Hueber Lektüren

Hot Air

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Chapter 1

Conderton, sixty-three

It was nearly night. The trees were dark shapes on the side of the road. I put my head against the car window and watched them fly past.

‘Here comes another sign, Dad!’ My little brother, Riley, bounced up and down on the car seat beside me. ‘What does it say?’

‘Conderton, sixty-three,’ I heard my father say. And through the window I saw the sign flash past.

‘Sixty-three kilometres,’ said Riley. ‘What speed are you doing, Dad?’

‘I’m doing eighty kilometres an hour.’

Riley flopped back against the seat and my head bumped against the window. ‘Okay,’ he said. ‘You’re doing eighty kilometres an hour and it’s sixty-three kilometres to Conderton. So we’ll be there…’

I turned to look at him.

‘…in forty-seven and a quarter minutes!’ he finished.

Dad looked at Mum.

‘Right!’ she said.

‘Good boy,’ said Dad.

I turned back to the window.

Was it right? I didn’t know. My brother is only eight years old but he’s clever. My father’s clever too. And my mother. But I’m not. I’m no good at school. I’m no good at sport. No good at music or dancing. I do like drawing – but I’m no good at it.

Mum says not to panic. Donna, you just haven’t found your talent yet, she says. But I am panicking. Maybe I don’t have
a talent. Maybe I’ll never have a talent. My friend Shelley wants to be a teacher. She’s good with little children. My other friend Nina wants to be a police officer. She loves riding so she wants to work with police horses.

‘Hey, Donna!’ Riley hit me on the arm. ‘Look at this.’
I didn’t turn to him. I watched the trees flash past.
‘Oh, forget it,’ said Riley and he flopped back in his seat.
‘Are you okay, Donna?’ asked Mum.
‘Yeah,’ I said.

Some days I am sad. All day. Mum knows this. I was sad that day.

‘We’re nearly there,’ said Dad. ‘It’s going to be a really great weekend.’

Mum has told Dad about my sad days. Dad’s answer to any problem is to go out and do things. Dad runs. He swims. He rides his bike. He plays football. So what was his answer to my problem?

‘There’s another sign!’ said Riley.
It flashed past my eyes.
‘It had a picture of a balloon on it, Donna. Did you see it?’
‘Yes,’ I said quietly.

Dad’s answer to my problem was to go up in a balloon.
‘I can’t wait to go up in the balloon,’ said Riley. ‘It’s going to be great. Are we staying in a hotel, Mum?’
‘No, love, we’re staying in a big house with all the other people.’

I sat up. ‘Other people?’
‘Yes, love. We’re not the only people going in the balloon this weekend. There’ll be other people too.’
‘I’m sleeping with Dad,’ said Riley.
‘Maybe,’ said Mum. ‘We’ll see.’

I looked out of the window again. The sky was dark now.
‘Conderton,’ said Dad suddenly. ‘Here we are. Now, where do we go?’

‘Jessup Road,’ answered Mum. ‘It’s the second road on the right past the church.’

We went past some houses and shops and an old hotel. ‘There’s the church,’ said Mum.
Dad turned the car into Jessup Road.

‘There it is!’ said Riley. He pointed to a house with a sign at the front. It said BLUE SKY BALLOONS – Get Carried Away.

Dad stopped the car and looked at the house. ‘The lights are on,’ he said. ‘Come on, everybody.’

We got out of the car and walked to the front door. It was open.

‘I can hear voices,’ said Riley. ‘Come on.’
Mum, Dad and I followed Riley through the house.

‘Hey, look,’ said Riley. He pointed into a bedroom. ‘Bunk beds! I’m having the top bunk!’

‘People are already in there,’ I said. ‘Look – their bags are there.’

‘Where are we going to sleep?’ Riley asked Mum.

‘We’ll see,’ she said. ‘Come on.’

The voices were louder and suddenly we were in a large, bright kitchen. Five or six people sat at a long table and there were two women on the other side of the room. The voices stopped.

‘Hello,’ said Dad.

A man got up from the table and said, ‘Thank heavens. Another man!’

He was the only man in the room. The women laughed.

He shook Dad’s hand. ‘Brian Richardson’s my name.’ He pointed at a woman and a pretty girl at the table. ‘And this is my wife, Patsy, and my daughter, Katie.’