

## Surprise!

by Sue Hitchcock

“What shall I wear?” Her excitement required she savour every detail of the evening.

“You’ve only got one posh frock, but it will be fine. I’ve only got one suit and I’m planning to wear the jacket with my jeans.”

“Oh, you scruffbag.” She knew it was no use arguing. “Couldn’t you wear the suit trousers?”

“No one is going to look at me, and I’m not wearing a tie, either.”

With two young daughters, they seldom went out in the evening, particularly together. They still had contacts, old friends, from the playgroup babysitting group. Ann had agreed to stay and their daughters had promised to behave.

Phoebe had only worked at the Theatre for three months. Her job as the mailing list clerk was not in itself interesting, but the context meant everything to her. She had loved the ballet since she was very young, though she hadn’t taken more than a few months’ lessons. Now she went to an evening class in International Folk Dance and it fanned the spark of her enthusiasm.

A few weeks into the job an unplanned booking cropped up for the celebrated Harlem Dance Company, only two weeks ahead. Panic arose in the management at how the Box Office staff would cope. The idea, novel at that time, of telephone bookings was the only solution, but who could do it? Phoebe agreed to work the long hours taking credit card numbers for bookings. It was only for two weeks, after all.

The experience was nightmarish. She had to abandon the ringing phone to get lunch and went home each night with a sore ear. Nevertheless she must have made a good job of it, because a reward was coming.

Miss Cauldwell who was Phoebe’s manager, had not divulged her first name. Maybe she relished the formality of it, a convention which she had warned Phoebe about, when Margot Fonteyn had visited the theatre – “Be sure you call her Miss Fonteyn, not Margot!”

Miss Caulwell was the secretary to the director and they worked cheek by jowl in the tiny suite of offices at the top of the theatre behind the stage. Apart from the lighting space above the stage, there was a spacious rehearsal room, both of which allowed Phoebe delightful glimpses of dancing as she went back and forth.

At the end of the tiring fortnight on the phone with no chance of these pleasant breaks, Phoebe went to collect her payslip from Miss Cauldwell.

“Thank you for working so hard. I’ve enclosed some tickets as a reward.”

Phoebe couldn’t wait to see what they were for, but waited till she was at Highbury and on the train home.

She caught her breath. The seats were in the dress circle the following week. She would see the Harlem Dance Company, and with a better view from the dress circle. Never in her life had she sat in such luxury, never better than the back stalls, and more often high up in the gods.

Now all she had to do was decide what to wear.