

## VERSION

He arrived late. Things were in full swing. Poses of girls rushed about shrieking. The parents moved in couples, greeting one another with false enthusiasm and competing for the attention of the staff. Mrs Fitton patrolled continuously, displaying a feverish combination of anxiety and benevolence. From time to time she hissed instructions at teachers or senior girls. Edward, hoping to slink past unnoticed, was pounced upon and told to hurry to his classroom, where the lower fourth had an exhibition with a literary theme. Edward had conceived and arranged the exhibition himself and was aware that it lacked verve: he was not good at these things. In desperation, the previous week, he had ordered the children to select a favourite passage from books he had been reading with them, write it out in their best handwriting and then add some comments on what they enjoyed about the piece and about the book in general. Those with artistic inclinations were encouraged to illustrate as well. Most of the children said they couldn't remember any bits they liked; eventually, with much prompting and nagging, everyone came up with something. The results were pinned up around the walls of the classroom. Edward, re-inspecting them, saw even more clearly the perfunctory effect, and blamed himself. He sat down gloomily behind his desk to await custom. *à attendre la clientèle.* He knew he would never have survived as a teacher in the state sector: he was both not good enough and not bad enough. He would never have been one of those charismatic men and women who inspire and enthuse; equally, he could never have achieved an indifferent acceptance of failure. At Crowford House the luxuries of small classes and lavish facilities, plus moderately compliant children, cushioned his inadequacies. Here, he was not a particularly good teacher, but he was by no means a disaster. He did the best he could. Quite often he enjoyed what he was doing.

Penelope LIVELY, *Passing on*, 1989

to prompt: s.o. (pupil-actor) - souffler, réplique, réponse...  
to be in full swing - battre son plein.