Everyone wants to play a princess so we’ll have to pick names out of a hat,” said Clemency.

“I don’t think the boys do but there will still be about eight names to choose from,” said Tamzin.

“Two out of eight is better than two out of twenty,” agreed Becca. “You have a better chance of getting to be a princess or a lady-in-waiting.”

“Ladies-in-waiting are almost princesses,” said Clemency. “They would be proper ladies and could have little tiaras while the princesses could have bigger tiaras!”

In the next class the choice was made. Eight girls wanted to try for the princess role and it was agreed that the “consolation prize” would be the role of lady-in-waiting.

The names were written on pieces of paper and Meldy was asked to pick the names.

“Pick my name, Meldy!”

“No, pick mine!”

Such were the appeals as Meldy’s hand hovered over the pieces in the container. She closed her eyes, reached in and out came the first name.

“Idrissa!” called out Ms Garrick.

There was a mini squeal of delight from Idrissa, who was normally quite quiet. Others looked disappointed.

The next name was pulled out. “Candida!” called Ms Garrick.

There were more disappointed faces now but at least there were four ladies-in-waiting to come. Then Johnny spoke up,

“Why can’t I be a lord-in-waiting?” he asked.

“Me too!” echoed his friend Landon. “Why do the girls always have all the good parts!”

Ms Garrick thought for a moment and then realised they were right. So each princess was to have one lady-in-waiting and one lord-in-waiting. Johnny and Landon got the parts as none of the other boys wanted them. Tamzin and Anita were to be the ladies.

But who was to be the evil woodcutter? David and William both wanted the part. William even gave an evil laugh just to show he could. But in the end it was agreed that Becca would do it with William as her side-kick. David would be the head tree.

Meldy was to be the narrator and the other students would play forest animals and trees.

That night Meldy had a dream. She was in a forest and suddenly the trees started to move. They were talking to her! But what were they saying?

When she woke up, she jumped out of bed. “That’s it! The trees will talk to the lords and ladies-in-waiting who will tell the princesses about the evil wood cutter!”

At breakfast she was still thinking of the play. Suddenly she blurted out, “Do you think trees could ever talk?”

Mr Wagley liked to think he could cope with most situations but he had to think about this one.

“Well, research shows that they make noises when they absorb water.”

Her twin sisters had to butt in here. “Meldy talks to trees!” said one.

“Be careful!” said the other. “We don’t want people to say our little sister’s mad!”

“That’s not fair!” cried Meldy. “I did have a dream!”

When they had heard about it and about the play, Mrs Wagley spoke up.

“Meldy, you really have something here! In your play, talking trees could be used very effectively to communicate with the audience. The message is what’s important, and the visual spectacle. It’s a really clever idea!”

Meldy wasn’t exactly sure what her mother meant but she glowed with pride. Even the twins agreed that it could work.

Later that day she told Ms Garrick about her dream and what her mother had said.

She smiled at Meldy even though she was tired and worried about the play.

“Meldy! That’s a wonderful idea!”

When the ‘tree and animal’ students heard, they were ecstatic!

“We can speak and move around!”

“I want to do a dance!”

“Well, I’m not going to dance! Im going to jump!”

“I’ll dance, speak and sing!”

Those students who weren’t princesses, lords or ladies were getting really excited now.

“Yes,” said Ms Garrick, “there will be singing and dancing.” Now she could clearly see the structure of the play. It was going to work after all.

“Students, each kingdom will have some trees. Princess Idrissa’s trees and animals will sing, ‘Mirror, mirror in the trees, who’s the fairest by degrees? Princess Idrissa!’”

She smiled and continued. “Then Princess Candida’s trees and animals will reply, ‘Mirror, mirror do declare, who is the fairest of the fair? Princess Candida!’ The lords and ladies-in-waiting will encourage them and the princesses will thank their own trees and animals for their loyalty.”

The students jumped up and down. They could just imagine it!

“The animals and trees can warn the lords and ladies-in-waiting when the evil woodcutter comes to measure up the wood for sale,” said Becca.

“And we can kidnap you and William!” said a deer. William didn’t want to be kidnapped but he was to be the evil woodcutter’s assistant so he had no choice.

“And we keep you until you decide not to cut down all the trees!” said the head tree.

“What if the kings want to build a motorway through the forest and princesses manage to stop it? They then become friends and everybody sings the final song. It could be ‘Somewhere over the Rainbow’.”

“Yes, please! Let’s have a song at the end!” they chorussed.

Ms Garrick wrote out the script with the students’ help and they rehearsed the following week. There were a few “I don’t like this!” and “I wouldn’t say that!” but finally they had a play. They could now learn their lines.

A few days later, Meldy met her neighbour Eustace. He was really coming to see her twin sisters but she stopped him and told him about the play.

“There are singing trees and animals and the princesses get together to save the forest!”

“Singing trees? That sounds - er - interesting,” he said.

“We need a good opening song but we haven’t got one yet,” she continued.

“What would it be about?”

“Well, I don’t know. I suppose the trees and animals need to sing together before the two princesses arrive with their lords and ladies-in-waiting.”

Eustace thought a few minutes, then said, “How about something like this:

Forest life is best for all
Let the trees grow strong and tall
Birds and insects come to stay
Keep those chainsaws well away
You all need us for your health
Do not cut us down by stealth
If you do, you will be sad
As your world will turn out bad!

or something else maybe?”

“What a brilliant song! If only we had the music!”

“I’ll write it, if you like. By the way, have you seen the twins?”

“Oh, they’re around somewhere. You’re so clever!”

If only the twins were so adoring, he thought.

The rehearsals went well and the Head, Mrs Snow, was so impressed she approved the sale of tickets for the performance.

On the evening before the play Meldy was looking at the trees outside the window of her room. “I love these trees!” she said to herself.

Just then a leaf fluttered past. It seemed to pause, then continued down to the ground. Meldy suddenly realised what to do at the end of the play. She would tell the others tomorrow. It would be a secret they all shared.

When the big day arrived the parents filed into the hall. The curtain opened and a slightly nervous Meldy stepped onto the stage.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, our play will soon start
And all our class will play a part
Two princesses you will see
They don’t like each other, how can that be?
They are too proud but the forests they adore
Their kingdoms lie close but there’s trouble in store.
So, please sit back and enjoy our show!

Eustace’s song was used to start the play. The trees and animals moved about very convincingly and then the lords and ladies-in-waiting appeared.

Johnny started his lines, then faltered. It should have been “Animals and trees, pray be ready for Princess Idrissa’s arrival.” Instead he said, “Princess Candida”.

Meldy, who was also the prompt, wondered what to do. Luckily Tamzin quickly intervened. “Lord John! You must be loyal to Princess Idrissa or she will not be happy!”

The audience sensed there had been a problem and a few chuckles were heard but the play continued. Ms Garrick was very nervous, as the head had told the other teachers how good it would be, but it was now out of her control.

When Becca appeared as the Evil Woodcutter the audience was ready. Meldy led them in a chorus of “Booooos”. Becca laughed her evil laugh, William followed with his then they started to measure the trees for, as they said, the sawmill.

The trees whispered, “Please don’t cut us down!” But evil people can’t hear the trees, can they?

When the lords and ladies-in-waiting reappeared they threw insults at each other until the trees begged them to help. Anita was supposed to say “Princess Candida will be very displeased! She loves her part of the forest!”

But she faltered, and Landon jumped in. “Wait until we tell Princess Candida! She will be hopping mad!” Once again the audience chuckled but the play continued.

Then the rope used to tie up the Evil Woodcutter and his Evil Assistant became untied and fell off. They stood uncomfortably waiting for it to be re-tied until William said, “Can you tie us up again, please?” This time the chuckles were louder.

The final song was sung and the play came to an end. The audience applauded enthusiastically and the students bowed while the princesses and ladies-in-waiting curtsied. The lords bowed in a very aristocratic manner.

When the applause had died down, Meldy gave a pre-arranged signal and moved along behind the cast. The students picked something out of her bag. What could it be?

They all turned together to face the audience and said in unison, “So help save our forests before the last leaf falls!” And the leaves in their hands fluttered to the stage.

The audience clapped and cheered again and the students bowed once more. Ms Garrick had tears in her eyes. “Students, that was brilliant! And letting those leaves fall, well, that was just perfect! Well done, all of you!”

The Head of the school came on stage. “I think we can all agree that this has been a wonderful performance! And such an important message that we can all take away with us. Well done, Ms Garrick and well done, students! You have made us very proud.”

The students and Ms Garrick were pleased with the praise they had received. I think you’ll agree, they deserved it.