

## The school play

*Joanna Jones is on the stage of a theatre. The people in the audience are clapping and cheering and calling her name. The bright lights feel hot on her face. She moves forward and bows. The audience stands. Someone comes onto the stage and gives her some flowers. She smiles and bows again. The noise of the audience gets louder. She feels wonderful. Joanna Jones is a great actor. She is a star.*

Joanna heard a noise behind her. She turned, but no one was there. She looked around her. There were no lights, no audience, no clapping and cheering. The theatre was quiet. She was Joanna Jones, a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, standing on the stage of her school theatre. But she knew that one day her dream would come true. One day she was going to be a famous actor.

Joanna shivered. She felt cold. She felt as if someone was watching her. She looked around her but the theatre was empty.

*I shouldn't be here, she thought. I'd better go before someone catches me.*

Joanna went down the stairs behind the stage, then out of the door at the back of the theatre. She walked around to the front, where a crowd of students was waiting. She found her friend Lisa in the crowd.

'Where have you been?' demanded Lisa.

'Nowhere,' Joanna answered.

'I don't know why I agreed to come to this meeting,' Lisa said.

'You agreed to come because you're my best friend. You agreed to come because you know how important this is to me,'



replied Joanna, and she put her arm around her friend. 'Anyway, you enjoy helping out with the plays too,' she added.

'Well, I hope it doesn't take long. I should be at basketball practice,' Lisa said.

'It won't take long. Here's Mrs Moon now,' said Joanna.

Mrs Moon, the drama teacher, was a small woman with short grey hair who wore big glasses. She unlocked the front door to the theatre and the students followed her in. They sat down in the seats. Mrs Moon went up some stairs onto the stage. She looked down at the students and smiled.

'Welcome, boys and girls, to the Willis Theatre. As always, I'd like to remind you just how lucky we are at this school to have this wonderful theatre. The new students may not know that the Willis Theatre was given to the school by the Willis family in the 1940s. Having this theatre allows us to do so much more than other schools can.'

Joanna looked around at the old theatre. She loved this place.

Mrs Moon continued, 'As always, I'm very excited about this year's school production. It's something a little different. I'm sure you are going to love it. Today you can take the audition notes. I've chosen some scenes from the play for the auditions. You'll have a week to practise them. Now remember, as always, students in Years Ten and Eleven will audition first. So you older students, please write your name on this sheet of paper if you would like to audition for one of the main parts. Students in Years Seven, Eight and Nine will audition after that, for the smaller parts.'

The younger students started talking.

'I know, I know,' said Mrs Moon. 'Don't complain, you younger students. Your turn will come.' Then she smiled and said, 'Well, who wants to know what the play is?'

Everyone started clapping and stamping their feet. Mrs Moon waited for them to stop.

'The school production this year will be...the musical *Grease!*'

Everyone started to talk at once. Some students cheered, but Joanna put her head in her hands.

'I *knew* it,' she said. 'I knew it was going to be a musical. This is the first year I can audition for a lead role and it's a silly musical.'

'It's okay, Joanna,' said Lisa. 'You can still audition. *Grease* is great. Think of all those 1950s costumes and the dancing and music. Come on, it's one of your favourite films. You'll have fun.'

'I thought you'd understand how I was feeling,' cried Joanna. She picked up her bag and ran out of the theatre.

Lisa was going to follow, but she stopped. She went back to the table and picked up the audition notes. She thought for a moment. Then she added Joanna's name to the audition list.

*She'll hate me when she finds out, but maybe in a few days she'll thank me,* Lisa thought.

She ran out and caught up with Joanna. She couldn't think of anything to say. The two friends walked in silence to Lisa's house. Joanna's parents both worked, so Joanna always went home with Lisa.

'I'll get us something to eat,' said Lisa.

Joanna nodded and went upstairs. Lisa went into the kitchen and opened the fridge. She felt really sorry for her friend.

*I know how important this is to her,* she thought. *I may be the only person who knows just how important.*

Joanna had always talked about wanting to be an actor. And now that she was in Year Ten, she had the chance to audition for a main part. Lisa knew how much Joanna had been looking forward to this year.

*Right!* said Lisa to herself, taking a couple of cans of soft drink and some cold pizza from the fridge. *I've got to make sure she auditions for a part.*

Upstairs, Joanna was staring at her books. She looked as if she had been crying. Lisa smiled and said, 'Okay, we might as well get this homework out of the way.'

For an hour the girls studied in silence. Then Lisa shut her books, stood up and rubbed her eyes.

'Enough!' she exclaimed. 'Let's look at something more fun.' She picked up the audition notes and looked through them.

'What did you take them for?' asked Joanna.

'I took them for *you*,' replied Lisa. 'This looks pretty easy.'

'Yes, right. You mean easy for someone who can sing,' Joanna replied angrily.

'Joanna, you *can* sing. You just don't like singing in front of people.' Lisa knew what her friend was thinking about. 'It was a long time ago, Joanna. You were only ten years old. It won't be the same now.'

Joanna sighed. 'It still feels like yesterday. It was such a bad feeling to have to stand in front of the school and sing. I sounded terrible. Everyone was laughing at me.'

She looked as if she might start to cry again.

'No, not everyone,' said Lisa. 'Most of us just felt sorry for you. It wasn't fair – Miss Mason just made you do it without any practice. But this is different. You've got a whole week to practise. I'll help you.'

Lisa went over to her CD player and looked through the CDs on the floor.

'Here it is,' she said, holding up a CD of *Grease*. She put it into the player and turned it on. The room was filled with music. Lisa picked up her hairbrush and held it up like a microphone. She started to sing.

'Come on, Joanna. You're better at singing than me. You know you are.'

She threw the hairbrush to Joanna. Joanna started to laugh. Lisa was always so much fun. Joanna held up her microphone and joined in. Her voice was clear and strong.



‘See? You’ve got a great voice,’ said Lisa. ‘Okay, now promise me you’ll audition for the play.’

‘Oh, Lisa!’ said Joanna.

Lisa was not going to give up. ‘Come on, say it!’

‘Okay, okay! I promise,’ replied Joanna.