

from SHIRLEY VALENTINE

by Willy Russell

Well, when Brian learned he'd got the part of Joseph he was made up with himself. All the time he's rehearsin' this nativity play his behaviour is fantastic; the headmaster's made up with him. I'm made up with him, the teachers are made up with him. An' he's made up with himself. He's practisin', every night in his room – (*on one note*)

'We are weary travellers on our way to Bethlehem an' my wife is having a baby and we need rest at the inn for the night'. Well, the day of the show, I got down to the school, the play started an' it was lovely, y'know, all the little angels come on an' they all have a sly little wave to their mams. Then it was our Brian's entrance; he comes on an' he's pullin' this donkey behind him – it's like this hobby-horse on wheels. An' perched on top of it is this little girl, takin' the part of the Virgin Mary an' she's dressed beautiful, y'know, her mother's really dolled her up to be the part. An' she's givin' a little wave to her mam. So Brian gives the donkey a bit of a tug because he's takin' it dead serious an' he doesn't believe they should be wavin' to their mams. He's up there, he's actin' like he might win the Oscar – y'know, he's mimin' givin' hay to the donkey an' he's pattin' it on the head. Well, the headmaster turned round an' smiled at me. I think he was as proud of our Brian as I was. Well, Brian gets to the door of the inn and he goes 'Knock, knock, knock' an' the little Innkeeper appears. Our Brian starts 'We are weary travellers on our way to Bethlehem an' my wife is havin' a baby an' we need to rest for the night at the inn'. So the little feller playin' the Innkeeper pipes up: 'You cannot stay at the inn because the inn is full up an' there is no room in the inn'. An' then our Brian is supposed to say somethin' like: 'Well, we must go an' find a lowly cattle shed an' stay in there'. Then he's supposed to go off pullin' the donkey an' the Virgin Mary behind him. But he didn't. Well, I don't know if it's the Virgin Mary, gettin' up our Brian's nose, because she's spent the whole scene wavin' to her mother, or whether it was just that our Brian suddenly realized that the part of Joseph wasn't as big as it had been cracked up to be. But whatever it was, instead of goin' off pullin' the donkey, he suddenly turned to the little Innkeeper an'

yelled at him: 'Full up? Full up? But we booked!' Well, the poor little Innkeeper didn't know what day of the week it was.

He's lookin' all round the hall for someone to rescue him an' his bottom lip's beginnin' to tremble an' our Brian's goin', 'Full up? I've got the wife outside, waitin' with the donkey. She's expectin' a baby any minute now, there's snow everywhere in six-foot drifts an' you're tryin' to tell me that you're full up?' Well, the top brass on the front row are beginnin' to look a bit uncomfortable – they're beginnin' to turn and look at the headmaster an' our Brian's givin' a perfect imitation of his father, on a bad day; he's beratin' anythin' that dares move. The little Innkeeper's lip is goin' ten to the dozen an' the Virgin Mary's in floods of tears on the donkey. Well, the Innkeeper finally grasps that the script is well out of the window an' that he has to do somethin' about our Brian. So he steps forward an' he says, 'Listen mate, listen! I was only jokin'. We have got room really. Y'can come in if y'want.' An' with that the three of them disappeared into the inn. End of nativity play an' end of our Brian's actin' career. Me an' our Brian, we sometimes have a laugh about it now, but at the time I could have died of shame. It was all over the papers: 'Mary And Joseph Fail To Arrive in Bethlehem.' I was ashamed.