





Parents' Day

Ben and Mary Norm thought their mum and dad were the best parents in the world. The trouble was, they also thought they were the most embarrassing parents in the world. Mr and Mrs Norm were always doing stuff other parents would never dream of doing, and they had no idea how awful they looked.

For example, Dad had a grotty grey ponytail that Ben and Mary hated. It was gruesome. It dangled from the back of his head and looked disgusting. Mary always

said that if someone shook it, they'd get enough dandruff to fill a talcum powder tin. Dad also had a ring in the corner of his right nostril. The trouble was, it was rusty because every time he had a cold his nose dripped and the ring got wet.

"Ponytails belong on ponies, not adults," said Ben.

"And rings belong in bulls' noses, not in grown-ups' nostrils," replied Mary. "If it rusts any more he'll get some dreadful farmyard disease, then he'll have to be put down."

That wasn't the worst of it. Not only did their dad have a ring through his nose and a ponytail, he also wore a puce-coloured bobble hat and a black string vest.



“Can you think of anyone who looks worse than Dad?” moaned Ben.

“Yes,” said Mary, “I can.”

Mary meant her mum.

Mrs Norm often wore a fishnet body stocking as part of her ordinary wardrobe but, as if that wasn’t bad enough, you should have seen how she dressed for work.

Unfortunately for her children, Mrs Norm was a belly-dancer and she was employed part-time by the local Turkish restaurant.

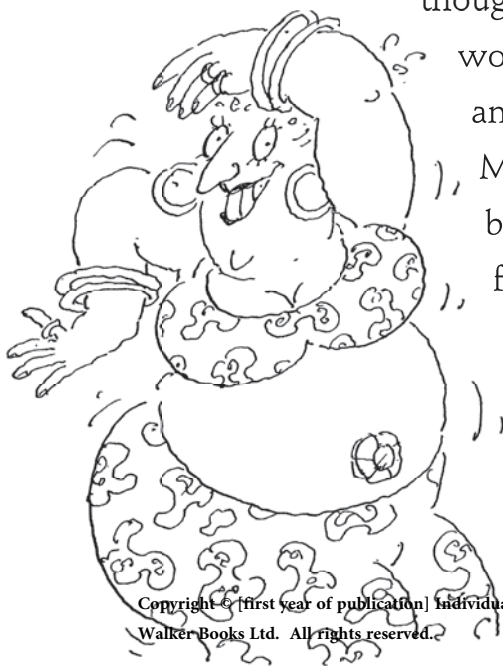
Whenever she went out to work, Ben and Mary crossed their fingers and hoped that nobody from their school would be going to the restaurant with their parents.



It would be awful if they saw Mrs Norm wobbling her vast belly and shaking her tassels to the sound of Turkish bagpipe music. Ben and Mary took a little comfort from the fact that part of their mum's outfit was a veil. They hoped that as long as she kept the veil on, no one would recognize her.

It wasn't only the way their mum and dad looked that embarrassed Mary and Ben. It was also Mr and Mrs Norm's manners, and their attitude to life. Mr and Mrs Norm didn't care one hoot what other people

thought of them. Dad would pick his nose and flick bogies at flies. Mum would practise belly-dancing in front of the window or take her shoes off and paint her toenails, which



doesn't sound so bad – until you've smelled her feet. Every time she took her shoes off, the cat fainted.

It was Mary's least favourite person, Alice Frimp, who started all the children at school boasting about their parents. One day they were standing around in the playground when Alice Frimp said, "My mum's responsible for keeping the Queen's clothes looking fresh. She's a royal fashion consultant."



“Well, my dad’s
a test pilot,” said
Charlie Buggins.



“My mum’s a
high-powered businesswoman who
used to be a brain surgeon,” boasted
Mavis Mayhem.



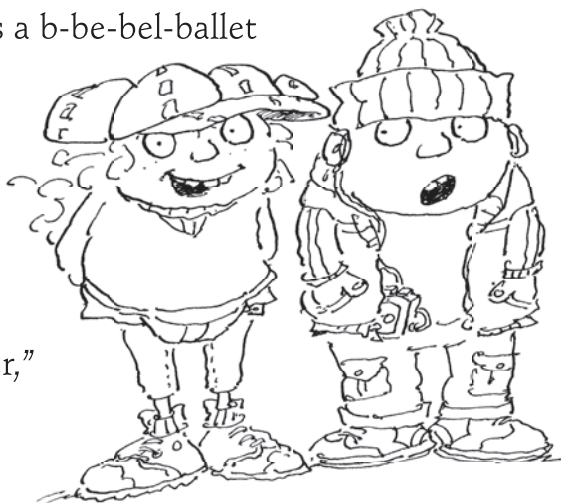
“Mine’s an
opera singer,”
said Pattie Rotti.



Mary nearly told
the truth. She nearly said her mum
was a belly- dancer.

“Mine’s a b-be-bel-ballet
dancer!”
she said
instead.

“And
Dad’s a
fire-fighter,”
said Ben.



Mary thought Alice Frimp was a real grub.
That very same day their teacher, Miss
Jones, said, "Don't forget, it's Parents' Day
next Friday. I'm looking forward to meeting
all your parents for the first time."



“I couldn’t stand Alice Frimp or any of her horrible gang seeing Mum and Dad. They’ll poke fun at us for ever,” wailed Mary as they walked home after school.

Ben felt the same. He wished he hadn’t said their dad was a fire-fighter. You don’t see many string-vested fire-fighters in puce-coloured bobble hats who have ponytails and wear rings in their noses.

What if Dad absent-mindedly flicked a bogey at Miss Jones? It was the kind of thing he might do. And then he’d pick something from between his teeth – with the same finger!

Ben and Mary were mortified. Miss Jones would be friendly to their parents, and pretend not to notice their habits. But what would she really think, deep down inside? There must be something they could do to stop the Dreaded Parents coming along to Parents’ Day.

"It's simple," said Ben. "We just won't tell them about it."

"Right," said Mary, "we'll keep Parents' Day a secret."

But their mum and dad already knew.
Every single parent had received a letter from Miss Jones.

"I can't wait to come along to Parents' Day," said Dad.

"Neither can I," said Mum. "I'll wear my leather jacket – the one with the slashes –
and my fishnet body stocking.
You'll be proud of us."



That night Ben and Mary held a powwow in their bedroom. The first thing they decided to do was to tackle the problem of Dad.

At midnight, when Mr and Mrs Norm were snoring loudly, Ben and Mary tiptoed into their parents' bedroom. Mary had a pair of very sharp scissors. With a few quick hacks, off came Dad's disgusting ponytail.



That was one less thing for Alice Frimp to be snide about. Ben had found a pair of bolt cutters in the garage. With a few expert snips, off came Dad's rusty nose ring. Next they took a pile of his tatty string vests and greasy bobble hats from the cupboard and put them in the dustbin. That was enough for one night.



When they went down to breakfast next morning, Mr Norm was sitting in the kitchen. He was completely bald except for a bit of stubble, and Mrs Norm was busy drawing something on his head. She was using an old-fashioned pen-nib dipped in red and black ink. When she'd finished, Mary and Ben saw what Mum had drawn. It was a large spider's web with a big fat spider sitting in the middle of it.



“For some mysterious reason I started losing my hair last night,” said Mr Norm, “so me and Mum decided to shave it all off and use my head as a canvas.”

“We’re just trying out a few design ideas,” said Mrs Norm. “If we like this one we’ll get

a tattooist to do it in permanent ink.”

“But Dad can’t have a spider’s web tattooed on his head!” cried Ben.

“Of course he can,” said Mrs Norm. “It’s not illegal, dear.”

There was no answer to that.

When Mum had finished, Mary came up close and studied Dad’s head properly. No matter what else she thought, Mary had to admit that her mum was a pretty good artist. She had drawn a very realistic fly caught in the centre of the web. Not only that, the fly was half eaten by the spider.

Ben moaned. Mary moaned. The spider’s web was even worse than the ponytail. And there were only a few days left before Parents’ Day! They were frantic! Why did they have such impossible parents?

“If Mum and Dad were a bit more intelligent, then they’d know we don’t want them coming into school!” said Ben.



“The cat’s more intelligent than them,” snorted Mary.

“I know that already,” said Ben, who thought Smudge the cat was the best cat in the world. “Have you seen the way he studies the fridge when Mum opens it?”

Mary said she had.

“Well,” said Ben, “yesterday Smudge brought a dead mouse in from the garden and dropped it by the fridge door.”

“So?”

“So a few moments later Dad comes in from the pub and puts the mouse in the

fridge. He thought it must have dropped out.”

Mary sighed.

Dad was Dad. She loved him the way he was even if the way he was wasn't the way she wanted him to be.

It was every kid's dilemma.

At school nobody seemed very enthusiastic about Parents' Day. In fact, everybody looked extremely worried. Even Mary's arch-enemy, Alice Frimp, who had started them all boasting about their parents, seemed worried.

“I don't think my mum will be coming to Parents' Day after all,” she said.

“I hope ... er, I mean, I think mine will be too busy as well,” said Pattie Rotti.

When Charlie Buggins said that he was looking forward to meeting Ben's dad because he was a real fire-fighter, Ben blushed and felt very hot. He wished he hadn't told a fib. And Mary nearly burst into tears.

Alice Frimp was a double grub, getting them all boasting about what their parents did!

Mary thought of the horrible humiliation she would feel if it was discovered that her mum was a belly-dancer instead of a ballet dancer.

And there was only one day to go!

That night Ben and Mary sneaked back into their parents' bedroom. This time they worked on Mum.



They found her wild blue glitter-wig and hid it behind the wardrobe, along with her snakeskin belt and her alligator-skin shoes.

Next they rummaged about in the cupboard.

They found her fishnet body stocking, which they stuffed into a bin-bag along with her pink feather boa and belly-dancing outfit. They also found more of Mr Norm's bobble hats and tatty old vests and threw these in as well. Then they took the whole lot downstairs and dumped it in the dustbin.



Next morning, when they went down to breakfast, there was a police officer standing in the kitchen talking to Mr and Mrs Norm, who were both wrapped in towels.



“A wild blue glitter-wig and a fishnet body stocking, you say, madam? And a nose ring, you say, sir? Stolen from your bedroom?”

“Yes, it seems there’s been a burglar prowling around. He’s obviously got good taste,” said Mr Norm.

"It means I'll have nothing to wear for Parents' Day today!" wailed Mrs Norm.

"Ah, Parents' Day. That might explain a few things," said the police officer thoughtfully.

He turned to Mary and Ben. "Are you two *quite* sure you don't know anything about this?" he asked.

Ben and Mary blushed bright red. Sweat trickled down their sides.

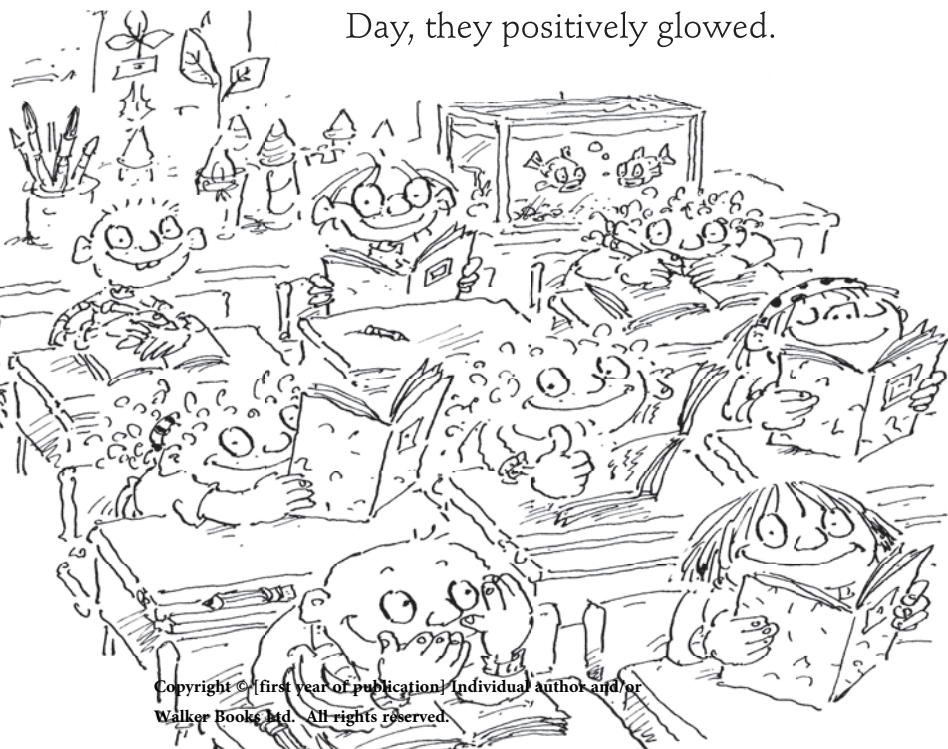
"It's just that we often get mysterious goings-on just before Parents' Day," the police officer said. "Well, if I see a burglar wearing a glitter-wig, a nose ring and a belly-dancer's outfit I'll let your mum and dad know immediately."

The police officer put his notebook away and left. Ben and Mary could have sworn he winked at them as he went out the door.



After Mary and Ben recovered from the shock of seeing a police officer in the house, they were quite pleased with themselves. Their parents had nothing much to wear now except towels, and they couldn't very well go to Parents' Day wrapped in towels. Ben and Mary left for school that morning with light hearts.

At school everyone looked happy again. Compared with how miserable they'd appeared after the announcement of Parents' Day, they positively glowed.



In fact, everyone looked a bit too pleased with themselves. They'd all been up to something, Mary was sure – but what? Could they possibly have been trying to stop *their* parents from coming along to Parents' Day too? Surely not. Surely nobody else had such impossible parents – or did they?

"Quiet, now!" said Miss Jones. "You all know it's Parents' Day, so I want you to be on your best behaviour."

She looked at her watch.

"They're coming soon,"

she said. Miss Jones

seemed to know

exactly what the

children were

thinking. She

seemed to know

exactly what was

going to happen.



It was about twenty minutes before the parents arrived...

The children looked out of the windows.

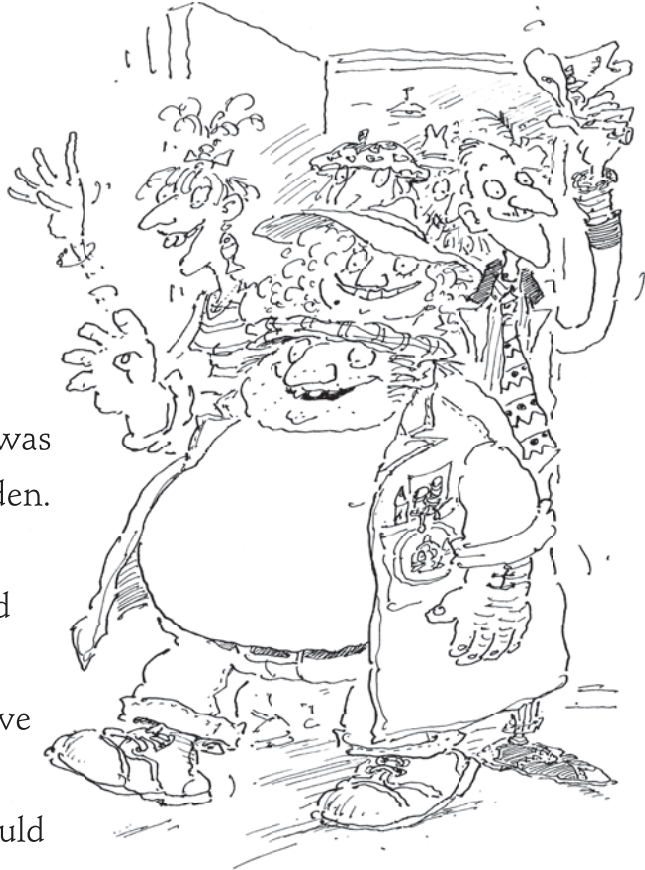
Fifteen minutes...

Then ten minutes ... nine ... eight ...
seven ... six ... five ... four ... three ...
two ... then—

The classroom door burst open and Alice Frimp's mum rushed in. Everyone could tell by the uniform she wore that she worked in the dry cleaner's around the corner from Buckingham Palace. So much for her being the Queen's fashion consultant! Alice Frimp had fibbed!



But then
so had Pattie
Rotti. Her
mum wasn't
an opera
singer – she was
a traffic warden.
And Charlie
Buggins's dad
wasn't a test
pilot. He drove
the wet-fish
lorry. You could
tell by the smell.



The parents piled in, one after the other.

Everybody thought everyone else's
parents were amazing and wonderful and
that only their own parents were impossible.

"It always happens like this," said Miss
Jones. "All children think there is something
embarrassing about their own parents."

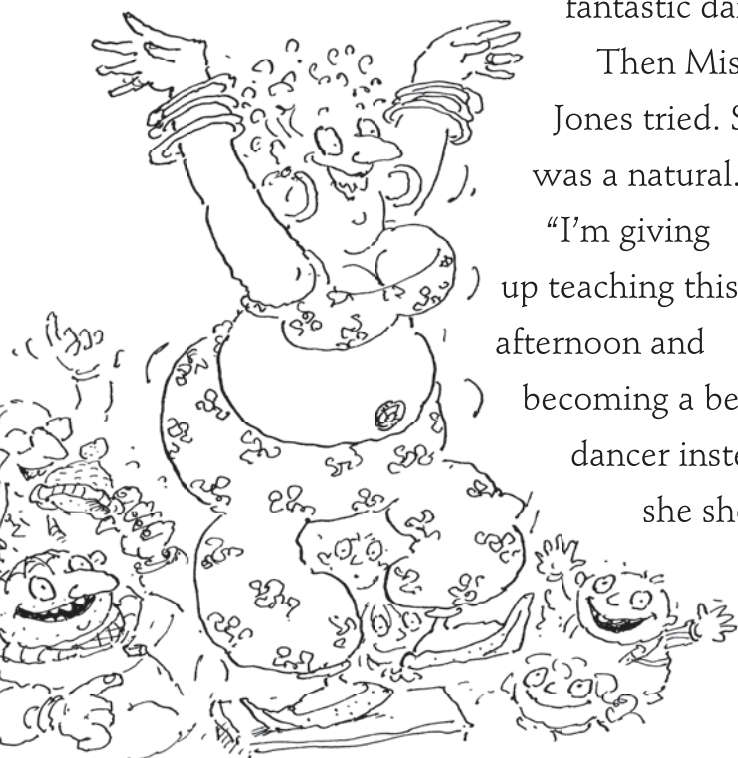
Then, last of all, Ben and Mary's parents stormed in. They had taken their clothes out of the dustbin. Mrs Norm wore her belly-dancing costume and everyone thought she was the most amazing mum ever.

Miss Jones was very impressed. She'd always had a secret desire to be a belly-dancer, so Mrs Norm showed her how to do it. She stood up on a desk and did a

fantastic dance.

Then Miss Jones tried. She was a natural.

"I'm giving up teaching this afternoon and becoming a belly-dancer instead!" she shouted.



The head teacher thought Miss Jones should have set a better example and not tried belly-dancing in front of the class, but everyone agreed that the head was just jealous.

As for Miss Jones, she never did give up her job and become a belly-dancer, but everyone had a really fabulous Parents' Day.

In fact, it was the most wonderful Parents' Day there had ever been.

