

EVIE'S CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

By Jenny Smith

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MY NAME'S EVIE DOYLE, and you could say that I'm a little bit—well—different.

“We'd like Evie to play Mary in the Nativity this year,” Father Mitchell said, sitting in our living room, drinking from a mug with ‘Keep Calm and Drink Tea’ printed on it.

Mum looked nervously at Dad and did her ‘face’, which meant: ‘Say something.’

Dad cleared his throat. “Father,” he said, “You may have noticed that Evie has... well, I mean I'm not sure Mary, the mother of Baby Jesus, would be as... unpredictable as Evie.”

Father Mitchell nodded and smiled. “Mr Doyle, we are aware of Evie's *issue*. But is our Lord not all loving? Is He not all tolerant? Evie has many fine qualities, and we think she deserves this honour.”

Mum fluttered with pleasure. “What do you think, Evie? Would you like to play Mary this year?”

Three pairs of eyes were on me. I got the bubbling feeling. It started in my tummy, then bubbled up and up so fast that I couldn't stop it. The words popped out, in a great big shout.

“HITLER TOILET!”

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Most people know about Tourette's Syndrome because they've seen some documentary on TV about it. I can understand why a lot of people think it's quite funny when they see people shouting out rude stuff.

But believe me, they're a *lot* less understanding when they see somebody randomly shouting down the local supermarket. And when you're the person doing the shouting and trying to control the tics and twitching, there's nothing funny about it at all.

I've had Tourette's since I was about seven. I kept jumping up in class and shouting things like 'FUGGLE BOTTOM!' and 'SMELLY WONGLE POO!' and sometimes whole sentences like 'PUT A WOOLLY HAT ON IT!' or 'NOT ON A TUESDAY!'

My older brother Luke loves it when I shout 'NOT ON A TUESDAY!' It's his favourite.

Of course I say worse stuff, but I don't want to write it here, so just assume that something like 'NOODLE DUMPLINGS!' is possibly really something a little bit ruder.

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After I shouted 'HITLER TOILET!' Dad said perhaps it was not the best idea, my being Mary. But Father Mitchell seemed more enthusiastic than ever. Maybe it was because he was new in his job and wanted to shake things up at St Anthony's.

"If Jesus was with us today," he said solemnly, "he would choose somebody just like Evie to play Mary."

I imagined Jesus sitting in our front room, drinking tea. He'd have to use the 'Keep Calm and Eat Cupcakes' mug. I wondered if he'd eat as many digestive biscuits as Father Mitchell.

I was desperate to shout 'No way am I going to play Mary, it's the worst idea anybody's ever had in the *entire* history of worst ideas'. But I didn't say anything, because I was scared I'd shout out 'FATHER MITCHELL HAS A HUGE ROUND FACE!' instead.

So I nodded and smiled, and my fate was sealed.

"Evie's playing Mary in the Nativity this year!" Mum was still on a high when Luke came in later.

"Very funny, Mum," he laughed, then his face changed as he saw she wasn't joking. "I mean, well done Evie."

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When I'm at Mass I sit at the back, using tricks to keep the bubbling down. Foot tapping, grimacing and humming. I'm close enough to the door so I can run outside if I can't control it.

Towards the end of primary school, my best friends stayed loyal, a few others started to pick on me. So now I go to a school for children who have

‘challenges’. This can be anything from learning disabilities – for example Jack who has severe dyslexia – to anxiety disorders – like Katie, who got so wound up at her own birthday party, she spent the whole evening in the loo, being sick.

It’s much easier to be different when everybody else is too.

*

I couldn’t believe my luck at the first rehearsal. Joseph was to be played by this boy who’s a year older than me, called Sean.

I’d had a crush on Sean since, well, just about forever. I thought he had the most beautiful blue eyes I’d ever seen, with long dark eyelashes. I’d even decided we might get married one day and have children.

“She’s Mary? This has *got* to be a joke, right?” was the first thing Sean said, as he stared at me. Father Mitchell had to take him outside to have a word with him.

Something inside me died as I stood waiting with the others. Who had I been kidding? I was the weird girl. Poor Evie Flynn with her twitching and stamping. Of course, Sean wouldn’t want to be on stage with me.

Sean came back with Father Mitchell and mumbled ‘sorry’ without even looking me in the eye.

Things did not get better. During the first rehearsal I had to run outside six times, and at one point I dropped the Baby Jesus because I was stamping my feet so hard.

Afterwards, a boy called Michael, who was playing the Innkeeper, complained. “Father, Mary keeps running outside. That’s not in the story.”

“Well,” said Father Mitchell, cheerful as always, “I’ve been thinking about that and I think I’ve come up with a useful distraction. This year, for the first time ever at St Anthony’s, we’re going to have a *real donkey!*”

I wanted to shout ‘DONKEY PANTS!’ but I managed to contain myself.

*

A boy called Charlie joined our class last term. If you have Tourette’s and you meet someone else who does the tics and twitching and shouting, it’s like being pushed in front of a full-length mirror and seeing how you look to the rest of the world.

So for the first few weeks we pretended each other didn’t exist.

Then one day he sat next to me at lunch and said. “When you can’t stop it, how does it feel?”

“It’s a bubbling feeling,” I said.

“Mine’s a tingling, like electricity,” he said, “Sometimes I expect sparks to shoot out of my ears.”

I laughed. We’re friends now. Nothing more, although I’ve thought about what it would be like if I went out with him. It would be a disaster, probably. I’d end up shouting ‘HAMSTER TROUSERS’ in his face.

*

At the second rehearsal I ran outside five times, which Father Mitchell noted was an improvement.

I was trying so, *so* hard not to mess up, but Sean kept making sarcastic comments under his breath. I wondered why I’d ever liked him with his beady blue eyes and his girl’s eyelashes.

*

I must have been quiet on the last day of term. Our English teacher, Miss Scott, asked me what was wrong.

“Are you worried about the Nativity?” she asked. Jack and Katie had been telling her all about it with great delight in class, including the fact that there was going to be a real donkey.

“Evie’s worried about shouting,” said Katie, before I had a chance to speak.

After class, Miss Scott called me into the staff room and we had what they call a ‘conference’ with the Head, Mrs Gilby, who offered to phone my parents about it.

“It’s OK,” I said, “Mum and Dad would be disappointed if I don’t do it now.”

I think Miss Scott phoned Mum anyway because I got my favourite dinner that night – chicken nuggets, baked beans and potato waffles.

“I’m sorry if we pushed you into this, love,” Mum said, quite tearful.

“I’ll be fine,” I reassured her, but I didn’t feel that way inside.

*

The final Nativity rehearsal was the dress rehearsal. I must have been extra nervous because I ran outside to shout eight times. Luckily, nobody

noticed because everybody was fussing around the very sad-looking donkey called Wilbur. Father Mitchell's plan had worked.

"Stupid donkey," Sean muttered. Maybe he was jealous because the donkey had longer eyelashes than he did. I wished that Wilbur would do a big poo all over Sean's feet.

*

At last it was Christmas Eve. Mum fussed around me all afternoon, asking me over and over if I knew my lines.

"I only have one, Mum," I told her, for the fifth time. "All I have to say is 'Thank you for the blessing of this precious baby.' I say it after Joseph says 'God has sent a Miracle tonight.'"

"You'll storm it, Evie," said Luke, "and if you don't, at least they've got a real donkey."

"Thanks Luke, I think," I said.

*

That night the church was packed. The cast of the Nativity gathered in a side room, in full costume. Sean stood apart, he was quiet and I wondered if he was nervous.

I stamped my feet a few times, then hummed, to calm myself down before I went up to him.

"You'll be great," I said, hoping that it would help. Despite all of his comments, I felt bad for him.

"I'm not worried about *me*," Sean said angrily, "it's your freak show I'm worried about, and the stupid donkey. Do you know what this is going to do for my credibility?"

"Oh," I said, "your credibility."

*

Maybe I was too angry with Sean to feel nervous, or perhaps I'd run outside so many times in rehearsal I'd got rid of it all.

Whatever the reason, for most of the Nativity my bubbling feeling simply wasn't there. In fact, I was actually enjoying traipsing around in my long blue robes, being Mary. At one point I caught Mum's eye and saw that she was beaming from ear to ear.

If I ended up a famous actress, I wondered, would they let me accept my Oscar without having to make a speech?

It was all going fantastically. Brilliantly.

Until the final scene, in the stable.

Wilbur stood patiently to one side. Everybody did their bit perfectly and Father Mitchell's big round face was all smiles as Sean said his final line: "God has sent a Miracle tonight."

It was up to me now, to close the Nativity.

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One line and it would all be over. Just one line, and I'd have managed the impossible.

A powerful, enormous bubble welled up, deep down and rising fast.

Sean sensed it. "Don't you *dare*," he hissed.

I thought about what I was meant to say: "Thank you for the blessing of this precious baby".

Sean glared at me.

Suddenly I didn't care anymore, he could stuff his credibility. I let the bubble burst and shouted, right in his face...

"BIG FAT WOBBLE NOSTRILS!"

*

There was a terrible silence. I felt sick, completely gutted. The nightmare I'd had for the past few nights had come true, but it was even worse than I'd imagined it would be. Everybody was staring at me.

Then a voice shouted, "CHEESY FEET!"

It was Charlie.

He was standing up in the back row, beside Miss Scott, Jack and Katie. I'd had no idea that they were coming. Charlie smiled round at everybody, as if shouting "CHEESY FEET" in church was the most normal thing in the world.

Miss Scott stood up beside him. "SILLY BONGO THUNDER PANTS!" she roared at the top of her voice, and gave a little bow. Several people laughed.

"GREAT BIG PILE OF POO!" this time it was Jack.

Katie was pressing a handkerchief to her mouth. She was half laughing and half crying.

The next bit made me want to cry too.

Mum stood up, took a deep breath, and did what was probably the bravest thing she's ever done. "CUSTARD FLUBBER!" she cried out, as loud as she could manage, in a slightly wobbly voice. Her face was bright red. There was a cheer from the old ladies in the front row.

Dad jumped to his feet and boomed out, much louder: "FLABBY CHEEKS!"

Even Luke joined in, "NOT ON A TUESDAY!" he shouted, and he winked at me.

Everybody was laughing now.

*

Father Mitchell got to his feet.

"I have something very important to say, and I need you all to listen carefully," he said with great authority, and he raised his hand. You could have heard a pin drop.

"SMELLY TROUT BOTTOM!"

The congregation roared its appreciation. It was amazing. Absolutely the best thing ever.

If I hadn't been there, if somebody had told me about what happened at St Anthony's this Christmas Eve, I would never have believed it in a million years.

Even Wilbur got in on the act, closing the Nativity with an extremely loud fart, which sent Sean running out of the church, losing any credibility he might have had left.

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My name's Evie Doyle, and you could say that I'm a little bit different. When you're twelve years old that isn't easy, believe me.

But it's much easier to be different when everybody else is too.

THE END

