

Prologue

A group of OFFICIALS bring YOU on. There's a balloon tied around your wrist.

OFFICIALS. Off you go then and best of luck.

It's bound to be different this time around though some of it might seem familiar.

The big questions, we mean.

The beginnings, middles, endings, et cetera.

Still, not to worry, it's all a work-in-progress.

And don't forget you're welcome to draw your own conclusions.

Ready?

YOU nod. An OFFICIAL takes out a pin and pops the balloon. A newborn wails.

PART ONE: ONCE UPON A TIME, ET CETERA

World, Oyster

A group of MIDWIVES are gathered around a bed.

MIDWIVES. Here she is.

A little girl!

Hello you!

Aren't you perfect?

And loud – did you hear that?

A real war cry.

'Here I am.'

'You'd all better listen to me.'

Well done Mrs –

(Miss –

Ms?

Shhh.

Is there a father?

Shhh, not now.)

Can you believe she'll be an old woman one day?

Can you believe one day she'll die of old age?

Hopefully – of old age, I mean, not prematurely.

Give her a chance, she might be a president.

She might be a famous soprano.

She might be a scientist who invents a compound that saves the Earth.

She might live an averagely happy life without great ambition or drama.

Well –

Well –

That’s not exactly –

Shhh, the consultant’s coming.

The consultant!

CONSULTANT *enters*.

CONSULTANT. How are we all ladies?

MIDWIVES. Very well thanks.

Tired but fine.

Bit emotional actually.

We’re all absolutely fine.

CONSULTANT. Good, then let’s get on with it. Weight, length?

MIDWIVES. Checked.

CONSULTANT. Lungs, eyes, heart?

MIDWIVES. Checked.

CONSULTANT. Post-partum strategy?

MIDWIVES. Checked.

Checked.

Checked.

CONSULTANT. Hale and healthy, whole life ahead of her, world, oyster, et cetera. Proceed.

MIDWIVES. Yes doctor.

CONSULTANT. Clean her up. And don’t forget to label her.

Changing the Story

You’re five, at home with your MUM, AUNT and GRANDMOTHER. They are talking to YOU. YOU are busy playing with your toy rabbit.

MUM. Why?

AUNT. Why?

GRANDMOTHER. Why? Because, that’s why.

MUM. You have to go to school, everybody does.

AUNT. And you can’t go to school with no shoes on, can you?

GRANDMOTHER. Lots of children don’t even have shoes, they walk barefoot.

MUM. (Mum.)

GRANDMOTHER. Dog mess, broken glass, you’re a lucky girl. When I was your age –

MUM. (Mum, stop changing the story.)

Put your shoes on please or we’re going to be late.

YOU shake your head. GRANDMOTHER takes away Rabbit.

GRANDMOTHER. Rabbit wants to go to school. (*Rabbit’s voice*.) I’d go to school in my new shoes, I would, ever so pleased.

MUM. (Rabbit doesn’t talk like that.)

GRANDMOTHER. I gave him to you, I know how he speaks.

MUM. He?

AUNT. Don’t ask me, I didn’t get a rabbit.

MUM. No, you got a dog, a live dog.)

GRANDMOTHER. If you don’t go to school you won’t learn how to read and write.

AUNT. Yes, would you prefer to grow up illiterate, because you’ll never get a job that way.

MUM. (It's a bit early for that.

AUNT. I'm making it her choice.

GRANDMOTHER. She doesn't need a choice, she's five years old.)

When I was your age we had to be good little girls.

MUM. (It's not the 1950s, Mum.)

GRANDMOTHER. We didn't have gap years and multi channels, we were too busy raising our families.

MUM. AND doing nursing work.

AUNT. AND making sure our little girls had a clean blouse every day.

AUNT/MUM. Yadda yadda yadda.

GRANDMOTHER *gives YOU back your rabbit.*

GRANDMOTHER (*to your MUM*). Fine, you handle it then.

MUM. Fine with me, she's my daughter.

AUNT. So I'm irrelevant because I'm not a mother? Fine.

YOU make Rabbit talk to YOU. YOU listen. YOU laugh.

MUM. I don't know what you're laughing at. Rabbit can't talk.

YOU look at Rabbit, shocked. YOU might cry.

Sorry. I'm lying. Of course he can talk. 'She', I mean. Now please will you put your shoes on? Please.

A More Rounded View

You're eight. Some TEACHERS are talking to YOU at school. One of the TEACHERS is holding a ruler.

TEACHERS. So you're the Cossack, I see.

And you ask your playmates to be peasant girls.

(Pretty peasant girls.

Yes, she's quite specific about the prettiness.)

And they have to weave and bake and clean in their –

Hovels.

Right, and then you, the Cossack, burst in brandishing this ruler.

Cutlass.

I see, and then you threaten to –

Pillage them.

Right, pillage them, unless they fall in love with you.

(Did Cossacks use cutlasses?

We're not so concerned about historical accuracy.

We're more concerned about the tying of peasant girls to chairs, the brandishing of rulers, et cetera.)

YOU. But –

TEACHERS. Do you know what the word 'pillage' means?

Well, let's say it's a sort of – (*Foreign accent.*) 'I'll have my wicked way with you if you don't do as I say' type of –

(I think Cossacks originate in Russia.

Yes, we've been studying Catherine the Great.

Is that where all this came from?

I think so, yes.)