

FRED'S ADVENTURE.

Fred Shufflebottom's surname had been handed down through the generations, but it was not until his eleventh birthday, that the true significance of the name Shufflebottom would become apparent to all. Fred was still at primary school, and had just reached the age when he was starting to take an interest in girls. Others appeared to have things 'sorted', while Fred was still working everything out. He was very fond of Maisie Clunkett, who was in the same class, but he was not sure how he would demonstrate his feelings for her. So, in the days long before Google, Fred resolved to take advice from his favourite rock star 'Cool Boy' Duff. Cool Boy's lyrics informed Fred that the key to a girl's heart was through gentleness and chivalry. This was the advice that Fred would follow.

Maisie was shy and quiet, but Fred was sure she really liked him. But how was he going to demonstrate his chivalry to her? Having recently studied the Battle of Hastings, Fred knew that chivalrous knights wore shining armour, so Fred managed to convince his parents to buy him a plastic suit of armour for his birthday.

On the day of Fred's birthday party, the usual gang arrived, with 'Smokey Joe' Galbraith wearing flared trousers, which had just become fashionable, and 'Razzer' Rawlings attired in what appeared to be a blanket, although Razzer assured everyone that it had spiritual connections with the East and started talking about 'karma'. Fred found this perplexing, but smiled politely, nodding in that way which signalled to everyone else that he was part of 'the in crowd'.

Just as Fred was completing his final nod, Maisie walked in the room, looking, in Fred's eyes, like the embodiment of everything beautiful. If the school had decided to do 'Sleeping Beauty' that year, Fred had no doubt that Maisie would have been cast in the lead role.

As was normal practice, the girls huddled in a circle, and the boys, determined to prove their masculinity by being inappropriately loud, stood on the other side of the room, each determined to outdo the others by making them laugh at the expense of their latest victim.

Realising that he could not compete, and wanting to demonstrate his chivalry to the vision in the leopard skin dress, Fred endeavoured to 'sidle over' to Maisie. Unfortunately, his attempt at 'sidling' consisted of moving one foot in front of the other, in the manner of an arthritic penguin, which resulted in him toppling over, his face landing slap-bang in the middle of the birthday cake that his mother had prepared, using an ancient recipe involving eggs. Fred had been aiming to be 'the cream of the crop', but had ended up with 'the cream on top'.

Fred Shufflebottom had not won the key to Maisie's heart that day, but he was to find the key to her heart in the future, as sure as 'eggs is eggs', as his grandfather would have said.