

## A Summer of Celebrations.

This story carries on from 'The rough and the smooth' but is complete in itself. The ongoing saga will continue in the lead up to Christmas-hopefully.

Steve helped Ben and Hazel to load their possessions into the horse box which had been cleaned out specially for the removal. Today was the day they were moving to their new home-Bill Chadwick's house. A new kitchen had been installed and alterations made upstairs but other than that the place was basically the same. Other work would be done gradually.

Their present flat was to become holiday accommodation once it had been made ready. It would be called The Horseshoe Pad Vi's sister, who lived in the village had been taken on as a part time cleaner to take care of this and The stable Nook and would start the following week . Dora would soon begin to give riding lessons at weekends to children with their own ponies.

Hazel was delighted with the new kitchen which would make catering easier for her. When term re-started at the nearby agricultural college the pony centre would take two students for six weeks at a time. The ex-prisoner who had worked for Bill after Tony left had been accommodated in a couple of rooms in the attic of Bill's large house and these would be where the students would stay. Each had been made into a bedsit with use of the bathroom on the next floor down. Hazel would provide breakfast and evening meal and they would be able to help themselves to lunch. The last year of Ben's university course would concentrate solely on accountancy as he now had a good enough background in law until he started employment when he would receive

further on the job training. The Leeds General insurance firm were sponsoring him through his last year and he would spend some of his time at their head office while still studying and then hopefully they would employ him once he had finished his course.

August was days away and would be an eventful month. Dora's birthday was on the 5th, Teri's baby was due on 20th and Jeff would be 2 on 31st which was Kathy Ross's birthday too. Steve was paying her rent and had also arranged to put a small allowance into her account each month which he hoped would stop her constantly badgering him for money. They had not had much contact since Bert's death. Her name was never mentioned in Milly's presence and Steve did not intend to do more than send a card for her birthday.

When he got home Dora was very excited. She had received a call from one of the mums she had got friendly with at the mums and toddlers group she went to occasionally. As well as her toddler she had a nine year old girl who had been given a pony by an uncle. It was proving difficult to handle and Susan was asking for Dora's advice.

'I've told her we'll look after it for a few weeks and get it to settle down then Jessica will come for riding lessons and be taught how to handle it.'

'Have you told her this would be strictly business and that we can't do it free?' asked Steve.

'Of course-she understands that- I've told her how much and they're not hard up. I've said we'll pick 'Looby Loo' up on Sunday.'

'Ok- and you know she has to go back-we're not keeping her!'

' Of course I do! I have grown up you know Steve'

'Oh yes, I know' said Steve giving her a hug and a loving kiss.

'I was thinking we'd move Dynamite down from Follyfoot

**Looby Loo has some company. Then if there are any children who want lessons but haven't a pony of their own we can use him. I know intend to let Jeff atart riding him in the new year but he wont be using him all the time.**

**'How do you want to celebrate your birthday this year?'**

**'I think we should keep it pretty low key. Bert's not been dead long. I'll share Jeff's celebration.'** Steve said nothing more on the subject but decided to give it a bit more thought. He had not lost the habit of reading newspapers from cover to cover even scanning the adverts. On the day before they were due to pick up Looby Loo he saw something which caught his eye. He went down to Follyfoot and spoke to Vi and Ron.

Dora's birthday was on Tuesday and he was arranging to take her out for the day leaving Jeff in Vi's care. Ron would entertain him for part of the day. When everything was sorted out he made a few phone calls and then went off to Leeds taking Milly who wanted to buy Dora a present. When he told her of the plans for Tuesday and asked if she would be okay she assured him that she had much to do in her greenhouse potting on plants ready for sale and that she would go down to Follyfoot to help with Jeff over lunch.

Looby Loo was a beautiful jet black pony who was not really keen on going in the horsebox. It took all Dora's soft words to entice her in. Jessica looked sad.

**'It's okay-you can come and see her whenever you want!'** said Dora-Steve remembered her saying the same to Angela Buckley when Barney had been taken to Follyfoot. They'd had their ups and downs with him and he could still be difficult but he was normally well behaved. As they were settling Looby Loo into her new home a horse box drew up and Annabel Seaton-Carew got out.

**'I've brought you some company for the new pony. This is Solly. He belonged to my neighbours children but they've got tired of looking after him. They've had him for about two years so he will still make a good pony for teaching**

**youngsters if you don't want to sell him on.'**

**'Did you have to buy him?'**

**'No. I've helped the family out a lot with him over the last few years. I've been talking to Jenny and Dick, my neighbours about what you're hoping to do here and as the children have not ridden him in a while they decided he needed exercise and more care than they have time to give so here he is-he's yours!'**

**'We're in business!' said Dora.**

**'We'll bring Dynamite down tomorrow and we can start advertising for non pony owners to come and learn how to ride.' said Steve.**

**Solly and Looby Loo were eyeing each other up.**

**'I think they like each other' said Dora.'**

**Annabelle went to look at the new kitchen and Hazel made tea serving with it a beautifully light sponge cake filled with strawberry jam and buttercream. 'I've been trying out my new oven' she said. Steve raised his eyebrows questioningly and she gave a small barely perceptible nod.**

**Plans had been approved for the accessories shop. Work was to begin shortly but the next step was the construction of Milly's greenhouse so that she could transfer the plants she was rearing for sale into it ready for the winter. When Dora and Steve got home Milly was sitting with Jeff on the sofa reading him a story called Gary's Garden. It had lovely flower pictures in and she was telling him all the names.**

**Knowing where they had been he ran to Steve.**

**'Daddy- Jeff see the ponies?'**

**'Soon mate, when they're settled in. Would you like to go to the garden centre and choose a tree for Bert tomorrow auntie' asked Steve. I've got to go and see Major Lewis and it's on the way.'**

**'I'd like that- perhaps you could drop me off on the way there and let me have a browse round, pick me up on the way back.'**

Early in the morning Steve walked Dynamite from Follyfoot to the new pony centre. The phone had been re-connected and Hazel said they were getting several enquiries about the Saturday riding classes. Dora had already enrolled three children and they had been busy telling their friends. Hazel gave Steve a list of names and telephone numbers. 'I've got Dora's cake organised and I'll have tea ready for you here when you get back tomorrow.'

'Don't do too much because we'll be having lunch in a pub restaurant.'

At the garden centre as well as a young cherry tree Milly bought a rose bush to plant outside her front door. 'It's a white one.' she told Steve. It'll be there after I go so you can remember Bert and I together.'

'You'll be with us for a long time yet auntie.'

'I hope so. I'm looking forward to seeing Jeff and Ron and Teri's baby grow up.'

Next morning Steve got up early, saw to Copper and their other horses, showered, got Jeff up and dressed and gave him breakfast. Then he got a breakfast tray ready to take in to Dora and let Jeff go and wake her with his home made card and a box of her favourite chocolates. The red rose bush had some flowers in bloom and some in bud. Steve had cut a bunch of buds and put in a vase on the sideboard and laid an open bloom on the breakfast tray.

'Gosh Steve-it's early' she said.

'Well we've a way to go so eat up'

While Dora got ready Steve checked on Milly then took Jeff down to Follyfoot.'

'Where are we going?' Dora asked as Steve drove away.

'It's a surprise but you'll guess soon enough.'

A little later she said 'This is the road to Marlingford!'

'Yeah- there's showjumping competitions on there today.'

I thought we could watch one this morning, have a look round the stalls and have lunch with Marjorie and Tom at that

pub we liked so much. I've booked in for 1 o'clock-they're meeting us there.

We're going to the pony centre for tea and you'll get your card then. I thought we'd choose your present together. Seeing a sign for a layby Dora asked if they could stop for a minute or two and when Steve stopped she leaned over to kiss him.

'What a lovely thought to go back to where we first made love!' she said.

'Yeah but we're not letting on to Marjorie about that!'

Although Dora wore jeans they were her best pair and she'd teamed them with a pretty blue floral blouse and a sunhat with blue trim. It slipped off as they kissed. Steve set it back on her head again.

'You wearing a hat reminds me of the day we had tea with Lord Beck. That was the first time I'd seen you wearing a dress. Nice pair of legs I thought. I think that was when I first saw you as a girl I'd like to kiss.'

'But you didn't until the day when uncle collapsed.'

'When I saw how upset you were when you came down the stairs because they wouldn't let you see him I wanted to hold you and comfort you then but you turned to Slugger and shut me out!'

'Oh Steve!'

'Enough of that, lets be off. You're mine now and I can feast my eyes on you every day.' He leaned over to brush her lips with his and smile his lovely smile at her, then drove away.

They met lots of people they knew at the showground including some of the competitors. 'Look there's Joe with the kids and that must be his fiancee' said Dora. 'No wait-they're married now I think.'

She waved to Joe and the two children spotted her and came running over flinging themselves at them. Steve swung Angela into the air then Jacky wanted his turn. Joe and his

wife strolled over-she was looking hot , cross and heavily pregnant.

'This is Jessica' said Joe. 'Meet Dora and Steve from Follyfoot.'

She smiled briefly then told Joe she was tired and wanted a drink.

**'How's Champion? Asked Dora.**

'He's ok but I like Chester best.' said Jacky talking about Champion's twin.

Dora and Steve walked with Joe and told him about the pony centre. He promised to keep his eye open for ponies in need of retraining.

'Are you competing Joe?' asked Steve.

'No the Olympic team selectors have asked me to keep an eye open for any promising riders. We hope we're sorted for the next games but the one after that some of us will be getting rather old! By the way there's an old friend of yours taking part in this afternoon's event- Lord Beck- got a new horse evidently.'

'Oh mate I hope we don't bump into him!' said Steve.

They went and watched some of the Pony Club Games. Dora eyed the ponies afterwards in the dismount area. One girl of about ten was shaking her whip at her pony.' You made our team lose Brigand. My friends are going to laugh at me. How dare you throw me just as I was about to spear the last hoop.'

'I think he may be hurt.' said Dora. Can we have a look?'

'Do you know about ponies?'

'Yes. As a matter of fact we've just opened a Pony Centre.'

Dora began lifting the pony's hooves while Steve stood at his head rubbing his nose and speaking to him softly.

'I thought so! ' exclaimed Dora. 'He's cut his foot-look! There should be a vet on duty, get him to treat Brigand for you.'

The equipment was being cleared from the arena and vehicles were bringing in fences for the showjumping. A man with a Marshall's badge came past and Dora told him there

could be something sharp in the grass near where the final hoops had been so he detailed a few of the arena hands to look.

The next time they saw Brigand he was being examined by the show vet who had a good looking boy of about eighteen with him.

'That's the girl who found Brigand's cut ' his young owner told her mother.

'Hello I'm Rachel Farley and this is my daughter Ruby.  
Thanks for telling her about the cut.'

'Rachel Farley the three day eventer?' asked Dora.

'Not since I had Ruby and her young brother Roger.'

'Do you miss eventing?'

'Well my husband is still competing so I'm still involved. I still use my maiden name around the horse world. He's Seth Drake.'

Is he here? We'd love to meet him wouldn't we Steve.' He nodded.

'He'll be back soon. Just taken Rog to the gents.'

Steve spoke to the vet who had finished treating Brigand.

'Do you come from round here?' he asked.

'No. I'm from Catterick. Just helping out for the day. Tom Carpenter's the name and this is my son Dave. He wants to follow in my footsteps. Family tradition- me dad and grandad were both vets.'

I'm Steve Ross. My wife Dora and I run Follyfoot it's---'

'Oh yes, I've heard about your place.'

'We're just starting a pony centre and we're on the lookout for ponies which are no longer wanted by their owners and any difficult animals we can help families to train.'

'Give me your number and I'll see if I can help.' He reached in his pocket and took out a notebook. Steve wrote down the numbers of Follyfoot, Coppers Rest and The Pony Centre.

'Could you give me those numbers too please?' asked Rachel.

**'We only live in Ripon, not that far away and we might need your help some day.'**

The marshall Dora had spoken to came by just then. 'Thanks miss' he said. 'One of the lads found a piece of wire in the grass.'

The competition was very close and only decided by a second jump off against the clock. Afterwards they saw Joe talking to several young riders and writing in a notebook. Dora and Steve wandered around the stalls getting ideas about items to sell and enquiring about suppliers. Dora left Steve talking to someone he knew and went off by herself.

**'Dora? It is Dora Maddocks isn't it? Remember me Juliet Sanders?'**

Dora's heart sank for this girl had been her school's worst show off. Her parents were loaded with money and Juliet spent more on clothes in a month than Dora would in 6 even when she was living in London. She fixed a smile on her face. 'Oh hello.'

**'What are you doing here?'**

**'It's a treat for my birthday.'**

**'Are your parents here too then?'**

**'No- I'm with my husband. I'm Dora Ross now.'**

**'Married-oh darling really?'**

**'Yes and we have a little boy who's nearly two. He's not with us today.'**

**'Where's your husband then? Is he filthy rich? Last I heard you were at that place for old horses.'**

**'We're still there. It's where we met. My uncle is dead now and Steve and I are running the place together. We've branched out a bit in the past year or so-but we're not rich by any means.'**

**'You must introduce me to er Steve.'**

**'That's Steve over there in the blue denim shirt talking to the guy in dark glasses.'**

**'Daahhhling- what a handsome guy.'** Steve began to walk

away from his friend at that moment and raised his hand in farewell.

Soon he reached Dora's side and draped his arm round her shoulders.

'Steve-this is Juliet, a girl I knew from school.'

'Hi' he said. He had picked up from Dora's manner that she was not very keen on this girl.

'I'm just going to have a drink in daddy's marquee. Do come and join us. It's the *big one* by the executive car park. Daddy's a jeweller-our shop's in Bond street' she said for Steve's benefit. 'We've a few little trinkets for sale here. Perhaps you'd like to buy Dora a birthday present. I can get you a good discount.'

'Er thanks but we're meeting friends for lunch shortly.'

'Perhaps after lunch then. You *are* coming back this afternoon.'

Lord Beck's competing. Caroline was very friendly with your people if I remember rightly. I expect she'll be sitting with mummy this afternoon. You simply *must* come and say hello daahlings'

'We'll try' said Dora meaning exactly the opposite.

When Juliet had gone Steve asked Dora if she'd seen anything she liked. She shook her head and he looked at his watch.

'We've got about 20 minutes so let's hope we see something on the way to the car park.'

'We'll have this afternoon.'

'There won't be much time after the competition finishes because I want to be home by six.'

Dora picked up a china mug with a picture of a horse on it.

'This looks a bit like Copper. I'll have it please.'

'Okay' said Steve who had spotted something else. 'Have a wander further on and see if there's anything else you like while I pay for this. There's a bit of a queue.'

They bought a plant for Marjorie as they had done on their

last visit, picked up re-entry tickets and drove off to lunch. 'I was so sorry to hear about Geoffrey' said Marjorie. We saw the obituary in 'The Times' at the airport. We were going off to Majorca for a month. It's lovely that you're so happily married and have your little boy. Have you got a photograph?'

Steve always carried a small one in his wallet but Dora produced a folder from her handbag with several photos in it including some of their wedding.

'Well I must say you made a handsome couple and was this one taken at the christening?' It was a group photo and Dora nodded and named all the people. Lunch was simple but enjoyable and they finished with half an hour to spare before the afternoon competition. 'I'll just phone Follyfoot and make sure Jeff's ok' said Steve. When he came back he said 'Dora' we have to hurry. Sorry Marjorie, Tom- we need to go back home.'

'Steve- what's wrong with Jeff?'

'Nothing love-it's ok but Teri's gone into labour!'

Teri Stryker knew all there was to know about delivering babies and had decided very early in her pregnancy that unlike Dora she did not want to have her baby at home electing instead for the midwife delivery unit in the hospital. When her contractions started with three weeks left to go she contacted the hospital at once and was told to go in so she could be checked over.

Ron went into a panic and Teri had to calm him down and tell him what she needed to take with her and where it was.

When finally she was sitting in the car he said 'It could be a false alarm couldn't it love? Everything could stop?'

'It could do Ron- but somehow I don't think so!

When they got to the hospital Teri was whisked away. Ron looked on anxiously . 'Don't worry Mr. Stryker-you'll be able to go in to her soon.' Ron felt in his pocket for his cigarettes then realised where he was and put them away. He had one

of his comic books in his pocket so he sat down and tried to read it but couldn't concentrate. About ten minutes passed then a nurse came to find him. 'Everything's fine Mr. Stryker!' 'False alarm eh?'

'Oh no- Teri's waters have broken and labour is progressing. Come with me and you can sit with her.'

Teri was lying on the bed and he stood in the doorway.

'Had I better phone your parents?'

'No not yet. Come and sit down and talk to me. It'll be a while yet.'

'What'll we talk about?'

'Actually Ron-how about you sing? It'll help me with breathing through the contractions.'

'Sing? In here- with all these people coming in and out?'

Teri reached for the gas and air mask. 'Please'

'I'll buy you a diamond ring my friend if it makes you feel alright'

began Ron.

'Oh it's no flaming good. Why can't I be like Steve all calm and supportive?'

'Because you're Ron. You're the one that I love and the one that I need.

'I wish I had me guitar.'

'Sing me our special song Ron!'

'Wise men say only fools rush in, but I can't help falling in love with you.....

As the song went on Teri closed her eyes and Ron thought she was asleep but when he's finished she told him to sing some more. He went through the quieter songs in his repertoire and time passed with Teri breathing through the contractions as they came. She gripped Ron's hand when they grew stronger. He was singing 'All I have to do is dream' when Teri reached out and pushed her buzzer.

'What's wrong?' asked Ron jumping to his feet.

'Nothing- I just want to push!'

**'What? Not yet- can't be yet!'**

A midwife that Ron recognised came hurrying in.

**'Give us a few minutes will you Ron?' she asked.**

Ron made his way to the nearest exit, lit a cigarette, took a few puffs, coughed, then stubbed it out. He went to the gents, washed his hands and looked in the mirror saying to his reflection

**'You can do this Stryker!'**

There was another man in there who grinned and said

**'First baby mate?'**

**'Yeah- how about you?'**

**'We're on number three. It gets easier!'**

**'I'll take your word for it.'** Ron put a piece of chewing gum in his mouth and sauntered back to the ward.

**'Where the devil have you been' called Teri. This baby's in one heck of a hurry!'**

This was the wake up call that Ron needed and he calmed down and gave Teri all the support she needed in the final stages of labour. When his baby girl was placed into his arms Ron Stryker fell in love all over again. It was late in the afternoon when He rang to tell Liz and Shaun the news.

**'Oh praise the good Lord-another little girl- and Teri's alright you say?'**

**'She's fine and we're going home shortly.'**

Dora and Steve were at the Pony Centre with Jeff and Milly when Vi rang them with news of the baby's arrival. She said she was going to go and make sure things were okay in the loft flat as Ron had left the key with her.

**'We'll save them some tea. Hazel's made loads' said Dora.**

**Steve- I'll have my tea in my new mug please.'**

He got out the parcel being careful not to let anyone see the other present. As Dora unwrapped it Jeff clapped his hands and pointed at the horse.

**'Copper!' he said.**

**'Clever boy!' said Dora.**

'No charm this birthday Steve?' asked Hazel.

Steve put his hand in his inside pocket and drew out a small box.

'Of course there is!' he said handing it over. It was a beautiful gold wishing well with a tiny bucket.

'Oh Steve!' she breathed and the tears inevitably started to fall.

'Mummy sad?' asked Jeff climbing onto her lap and putting his arms round her neck.

'No Jeff- mummy's very happy. People do cry when they're happy sometimes.'

Steve knew that Teri's news coming as it did on her birthday had reminded Dora that the baby she'd miscarried should have been sharing this day too and that her tears were not all of joy.

Later when the time came for her to blow out her birthday candles he said 'Don't forget to make a wish.'

The cake had pink icing just like the one he'd bought her when she'd celebrated her first birthday at Follyfoot when the real Copper had been her uncle's gift. Their eyes met, his smiling, hers still wet with tears. 'Help mummy blow Jeff.'

'I suppose you'll be wishing for lots of ponies Dora' said Hazel.

She shook her head as she looked at Steve. 'I'll tell you when my wish comes true.'

They heard a car approaching. 'Uccle Won!' shouted Jeff as it came into view.

Ron stopped the car and wound down the window.

'Alright mate?' asked Steve.

'Fine-nothing to it piece of cake!'

'Cake!' repeated Jeff.

The baby was snugly tucked into her carry cot and everyone took a little peep. 'Meet our daughter 'Rikki' said Ron spelling it out. 'We both like Ricky Nelson and we thought MaryLou was a bit of a mouthful!'

'You okay Teri?' asked Dora.

'Just a bit tired.'

'You're tired! This one had me singing all the bloomin' afternoon.'

'We'll come and see you tomorrow.' said Steve. Hazel handed Ron a Tupperware container of savouries and slices of cake wrapped in tinfoil. 'Enjoy!'

'Had a good day love?' asked Steve later as they sat at home relaxing with a glass of white wine.

'Mmmn lovely. Thankyou for my presents.'

'Oh that reminds me' Steve went to the bedroom where he had taken the carrier bag with the extra gift he had brought her in. It was a crystal pony which sparkled as the light touched it and gave off a rainbow of colours. Dora gasped with delight.

'Oh Steve it's so beautiful!'

Steve finished his drink. 'Ready for an early night?'

Dora nodded and took their empty glasses to the sink to rinse.

When they were in bed she said 'Next we need to plan Jeff's birthday.'

'Mmnn' said Steve 'but not right now. We need to finish celebrating yours.'

Jeff Ross was normally a well behaved little boy but a few days before his birthday he was naughty. After lunch Steve normally sat and read to him for a while before going back to work. Jeff would often have a nap and Dora would leave Milly with him while she went to Follyfoot or sometimes now to the pony centre. On the day in question Ben was coming after lunch to help with the accounts so Milly stayed with them after lunch to look after him. Jeff always went to get a storybook and would sit on the settee with it waiting for Steve. When Ben came Steve ruffled his son's hair and said 'Auntie will read to you today Jeff. Mummy and Daddy have to do some work with uncle Ben. 'No daddy read to me first!'

'Come on Jeff. You know you like it when auntie reads to you.'

'Don't want auntie- want daddy!!'

'Jeff that's not kind. Now say you're sorry.'

'Shan't!'

'Let's think about this Jeff. Unless you say sorry to auntie you will have to go to your room.'

'Sorry'

'That's better. We'll see you later'

'Here Jeff. I brought you a drawing book' said Ben.

'How about I read you a story then you draw a picture of something in it?' said Milly. Jeff seemed to cheer up and Dora and Steve went into the office with Ben feeling relieved. When she'd finished the story Milly gave Jeff his crayons and settled him down on the floor by her chair while she took up the sweater she was knitting him for Christmas. It was quite complicated as it had a horse's head on the front and that was the piece she was working on so she soon became engrossed in what she was doing and did not take very much notice of Jeff until she heard the noise of ripping paper.

'I hope you're not tearing your drawings up before we've seen them Jeff' she said. She looked down and gasped in horror. Her chair was near the bookcase and Jeff had taken the Bible that Cleo and James had bought for his christening down from the shelf. Milly picked it up. Oh Jeff-what have you done? She turned the pages. He had scribbled over some of them with red crayon and torn others. She thought about hiding the book in her knitting bag and buying a new one when she next went shopping but she knew this was really not a good idea. Dora, Steve and Ben came out of the office just then and saw the look on Milly's face.

'What's wrong auntie?' asked Steve.

'Er well- you'd better see this' she said handing Steve the ruined Bible. 'I should have noticed Jeff had got bored but I dropped a stitch and had to take several rows back. I don't

know how he reached it' she said knowing it normally lived on the top shelf.

'That's my fault' said Dora. 'I got it down to look at because I think I might get one for Rikki. The phone rang and I just put it on the shelf. I meant to move it!'

'I think I'll be going' said Ben guessing that Jeff was about to be told off.'

'I'll make a cup of tea' said Milly and Dora followed her to get out the cups.

'Come here please Jeff' said Steve 'It's no good trying to hide behind mummy.'Now why did you do this?You do know that it was naughty don't you?'

'Daddy was naughty- so Jeff was naughty.'

'Daddy had to work. I wasn't naughty but you have been very naughty.'

'Daddy smack?'

Dora held her breath. Neither she nor Steve had ever smacked Jeff and had said they never would but -----

'No Jeff. Daddy is not going to smack you. I am very cross with you though and you do have to learn not to do something like this again. So I'm afraid that we won't be having our usual playtime together this afternoon while tea's being got ready. I have to go and see to the horses at Follyfoot now and you can play quietly by yourself till I get home then all your toys will have to be put away and you'll sit quietly till teatime.'

'Bedtime story?'

'Yes- I will read to you then. Now you can have milk this afternoon-not squash and a plain biscuit, not chocolate.'

Dora brought the drinks over with a plate of biscuits. Jeff was given a plain one. There were chocolate bourbons on the plate-Steve's favourite but he took a plain digestive instead and Milly and Dora followed suit. When Steve went back to work he kissed Dora and gave Jeff a quick hug. Milly had gone home for a rest and Dora sat down to read her magazine.

'Mummy play?' asked Jeff.

'No you must play by yourself this afternoon.' She did however put the television on for half an hour so he could watch his favourite programme. Often she would leave it on and they would watch the nature programme which followed together but today she turned it off. Normally Jeff would chatter to himself while he played but today he was quiet and she felt really quite sorry for him. When Steve came home she met him at the door and whispered to him. 'Oh Steve he's so little and he's been really quiet this afternoon couldn't you just play with him for a bit?'

'No Dora. I'm not going back on what I said. He has to learn.'

He went and picked Jeff up and sat with him on his lap. The little boy buried his head in Steve's shirt. 'Daddy's going for a wash Jeff. I want you to tidy your toys away while I'm gone.'

When he came back everything was put away except his favourite bear. 'Okay you can have Eddy Bear and one of your picture books and sit in the big chair while I read my newspaper and mummy gets on with the tea. ' Normally their playtime would last anything up to an hour but Steve knew he would not make Jeff sit still for all that time. He couldn't concentrate on his reading. He could see Dora was biting her lip as she peeled potatoes and he felt dreadful. After only ten minutes he had had enough of seeing his son sitting alone and unhappy. 'Come and sit beside me Jeff-mummy will come too.' When all three were together he went on 'I have missed our playtime as much as you have Jeff but I hope we won't have to do this again.'

'I sowwy mummy and daddy'

'That's a good boy. Don't forget that auntie was very upset too.'

I say sowwy to auntie.' Steve took Jeff onto his lap again and hugged him close. Dora then moved close to them both and they shared precious time together.

'Do you want to come out with me and see Folly and the others?'

'Please!'

Dora breathed a sigh of relief as they went out together. Milly came in. 'Everything okay love?'

'Yes it's fine. I don't know whose felt worse this afternoon Jeff or us.'

'I could kick myself for not stopping Jeff.'

'And me for leaving the Bible in his reach.'

'Are you letting him have fishfingers and chips as planned?'

'Oh yes. I think he's been punished enough!'

When Jeff and Steve came in they were laughing together and Jeff immediately ran up to Milly. 'I sowwy auntie' he said and she picked him up and gave him a hug.

'How about you help me set the table?' He could only stretch up and lay things on the table and usually it was only the cutlery he helped with but tonight he held out his hand for a small side plate and Milly gave it to him. Somehow he managed to trip and drop it on the tiled kitchen floor and it broke. Jeff began to cry.

'I didn't mean it daddy.'

Steve immediately picked him up and cuddled him close.

'I know mate. It was an accident. Even grown ups have accidents sometimes and you mustn't be scared to tell us if you do.'

That night Jeff took a long time to settle. Steve read him three stories and he and Dora both stayed with him until he finally dropped off. Around three o'clock in the morning they were awakened by Jeff calling out. This was very unusual, Dora jumped out of bed and put on her dressing gown. Steve rubbed his eyes sleepily and sat up.

'It's okay- I'll go.' said Dora.

She came back some time later with Jeff in her arms.

'Can he come in with you while I change his bed. He's had an accident.'

Jeff snuggled close to Steve.

'Did you have a bad dream?' he asked.

'I fink so.' He had gone back to sleep by the time Dora got back from changing his bed and putting his wet sheets and pyjamas in the washing machine.

'We'll let him stay here for a while but then he can go back to bed otherwise he might decide to wake us up more often.' said Steve.

The little boy hardly stirred when Steve took him back to his own room.

'Did Jeff seem worried that we might be cross about his accident?' asked Steve.

'I don't think so but I do think what happened today has affected him.'

'Do you think I was too hard on him?'

'No- you were right-he did have to learn.'

'I think I may have told you that at the orphanage we all got the slipper regularly. I had a spell of bedwetting. Not only did I get the slipper I also had to launder my own sheets and pyjamas and stand up in front of everyone and say what I'd done and confess to being a very dirty little boy. After the third time I stopped drinking and almost made myself ill. One of the older boys took me under his wing after that and things got a bit better. When I was in the approved school some of the lads were affected. They got a right telling off from the warden and a bit of ribbing from the others. One lad in my dormitory was very nervous when he first arrived and I heard him crying early in the morning. He'd wet the bed so I pretended it was me. I was quite used to humiliation. Anyway I hope Jeff will be okay.' Dora was beginning to realise how events in his past life had etched bad memories deep into Steve's mind and was glad when some of these things began to come to the surface and allow healing to be completed.

Next day Jeff was really subdued but wouldn't say what was wrong. He hardly touched his breakfast which was very unusual. Jeff loved talking to the donkeys and the youngest, Button, was his favourite. He nodded his head vigorously when Steve asked if he wanted to go and see them after breakfast.

'You know Button' said Steve. 'Jeff's feeling a bit sad today and we hope perhaps he'll tell you why.' Dora stood outside the pen knowing that none of the gentle animals would hurt her son.

Button obviously loved Jeff too and responded to the little boy's gentle caresses. Dora listened as Jeff whispered to his friend. He tended to whisper quite loudly and she heard the words 'naughty

boy,no funfair , no party and no presents.'

Dora made the connection. 'Let's go see auntie Teri and Rikki now.' she said. They went to the farmhouse first to wash their hands and see Vi and George. Vi had been baking sausage rolls and by now Jeff was feeling hungry. 'Would you like one Jeff?' 'Pease aunnie Vi.'

Ron was indoors as Dora had hoped. Rikki had just been fed and Teri was holding her. Jeff was fascinated by her tiny fingers but a little disappointed that he couldn't play with her.

'Will you stay here with uncle Ron while I go and see Daddy-we need to talk about grown up stuff.'

'OK' Jeff pointed at the guitar. 'Uccle Won play to Wikki? '

'Well I reckon she'll be asleep soon so why don't I play for you eh?'

Jeff nodded and sat on the floor by Ron's feet.

Ron began to sing 'Nellie the elephant.'

Meanwhile Dora had found Steve.

'I think I know what's wrong with Jeff. Do you remember when you were showing him our old photos and there was the one I took of the carousel?'

'Mmmn. I said if he was a good boy the next time the fair came we'd take him on it.'

'And the fair's coming this weekend-just before his birthday.'

'And when it was your birthday we promised him presents and a party on his birthday-----"

'If he was a good boy' finished Dora 'Oh Steve!'

'It's ok-we'll talk to him. Let him know everything's ok. Where is he?'

'With Ron and Teri.'

'Well-that's the first step then- invite them to bring Rikki to Jeff's party.'

Ron was singing Puff the magic dragon when they went into the flat. Teri had put Rikki down for a nap and was sitting resting with her eyes closed. Jeff was joining in with the word 'Puff when Ron nodded his head. He got up and looked at his parents. 'Sing!' he

said and they obliged. When the song finished Steve said. 'We've come to invite uncle Ron, auntie Teri and Rikki to your birthday party JR. If you're lucky uncle Ron might sing you some more songs.'

'And next year Rikki and mummy can have their birthday party together.' said Ron.

'Let's go to the pony centre now and see Dynamite and the others.' said Dora.

They hadn't brought the buggy so Steve carried Jeff most of the way holding him close. They stopped at the seats by the lake and sat down for a while.

'Yesterday was not a good day for us Jeff because you were naughty but it's over now. You've been good today and every day last week and before so you're not to worry that you won't get your birthday treats. We're going to go and see auntie Hazel and ask her nicely to make you a cake and on Sunday we're going to the fair.'

That night a very happy little boy snuggled down in his bed tired and happy. The carousel toy that had been a Christmas present last year stood on his little bedside cabinet and played nursery rhymes and no bad dreams disturbed his rest.

Sunday was warm and sunny and brought families out in droves to enjoy all the fun of the fair. Soon the children would be back in their classrooms daydreaming about the sights, sounds and smells that the fair brought. Jeff was enthralled by the music and was content to stand listening to the many different tunes-until that is they arrived at the carousel. His little face was wreathed in smiles as he saw the beautiful horses each with their name on the saddle. While it was stopped he walked round asking what each one was called. Dancer and Dreamer, Lucy and Lemondrop and lots more.

'Look' said Dora. 'There's one called Periwinkle. I didn't think you owned the fair anymore Eddie.' she said as he appeared beside them his face wreathed in smiles.

'Dora, Steve- great to see you. Any rides you want on here are

free.'

'Won't you get into trouble from the boss?'

'I still own half the fair- and the other half is owned by my new wife Marianne. She's Madame Mariella, the fortune teller. She's very good too. Cross her palm with silver and she'll tell you all the good things you can expect.'

'What about the bad things?'

'Well she can see those too but she tries not to be too specific and upset people. '

'I don't think I want to know my future.' said Steve.' Where's Tim?' He's with some of his mates back by the caravans. There's plenty of mums and grandparents around to keep an eye on them. Looks like I'm full for this ride. See you later.'

Eddie started the ride and walked round collecting money. When it stopped again Steve helped Jeff onto 'Dollymixture' and got on behind him. Dora mounted Dixie. They had two turns ,then ,as there were lots of people waiting to go on Steve said they'd carry on walking round and come back later. They tried the 'hoopla' without success then Steve tried the rifle range managing to score enough to win a prize. Jeff chose a football.

'We'll take it back to the car so we don't lose it' Steve said. The caravans were in a field by the car park and they stopped to watch the game of tag spotting Tim amongst the happy children. They called to him as he ran close by. 'Dora, Steve!' he yelled. 'Jeff' called the little boy not wanting to be left out. 'Jeff!' repeated Tim.

'So Tim- you've got a new mum!'

'Yes- she's great. I'm going to have a baby brother so Mama says.

'Are you two married' he asked with all the directness of the young.

'Yes very happily, so's Ron and his wife Teri has just had a baby girl.But Dora's uncle and Slugger have both died.'

'Come and see Periwinkle!'

'Oh - so he didn't have to be sold!' They followed Tim to the back

of the caravans where several horses were grazing.

'This one's mama's horse-but she can't ride him at the moment. He's called Whizz. Oh look- it must be time for lunch. Mama's coming. She shuts for half an hour at noon.'

'Need Loo!' said Jeff. 'There's one in the car park' said Tim helpfully.

'I'll just take him and put the ball in the car' said Steve.

Marianne was obviously only in the early stages of pregnancy as her waist was still trim 'Mama' said Tim. 'This is my friend Dora.' 'Ah yes-I've heard a lot about you. Come to my tent later and I'll read your palm-no charge.'

'Well I don't know- Steve isn't keen.'

'Well you're welcome to come. Now Tim-let's go and get some lunch then you can take dad his sandwiches and flask. Would you like some tea Dora?'

Steve had come back. 'We were just going to get an ice cream thanks' he said.' Yes! said Jeff jumping up and down. 'Ice cream!' They said goodbye and were soon eating three -flavoured cones. Predictably Jeff got in a mess necessitating another trip to the toilets to get cleaned up. 'We'll have a kick about for a while before we come back.' said Steve.Marianne passed by on her way to her tent and Dora followed her. She was back at the arranged meeting place before Steve and Jeff arrived.

'I saw a 'Hook the duck stall' near the carousel' said Steve. 'Let's go see if Jeff can win a prize shall we?'

'Mmmn- if you like'

Steve held Jeff so he could catch one of the multi coloured ducks. Dora stood a little way back head down, deep in thought.

Jeff didn't get an even number on his duck so he didn't win a toy but he was given a balloon.

'Looks like another trip to the car or this won't survive'

'I'll go this time. I need the loo anyway' said Dora.

'See you by 'The Mat' said Steve. Adults and children were sliding down the spiral on mats hurrying to stand up before the person behind bumped into them. Sometimes they didn't succeed and

several people landed in a laughing heap.

'Do you want to try when mummy gets back?'

Jeff nodded. His eyes had been drawn to the jets whirling round and climbing. His hand gripped Steve's tight.

'It's okay. You can't go on them. You're not old enough.'

Dora said she didn't want to try the mat but watched as Steve and Jeff came down the three times which constituted a 'Go'.

'Horsies?' asked Jeff.

'Okay- let's go see Eddie. How about you sit with mummy this time?'

'Yey- sit with mummy!'

'You ok love?' asked Steve.

'I'm fine'

This time Dora and Jeff rode 'Rainbow' while Steve sat astride 'Sunshine.' They stayed on for three turns then Jeff said he was hungry. 'Hot Dog with onions and Fries for me- how about you love?'

'Just a plain hot dog with tomato sauce. No onions or fries. Jeff can have a hot dog and a few fries.'

Jeff and Steve soon demolished their food. Dora took ages. Jeff was hopping from one foot to the other eager to go and see what other delights the fair had to offer.

'You carry on walking- I just want to sit here for a few minutes. I'll catch you up.' said Dora. Although the sun was still shining Dora was feeling shivery. She still had the car keys and went to fetch the extra sweater she always left in the car. When she caught up with Steve he scanned her face. 'Dora there *is* something wrong.'

'I feel a bit shivery- p'raps I'm starting a cold.'

They were standing by the 'Test your strength' game and Jeff stood fascinated as young men tried to hit the target hard enough to ring the bell. 'Daddy try?'

'Er no mate. I don't think so-let's try the horse racing game. They each got a card with the name of a horse on it and watched as the light flashed on and off each name gradually slowing down and finally coming to rest on 'Pinto'.

'Sorry mate-we didn't win' Jeff's face fell.

Dora decided to try her hand at Darts but also failed to win. The coconut shie produced a similar result for Steve. Jeff won a small cuddly monkey on the roll a ball stall then his eyes were drawn to the stall where getting a ping pong ball in a glass bowl was rewarded with a goldfish as a prize. Both his parents tried to dissuade him but he pleaded with them to have a try and in the end they gave in. They had three balls each. Steve held Jeff steady and Dora handed him the balls one by one. Amazingly one ball went in and he was rewarded with a fish in a polythene bag. 'He needs fwend mummy-twya hard. Dora was on target with her first ball then decided that the fish would have a better home with them than at the fair so she tried hard and got the second and third balls in too. 'Come on Daddy!' cried Jeff. Steve felt torn. He didn't want to be shown up by his wife and son but he wondered how they would get the fish they had already won home safely let alone more. He shut his eyes and threw the balls one after the other in quick succession. Two landed in the bowls. Eddie spotted them carrying their new friends.

'We've got a tank we don't use in the caravan. It's got a lid and if you empty all the water into it they should be okay if you don't drive too fast'

The man on the stall had sold them a tub of fish food and advised them not to put them in their pond until they got bigger.

'Marianne finishes in 15 minutes and someone else takes over. She is starting to feel tired in the afternoons now. Go over to the booth and she'll take you to the caravan and find the tank for you. 'More horsie ride?' said Jeff hopefully.

'The fish wont like it' said Steve.

'It's ok- you take him on while I hold them then we can swap over-we'll pay Eddie!'

'No you won't. I owe you more than a few rides and an old fish tank for the help you gave me with Tim. There was a seat nearby and Dora sat down with the fish watching the horses go round.

Was it her imagination or did her head really feel swimmy? When

it was her turn on the ride she was relieved that she felt okay. They said goodbye to Eddie and walked towards the Fortune tellers booth. There was a kiddy roundabout with cars, a motor bike an aeroplane and a double decker bus. 'Let Jeff have a couple of rides Steve and I'll walk back with Marianne. See you at the car.' 'You okay with all those fish?'

'I'll manage.'

Marianne was just handing over her crystal ball to her replacement and Dora explained her mission.

'I must warn you' she said 'Those fish probably won't live very long. Tim's had several from the stall and in the end he gave up because they kept dying. Do you want a cup of tea now?'

'No thanks we need to get back to the horses.'

Marianne found the tank and tested it for leaks. Satisfied that all was well Dora transferred the water and the fish, put in a couple of pinches of food and put the lid on. Marianne found some sticky tape and taped the lid on for her. Then she walked with Dora towards the car park. Steve and Jeff came into view as they were parting. 'Remember what I said Dora' were her last words.

Steve took the fish tank from her. 'What did she say?' Jeff was busy chattering to his monkey but Dora quietly told Steve about the likely brief life of the goldfish relieved that she did not have to mention having her fortune told earlier.

'I think I might have an early night.' she said later.

'Good idea-me too.'

'Steve-I need to sleep. The fresh air has made me tired.'

'Yes and grumpy too. There is something wrong-tell me.'

'I told you I think I've got a cold coming on.'

'Dora-you're keeping something from me and I want to know what it is.' Steve was getting annoyed now. Dora sighed deeply and said 'The second time you went off with Jeff Marianne came past and...'

'Don't tell me -you had your fortune told! You know what I think of that sort of thing girl . Let the future take care of itself-that's what the Bible says isn't it?"Take no thought for the things of the

morrow for the morrow will take care of itself!' repeated Dora.  
'She said we were going to have a long and happy life together and that we would have a little girl next.'

'Don't get your hopes up-you better tell me what else.'  
'She said someone very close to us would have something bad happen in their lives and although she wouldn't say when I got the distinct impression it would be quite soon.'

'Oh for heaven's sake. Bad things are happening all the time. I dare say when you look back on life there'll be something there that you can put down to happening because Marianne said it would. Now forget it.'

'I can't Steve. I don't know why you're so sceptical about it after all the time you spent with Tina's family. Some of them told fortunes didn't they?'

'Yes but not mine! I made it clear that I didn't want anything to do with crystal balls, tarot cards or palmistry.'

'She read my tea leaves. She told me some things to watch out for.'

'Oh for heaven's sake girl! Don't tell me you're going to be examining the dregs every time you have a cuppa!' Dora shook her head . 'I really am tired Steve'

'Ok- go to bed. I'll sit and read for a while.'

'You can read in bed.' Steve didn't answer but picked up his novel from the coffee table and opened it.

'Goodnight Steve.'

'Night.'

As she always did, usually with Steve ,she looked in on Jeff who had Eddy bear on one side of him and newly named Maxi monkey on the other. Dora sighed. He looked comfy and peaceful- she hoped her rest would be the same. She almost went back to the lounge for a goodnight kiss but decided against it. In the bedroom she opened a drawer and pulled out a short cotton nightie. She'd not worn one of those for a very long time.

Steve had not got many pages left in his book and he was a quick reader and soon finished it. He made himself a hot chocolate and

while it cooled searched the bookshelf for the new book he'd bought recently. It was a thriller and he re-read the blurb on the back. He hadn't intended to start it but he decided to read while he drank his chocolate. He nodded off with the empty mug in his hand and was woken by a startled cry. Thinking it was Jeff he ran to his room but he was still sound asleep. He found Dora sitting up in bed shaking and crying-obviously she had had a nightmare. He sat down on the bed and put his arm round her. 'Do you want me to make you a hot drink?

'No Steve-just hold me-please.'

He tugged at the cotton nightie. 'What's this in aid of?'

'I didn't think you'd be holding me tonight.' Steve shed his own clothes.

'Don't I hold you every night?' he said pulling the offending garment over her head.

'Well I did say I wanted to sleep.' He got into bed beside her and she snuggled into his embrace.

'Well you've had your solitary sleep and now are you going to tell me about the bad dream?'

'I can't remember Steve-and that is the truth. I only know it was really horrible.'

'Pr'aps you'll remember later.'

'I don't think I want to.'

Early next morning the phone rang. Dora woke up with a start . The phone was on Steve's side of the bed and she leaned over him but his hand had already plucked it from it's cradle. Dora was trembling remembering the early morning phone call that had told them of her uncle's collapse. Steve held the phone between them so they could both hear.

'Joe-Hi mate how are you.'

'Steve- I'm in a hurry. I need a big favour. Jess went into hospital yesterday. She's had problems with blood pressure and they think they will need to induce her later today. The thing is my groom and his wife who's my housekeeper are away for a few days. I need to be at the hospital and there's no-one to look after the

kids. Can they come to you till Thursday evening? The Barkers will be back by then. ' Steve looked at Dora who nodded.

'Okay Joe- we'll do it. It's Jeff's birthday tomorrow and they can join in the fun.'

'I'll bring them over in a couple of hours then-thanks.'

'Steve do you think that Joe's wife could be---'

'Stop it girl!' said Steve more gently than he had the day before.

'We've got work to do.

After breakfast they moved the camp bed from Jeff's room into the spare room as Jacky and Angela were used to sharing. Jeff was very excited to hear that there would be two children to play with for a few days. When they arrived the Whittaker children did not seem in a very good mood. 'The wanted to bring Champion and Chester but I couldn't manage it. I've got one of the neighbours to look after them for me.'

'We'll all go down to the pony centre and you can meet Dynamite, Looby Loo and Solly.' said Dora.

'Can we ride them?'

'Of course.' The children cheered up and Joe took his leave promising to let them know when the baby arrived. It was a lovely sunny day and the three children had fun outside. Angela and Jacky rode well, Joe had obviously done a lot of work with them. Dora supervised the riding while Ben looked after Jeff keeping him out of the kitchen where Hazel was icing his birthday cake. The greenhouse was now complete and later in the day Steve transported the plants which were ready to sell. The grand opening of the pony and garden centre was set for the second Saturday in September and invitations had already been sent out. The children all enjoyed listening to stories at bedtime. Jacky and Angela were allowed to read by themselves for a while after Jeff had settled down. When Steve and Dora went to tuck them in and turn out the main light leaving a small lamp burning Angela was reluctant to settle. She clung to Steve and said that uncle Joe didn't spend so much time with them now and auntie Jess told them off for the slightest little thing. She thought it would get

worse when the baby came home.

'It's hard work getting ready for a baby to be born isn't it Dora?'

'Yes and uncle Joe is busy with his showjumping too. I got very grumpy just before I had Jeff and Steve had to help me a lot. You can be a great help to Auntie Jess and Uncle Joe.'

'How?'

'They'll tell you when the time comes- now snuggle down and go to sleep.' Goodnight kisses were exchanged and Dora and Steve could at last relax.

Jeff was awake bright and early and was allowed into his parents bed. 'Happy Birthday mate!' said Steve.

'What would you like for breakfast?'

'Auntie make pancakes!'

'Ok we'll ask her. I expect Jacky and Angela would like that too. It's very early but since we're all wide awake how about you come down to 'Follyfoot' with me.'

Jeff bounced up and down on the bed 'Yes please.'

'You can have a wash in our room.' Steve put his dressing gown on and went to fetch Jeff's clothes. 'Now don't make a lot of noise at the farm because they'll probably all be asleep' said Dora as she helped him wash. When Steve and Jeff had gone Dora got out the presents and cards they had been hiding. Milly was an early riser and came in as Dora was supervising Angela in the bathroom. 'Jeff would like pancakes for breakfast she said as she plaited Angela's hair. 'Would you and your brother like to help?' asked Milly.

'I would but Jacky won't-he's a boy!'

Jacky, who had washed earlier came out of the bedroom.

'What won't I do?' he asked.

'Help with the pancakes.'

'Will to'

'You won't. You'll make a mess.'

'If there's a mess it'll get cleaned up. Now both of you come over here.' said Milly.

There was much arguing but finally a bowlful of batter was ready

and Milly began cooking while the children helped Dora with the table.

'Oh' exclaimed Angela. 'Maple syrup-my favourite!'

The pancakes were kept hot until Jeff and Steve got back and they all ate together. Jeff was sporting a new blue baseball cap. 'Aunnie Vi and uncle gorg were up and gave me this and a new book.' he said. While Dora and Milly cleared away and washed up Steve supervised the opening of the cards. 'We'll wait for mummy and Auntie to come before you start on the presents'

'We haven't got anything for Jeff' said Angela looking upset.

'It's okay. Uncle Joe left some money for him and you can both draw him a picture later on.'

Jeff's favourite gift was the set of miniature gardening tools including a bright red watering can from Milly. He liked his Thomas the Tank engine train set too but predictably ended up playing at being a train driver in a cardboard box.

'Can we go and see the ponies now?' asked Jacky.

'Yes-you can help Hazel with them.' said Dora. Tony arrived and presented Jeff with a fireman dressing up set.

'Fanks!' he said and went to find the fire engine that had been last year's present from Bert.

It was a glorious sunny day. After a morning spent with the ponies and a salad lunch Steve inflated the large paddling pool that they had bought and kept to be enjoyed after the other presents had been played with. The children enjoyed splashing around and soaking the adults, Gip arrived on his bike with a plastic boat knowing in advance about the pool. Everyone from the farm came to enjoy tea. Ron lifted up a plastic sheet that had been fastened down on the grass. 'This is our present Jeff- Rikki will be able to enjoy it too when she's older.'

'Wow sand!! '

A large wooden frame with a floor had been sunk into a hole in the ground and filled with about a foot of sand.

'Always remember to get someone to cover it up for you when you've finished playing Jeff. We don't want animals using it as a

toilet.' said Teri.

The birthday cake was a Masterpiece- Thomas the Tank engine again.'

In the evening Joe rang to say that Jess had given birth to a 9lb baby girl born by caesarian section.

Angela clapped her hands delightedly. Jacky merely grunted.

'Huh- girls are no fun. Can I stay here with you?'

'Sorry mate-nothing doing.'

The phone rang again after the children were in bed.

'Mummy' said Dora. 'You've missed Jeff-he's in-----'

'Dora listen- your father's been taken ill. As soon as he's well enough we'll be coming home on extended leave' Dora dropped the receiver and put her hand over her mouth. 'No! not daddy. She can't have meant daddy!' Steve picked up the phone and listened while Prudence told what had happened. When he rung off he said

'Dora-it's not too serious. A stomach ulcer they say. He'll have to watch what he eats but he's over the worst.'

'They only say it's an ulcer. Steve it could be cancer!'

'Dora for heaven's sake girl! I'm sure the doctors in Buenos Aires know what they're talking about.'

'They could be keeping it from him'

'Your mother would insist on the truth You know that!'

'Well she may be keeping it from us and him!'

'I'm sure that the Harley Street specialist your dad sees for his regular medicals will set everyone's mind at rest. You have to stop thinking the worst about everything simply because of what a gypsy said at a fairground.'

'This one's no fake. I know it.'

The nightmare came again that night and again when Dora woke she couldn't remember it but she was certain that her father wasn't in it.'

Again they were woken by an early morning phone call.

'Steve' Milly's voice. 'I'm not feeling well.'

