

## THE DROP-OUT

*Jo McIntosh*

Early morning sees the usual panic; five competing for occupancy of the only bathroom; boys declaring porridge is "euchh;" Father searching for his car keys. Why then this gloom, this sense of doom? Can it be Friday the 13th or the Ides of March?

Neither, smirks the calendar. It's observation day at the nursery school. The two year old is welcome but the dog is not.

One out of the house, now two — three to go. One eye on the clock; haul out snowsuits, mitts, hats, scarves, boots. The two year old won't wear "those" mitts. Scramble for more in the all-sorts box. What are three shrivelled coconuts doing in there?

Two india-rubber offspring wrestle on the floor; call them to attention; announce we must hurry; produce the snowsuits; rigor mortis sets in. Mash arms and legs into snowsuits and feet into soggy boots.

Finished.

"I need to go to the bathroom."

Contemplate strangulation or a karate chop to the back of the ear.

Hurry! Scurry! Lug on the snowsuit a second time. The zipper's stuck. Wish I were a career girl.

Ready to leave.

Hell's delight! Freezing rain. Driving one and dragging the other, we slither across the park. At last the school.

"Why are you crying?"

"I lost my mitt."

Enter the building. Temperature 120°. I feel faint. Observe a gaggle of mothers on baby bear chairs. Sit down gingerly, expecting baby bear results. Place looks like a rummage sale; clothes up to the ceiling. Principal waves her magic wand and they all disappear.

"Good morning, children. Bonjour, mes enfants."

Dutifully, the children respond. Mothers smile fatuously at their progeny. My sons shape up well. Intelligent, healthy, kids to be proud of.

"Now we'll all sing "Baa-Baa Black Sheep," bleats the principal — "in our best voices for the mothers."

I grin, knowing my son's rendition.

Baa-Baa Black Sheep  
Had a farm  
Up above the world so high  
Like a varmint in the sky.

"Baa-Baa Black Sheep" comes through loud and clear. Plugging his mouth with his thumb, my son surveys the ceiling, while his brother wanders off to another room.

"Children, would you like to be galloping horses this morning?"

A chorus of "Yes-es."

Clockwise, children and staff prance wildly around the room. My lulu gallops the opposite way, knocking 'em down like ninepins.

"Who IS that child?" whispers a mother.

I'm a deaf mute with a frozen smile.

For six months these children have been learning French. I didn't know. They've learned the "Lord's Prayer." I didn't know that either. It is now perfectly clear that my son knows neither French nor English.

"Sit down please, children."

Mine stands.

"Lie down on the floor."

Mine lunges across the room.

"Where's Scott?" he demands.

Now everyone knows whose child he is.

"Go back to your place," I plead.

"NO."

"Now we'll do some finger painting," authority commands.

Saved by the bell.

But finger painting! The mind boggles at the thought. A wet paper, three blobs of gloppy paint and they're away.

"Finger tips only," shrills the teacher.

Too late. My fellow's already up to his elbows. The work is displayed on the walls. Ours is the only unintelligible blurb.

Now to the playroom. My son is reborn. He hammers nails; hammers his brother, hammers everyone in sight.

The principal wants a word with me.

"I'm sure you must have noticed that your son is not really co-operating here. He doesn't appear to be *ready* for nursery school. But of course, he IS young."

I clutch at straws.

"That big boy over there doesn't participate much."

"Ah, he's retarded, you know."

Silence.

What conclusions must I draw?

"I suggest you send him to school only if he *really* wants to come," says the principal.

"You mean he's EXPELLED?"

“Oh, no, not expelled. But don’t pressure him.”

Well, I knew he was no Einstein, but a nursery school drop-out!

Mercifully, it’s over.

“Lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi, samedi, dimanche,” burbles my idiot child. “Why do we die? When will I get dead? Are God’s legs hanging out of the sky?”

Home.

I am depressed all day.