



LET'S DO A PLAY

UMA ANAND



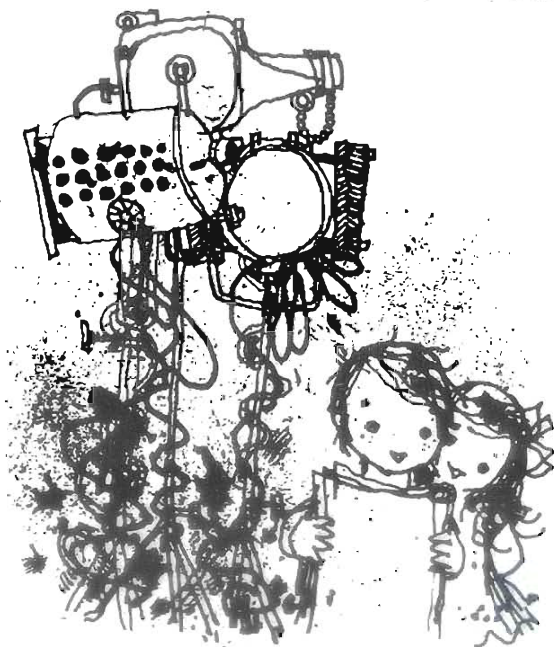
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THE MAGIC CALL

Deepak lay on the grass in the sun reading comics. It was the last day of term and he had just returned from school where he had exchanged his comic for a new one with his friend and neighbour Rafiq. He wanted to finish it before his mother returned from work at 5 o'clock. She did not like him to waste his holidays reading comics.

“Pee-peeha-papee!”

Startled, Deepak sat up as he heard a strange, sharp whistle.



“Pee-peeha-papee!” Again the curious sound rang out. Deepak leapt up and ran to the gate which led to the narrow lane in front of his house. At the turn of the lane, he saw a tall dark man, with fierce moustaches and twinkling eyes, smiling at him. He wore a big yellow turban wound loosely round his head and a dark red *kurta* over a white *dhoti*. Two gold rings glittered from his ears. He carried a big pack on his back. With him were a young lad and a small boy, dressed like him, except that the little boy’s turban was green.

“Pee-peeha-papee!” squeaked the big man. Deepak noticed that he seemed to have some sort of whistle inside his mouth.

Suddenly Deepak turned back and ran to a low hedge that separated his part of the lawn from the next-door compound.

“Dido,” he called excitedly. “Dido, where are you? Come out. Come quick.”

“Coming,” answered a voice, and a tall, thin boy ran out. This was Rafiq, Deepak’s best friend, better known as Dido to his friends.

“Coming,” called out another voice, rather high and thin, and out ran a pretty, plump little girl with curly hair and dimpled smile.

“Oh, bother,” grumbled Deepak. “I didn’t call you, Paro.”

The little girl stopped smiling. She was Parveen, Rafiq’s sister and great admirer. She always wanted to do what her brother did although she was only ten years old. Both Rafiq and Deepak were over 12, and Deepak did not like



having Paro (as her family called her) tagging along and spoiling their fun.

“Never mind her,” said Dido, “what did you want me for?”

“There’s a puppet-man in the lane and I think he is going to put up his stand in the bazaar. Let’s go and see the fun.”

“Take me too,” cried Paro, running behind the boys as they dashed into the lane.

“Mee-too-oo,” piped another voice as a chubby, fat, little ball of a boy rolled up and started running behind Paro.

“Now look what you’ve done,” shouted Deepak. “We will have to take Tuppo along as well!”

“Let’s all go,” said Dido, who liked to look on the bright side of things. “Hold my hand, Paro,” he called to his sister.

“Come along. Ride pick-a-back, Tuppo,” said Deepak making the best of a bad job, as he hauled his five-year-old little brother on to his back.

They soon reached the market-square where a crowd had gathered. “Pee-pee-ha-papee,” squeaked the Puppet-man’s whistle. “Dum-ta-ta-dum,” boomed the lad’s drum.

The children pushed their way through the crowd till they got to the front. They sat down with the other on-lookers. The Puppet-man had set up a small box-like stage. From behind it, he worked his puppets with long strings which were wound round his fingers.

On the stage a *darbar*-scene was being enacted. The King, Amar Singh Rathod, and his Queen, Hadi Rani, were sitting on a balcony. They were beautifully dressed wooden dolls. The King’s moustaches were as fierce as those of the Puppet-



man and he had tiny rings in his ears and a gold crown on his head. The Queen was dressed in red and silver with gleaming jewels around her neck. Below them a court dancer was dancing. The Puppet-man moved her with great skill. She whirled and turned and her skirt swished and swirled.

“Pee-pee-ha-papee,” shrilled the whistle. “Dum-ta-ta-dum,” boomed the drum. Then a *madari*—a juggler—appeared. He played a pipe and a snake wriggled out of his basket, while a black-and-white dog turned somersaults. Suddenly a messenger-doll rushed in. The enemy was attacking! Amar Singh Rathod got up, picked up his sword, got on his black horse and rode away.

The scene changed. Now it was a ‘battle-scene’. Amar Singh on his black horse fought his enemy who rode a red horse. The horses dashed against each other. The swords of the fighters clashed. “Dum-ta-ta-dum, dum-ta-ta-dum,”

