



Babs Horton

Letter to My Teachers

WELL, YOU WERE A MOTLEY BUNCH but then I went to seven different schools, so at least I had plenty of variety.

Mr Andrews you were by far the most exciting of them all but if you were around today, you'd probably be preparing for a court case or life without a pension. I expect you knew we called you Archie Andrews after the ventriloquist's dummy on television who also wore a suit and a monocle? It was rumoured that you were in the First World War and still had shrapnel inside you. When a car backfired or another class did percussion and set to with the cymbals you used to cover your head with your hands and we had to run for Mr Tibbs the caretaker who gave you some strong-smelling medicine from a hip flask.

I liked the way you turned off your hearing aid when you wanted to read the newspaper, or we were getting on your nerves. Those hours of freedom were when I first nurtured dreams of becoming a writer. While bedlam ensued around me, I used to write long stories or daydream about adventures I would have when I could afford a compass, a map, a dog and some stout shoes. When you did decide to teach, your lessons were brilliant. Especially the Second World War ones where you taught us how to make goggles by turning our hands backwards and making holes with our thumb and fingers. We flew around the playground humming the *Dambusters'* tune:

DER DER DER DER DER DAD A DER DER DER
NEEEEEOW



And in the classroom you hung loads of metal aeroplanes from the ceiling on string and when we re-enacted the Battle of Britain you staggered around the room swinging them round and round:

Take that!

Kerpow!

Bang

As well as learning about history it was good for our reflexes because we had to be on the ball and duck or else you could get killed or just knocked out like Vivienne Pryce-Jones who always sat up straight and took a direct hit between the eyes from a German Focker.

And the books you read to us were terrifying and thrilling. At night I swear I would hear Blind Pew from *Treasure Island* tapping his stick along our road coming to our house with a black spot for my mother. Or Bertha Mason, the mad woman from *Jane Eyre* shuffling around in the attic above my head striking matches. For years after whenever I went to the lavatory, I flapped my arms about to check that the invisible man hadn't taken his bandages off and was hiding in there.

You told us to read anything we could get our hands on and I did. It was excellent advice although the books my Auntie Edith kept under her bed were forcibly removed from my grasp.

There were other teachers who inspired me, scared me witless or wounded me with their sarcasm. You have a special place in my heart.