

## Chapter 1

### THINGS GET COMPLICATED

The family at the big old Manor House on the Thetford Road was splitting up! Nobody had really believed it was possible but it had happened. Tomorrow was the day when Mr and Mrs Waterson were going their separate ways. Right in the middle of things, and certainly the one who seemed to be coming off worst of all in the break up, was pretty golden haired Samantha, the eight year old daughter of the house. She loved both her parents and couldn't understand why her mother should be leaving them and why her father would want to take her to America.

Things had been going from bad to worse since the manager of father's American office had been arrested for stealing the company's money. Since that day, Mr Waterson had to spend so much time abroad getting things going again that he wanted his wife and daughter with him. But Mother wouldn't give up her charity work in England and had refused to go to Cincinnati with him. Nor would she let Samantha go without her, and that was the start of the end.

It was a great pity that Samantha's father was a company director and a very logical thinker because he couldn't leave his business habits at work. He had tried to explain to her that he and her mother were only having a 'trial separation,' and that things would soon be better.

"Just as soon as we get ourselves sorted out!"

Such words didn't mean much to an eight year old, they had just made Samantha run into her bedroom and cry.

On the other hand, Mother had been very quiet and wouldn't discuss anything with Samantha, nothing at all. It was all very strange and disturbing. Father had come home yesterday and announced that he was taking Samantha to America, and mother still hadn't said a word. Samantha tried to be brave about it as she sat at the breakfast table before school that last morning, but it wasn't easy.

The staff below stairs were just as confused about the whole thing, and their allegiances were split.

As Cook sat down at the kitchen dining table after taking in the dining room lunch, she said her bit.

"It's about time that someone in this the house started to take an interest in their daughter. One or the other of them upstairs ought to be a proper parent."

Since the father was a busy business man and the mother was a volunteer social worker, Cook was the one person who really knew Samantha and she was entitled to have an opinion.

"To my way of thinking, her father might turn over a new leaf when his trip to America is over." She said. "It's about time somebody started to care about the poor girl. They've both been neglecting her something terrible these last months."

The maid's sympathy was all for the mother, but her own parents had been divorced when she was small and she'd lived with her father, so Cook said it was only to be expected. Then, to everyone's surprise the old Gardener had come out for the father. Of course, he'd worked for Mr Waterson and his father before him for years and years. He had known Samantha's father as a child, so perhaps he could be excused for being biased.

The staff were waiting at their lunch table agreeing to disagree when tall thin greying haired Mr Sinclair, who had been the families Butler for years, came in like a shadow to stand behind his chair. He stopped them with an upraised hand.

"We are entitled to our own opinions, but we should not air them!" He commanded in his usual superior voice as he walked around the chair to the head of the table and started to carve the meat.

Since the house was soon to be sold, and only the Gardener expected to stay on in his cottage beyond the garages, the conversation over the meal drifted naturally to everyone else's new jobs. Susie the housemaid had been placed in the village.

"Incomers, but very nice people," her Mistress had told her, and Susie had been impressed enough by them to take the job.

Cook was retiring. She had a little money and was going to open a small hotel at the seaside where her married daughter was going to join her as a partner.

"My Jenny, she always says with her Bob's business sense and my cooking we'll be millionairesses in a couple of seasons."

The gardener made a "Hrrmmph" sort of noise.

"What are you going to do, Mr Sinclair?" He asked. "You are taking a new position, I suppose? You've been very quiet recently."

The Butler adjusted his always neat tie in his stiff white collar and shook his head.

"You do have a place, though?" Cook wanted to know. Mr Sinclair had been there since before she came and she had come to respect, almost love, the man who ruled below stairs. "I heard say that you are off at first light tomorrow, before the Old Man and his daughter go to the airport?"

"Please remember your position! The master of the house is never 'Old Man' to his staff!"

The gardener reached over and patted the butler's hand.

"Don't worry Mr Sinclair! Your Secret is safe with us. We won't be telling anyone."

The Butler took his hand away.

"I should hope not!" The Butler retorted. "I have to pack this afternoon, and I shall be busy until dinner tonight. Please call me if the car is required."

He picked up his coffee cup and stalked out.

"What's that for a Secret?" Cook wanted to know. "You heard where he's going, then?"

The old gardener smiled a crooked smile.

"I do think I guessed right, but he'll not like it if I tell you. But then he's not here, is he?"

"Tell us, George, don't keep it to yourself." Urged the maid as the gardener stood up and went to the dresser. "He's such a very secret man, that one!"

The old man poured himself a measure of milk from the big white jug, filled his mug from the big glass jug under the electric coffee machine, ladled in three teaspoonsful of sugar and sat down in his place again.

“I’ll tell you what I know about him, and what I saw last summer. I think I know where he’s going and he’ll never tell you himself,” he confided. “You can think what you like, but he’s still the best butler I ever knew, even if he’s giving it up.”

There was a long pause while he sipped from his cup.

“Did you ever see a Circus called Sinclair Brothers?” Asked the old Gardener as he finished his coffee. “They come through this part of the country every now and again?”

Both women knew the name, and the maid admitted to having once gone out on a date with a young Spaniard who had worked with the show.

“Well, believe it or not, the bosses of the show are Mr Sinclair’s brother and his nephew. He told Mr Waterson once when they were here in the village and I heard the Old Man tell his wife. I tell you, I’d forgotten until last August bank holiday. That’s when I took my grandson to see the Circus at the seaside, and you’ll never guess what I saw? Our old Butler dressed as a clown and performing in that circus ring as though he belonged there. The children loved him, too.”

“You’re kidding! If there’s one thing that he hates, it’s children.” Argued the cook. “Anyways, dressed as a clown, and with a painted face? You’d never have recognised him.”

“I wouldn’t have believed it, neither, but my Ellie’s young Teddy, he wanted to talk to the clown after the show and get his autograph. It was Mr Sinclair as clear as day, and he called Teddy by name, and he couldn’t have known that without that he recognised us, could he?”

“But did he acknowledge you?” Asked Cook.

“Not then, but I hint about it now and again, like just now, and he never says no.”

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Samantha’s mother was in her bedroom having a last conference with her co-conspirators.

“Not even Samantha is to know, until my after my husband goes to bed. You two can get her up when you’re sure it’s safe and put her into her disguise. I’ll be outside with my car on the layby across the road at two in the morning to pick her up.”

She hugged the old cook, and put an arm round the young housemaid.

“You can’t begin to understand what it will mean to the two of us.”

“Don’t worry, Mu’m,” answered Cook. “I can’t bear to think of her being left alone in a flat in Ohio, or wherever, however good a housekeeper he employs. Look how little time he has for her now!”

“Thanks again, both of you.”

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Tonight at dinner. Samantha dressed in her prettiest white dress with pink trimmings. Her father always said that he liked that one because, with her very white skin and

very dark golden hair, it made her look like a china doll. It was a special present from her mother, too, and she hoped that it would please them both.

The meal was very solemn and although both grownups tried to start conversations nobody wanted to talk. They finished eating at last and Samantha's father went off to his study. Mr Sinclair carried luggage from the hall to the taxi and helped Samantha's mother into the back where she leant out to kiss and hug her daughter.

"Do I really have to go to America with Daddy?" Samantha was just short of collapsing in tears again. Somehow she managed not to cry as she kissed her mother.

"I want you to come!"

"I'm sorry. It's only for a while until your Daddy and I make up our minds. If you come with me, We'll have no home and no money and Daddy's lawyers will find a way to take you away. You'd rather have a nice home and clothes and holidays than be poor, wouldn't you?"

Samantha stamped her foot on the step.

"I'd rather be poor than stay with just him! I hate you both!"

Samantha kicked the taxi door closed and ran off into the house. Her mother was so upset that she might well have followed her, until she remembered her plan. She smiled as she closed the window.

Yet, despite everything, there was something worrying her as the car drove off and she didn't know what it could be.

Mr Sinclair went into his pantry to tidy up for the last time, almost an hour after the car had gone. He had already been upstairs to change into off duty clothes and was happy that he had finished his job tonight. If the other staff members had seen him they would have been surprised at the change from earlier. Without his dark suit, he now wore blue jeans and a red tee shirt, he looked a good twenty years younger. He was also humming to himself in a very un-butlerish way as he started to put the best silver away for the last time.

Samantha had been crouched under the table in his little wine store, and she was still there crying quietly when he opened the door to put the unused bottles into the racks. The light twinkled on her tearstained face and he squatted down to her level.

"I'm unhappy to be going away, too," he said, reaching into his back pocket and unfolding a big white handkerchief.

Samantha wiped her eyes and cheeks and stood up to pass the hanky back.

"It's not right," she managed between snuffles. "I don't want to go to America. My dad tells lies. He says I'll like living with him, but he'll never be home. Just like it is now."

Suddenly and surprisingly she threw her arms around the butler's neck and gripped tightly as if she would never let go.

Mr Waterson found his daughter with his butler in the main pantry an hour later. Samantha was sitting on the table and laughing at something that Mr Sinclair had told her as she helped put the silverware into its cases. It seemed as though her father hadn't missed her since dinner.

"Still up Samantha? It's time for bed, young lady. We have a long flight tomorrow. You shouldn't be worrying the staff you know."

He looked at his butler as Samantha slipped down from the table and went to the door.

"I hear you have a long journey, tomorrow, Sinclair?"

“Yes Sir. Indeed Sir. I will be missing breakfast in order to reach the ferry in time.”

“Germany, isn’t it? Then we should both wish you a safe journey, and I hope the new position is to your liking.”

“I thank you, both. I was proud and privileged to be able to be with you. May I wish you all the very best?”

Samantha went to bed, feeling a little happier inside.

Her long conversation with Mr Sinclair had helped her a lot, mostly because it had nothing to do with her problems. Up to tonight she had never thought of their butler as anything but the man who sometimes drove her father's car for her mother when he was away and who looked after visitors, and sometimes served them at dinner. Now he had told her about his childhood with his mother in Wales and at school in Suffolk. He was nice to talk to, and not a bit stuck-up like she'd thought of him. Now it was too late and she wished she'd known him before. He would have been a nice person to have as a friend.

Then she remembered tomorrow's journey and her happiness evaporated. She was sobbing quietly into her pillow as she went to sleep.

As Samantha slept Mr Sinclair was packing his last case and, still dressed in blue jeans and now with a blue and green tartan shirt over his tee shirt, was folding his black suit into the trunk that was to be sent by train to his brother's farm in Berkshire. A few minutes later Cook, reading quietly in the kitchen, heard his steps on the back stairs and the side door closing quietly.

It wasn't time for her and the maid to do their part, she could still hear the television in the master bedroom upstairs. It wasn't time until five minutes past one, when she crept up the back stairs and woke the maid.

“Get up. I'll get the girl and you get her things ready.”

Now it was time and she knew that they had to get on with their mistress's plan.

Samantha woke when the cook shook her.

“Quick, come down stairs quietly and don't wake your dad. You're going to escape with your mother.”

The three of them crept downstairs to the kitchen, and the cook opened a small travelling case that contained clothes. She took out a plastic bag and handed a pair of scissors to the maid.

“Not a squeak, and no tears, Miss Samantha!” Commanded the maid, and started carving at the back of her long hair. “Your mother says you have to be disguised as a boy, and no boy has hair he can sit on.”

Samantha wasn't too sure if she wanted short hair, but she was so happy at the thought of going to her mother that she let the cutting continue.

Cook collected every last piece of hair into the plastic bag, even the smallest clippings, as the maid cut. As the job was finished she looked approvingly.

“You're pretty good, Susie! Where did you learn to cut hair?” She asked the maid.

“With five brothers, and a mother with two left hands, where do you think I learnt?”

They all three laughed at the joke, and the cook started to help Samantha out of her night-dress and into the boy's clothes that her mother had left for her.

It was a few minutes before two in the morning when the maid and a small person crept out to the long parking place on the main road opposite the house and sat on the seat in the dark of the bus shelter. That person seemed to be a boy in school uniform of shorts, grey shirt and dark blue blazer and was wearing neat black shoes and garter tabbed long socks that looked warm in the cold morning. The night was starry and it was easy to see a big blue motor caravan at the far end of the lay by.

The maid whispered that it must be Mr Sinclair's.

"But he won't be off until long after you've gone,"

Except for a few animal noises, the night was quiet.

"Listen for the car, Miss Samantha. We shouldn't have long to wait. Your mother should be here at any minute."

Mother wasn't there in minutes, or in an hour, or even in two hours. It grew later and lighter, and the two waiting in the shelter woke up with a start as a car roared past. Finally, it was nearly five o'clock and Cook was coming across the road with a worried expression on her face.

"You'll have to go somewhere with her," said the cook. "We can't take her back into the house looking like this!"

She considered for a long while.

"Her mother was so sure that nothing could go wrong with her plan that we never thought of anything else. Maybe you can catch the first train out with her, is there somewhere I can send you?"

"Wherever it is, it will be the first place the police will look!" Said a familiar voice. All three looked round. Mr Sinclair was standing beside them, a very different Mr Sinclair to the butler they knew. He was dressed unfamiliarly in jeans and a navy blue sweater, but he spoke in his usual direct manner.

"You've got twenty seconds to tell me what's going on, and then in another ten I'll tell you if I'm going to help. I overslept and I'm late."

It didn't take the cook a lot longer than the twenty seconds to explain the whole plan, that Samantha's mother was to come back with a hire car at half past two and hide with her daughter until the hue and cry was over.

"I wondered what that man was hatching."

Mr Sinclair was looking across the road at the dark house.

"I picked up the phone before dinner and accidentally heard him fixing to have some friend of his pick up his wife yesterday evening."

Cook looked at him in surprise. He had never discussed Upstairs business before.

"He said to *give her a good time so she won't be so unhappy*, but I can guess what he really meant. I expect she's got a beauty of a hangover this morning."

Without moving his gaze from the house he took a car key from his pocket.

"You've had your twenty seconds. Here's my ten. Open the back door of that van up there, and close it again. I won't be looking until I get my key back!"

Cook knew what he meant. She ran with Samantha, opened the rear door of the motor caravan and helped her in. Then, as she had been told, she locked it and brought the key back.

"Did you load any luggage?" asked Mr Sinclair.

"She doesn't have any, her mother was bringing it in the car."

Mr Sinclair said a very unbutler like word.

“And no papers, either?” He asked.

The cook sounded a little happier.

“She's got a visitors passport in the name of Sam Waterson, It's in her blazer pocket. They made a mistake when she was going to France with the school at Easter, and her mother kept it. That's how she got the idea of disguising her as a boy.”

The ex butler sighed.

“It's certainly not legal, but it might have to do. Good bye and good luck. Remember that I left before you woke up and don't forget that I positively hate children!”

The two women ran back to the garden gate and watched as the motor caravan started up and pulled away.

“I hope he didn't mean what he said!” said the maid.

“About hating children? I doubt it,” whispered the cook, “but I've just realised something. We've just sent Samantha off with a man who we only know as the butler, and we don't even know where he's going with her!”



## Chapter 2

### Travelling

Samantha sat on the floor in the back of the motor caravan where Cook had put her, and kept still and quiet as it started off down the road. Mr Sinclair appeared to have forgotten about her for a long while until he stopped at a red traffic light. Then, without turning round, he called out.

“Still there? There's a sort of settee, my side behind the driver's seat, with a rug on it. You can try and wriggle on to it and see if you can sleep again, or if you're too excited to sleep you can climb over into the passenger seat and sit next to me?”

Samantha decided she'd rather like to sit in front and scrambled over between the front seats. Mr Sinclair glanced at her as she bounced into the seat.

“You'll be more comfortable if you drop that blazer behind you and put on your safety belt.”

He watched her in his inside mirror but, once she was settled, he concentrated on his driving.

“Has anyone ever called you Sam?” He asked as they went through the twists and turns at the centre of a country town.

She shook her head.

“Sometimes, at school, but Daddy says names shouldn't be chopped up. I was christened Samantha, and I should always be called Samantha.”

“Well I've got some bad news for your dad. I don't know any boys called Samantha. Your name has to be Sam from now on!”

“Yes, Mr Sinclair.”

“Who might that be?” He asked, “Wasn't that the name of the butler at that big house where you used to live? I don't remember? But, that man you spoke to after dinner last night, Sam? You're with him now. He'd better be your Uncle Duncan!”

“Yes, Uncle Duncan,” answered the newly re-christened Sam with a little giggle. “Are we going to have an adventure?”

“Hold on to your hat, keep your nerve, and you'll not only have an adventure. You'll be the one to decide who you are going to live with when your parents finally come to their senses, and I think you'll most likely keep them both!”

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They stopped several times on their way to the coast. The first, and most welcome to Sam, was their breakfast. She woke up from a comfortable sleep as they pulled into a big but nearly empty car park.

“You can order for me. Choose what you want. I'll have hot chocolate and a full fried breakfast to start.”

Duncan Sinclair led the way into the quiet cafe and sat her at a table.

“I'm going to use their telephone!”

Their breakfasts were being served as he came back from the little phone booth by the door. He was looking like the Cheshire cat with a big grin across his face.

“Well, that's the first part of the problem solved,” Was all that he would say, and his face said that he refused to be quizzed. “Just enjoy eating, we've got a long way to go before we eat again.”

They both ate sausage egg and bacon, Sam had a full adult portion, and she went on to have pancakes as well as a second hot chocolate.

“I like to see growing boys that can eat,” commented the cashier as she rung up the bill. “Do you have far to go?”

Sam looked at Duncan who had passed her his credit card to give to the woman. “Not far,” he said. “I'm taking Sam home.”

“You must have been starving him then,” grinned the woman, passing over the slip for him to sign.

As they went out to the car, Sam was happy. She jumped the whole way up into the driver's side of the van and bounced across into her seat.

“It works!” she said, gleefully. “She thought I was a boy.”

“She's never seen a girl who eats like a pig, that's why.” Duncan grinned back at her. “When I've seen you at home you've pecked at little portions like a bird. What's happened? You ate twice as much as I did.”

“I was hungry, that's all.”

He screwed his fist into her arm as if he was punching her and grinned again.

The next proper stop was after eleven o'clock. They pulled into a garage and stopped at the diesel pump.

“Know how to do it?” Duncan asked as Sam followed him round to the filler cap.

“Open the hole, put the squirty thing in and pull the handle? I've watched Mum and Dad do it.”

“That's it. Fill it right up for me. Here's the credit card in your trousers pocket, I'm going to use the phone again.”

Sam managed it quite well for a first try. She unscrewed the metal cap, put the spout right into the deep hole and pulled on the lever in the handle. Diesel fuel poured in for a long time until, suddenly, the lever clicked loose. She pulled it again, and it clicked loose immediately. She looked at the meter behind her. It read sixty two litres and a bit, which sounded a lot more gallons than their car took, so she put the spout back into the place on the pump. The motor inside stopped.

After putting the cap back on the van's tank and making sure it was tight, she trotted off to the cash desk.

“What number, Sonny?” asked the man.

Sam was a little ashamed.

“I didn't look! It was Diesel. The pump over there.” She pointed. “Sixty two and a bit, it said?”

“That's easy then. Number Eight. But another time, look at the number. We get busy. That your Dad on the phone?” He asked.

“My Uncle. This is his credit card.”

“Good!”

The man went through the procedure of printing the slip, and then handed it to Sam with a ball point pen.

“Take it over to him!”

Duncan said “Hold on!” into the telephone and signed the slip.

She carried it back as Duncan went back to his call. The man compared the signatures on the card and the slip and gave back the card, the white part of the slip and a handful of coloured tokens.

“Get another couple of those tokens and you can have a glass mug with your name on it,” he said, pointing at a plastic tree with mugs hanging on it.

Sam went over to look at the tree.

“If your name's there, you can take it. If it isn't, then it takes three weeks.”

She found one with the name *Sam* near the top of the tree.

“I've got quite a lot of those tokens, already,” said Duncan, who had finished phoning and had come over to see what she was doing. “I'll move off your pump and send Sam back in with them.”

He was as good as his word. He had a whole stack of the tokens in the glove compartment so Sam' collected them together and took them back to the cashier. They were only two tokens short for three mugs and the man handed two more tokens to her with a wink.

“Choose three if you want to, but I warn you they're all the most unusual names.”

Duncan unhooked the *Sam* and found a *Lee*, which he took down and handed to her.

“That's one I'd like to have,” he said.

There wasn't a *Duncan* but, right at the back there was one with *Michelle* on it. He held it in his hand.

“If there isn't another one you want, I know someone who is going to deserve this.”

Sam didn't know any *Lenas* or *Archies* or any of the other names, so they handed the tokens over for the ones that they had chosen.

The man took them and made a funny face at Sam as she thanked him.

“I'm not cheating, really. Lots of people don't want their tokens and if they give them back I put them in a box for people like you.”

They stored the cups in a cupboard in the back of their van and got back into their seats.

“If we're going to have a lunch we'd better scream on to Harwich or there won't be time.”

There wasn't time. They got to a big roundabout where they could see the tops of the masts and funnels of several boats above the trees and buildings on the left. Duncan turned up the little hill toward them. It was twenty past one as they pulled up at the end of the slow moving queue of cars at the top of the road.

“Sorry, Sam. It's late, but you won't starve. We'll make sure you get something to eat when we get on the ferry.”

The traffic turned left into a car park in front of a terminal building and an attendant waved Duncan to drive down alongside the rows of parked cars. As he parked behind a rusty old green van with pop posters hiding its dents and scratches, Sam saw a slim black haired young woman with a pony tail who looked as if she was waving to them. Sam watched as the woman, who was wearing blue jeans and a white sweater and carrying a small suitcase, came across to the van and tapped on the glass. Duncan wound down the glass in the driver's window.

“You aren't as bad as my father in law after all,” she said. “I would have been panicking by now if he'd phoned me and said I'd need to be here by one!”  
“Sorry, Michelle. I wasted a lot of time phoning ferries and airports after I called you, and we missed our lunch to get here at all.”

Michelle helped Sam down.

“Look, Sam. This is the bit where we aren't going to be quite honest gentlemen.” Duncan was sitting sideways on his seat and looking at Sam and Michelle. “You are going on the ferry boat with your mother. This mother. You are nearly nine years old and your name is Jamie Sinclair. Just chatter to your *Mum* like you've been chattering to me. By the way you haven't seen her for a year. She'll tell you all about it!”

The green van had already gone, and an attendant was beckoning him on quite frantically as he twisted back into the van, slammed the door and drove off to where the other cars were going through a ticket barrier.

Sam thought that Michelle was really nice. She wasn't all that old, really. Not nearly as old as Sam's own mother. As they walked along the long footway from the car terminal to the passenger entrance at the railway station they got to know each other. At least Sam got to know about Michelle because Michelle winked and pretended to zip Sam's mouth as they crossed the road.

“Have you ever been to a circus?” she asked, and Sam nodded.

“But only once. They took our class on a visit to the Christmas circus with the whole school.”

“I work in one,” Michelle told her and explained that she was a trapeze artist with a big circus and it was working near Ipswich this week.

By the time they had climbed the steps of the footbridge and reached the kiosk at the ferry entrance, Sam knew that Michelle used to be married to Duncan Sinclair's nephew David.

“I'd like to be in a Circus,” whispered Sam. “Has your Jamie, I mean have I, ever been in a circus?”

Michelle shook her head.

“Not really. *You*,” she grinned at the word, “were born on our Circus, but my David and I started a riding school near Basingstoke. That's where David and Jamie live now.”

“Is he nice?” Sam asked.

“David or Jamie? Both of them are really nice. I'm proud of them. I'm the failure.” She sounded so sorrowful that Sam jumped up and kissed her.

“Naughty! Boys don't do that!”

Michelle bought a couple of bars of chocolate at the kiosk, and then they went back to the left luggage office and picked up a reddy brown overnight case, which Michelle gave to Sam. They carried their cases into the main entrance and went up to the gateway for the ferry. They were walking along a long narrow passageway before Sam realised that they were already through the passport control and customs.

“Is that all?” she asked.

“Yes. It's not like it used to be. One thing is the same, though. We have to change our watches when we go on the boat.”

Sam wanted to know why.

“You know it's night in Australia when it's day here?” Michelle asked.

Sam knew that. Everyone knows that.

“Well, the time doesn't suddenly go `click' it's midday - `click' its midnight.” Michelle was pointing her right index finger at her left thumb and moving the hand round in jerks so that it pointed to each of the other fingers in turn.

“I know. It goes gradually, an hour at a time.” Sam agreed, copying Michelle who was chanting “one, two, three.” Up to “ten, eleven, twelve,” as their fingers went round from one side of their fists to the other.

“But why do we have to change it now? We're still in England,” she asked. “Because the boat is German, so it always has German time.”

Sam thought for a moment.

“We have to change here going this way, and coming the other way, the passengers have to change back here too. Then the boat keeps its clock on one time?”

She was imagining the captain running round moving the hands on every clock, which made her miss what a man at the doorway into the boat was saying. Michelle said something to the man who looked at her ticket and pointed across to the other side of what looked like a hotel lobby.

Sam knew hotel lobbys from holidays with her parents. They carried their cases into a passage way like one in a hotel, but narrower, and Michelle read the numbers by the doors.

“Here we are, this is our cabin. Right at the end.”

They had a cabin with three beds. One on each side was already made up with pillow and quilt and a bunk bed was folded up into the wall above the right hand one. Sam opened a side door to find a toilet with a washbasin. She went in.

“What's this curtain for?”

“Shower,” answered Michelle, who was looking out of the window. “Look behind the curtain and you'll find the head thing and the special tap. You can try it later. We've got to find Duncan first.”

There were three keys with big yellow tabs hanging inside the door. Michelle took one and gave it to Sam.

“Come out. Lock the door and we'll see about that lunch you missed.”

Sam had already eaten her chocolate, ages ago, but her stomach still remembered that she hadn't eaten since breakfast, even if it was a late breakfast. They went out into the corridor. Sam closed the cabin door and turned the key. Something clicked so she took the key out and tried the handle. It was locked.

“All safe!” She said as she put the key in her pocket.

They went back to the lobby again, and joined the queue at the window marked `Information'. When it was Michelle's turn she borrowed the key from Sam to show it to the lady behind the counter, and asked something in a foreign language. The lady behind the counter looked in the folds of a computer printout and shook her head. Michelle looked very pleased at what the woman told her.

“What did you ask? That was German you spoke wasn't it? Where are we going?” Sam wanted to know everything at once.

They were going along past some closed shops, one with perfumes on display and another like a supermarket.

“I asked if the third bed in our cabin was for someone else and the woman said it wasn't, because you are a boy. I ought to have thought! We have the cabin to ourselves, so Duncan can move in. Yes it was German, and we're going up those stairs

to the cafeteria. I only had a marmalade sandwich for breakfast and a bar of chocolate for lunch. Duncan got me out of bed with his phone call!”

Duncan was sitting at a table by the window, waiting for them.

“Thanks Michelle. If you'd like to sit and watch my holdall I'll fetch lunch for us. Coming Sam?”

“You go, Sam,” said Michelle, taking the other window seat. “I'll sit and watch the scenery for a bit. Will you get me something fried, Duncan? It will make a change from my diet!”

Duncan and Sam went to the self service counter and took a tray each. Duncan loaded knives and forks from square tin holders above them.

“Ask the cashier for tea bags.” He ordered. “Two, unless you want one as well.”

The cashier handed them to her, she didn't want one, and Duncan put them into two cups which he filled up with boiling water as she filled her plastic beaker with a cola drink.

“I'm having Spaghetti Bolognese, how about you?” He asked.

Sam liked the idea of spaghetti, so Duncan ordered sausage egg and chips for Michelle and doubled his order for spaghetti.

They finished the meal with chunks of apple tart with whipped cream. Sam had seen them beside the counter so Duncan sent her off to get three. He gave her a green banknote with '20' written on it and she was quite proud when she came back with them on a tray, because she had remembered the spoons and had a handful of change. She spent more time examining the coins than eating, until she noticed some children playing in a room at the end of the cafeteria and went to investigate.

“I'm going in there!” she said, coming back and stuffing the remains of her apple tart into her mouth.

She tore off her neat black shoes, her socks and her grey pullover. Untied the striped school tie round her collar and launched herself into the play room.

Anyone who had known Sam as a girl might have said that this was the rather rough brother of that young lady. Within a short period of time she had entered fully into the sport of being a boy with two or three soldiers' children who were sliding down a wooden ramp into a sea of plastic balls.

When one of them asked Sam if her father was in the army she said he wasn't. “Then you're just a junior here,” one boy said, puffing out his chest. “We've been coming on this boat twice a year since we were babies. It's our boat.”

“It's not yours. We can come on it when we like.”

“If you're not army you're a sissy!” Exclaimed another boy, standing in front of her with his arms folded.

Whatever Sam was, she wasn't going to be called a sissy! She shook her fist in the boy's face.

“Don't call me sissy,” She warned.

Without a warning he punched her in the chest, and that was his mistake. Sam had never punched anyone in her life before, and didn't make the mistake of raining feeble blows like a windmill either. She balled her fist and punched as her father had once shown her with a fairground punchball.

The boy sat down with a bump and howled until his mother came and rescued him from where all the other children were standing watching him. His mother led him out to where Duncan and Michelle were beckoning to Sam.

“You should be ashamed of yourselves, bringing up a child to be vicious like that. My Julian is only nine, and he never misbehaves.”

As the boy was dragged away to the cafeteria, still complaining but placated by promises of ice cream, Sam came out of the play room.

“I told them my name is Sam,” she whispered. “That's okay isn't it. I mean, with having Jamie's passport?”

Duncan assured her that it was all right.

“But did you have to thump him like that?” He asked.

“Julian? It was an accident. Anyway, he said I was a sissy and now he's gone they're my gang in there.”

She sat and looked out of the window, but there wasn't much to see.

“We have to do a bit of shopping, and we could go to the pictures afterwards,” suggested Michelle. “Do you want to stay here, or come with us?”

Sam thought about it.

“Samantha might like to go shopping, but Sam wouldn't. What's on at the pictures?”



## Chapter 3

### On Board

After they had been to the supermarket on the deck below the cafeteria, Sam decided that Sam liked shopping just as much as Samantha after all. Michelle paid for a pair of canvas shoes for her and, out of a box of special offers, a white tee shirt with the company badge and the ferry name on its front that looked as if it would fit her.

Michelle led the way back to the cabin and, on the way, they passed another shop. Duncan asked them both to wait a moment while he went in and bought something. He stuffed it deep into his trousers pocket.

“Let's dump my luggage in your cabin, and then we'll see what is on at the pictures.”

+ + +

It was nearly empty in the cinema, but it was one of the newest cinema films and they all three enjoyed it immensely. They sat together near the back of the small room and ate chocolate biscuits from a large packet that Michelle had in her handbag.

“You'll get too fat for the trapeze,” Duncan whispered loudly as she produced a large bar of chocolate.”

“I'll just have to exercise it off,” she whispered back.

Sam could see a big grin on her face.

They had just enough time for a late night hot drink after the film. Sam was in charge of the cabin key and wanted to look outside after the cafeteria closed, so they went up the front stairs and out on to the deck. There were a few lights in the distance, but nothing that Sam could understand until an officer came past on his way from the bridge.

“Don't you get lost without road signs and catseyes and things?” She asked as the man wished them a “good evening.”

“Can you see a big bright light over there?” He bent down so that his shoulder touched hers, and pointed. “You can see it going round.”

Sam could see it.

“Now look there, that one doesn't go round, does it?”

“It blinks?”

“Clever boy! Every light is different, which is as good as having the name up in lights. Come and look.”

He led Sam into the stairway and, with Duncan and Michelle standing listening, showed her the big sea chart in a wooden frame on the wall.

“There's the big light,” he pointed to the map, and then to another mark.

“O. C. C. ?” asked Sam.

“Occulting. Blinking out. F.L. means flashing, which is blinking on,” The officer explained.

Sam took a step back and stared at the map. She held out her arms, and turned from side to side. A giant grin came over her face as she put her left hand on the line on the map, which showed where the boat was supposed to go.

She stared into space for a moment, as if she could see outside through the metal sides of the ship. Then she moved her hand along the line with the other one pointing like a compass on top of it. Michelle looked at Duncan, not understanding. Duncan grinned and nodded to Michelle, and moved closer as Sam took her left hand away and jabbed her finger on the map.

“We're just here!” Sam said, gleefully.

The officer looked at Sam's finger on the map.

“Within a mile or so, yes. Well done!”

He looked at Duncan and Michelle.

“You've got a bright one there. Most ten year olds look dim when I explain things like that. If he's still interested in navigation tomorrow morning, bring him up to the bridge after breakfast.”

“Don't blame me.” Duncan was grinning from ear to ear. “Sam's not quite nine, I'm just the uncle round here but he'd like to see you in the morning. Thanks very much!”

Sam would have stayed up and watched lights all night, but Michelle was getting tired and Duncan was getting cold with no pullover so they both vetoed the idea.

“You'll want to be awake for the river in the morning,” said Duncan. Sam ran her hand along the line to where the boat would be in the morning. It ran down a long narrow looking river that opened like a funnel into the North Sea.

“Can I look out of the cabin window?”

They went down the stairs and walked along the passage to the cabin. Duncan's first job was to fold the upper bunk down and to unhook a ladder from behind the door. It fixed on to the edge of the bunk so Sam could climb in and out without disturbing anyone.

Duncan pulled his sweater out of his holdall that was laying on the opposite bunk.

“I'm going for a walk whilst you two get ready for bed.”

He picked up his sweater and one of the keys and opened the door.

“See you in half an hour.”

+ + +

When Duncan came back the two of them were in bed. Now, after showering and climbing into their bunks, they were both reading. Michelle had a magazine and Sam a comic from the shop. They looked up as Duncan came in.

“Thanks for the break, Duncan! I needed a couple of days away from the show,” said Michelle with a sigh. “But I'm going to have to sleep.”

She reached up and turned off her reading light and Duncan turned off the cabin light.

“I'll open the curtain. As soon as you switch off your bedhead light you'll be able to see anything that happens outside.” Duncan told Sam.

She closed her comic and stuffed it under the pillow.

“How will I know when it's time to get up?” she asked.

Duncan reached into his pocket and took out a watch. A boy's digital watch. He put the strap round her wrist.

“If it's dark, you press the top button, there, and it lights up. Or you put on the reading light and have a longer look. Its little battery goes flat, though, if you waste it on light.”

He switched off Sam's bedhead lamp and drew the curtain aside. “Breakfast is at half past eight.”

He went into the little washroom and by the time that he started to undress by the light of his reading light, the others were already asleep.



## Chapter 4

### Meanwhile, In London

The old family lawyer and his young partner had a few minutes for a late night reviver at the Kings Head before driving home. They rarely discussed business over the bar, but tonight was an exception. Not surprisingly, the subject was Samantha and her parents, whose problems had kept the office busy since mid afternoon.

“Did those two manage to work out which one was hiding the child from the other?”  
Asked the partner.

“They weren't saying when they left here at seven. One of them is, for sure, and I'd lay my money on the father. He's going off to the states as he'd planned, which tells me he's not worried about his daughter.”

“So they both turned up in your office at the same time?”

“Within a couple of minutes.” The lawyer passed his glass to the barmaid and pointed to his partner's nearly empty one. “You too?”

“Please!”

“Well, Mrs Waterson comes steaming in first, with a story that one of his friends got her blind drunk last night so that he could steal the kid away to America. I've just started to write it all down and my secretary calls to say that her husband is in the front office twitching to see me.”

“That's when you borrowed my office?”

“Right! I let her wait and went to see him.”

“The father's story confirmed the mother's. He had a ticket for the child for tonight's plane, and then he got wind of a plan for the mother to whip her off to the grandparents in the middle of the night.”

“So he did arrange his trap?”

“Exactly! But it misfired, and he thinks it was because she'd had friends of hers carry out *her* plan.”

They drank slowly, enjoying the calm after the days work.

“What's happening, about finding the child?” asked the partner as they went to collect their hats.

“He says he's put a private investigator on it. She reported the girl missing, and gave a photo to the police. I phoned both. They said they think the same as I do, that she'll turn up with one or other of them in good time. She's on both their passports anyway and hasn't got one of her own.”

“Then we'll soon see who's the actor, won't we?”



## Chapter 5

### The River Elbe

Sam woke just once during the night. It was dark and she wondered what time it was until the strap around her wrist reminded her of her new watch. She looked at it twice. First she found the little light button and read dimly by the watch's own battery light that it was five minutes to three. Then she switched on the reading light above her head and read the time again to be sure.

After that she tried out the other button to see if the day and date had changed too. They had. It was five past three tomorrow morning.

She slept through the loudspeaker announcement at eight o'clock, making up for the night before. It was twenty past eight by her new watch when she started to climb down from the bunk. It was light outside and she knelt on the narrow seat by the window to look outside.

"We're on the wrong side of the boat," said Duncan, who had been watching her move left and right in the hope of seeing something. "You'll only see the traffic going the other way."

She turned round and looked at him.

"I thought you said it was a river?" She accused.

"You saw the map, and you said it was like a funnel. It's wide out here and we're close to the south side, but it gets quite narrow later on and the north side comes closer. We can get the river map after breakfast, then you can see."

"When's breakfast?" She asked.

"As soon as we're ready. I've just got to shave, and shampoo my hair. That won't take long."

"Have you got some shampoo? Michelle says she's forgotten hers."

Duncan had the washroom door open.

"Shampoo? I brought a new bottle with me."

"My hair needs shampooing too."

Sam watched Duncan shave, and giggled when he brushed some soap on her face and let her try the safety razor.

"Now let's solve your problem!"

It didn't take long to wash and rinse their hair in the shower. Duncan had a big bath towel in his holdall, which was good because the little white towels in the cabin were quite small and rather damp from last night's showering. Sam was soon dried off and starting to dress. Duncan came out and pulled on his clothes too.

"Isn't Michelle getting up?" Sam asked.

"Ask her." He suggested.

Michelle rolled over and looked at them through one eye.

"For a start, I'm enjoying having a two day holiday at someone else's expense and it's nice to lie in sometimes, you know. For the other thing, it might be ten to nine to you, but my inside clock says it's ten to eight."

She closed her eye and rolled back to face the wall.

“I'll know where to find you, won't I!”

As they went out of the door, Duncan reached into his holdall and took something out. He walked round behind Sam as she locked the cabin door and followed her toward the stairs.

“Whoa!” He called as she ran up a long way in front of him and through the doors to the coffee lounge. “Wait for me a moment.”

But he didn't have to stop her running on to the cafeteria because Julian, her injured friend from last night, had done it for him.

“Are you going to do the treasure hunt?” Julian was blocking her way and was very insistent.

Sam looked round at Duncan for support, but he was going into the kiosk by the doors she'd just come through.

“I'm going up to the bridge, where they steer the boat, after breakfast,” She remembered.

“If we have time I might do the treasure hunt after that.” She told the boy.

“What's that?” she asked, as Duncan put a folded paper in her hand.

As she looked at it, and she could see that it was a map of the river, he dropped a loop of something over her head. She reached up and found she was wearing his big binoculars around her neck.

“Breakfast first!” called Duncan, who was already walking off toward the cafeteria.

“Bread Rolls, cheese and jam I think. Then you can start looking for scenery!”

+ + +

The ship's bridge can be reached from inside or outside. Duncan took Sam to the information desk straight after breakfast and they phoned to ask if it was still possible to visit, and it was. Their friendly officer from last night met them at the top of the stairs. He remembered their conversation, too.

“Give me your map, and I'll get the times of passing written on it. There's no lighthouses this morning and a clock will be better for working out where we are.”

They looked at everything. Sam looked in the radar display to see the other traffic on the estuary. She even stood in front of the pilot at the steering position and put her hands on the wheel as the ferry started to turn a corner.

“Would you like to see the radio room?” another officer asked, and Sam said she would like.

She was very interested because there were two young ladies looking after the radios, and they were talking to people on shore.

“They're women!” She whispered in Donald's ear.

“Sure they aren't pretending?” Duncan whispered back.

“Ssssh!” she said, and giggled.

Their officer came back as they were watching a weather chart printing itself on a roll of paper. He handed Sam her map, and she looked at it to see that he was as good as his word. There were times written on the map in pencil, one by each important feature. Sam had already seen the entrance to the Kiel Canal which, as the captain told her, had been built as the *Kaiser Wilhelm* Canal and is now called the *North Sea* -

*East Sea Canal* because it joins the North Sea at the mouth of the river Elbe to the Baltic at Kiel. Now she looked at her watch and the map and knew how she could see what to watch for.

They both thanked the officers and especially the Elbe Pilot, who could have said 'no' to Sam's visit but hadn't. The pilot saluted Sam as her officer took them back to the door.

"Come and see us again!" He said, shaking hands with her.

Sam went off with Julian and the map, leaving Duncan sitting at a window seat drinking another cup of tea. When Sam came back later, with a tribe of several small and not so small boys in tow, Michelle had come up for her breakfast too and she and Duncan were just getting up from the table.

Sam grabbed their arms.

"Come and see the *Welcoming Point*," she was saying. "We should be there in a few minutes."

"Go on, we'll follow!" said Michelle. "Duncan showed me once before. You run on up, though. Its worth seeing and hearing."

Sam led the way up to the side deck and showed her tribe the text by the picture on her map.

"They play welcome music when a boat comes in. The national anthem of the boat's country."

"What do they play when the boat goes out?" Asked Julian's little sister, apparently the only girl allowed in the group.

"Auf Wiedersehen!" Sam read from the map. "That means 'until we meet again!'"

They did play national anthems, too. There were several boats passing at that time, both in and out. The boat in front had to be American, they recognised the national anthem and heard the welcome in English. Their ferry was greeted in German, but the music was something else.

"This boat is registered at Nassau. That's in the Bahamas. I saw it written on the stern." Duncan explained it to Sam, and went back to talking to Michelle, and Sam told her tribe as they rushed off toward the stern of the boat so that they could hear for as long as possible.

Duncan was still talking to Michelle when Sam came back again without the boys. "They're all with their parents, getting ready to go to their cars. You see that tall building in front? The ferry terminal is just past it. Julian's Dad showed me, you can see the bridge thing with the binoculars. Look!"

She passed the glasses to Duncan, who looked carefully at the shore.

"Since our van is parked by the back doors, I hope the boat goes past and backs down on to the bridge. Then we'll be out quickly." He said.

"I asked at Information, Sam, when we took our cases down," said Michelle. "It's okay for us to ride out in the van. The customs and passport control is up the top of the ramp."

Both Donald's hope and Michelle's information were right. They were no sooner in the van than they heard the ships motors running hard.

"Got his brakes on," said Michelle.

They watched as one of the two big rear doors was lowered and then a crew member

made a sign that they should start up. Duncan had no difficulty in backing up and driving off.

“Drive on the right!” said Duncan, bumping over the plates onto the pontoon and then steering up the sloping ramp to the harbour wall. “Say it as you start off and you’ll remember it all the day.”

When they reached the top of the slope they saw a man waving them to go the right. Duncan turned and then stopped as he saw a sign pointing into an entrance under a car park.

“That’s too low for us to get in. We’d better wait until someone tells us.”

Another man, in a green uniform, came out from the car park to see why they had stopped. He glanced up at the high roof of the van and walked to Michelle’s door.

“Passports?”

Michelle had her passport and Donald’s ready to show and started to pass them out. The man saw the dark blue covers and waved them back.

“That’s okay, thank you! Drive down that road. Have a good visit to Germany!”

## Chapter 6

### A Foreign Land

The cars and lorries coming of the ferry had to drive along past the buses and cars waiting for the foot passengers. Luckily, as Duncan's motor caravan was almost the first one off, there was nothing coming out of the exit of the customs road. They only had to drive through the visiting traffic for the passenger harbour and the many day trippers, but it was busy enough to hold them up.

"Another ten minutes and we'd have got into a giant traffic jam," Duncan remarked as they turned left across a very wide road and started back parallel to the river. "Watch out for road signs with aeroplanes on them."

Sam saw one immediately.

"It points the way we're going. What's *Flugg haffen*?"

Michelle explained, pronouncing Flughafen properly, as 'Flue-g harven'.

"Think of flying and haven."

"Flying harbour?" Sam decided. "Air Harbour? Oh! Air Port! Is German easy to learn?"

"You'll learn enough in a week for everything that you need," said Duncan. "But keep watching for those signs. I've not been here since they built the new *Autobahn*, the motorway that's in front."

They turned right up a long avenue and then left round a church into a wide road. "There's a blue sign up in front with the aeroplane sign pointing to the right," Sam warned as they stopped at a red traffic light.

"Oh good. That means we do go up the motorway. Jacky was a bit vague"

But they didn't go all that far up the motorway. They drove in heavy traffic and took a right fork and then the signs pointed off to the right again.

"It doesn't say how far!" Sam complained. "Where is it?"

"Over to the right of the road, I think. But it can't be all that far!" Duncan guessed.

It wasn't far, really, but it turned out that they were on the wrong side of the airfield and had to drive half way around the outside to get back to the terminal buildings. Still, they were still in plenty of time for Michelle's flight, except for the problems of parking.

"I'm not sure if we can find somewhere to stop," Duncan warned Michelle, looking at the filled parking places. "We're too long to park at a meter, and I bet there's nothing else. You might have to walk."

It did look quite hopeless as they came up to the main departure building, but Michelle leant out of her open window and asked a policeman, who directed them to a coach stop.

"He says we've got a quarter of an hour before the bus comes back," She told Duncan.

"We won't need that long!" He exclaimed. "Come on then, we'll get you unloaded."

Sam remembered something and fetched a plastic carrier bag from the cupboard in the caravan kitchen and put something in it. They took nearly ten minutes to get Michelle on her way. There wasn't anybody else waiting at the British Airways counter, so Duncan went straight up and told them that he had ordered a ticket for Michelle. He used his credit card to pay for it and handed it over.

Luggage check in took a little longer, but they gave her the boarding card at last and Sam and Duncan followed her to the x-ray machines.

"Well, Sam. It's been nice knowing you. Come and visit our circus next time we're near you. We'll let you in to the best seats. You won't have to pay!"

"We should thank you, Michelle. Just tell me if I can ever repay you." Said Duncan, giving her a quick kiss.

"Don't be silly, Duncan! You and your brother help other people all the time. It's about time someone did something for one of you two for a change!"

Sam felt a little out of things. She would have liked to have kissed Michelle too, but she didn't think a boy would do that. She simply held out the plastic bag. Michelle looked in the bag and took out her glass mug. She solved Sam's problem for her by leaning down and kissing her on the cheek.

"Thanks Sam, what a nice present. I'll remember you every time I use it."

When they arrived back at the van, the policeman was waiting. He waved to them and walked off as they climbed in. Sam put the safety belt on and waited for Duncan to start off.

"Where are we going now?" She asked as he drove round a long traffic island.

"Back to the motorway, I think, and then north. What time is it?"

Samantha's new watch said twenty past three.

"Then we should be able to call them and ask."

He switched on a radio transmitter that Sam hadn't seen because it was fixed under the dashboard and plugged in a microphone that he took from the glove compartment. There were German voices talking.

Duncan waited quite a long while for a break and gave some call letters in English. There was a short pause with no one speaking and then a scratchy sounding voice asked in English where they were.

"Okay Jacky! I just dropped your sister in law at the airport and we're heading back to the Autobahn." Duncan reported

"Don't do that!" Said the voice called Jacky. "You're on the correct road already. Follow the signs for *Kaltenkirchen* and call me direct when you get into open country!"

Sam picked up the town name off the signs at the next junction and at the next two. It was always straight on. They passed a bus station and a railway station, drove across a busy junction and then there were fields on both sides.

"Is this open country?" Sam asked.

"Must be, let's see what my nephew has to say."

Duncan switched on the radio and twisted the knobs. He picked up the microphone and gave his call letters again.

"You haven't got lost then?" Asked Jacky, much clearer now. "We're in a small village to the right of the road you're on. I'll talk you in."

It took another half an hour to reach the village, but Jacky seemed to know the way.

Sam had got used to sitting on the side of the van nearest the passing traffic and being asked if something was coming whenever they stopped at a junction.

“Has your Jacky lived here long?” She asked as they stopped at a junction to let a car come out.

“In Germany? Only since Easter last year,” answered Duncan.

“In this village?”

“He doesn't live in the village,” Duncan explained, and before Sam could ask more the van was turning into a field.

“But it's a circus!” Sam exclaimed.

“Didn't you realise?” Duncan asked. “That's where we're going!”

+ + +

Sam didn't have time to be surprised. Things were happening too fast. Jacky turned out to be a young man with wavy blonde hair who greeted Duncan and helped Sam down from the cab.

“So you're my Uncle's new young friend, are you? What can you do in the circus?”

Sam said she didn't know. “I haven't ever tried.”

“We'll teach him,” Offered a long haired girl of about Samantha's age.

“This is 'Lotta, short for Carlotta,” Duncan introduced her. “She's the bigger of our two monsters. Where's Jess?”

Carlotta shook hands with Sam.

“You can do clown tricks with us until Dad and Uncle Duncan teach you something else. Jessica's my sister and she's gone shopping with mother. They should be back by now. It's nearly show time.”

Carlotta and Sam helped Duncan park the motor caravan. That sounds easy, but they weren't just parking but putting it ready to sleep in. The ground wasn't flat so that to make the beds level and not tilted, they had to put blocks under the wheels on one side to raise it up. Duncan opened a door to a sort of locker under the side of the caravan and pulled out a small heap of wooden blocks. He put a big one under one of his front wheels and then climbed back into the cab to drive backwards on to it. They needed two more smaller blocks under the other front wheel and one more thin one under the back wheel. Duncan opened the back door and the three of them walked round inside to see how it looked.

“It'll do. Next time, one of you can drive it for me and I'll do the blocks,” Duncan told her. “But for now you can just put the kettle on.”

He opened the top of the cooker and washbasin and took a kettle out of the cupboard beneath the cooker. There was a metal pipe folded down in the sink, and he stood it up.

“Put the kettle under the pipe, and press the switch,” He explained.

As she did it an electric pump started whirring and water came out.

Sam knew how to light the gas cooker. She remembered that from a visit to a school friend. You turn the tap round and push it in so gas comes out. Then you put a lighted match to the burner and it starts. She also remembered that you hold the tap in until it is warm enough not to go out again.

“Not bad for a boy!” He said. “Can you do the rest of it?”

They were drinking tea and eating biscuits when the actual owner of the circus came to see them. He was quite old, a lot older than Duncan or her father, and dressed in working clothes.

Duncan greeted him as "*Herr Direktor*."

"Your nephew says you can take over our clowning. I can't pay much but he'll tell you I'm honest. I do pay."

Duncan had heard all this before from other bosses, and his training as a butler had taught him how to deal with people. The director mentioned a sum of money. "Suppose you offer me a contract, and we'll see."

"Of course if the boy is in the show, I can offer you a little more?" The owner was angling for information.

"Sam? He's clowning with the little ones, but he's just on holiday at the moment. Lee and Jacky are going to try him in some other acts, then we'll talk to you again."

"We'd better go and see the show before we're part of it," Duncan suggested to Sam. "I think I heard a car come in."

He led the way round by the wall of the tent to the front of the circus. There was a large white four wheeled caravan on one side of the paybox, but they walked past it to a very different caravan behind it. This was really a low loading trailer, with two wheels near the back and the front resting on a short tractor. Duncan led the way up the steps.

"Come in!" called a woman's voice, and Sam went in to meet the rest of the family.

Lee Sinclair, Jacky's wife, was blind. Duncan had warned her as they crossed the ground. Carlotta, now dressed as a clown in a multi coloured costume, took Sam into the wagon and introduced her as 'Uncle Donald's new young boy'.

Sam said "hello" cautiously, a little overawed by the strangers.

Lee asked if she could put her hands on her face, and then ran her fingers over her head and down to her waist. As she touched her, she asked if Sam had ever been on a circus before, and when she said she had had only ever been to a show once since she was little, asked if she was strong.

Sam said she was, and held out her arm for Lee to feel the muscles. Lee stroked the arm and smiled.

"Well, Sam. You enjoy playing with my girls, and see what you can learn."

"Come with us to the ringdoors now, and help us get ready for the show," Carlotta suggested, and they dashed off to the big tent.

## Chapter 7

### Helping

Sam met Carlotta's little sister Jessica, who was already waiting in the curtained off area behind the artists entrance, which the girls called the *ring doors*. There was only a year between the two sisters, but Jessica seemed a lot younger. She, too, wanted to know what Sam could do and seemed disappointed when she told her that she had never learnt any circus tricks.

"Mummy will teach you if you want. She's clever." She said.

"Sam might want to be a clown," Carlotta suggested, "Then Uncle Duncan will teach him."

Sam spent nearly the whole show in the ring doors with the two girls and the other performers, and she worked hard, too. She didn't need to miss seeing much of the show from there because she could look through a gap between the curtains. Though she did miss a bit because there was as much happening outside the ring as there was in it. There were animals to hold, props to put ready and tidy away and the curtains to open.

She soon got used to the organ music played by the circus owner's wife and even recognised the woman's trick of starting the music over again when the act was about to finish. That meant she was always on time to sweep the curtains apart as the performers ran out.

"I never worked this hard," She confided to Jacky at the interval while he took money from zoo visitors.

She liked the girls father who had thanked her every time she opened the curtains for him, and had winked at her when he saw her working. He brushed his hand over her short hair.

"Welcome to the club! The womenfolk in my family won't do a stroke of work if there's a man about to do it," He told her.

Sam thought for a moment.

"But they're *all* womenfolk, Jessica and Carlotta and Lee! You're the only man."

"So that doesn't leave many of us to do the work, does it?"

Sam looked at Jacky to see if he was joking, and still wasn't sure.

He grinned at her as he closed the zip on his money apron.

"See you in five minutes, I'm on first after the interval."

He was back, too, just as the directors wife started to play again. He was dressed as a cowboy and carrying ropes and whips, but more surprising was Lee who was holding on to his arm. She was wearing a short brown leather skirt and a coloured shirt with fringing sewn on all the seams and she had a cowboy hat on her head.

"Hello, Sam!" She said, to Sam's surprise looking directly at her. "Have you seen the act you'd like to do?"

Sam thought for a moment, but so far she would have happily done anything and would have tried everything if they'd let her.

“I'd like to do it all!”

“One thing at a time! Ring groom today and flying trapeze tomorrow?” Lee laughed. “Watch my Jacky and see what he does.”

Sam glued herself to the gap at the side of the curtain and watched. At first, Lee just disco danced on the spot as Jacky worked with spinning ropes, first one on its own then two, one in each hand, and finally a really long one on its own again. Then she picked up lighted wax tapers from a stand and held them in her hands, then in her mouth while he cut the flames off with a long whip.

All the time she and Jacky gave out excited cowboy cries of ‘Yip yip’ and ‘Yippee!’

“How does your mother manage to look as if she can see?” Sam asked Carlotta, who was standing at the centre of the curtains.

“She always looks like that in the ring. Dad says she did when she was little, too and she says it's the music.”

“Music?”

“Music and dancing. Music gives you the timing. Dancing steps means you move where you practised. Dad says it's knowing what you're doing that's most important. You should see her climbing trees!”

Sam looked at Carlotta in surprise.

“Trees?”

“She's mad on climbing trees. She climbed up and fetched a stuck cat down from a really big one last year and got in all the newspapers!”

Sam would have liked to hear more but there was a loud ‘thwump’ from beyond the curtain. She jumped back to her gap to see that Lee was standing in front of a wooden board and Jacky was throwing knives around her.

As she watched he took another six knives and set fire to their handles before throwing them too.

As the last one thudded into the board, Lee jumped forward with another ‘Yippee’ and ran with Jacky to the front of the ring to take a bow.

Sam had been too busy watching Jacky and Lee to notice how Carlotta and Jessica were dressed now they were back. She now saw that they were wearing matching light blue ballet dresses to go into the ring with the director to show how the younger circus children learnt acrobatics.

Jessica wasn't too good on her own, although she could balance on her hands on the man's hands without much effort. Carlotta was much better than her sister. She could even do cartwheels and drop backwards into a handstand without moving from the spot.

Sam wished for a moment that she wasn't being a boy. She felt it would be fun to do that sort of thing.

She missed the musical cue this time, and as the girls ran out they had to open the curtains themselves.

There were more acrobatics later. Jacky and the director of the circus carried a small wooden table into the ring and ran back to the curtains as the owners wife announced Lee as “*Miss Lee Sinclair.*”

Compared to Lee, Carlotta's acrobatics had been like a farmer in heavy boots. Sam watched absolutely entranced as Lee bent backwards and forwards into headstands and handstands. She wondered if it was easy, and then guessed that it wasn't because Carlotta would be better at it if it was.

Jacky heard her sigh as she turned away from the curtains.

"It's a girls act." He said. "My mother always wanted me and my brother to learn acrobatics, but boys do more jumping and diving and old Alli our house acrobat moved us on to trampoline instead."

"What's a trampoline?"

"Bouncing bed. We used to have one but it wore out and we left it somewhere."

Sam remembered seeing one in a circus film and wondered if they would ever buy a new one.

Sam came back from a day dream of herself on a trampoline as Carlotta tapped her on the shoulder and gave her the end of a leather strap. She looked up to see that it was tied to the head harness of a camel. She held it while Carlotta and Jessica went to fetch a llama each.

The director's wife announced the animals with her microphone and the girls led the llamas into the ring. There was nobody left to take the camel.

"Go on boy, follow the girls and walk slowly. He's quite tame. Just don't let him take charge of you."

So Sam made her debut as a performer, and Duncan made a thumbs up sign as she walked past his seat. She managed a feeble grin at him, but concentrated on her task.

"She's too serious," Duncan thought to himself. "I wonder if clowning will be the way to get her to loosen up."

+ + +

Duncan wasn't the only one who thought that Sam was too serious. She stayed to play with the girls in the ring after the show as the adults were sitting in the big caravan discussing her.

Inside the tent, Carlotta was trying to teach Sam how to do a handstand and she was getting frustrated because her pupil couldn't quite get the trick of holding it without falling over. Jessica demonstrated it once again, and Sam tried to copy her once more.

"You're not trying!" Carlotta complained. "Try something else!"

"That Sam needs to relax," Lee was sitting in her wagon with Duncan and Jacky. "He sounds and behaves like eleven or twelve. Is it because he's with you, Duncan?"

Duncan thought of the times he'd seen her at home, dressed in prim and pretty dresses and following her mother and father demurely into dinner.

"How long have you known Sam?" Jacky wanted to know.

Duncan answered the second question first, and found that it answered the first as well. "Sam is the only child of my late employers. I was there when the mother was expecting. Of course, as butler, I only see and hear things. No, I reckon Sam's had no proper childhood."

Duncan and Jacky went to look for the children and heard happy voices from the tent. To their surprise it was Sam who was performing for the others. The circus director had found the three children in the ring and had taken her in hand. Now barefoot and

wearing just her grey flannel shorts, she was balanced on her hands and trying to take a few steps forward. As they watched she overbalanced backwards and flicked over to land on her feet. She grinned a triumphant grin.

“Three whole steps this time!” She exclaimed. “It's easier than I thought.”

“Do cartwheels again,” Jessica ordered, and the two of them stood back to back and turned three good cartwheels together across the ring.

“Well done,” Jacky complimented them both. “Jess' is going to have to work hard to stay at number two.”

Duncan led a warm and dusty Sam back towards their van.

“Don't bother to wash or anything, drinks are ready,” called Lee from the door of the big wagon, so Duncan threw Sam's things into the van and followed her up the steps.

Now that she had found that she could do something after all, Sam was happier and went into the end bedroom with the girls to look at their photograph album.

“Maybe he will loosen up,” Jacky commented.

“If it's any help, Sam sounds more relaxed since this afternoon,” Lee added. “But there's a lot of strain in his voice still.”

As Sam and Duncan laid in bed that evening, he tried to decide how she sounded. It was all right for Lee to say that someone had strain in their voice, but she had an ear for those things.

Sam just sounded like a child to him.

“Are you all right?” he asked her. “I mean, is it all right with being here with me, and you having to pretend to be a boy and all that?”

She cuddled up to him.

“I'm enjoying it, but I'd like to have some more summery clothes instead of this school uniform.”

“I know, but you can't wear anything too light as trousers can you?”

She giggled, and it turned into a laugh and she hugged him again.

“There was a boy in the pony rides after the show. He was wearing brown shorts, like my favourite summer shorts at home. You know, the really short ones my father won't let me wear. His were made out of brown leather stuff instead of cotton. That would be a good thing, wouldn't it?”

“That's quite a good idea. We'll see what we can do, tomorrow morning.” Duncan promised.

## Chapter 8

### Where can she be?

The tempers of the little group in the solicitors office were getting quite heated. Samantha's mother kept accusing her husband of every possible crime and the private detective, employed by her absent father, was getting quite upset as the junior partner criticised his lack of success. The senior partner had called the meeting of both sides in the hope of clearing up the case. He rapped on the table for silence. "Had it occurred to you people that if both parents are telling the truth, the girl might have been taken by someone else?" The detective opened his notebook and read from his notes.

"If you look at the household, you can eliminate the maid and the Gardener because they are still in the village. I traced the cook, and interviewed her. She is living with her daughter in Southsea, and she knows nothing."

He turned the page.

"The butler is different. He went off during the night that Samantha disappeared, and was our prime suspect outside of the family. But it turns out that he met his niece at Harwich and went off with her and her young son on the Hamburg ferry. I spoke to some of the crew and there's no doubt about it. The boy was visiting on the bridge the next morning and there's no chance that they might have had Samantha with them."

He carried on reading out the results of his investigations of various friends and acquaintances of Samantha's mother, none of which had led him anywhere.

"So you see," she said triumphantly. "If it's not the staff and it's not me or my friends, then it's my husband!"

The lawyer looked questioningly at the detective.

"She has a point there. You tell us that Mr Waterson has employed you to find the girl. It's not completely beyond the bounds of possibility that you are there as a smokescreen, is it? The girl's father is safely out of the country, so if someone had taken her to him you could investigate as much as you like without finding her."

"I ought to be offended." The detective started to make notes. "But I'm not. Everything is possible in love and war, and child custody is war at its worst. I admit I was puzzled that nothing led anywhere, and for my own satisfaction I'll look into it."



## Chapter 9

### Part of the Show

Duncan was as good as his word over the clothes. Lee knocked on their door while they were eating breakfast and he invited her in.

“We need to do some shopping for Sam today.” He explained. “The weather caught us by surprise and Sam has taken a liking to some brown leather shorts.”

“Brown? Not the floppy grey ones?” Lee asked. “Oh, I know the sort you mean, Michelle got some for Jamie when she was over here at Christmas. They're the sort that Jacky and I used to wear all the time when we were kids. I'll take you to the shop, you'll never find it on your own.”

They borrowed Jacky's little car and Lee gave Duncan directions as he drove them to the next slightly bigger town.

“There's a large open space in front of shops, like a market place.” She described it to Duncan as they passed the speed limits signs, and then it was there just as she had said it would be as they drove into the town centre.

“There should be a *disabled parking* place outside a shoe shop.” Was Lee's next direction, and Sam pointed to the shop with a big brown shoe painted on the wall above the shop front.

“Shall we park there? It's empty.”

Lee said they should, and as they locked up the car she stood facing the shop.

“We want to go to the right. The road goes round a corner to the left. After about two hundred yards there's this clothes shop we found last year.”

After walking for a while, Lee said they were close to it, perhaps about two more shops.

Sam looked into the windows. The next shop was a hobby shop with all sorts of modelling things and the one after had woman's and children's clothes in the windows.

Sam led the way inside.

“*Kann ich behilflich sein?*” Asked a woman, coming from the back of the shop, but when she saw Lee she switched to English.

“You are the English lady from the Circus, who came here last year? I sold you some boy's shorts? Is this the boy?”

Lee said it was, and that he needed two more pairs.

“Yes they are very good, but the boy is bigger than you said. We will buy the right size this time, yes?”

They let Sam keep one pair on, the other pair and the English school uniform shorts went into a big plastic bag. Lee found a pair of jeans shorts for herself and decided that she would bring her girls in when she had a bit more time and money.

“It's getting late. We'd better go back to the show. Jacky will need the car again before lunch.” She said as they came out of shop.

Late or not, they stopped for ice creams on the way to the car. Duncan asked for three cones with three scoops each and stood back as Lee asked for the flavours she wanted.

“*Nuß, Schokolade und Erdbeer.*” She ordered and Sam watched as the man put scoops of light brown, dark brown and pink ice in the cone and passed it over.

Sam looked worried.

“Point to the ones you want.” Duncan suggested, and Sam chose a creamy white ice that had pink streaks in it as well as the all red one and as her third one a white one with sultanas in it.

She went out with Lee as Duncan chose his and paid for all three.

They sat in their seats finishing them.

“It's a good way of learning the language.” Commented Lee. “I guess you knew what I had?”

Sam nodded.

“Nut and Chocolate, and the red one tastes like Strawberry.”

“*Erd-Beer*, Earth Berry in German,” Lee confirmed. “*Jord Beer*, in Danish ....”

Duncan started laughing.

“Stop giving her ideas, Sam. It's Lee's favourite. She'll tell you what Strawberry Ice Cream is called in twenty different languages!”

“When can I do something in the show?” Sam wanted to know as they started off again on the way back to the show.

“You could learn some clown tricks,” Lee suggested. “I always like clowning.”

“Do you do clowning?” Sam asked, surprised. “How did you learn to do it?”

“The same way as everyone else. I was only eleven when I joined Jacky's Dad's circus, and I wanted to do everything. But especially be a clown. Commander Sinclair would only let me do a few gags.” Lee answered. “He always said I looked as if I was blind and David and Jacky mustn't ever get the best of me because people would think they were taking advantage. Boy that hurt!”

She seemed to be looking into space as if she was remembering.

“Jacky's Mother always said that was why I worked so hard at not looking blind.”

“But do you actually do clowning in the ring? I've never seen you do any?” asked Duncan.

Lee nodded and gave an odd sort of laugh.

“I only did two or three tricks when we were kids, but I learnt them all. I knew that I had to learn for when we had our own show,” she answered. “When we've been desperate I've done all the clowning in the show, on my own. I love it.”

As they drove back across country toward the village where they were showing, Lee was telling Sam some of the tricks that she ought to be able to do, explaining some of them in such fine detail that Duncan knew that she really had done them herself.

“I feel useless when I listen to you!” Duncan remarked, but Lee was back to being her usual realistic self.

“I said I love clowning, Sam, not that I'm good at it. Yes. I can do it as well as the next man, but I can't work the audience like your Duncan here. He can fill five minutes simply waving at two or three children. I can only do what I can hear and feel.”

She sighed.

“We'll teach you words and movements. But nobody can teach you how to reach out to one child without losing the others. You either have it or you don't.”

She was very quiet for the rest of the journey, but Sam was holding Lee's hand in hers to show she understood.

“Duncan?” Lee asked as Sam went off to show her new shorts to the girls. “You've often come to us on holidays, and had boys with you, but I think Sam is very different to anyone you ever had with you before. Would you like to tell me more about him?”

“I'm not sure if I can,” He answered. “I can tell you this, I intended to come to Germany on my own and try to make a new life. Sam was thrust on me as I was leaving.”

“Sam is one of those people who grows on you,” Commented Lee.

“Do you still think there's strain in his voice?” Duncan asked.

“Maybe not as much as I thought. But yes, there is.”

She started to climb out of the car.

“There's more strain in your voice than there is in Sam's! When you want to talk about it, I'll listen, and I promise I won't tell anyone what I know.”

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Duncan spent the rest of the day organising his props and costumes for the show. He only saw Sam at mealtimes, and wondered what she was doing with the girls. At five o'clock he came into the ring doors ready for the performance and worked out with the director what entreés he was going to do in the programme. Sam appeared, wearing one of Carlotta's dark blue overall jackets, as the director's wife appeared to start the show.

“You look as if you're going to do some work,” Duncan commented.

“I'm going to help 'Lotta with the props, and then I'm going to be allowed to help in the acrobatic training. The owner promised.”

At that moment the show started and the director's wife went to do the announcement. Carlotta and Sam went in with two ponies each and stayed to move the jumps and pedestals in the ring. Sam was busy for the first half of the show, but she still had plenty of time to watch Donald's clowning. It was as Lee had said. He did the simplest of tricks and he did them for individual children in the audience. But he was doing them so that everyone watched.

After the interval, when Carlotta and Jessica went to change, Sam took off the jacket and put on a thin blue sweater before going and sitting in the audience. She watched the next two acts and then it was her turn. She'd done a couple of try outs with the director and the girls, and he told her that she was to treat this as just another practice. She took his advice and did a lot better than last time.

“Each show we do this and you will be a little better,” said the director as they left the ring.



## Chapter 10

### A secret isn't very secret

**A**fter two weeks, when everything was settling in and Sam had helped the show move to another place twice already, it started to rain and it kept raining for several days.

It was midday on the day after their third build up and there was no show. It was raining quite hard, too. Sam had just been with Jacky in his little car, into the town where they'd had haircuts and collected the letters. Now after a quick meal of sausages and chips Jacky was sitting in the cab of his tractor talking to his radio.

Sam decided that she wasn't interested in the radio after listening for a while and now, here she was, back at the show with nobody else to play with and nobody to practice with. She went round to see if anyone else was left.

Duncan had taken the car as soon as Jacky had parked it and gone off with Lee and Jessica to buy something. The owner and his wife were off booking new grounds. She went into Jacky's wagon where Carlotta was just finishing drying the dinner plates.

"Can you swim?" Carlotta asked, reaching up and throwing the cloth over the drying line above the sink.

Sam had learnt years ago and was quite good.

"But I'm not allowed," She told Carlotta, "I can't say why, but Duncan won't let me."

"You aren't ill or anything, are you? What nobody knows won't hurt them! We'll take Jess's bike and mine. We'll go to the next village where nobody knows us and when we get back we'll just tell them we just went for a bike ride."

Sam had doubts, but she put a pair of loose baggy bermuda shorts and a towel into a plastic carrier bag, pulled on her waterproof jacket and went out with Carlotta to fetch the bicycles from the big lorry.

The outdoor swimming pool was empty of customers, except for three small girls who were creeping out of the changing rooms into the pouring rain on their way home. Carlotta led Sam toward the cubicles and then pulled her into the doorway of the closed snack bar.

"You aren't going to wear those silly shorts, are you? I've got two pairs of my bikini trunks in my bag. Nobody's going to know where we're from. You won't have to pretend to be a boy for an hour. Let's get changed!"

Sam didn't ask how or why Carlotta knew. Nor did she protest. It was just a great relief to her that someone else knew.

She followed Carlotta into the girl's cubicles. They both changed and ran out into the pouring rain and dived into the warm pool.

Sam felt clean and happy to be herself again and they both enjoyed themselves immensely, racing and diving.

"Look at the clock!"

Sam had just seen the hands on the big clock as she slid down the water slide and was waiting in waist deep water for Carlotta to follow her.

“It's nearly five o'clock. They'll be wondering where we are,” She said. But Carlotta shrugged.

“It's not show day. Dad saw us go off on the bikes, he'll tell mother. I like biking.”

“In the rain?”

Carlotta shrugged again.

“If I say so!”

They had hot showers and then dressed. Sam didn't mind so much having to be a boy again, but she did stroke Carlotta's waist length hair as she dried it under the electric hot air blower.

“Was your hair long once?” Carlotta asked.

“Longer than yours, and not that long ago, I could sit on it, easy.” Sam remembered.

“But we've got to forget it. My father might catch me and take me away to America.”

“He won't find you with us. You don't look like a girl, so nobody will ever know.”

“But you knew! What did I do wrong?”

Carlotta whispered in Sam's ear, and Sam giggled.

“Really? I never thought of that!” She said, “But does any one else know?”

Carlotta was certain that nobody knew.

“Nobody, and I'm not telling on my best friend!”

Their friendship might have been strained when they got back to the show and ran into a group of worried and upset grownups. Duncan had been driving around in the car looking for them and they cycled on to the ground as he started off for the fourth time. He was annoyed. Jacky was annoyed, too, and he put the blame fully on his daughter, while Duncan said it was Sam's fault.

The only one who seemed to understand was Lee. She listened as Jacky told them both how dangerous it was to go cycling off in a foreign land, and to him meting out the punishment of extra work for the next week.

Jacky went off with Duncan to see the boss, leaving the two girls to Lee.

“You two smell of chlorine, so I know where you've been,” Lee said as the door closed. “Give me your swimming things, I'll try and get them dry without your Dad seeing.”

Carlotta handed over Sam's carrier bag that now contained both costumes and both towels.

“Sorry, mum, but we forgot the time. Can we go again?”

Lee thought for a moment.

“We'll see,” she said. “Your Dad isn't all bad, you know. He just cares about you.”

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In the end Carlotta and Sam did go swimming again, several times. Lee had talked Jacky round and he agreed that they could go on the bus or train to the big pool in town if Lee went with them.

“Only on mornings or when there isn't any show, though,” He warned.

Duncan watched Sam loading her bermuda shorts and towel into a small rucksack. Jessica and her dad were off somewhere since before breakfast and Sam had been nagging to go since Lee had said there was nothing special to do that day.

"I wish I could come with you, but I never learnt to swim."

"We'll teach you," Sam offered. "My Dad taught me on holiday when I was six, and 'Lotta's Grandad taught her when she was even smaller."

Duncan shook his head.

"I have no intention of letting you two boss me around. If I want to swim I'll take lessons."

"You'd do worse than getting your brother to teach you, Duncan. He taught Jacky and our two monsters." Lee was waiting at the van door to take the children.

"Come on kids, we'll miss the train."

The train line ran behind the circus ground to a station in the village centre. They were there in time for 'Lotta to wave the little red four wheeled railcar to stop at the platform. The driver sold them a ticket each, not objecting to giving each of them change, and then turned round to drive on, back past their tent and wagons. The two children waved from the windows as they went past and the driver tooted the horn so that Duncan looked up in time to wave back. The big swimming place was two stations on, beside a river and a lake and they were soon there and buying their swimming tickets.

As Lee couldn't see, there was no problem in changing on the pool side without giving away Sam's secret. The three of them were soon swimming in the heated outside pool.

"You can swim as good as us!" Sam remarked to Lee as they finished a race.

"So long as you two swim with me. But I'm going to sunbathe and listen to my book."

She made herself comfortable in the sun and pulled her Walkman out of her bag.

"Go and enjoy yourselves."

They were back in good time for the show. Lee was hanging the bathing clothes on the portable washing line when Duncan came past.

"How was the swim?" He asked.

"You really should have come with us. I had a good swim and the kids enjoyed every minute of it, though I must admit German sausage and chips isn't my ideal lunch."

She laughed.

"The next time I'll take salad sandwiches."

"You'd repeat the day out?"

"Any time. You wouldn't believe how often I long for a chance to stretch out in the sun and take it easy."

"I thought you were always on the go? I mean, I've ...."

Lee interrupted him.

"Don't take me too seriously, Duncan. I don't mind what happens so long as things keep on happening!"

She hugged him.

"By the way, Uncle, I said I'd tell you. I don't know when I noticed it, but there's no trace of strain in Sam's voice any more."



## Chapter 11

### Spies!

**A**n English circus fan turned up in a little hire car as they were building up the show. At least, he said he was a circus fan.

It was six weeks since Duncan and Sam had joined the show and she had become a useful member of the family. So, after the visitor had introduced himself to the director, Sam and Carlotta were asked to take him around. They both liked him at first and answered his questions about the circus and the acts.

"I've been on holiday in Sweden and Denmark," He told them. "And I'm booked back to Harwich on the Esbjerg ferry so I can see the Circus Museum at Preetz on the way back. I just saw your tent, by chance, as I drove along."

"Are you staying for the show?" Carlotta asked.

"I'm not going to miss seeing you and your brother in the show!"

Carlotta giggled.

"Do you do an act?" She inquired.

"A bit of juggling, and clowning of course," said the man. "What do you do?"

"Wait and see!" Carlotta answered cheekily. "Me and my brother and sister are the stars of the show!"

"He's nosy!" Carlotta commented as the circus fan went off to his car. "Don't tell him anything!"

Sam looked at the man's back.

"I liked him. You thought he was nice, didn't you then?"

"Too nice," Answered Carlotta looking at him as well. "But he didn't brag about the circuses he'd visited, or tell us about himself. He only wanted to know about us. I'm going to tell mother."

She went off to the big wagon and Sam went back to the stable tent where she was supposed to be brushing the four liberty ponies. The hot sun was burning hot on her sun browned back as she worked away.

"Is your sister really your sister?" asked the circus fans voice. He had changed into neat grey flannel trousers and a clean white shirt and had a Polaroid camera round his neck.

"Does she look different, then?" Sam asked, carrying on brushing.

"A lot different." answered the man. "Your little sister looks like her mother, but Carlotta doesn't really look like her at all."

Sam hadn't really thought of who looked like who, though Jessica had her fathers hair colour. 'Lotta and Jess' were just who they were as far as she was concerned. She shrugged her shoulders just as Carlotta always did.

"Good afternoon!" said Lee, who had come back with Carlotta and heard both question and answer. "You two go and fetch your sister and go to the wagon. It's time you were getting ready for the show."

Lee smiled at the circus fan.

"It's amazing how family resemblance's can skip a generation, isn't it. Do you look like one of your parents?"

She sounded as sweet and polite as ever, but Carlotta winked at Sam and whispered in her ear as they went to the big wagon.

"She's livid! That about me not looking like her really put the lid on it. She'll end up throwing him off the ground."

Sam glanced over her shoulder to where the two grownups were still talking together, and then looked critically at Carlotta.

"You look like Jess', just older," she decided.

"Not quite. You should hear my grandmother Veronique. She says I look exactly like she did when she was ten. I'll show you the picture."

Jessica had been sent to Donald's van to fetch Sam's costumes and they were laid out on the bunk beside Carlotta's. Jessica had carried her own into the living room and was nearly finished changing.

As the other two got ready for the opening, Carlotta pointed out the big picture of her mother's mother on horseback. Sam had seen it before, but hadn't known who it was. Carlotta was right. It looked so much like her that the first time she had seen it she thought it really was her, until she read the date.

"Mum says you've got to change in here. She thinks that man's a detective and not a circus fan at all."

"Whistles going!" called Jessica, and they all ran to the ring doors.

It was a good show. The circus fan took photos of the different acts, but he took more of Carlotta than of anyone else. At the end of the show, as Sam and Jessica were doing the pony rides, he came back with a folder where he'd stuck the instant pictures. He showed them to Carlotta who was helping Sam collect rubbish from under the seats. They sat together and turned the pages as Sam came over to look.

"That's me!" Sam exclaimed. "But, haven't you got my front in a picture?"

She was looking at a picture of the acrobatics act where she was balanced hand to hand with the circus owner. The picture was taken at the moment when they turned from side to side so her back was to the camera. It showed Carlotta and Jessica standing each side, but Sam's face wasn't visible.

"I think I have one or two," he said, looking through the pictures until he found them.

The first was taken of the three girls holding the dogs. Sam was right at the edge and only half visible. The second was taken at the interval with a group of children crowding around her to pay for the zoo.

He took the second picture out and gave it to her.

"Sorry it's not better of you, but at least it proves you do a job of work."

The circus director saw him off, and invited him to come back sometime.

"I'll make some copies of the photographs and send them to you," he promised.

As the car went away, Jacky called to Duncan.

"Uncle. I think we should have a talk."

They sat at the table and drank tea as they watched the three children through the open window.

"It doesn't seem right to me," Jacky began, "That everyone else in my family knows what you are doing with Sam. Except that I don't know anything at all."

He looked at Lee.

“When Lee went off to see that so called circus fan, Jessica let slip that if Sam gets caught *her* father will take *her* to America.”

He produced an English newspaper and laid it on the table.

“*Tug of love girl still missing. No trace of Samantha.*” It said in large letters.

“I read the story.” Jacky pointed to it. “The mother says the father is hiding her. The father says the mother has her hidden away, and she's here with us all the time. Who's side are you working for, Uncle Duncan?”

“Would you believe that I don't know?” Duncan answered, and told them the story from its start.

When he had finished, Jacky look despairingly at his uncle.

“One thing is certain, you don't have any right to keep her.”

He stopped Duncan from interrupting by holding up his hand.

“The other thing that is more certain, in my mind, is that Sam has rights of her own. Why is she afraid of her father taking her to America?”

Duncan admitted that he didn't know.

“Perhaps because her mother told her she wouldn't like it?”

“More likely because she couldn't bear not to have both of them. Do you remember Tommy Constantine when he didn't want his mother to marry?” Lee suggested.

“Lee, you have the best brains in this family,” Duncan asked, “How do we get out of this without hurting her?”

By the time that the girls came in to see if there was anything to eat, the three grownups had agreed that they would have to do something. But had no idea what. Carlotta saw the serious faces and held Jessica back as they came in the door, but Sam breezed in and sat at the spare table seat. She looked from one serious face to the other.

“Have I done something wrong?” She asked.

Lee put her arm round Sam's shoulders.

“Not you, Sam, but beside you and Duncan there are two other important people being hurt by you hiding here. You know who I mean?”

Sam was very quiet.

“My Mum and Dad?” She asked.

Jacky passed her the newspaper, and waited whilst she read the article. She looked a little tearful and Jacky passed her a paper handkerchief just in case.

“It was because of your mother that Cook sent you with me. Your mother didn't want you to go with your father. Do you know why?” Duncan asked.

Sam shook her head.

“I thought I was going away with Dad and I'd never see Mother again and I'd live with some crabby housekeeper and not see Dad either. Then they woke me up and dressed me as a boy. Then Cook and me waited in the cold until you came along.”

“That seems to be the problem. Your mother thought she'd never see you again, and your father thought the same,” Lee suggested. “But I wonder how we can solve the problem?”

She looked towards Sam's voice as if she was trying to think her way into the little girls mind.

“You see, we don't know who we should talk to first. We could end up with one of them taking you off right away, and you're back to where you started.”

“Talk to my Dad!” exclaimed Sam, and burst into tears.

## Chapter 12

### Phoning America

Samantha's father was just tidying his desk for a morning meeting with his new area managers when the telephone rang. It was the detective phoning from England.

"Mr Waterson? Did you get the facsimile pictures I took at the circus?" asked the voice.

"Are either of those girls your Samantha? There were only the three children there." He had the large black and white picture of the dog act on top of his files where he had been looking at them.

"I assure you that neither of those two girls is my daughter. I'm sure the butler had nothing to do with it. You need to find another idea."

"I came back yesterday and I'm re-investigating your wife's closest friends. I'll report again when I have news."

He put the handset down and put his hand on the intercom to tell his secretary to send in the managers when the telephone rang again. The secretary gave him the callers name, Commander Peter Sinclair from England, and put the call through. It was a man's voice, and it seemed somehow familiar but he couldn't place it.

"You remember we were in the Radio Club together in Cambridge, asked the voice. "You had a Royal Navy scholarship and you went off with Alli Yussif in the long vac' each year to run a circus?" he asked, suddenly remembering the name and the man to whom it belonged.

"That's me, and I think perhaps you know who I'm calling about."

Mr Waterson picked up the photograph and looked at it again. Could there be a connection that he and the detective had missed?

"Where is Samantha?" He asked. "Did my wife put her with you?"

"Can I be honest? Your wife was trying to take Sam' to her grandmothers, but somebody got in the way and she ended up dressed as a boy and with nowhere to go."

"Is she all right?"

"Your ex-butler is my brother. He, sort of, rescued her." He explained. "She's having the time of her life, from what they tell me. But she's worried that you'll take her away and she'll never see her mother again. We told her you're not like that. I hope you aren't!"

"I assure you that I'm not like that. I would have to find her a home anyway, I live in an apartment here in Ohio."

"She's got a home, at the moment, with my younger son and his wife and their two girls. Their circus is just outside Flensburg, on the German - Danish border."

Mr Waterson looked at the picture again, but now he knew what he was looking for he peered at the half cut off image of the small boy on the right edge. It did look a little like Samantha.

“Does your son have just two children?” he asked.

“Two girls. Jessica who's nearly eight and Carlotta who's the same age as Sam.”

“Who had the idea of cutting Samantha's hair and dressing her as a boy?” he asked, and burst out laughing as the strain of the last weeks suddenly evaporated.

At last he could speak again.

“Sorry!” he apologised. “My laughing is on your phone bill. I can't imagine Samantha as a boy. She's always been like a china doll.”

“Well, I haven't seen her, but if my Jacky is to be trusted, she's a bouncy sunburnt little boy and he's having trouble imagining her as a girl. Oh yes, sorry! It seems that it was her mother's idea to dress her as a boy to fool you.”

“Look. You'd better phone her mother and tell her the good news. I'll book air tickets to, wherever the nearest airport is. Hamburg I guess. I'll book for both of us and we'll come and see her.”

“I guess you'll be wanting to take her away?”

“Then you guessed wrong. At least from my point of view, and I think her mother will agree with me. We'll see what Samantha wants for a change. Since we didn't think of her before, we'd better think of her now!”

There was a long pause before he continued.

“I'll phone you when I have the tickets, and I'd like to buy you a ticket too if you would meet us there?”

Commander Sinclair accepted the offer.

“I'll call my son Jacky and say you're coming, then.”

“Don't let him tell her. We'll surprise her together.”

He paused.

“If you have to tell her anything, just tell her we both love her!”

## Chapter 13

### Reunited

The show had moved on to the seaside resort on the Baltic coast, where it was going to stay for the summer holidays. Although they had only been there since Sunday everything was built up ready for the opening. Sam was still being a boy in public and in the show, but she didn't have to keep a secret any more.

Commander Sinclair had passed on her father's message by radio, almost as soon as they had finished the phone call and her mother had sent her a photograph taken on her birthday last year "to remind her what she should look like."

When Jacky had seen the photo he had fetched his instant camera and snapped her leading the camel to the stable. The two pictures were now in a frame beside the high top bunk in the big wagon where, on Lee's insistence, she now slept above Jessica and Carlotta in their bedroom.

It was purest chance. Wednesday, the day before the first holiday show, was a tidying day and everyone found something to do. Duncan was cleaning his van and found Sam's visitors passport and gave it to Jacky, and Jacky read it to Lee before he put it away.

"That's tomorrow," Lee said, as her husband read out Sam's date of birth. "It's her birthday tomorrow, and we haven't done anything for it."

Jacky leant out of the open window and called Carlotta, who ran across from the tent.

"Where are Sam and Jess?" Jacky asked.

"Sam's helping paint the show front. *Herr Direktor* has got her up the big ladder painting the lettering, and Jess is getting all painty stirring the tins for them. It looks like a job for life."

"Are you doing anything?"

Carlotta jumped up the steps and into the wagon.

"You've got a secret! Tell me!"

Duncan and Lee took Carlotta into town with them to do some shopping that afternoon. There was a long list of things to buy from the supermarket but, after they had unloaded the trolley into the back of the car, they found a place for the car in front of the department store in the main street and went to look for birthday cakes and presents.

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It was quite cool for a summer day but the three girls went across the road to the swimming pool before Thursday's opening show, so they missed the arrival of the visitors. Of course, they couldn't be blamed for not knowing because no one else had known they were coming today, either.

Commander Sinclair had met Sam's mother for their flight from London Airport and they had collected their hire car in Hamburg in time for the arrival of the jumbo jet from New York.

It had only taken a little over two hours to reach the coast and book in to their hotel. They drove to the circus field after freshening up, and Commander Sinclair introduced them to Jacky and Lee.

Not unusually, it was Lee who most impressed the visitors and who made them feel at ease.

They were looking at the girl's bedroom when Sam's mother suddenly grabbed Lee's arm.

"I'm going to take the bull by the horns," She asked.

"Would you give Sam a home until my husband and I get our relationship sorted out? Now he's got his business back in order, we're going on a long cruise together."

Lee had no doubts that they could.

"We can talk about anything you're out of pocket later, Lee," said Sam's father.

"There's no expenses, and I'm sure she'd love to stay on." Jacky answered for her.

"But you ought to ask your daughter, not us, didn't you?"

As it came up to show time, and the girls were about to come home, the visitors went for a short walk. Carlotta and Jessica had managed to keep their secret, although it had been hard. But as the girls went in to change Sam knew that the show was going to be special.

For a start, Lee and Jacky had put out everyone's newest and best costumes, including newly finished stretch trousers and singlet that Jacky and Carlotta had made for Sam.

"Best show we've ever done." Ordered Jacky as the show started.

Sam was doing her usual work as ring groom with Carlotta when she noticed that someone was waving to them. She didn't know the man, although she thought he looked familiar, but she did know the two people sitting with him in the box. Two people who waved at her.

"That's my Grandad over there," Whispered Carlotta as they slipped into the ring doors.

"That's my Mum and Dad with him," Sam confided.

"Then everything's going to be all right. They'd have just barged in and grabbed you if it wasn't. My Granddad wouldn't be there if they were going to do anything horrible."

Sam nodded. She was learning that Carlotta's judgement was almost as good as her mother's when it came to making such remarks and was reassured.

It really was a better show than usual, everything seemed to fall into place and even the animals seemed to be enjoying themselves after their few days off. Jacky was surprised how smooth everything was going, and said it was unusual because things were usually at their worst if his father was in the audience.

Sam was disappointed when her parents went out to talk to the circus owner in front of the show instead of coming into the zoo at the interval. It was was her turn to take the money for the zoo and she had been practising in her mind how she would refuse to take their money.

The visitors were back in their places when the second half started. Sam watched them sit down, and then waited for her turn in the ring with the acrobatic act.

Sam had practised once or twice a day and performed five times a week since she had joined the circus. Although she knew she would never be able to bend like the other

two girls she had the advantage of being a lot stronger and having the best balance of the three, so she could still manage some of the more difficult tricks. The new white singlet and blue stretch trousers showed off her very brown skin as she balanced on her hands on the big man's bald head at the end of the act.

He gave the cue and she flicked herself over and round to end up in front of him facing the audience.

The director's wife gave her the special credit over the microphone as she stepped back to allow Jessica her turn. As she looked up she could see her parents clapping enthusiastically.

At the end of every show that Sam had been in, everyone had come into the ring for the finale. Usually, the director's wife says the farewells and then everyone marches out to the music of the circus march.

Today, she came to the front of the ring with her microphone as usual and thanked the audience. Everyone stood in a half circle and the girls were getting ready for the final music when Commander Sinclair walked in to ring and held out his hand for the microphone.

She handed it to him and stepped back as he made a little bow and held up his hand for attention.

“My Ladies and Gentlemen, dearest Children,” He announced, speaking in perfect German without any tricky words or grammar, so that even Sam could understand. “Today we have a special treat for our young visitors.”

He reached over and led Sam forward to the front of the ring.

“Miss Samantha Waterson, today nine years old and a visitor from Great Britain, is our newest recruit. Six weeks into her apprenticeship she is showing herself as a real star.”

He prodded her in the back and she ran forward and bowed.

“Now, a surprise for you all and for our Sam!”

Everyone stood to one side as the director and a tentman came through the curtains with an enormous white birthday cake on a big tray. It had three rows of three candles and “Happy Birthday Sam” in pink letters across the top.

“Blow the candles out, Sam,” Ordered Carlotta, “And make a wish.”

Sam blew, and wished as the candles went out.

The men put the cake on Lee's table that Jacky had brought to the front of the ring, and started to cut it. Two village girls carried in cardboard boxes and started to hand out tins of fizzy drink, and the directors wife played “happy birthday to you” on the electric organ.

As people took pieces of the cake and tins of drink, they came past where Sam was standing, shook her hand and wished her happy birthday. There were quite a few of them and Carlotta and Jessica went out and fetched small packages and presented them to Sam and wished her a happy birthday.

Then at last her parents were there too, and wishing her the same.

“We've got presents for you, too. We were thinking we would have a party after the show, not in it! You can have them straight after the show.”

At last it was the end of the show, and Carlotta and Jessica ran in with the ponies for the children who had stayed. Sam's parents had started to talk with Lee and Jacky by

the front entrance of the show so Sam took over the biggest pony so Carlotta could take the money.

Commander Sinclair climbed back over the ring fence and kissed his granddaughters, and then helped Sam lift a small girl into the saddle. He walked with her as they led the pony round the ring.

"It's difficult to know whether I should kiss a girl who's dressed as a boy," He said. "I'm 'Lotta and Jess's grandfather, but they must have told you that?"

She liked him immediately.

"You can kiss me if you like," She said. "Dad has, at least three times already." He grinned at her and gave her the lightest possible kiss on the cheek.

"I know it's my birthday, but they haven't said. Have they come to fetch me or not?"

Sam asked as they set off with the next customer, another small girl. "Lotta says they haven't. If they were taking me away, you wouldn't be here."

"Lotta is a very clever little girl," He said, looking at her walking with Jessica and the other pony a few paces in front. "She takes after her mother."

"She was the only one who knew I wasn't a boy, from the very first day." Her face went a little red. "Because I always use the lavatory in their wagon."

Commander Sinclair laughed and put his hand lightly on top of her head and turned it so he could look in her face.

"Don't you believe it Sam! Maybe 'Lotta told you first, but I'll bet any money that Lee knew, as soon as you spoke to her. She's clever. She just knows when to talk and when to keep quiet."

Sam helped the girl down and stood back as a bigger boy climbed on the pony. Commander Sinclair stepped out of the ring and someone else put a hand on her shoulder.

"Let's go, Circus star. Lead on!" Said her father's voice.

"Did you like our Circus?" She asked.

Her father didn't answer until they had nearly completed the first lap.

"Did I ever take you to a circus?" He asked, and she shook her head.

"I only went with the school. You never took me."

"We missed something, didn't we?"

Sam leapt up and kissed him.

"Lotta was right. You aren't going to take me to America!"

"Only when you want to come for holidays. I promise. But where do you want to live, Sam?"

"You never called me Sam before!"

"I never thought of you as a Tomboy before. I thought you were all peaches and cream." He looked down into her face.

"Where do you want to live?" He asked again.

"With mother, *and* with you. If we can't live together I could go to school and we could have our holidays all together."

"Where would you like to live until we all make our plans? Would you like to live here?"

Sam dropped the reins and hugged her father happily.

"Could I?"

To her surprise, Sam's mother called her Sam, too, when they walked together to the stable tent and tied up the pony to the rail. As they walked out of the horse tent again, her mother looked at this strange short haired person in shorts and tee shirt.

“When I asked cook to cut your hair and dress you like a boy, I meant for your dad not to know you. But I didn't know you when I saw you. How did you get so brown?”

“Swimming every day. They have good swimming pools in Germany with slides and even waves. You can come to the one here and I'll show you.”

“Perhaps we'll go in the morning, Your Dad is tired after the flight.”

“Where will we go?” asked her father, coming into the stable.

“Swimming. She's going to take us to the pool, tomorrow when you've got over your jet lag.”

“That's one thing I wish you hadn't mentioned! It's making me feel tired again. Are you coming to the hotel with us, young lady, or do you sleep here?”

“I'd rather stay here, please.”

“Then you'd better kiss us good night. We're going to take Commander Sinclair for a meal, and after that I've got to sleep.” He yawned. “Where's my good night kiss?”