

and shouted, “you get out of here.”

There was a terrible squabble going on between my Mam and the woman in a black coat and a funny hat. The woman turned to stare out of the window and took her mobile out of her pocket.

“Come in, Albert. I’ll need your help after all.”

A car door slammed and a policeman came in. He held my Mam while the wrestler woman wrenched me from her. I fought the woman with my fists and suddenly the policeman left my Mam, took me from the wrestler and lifted me up as if I were a baby.

“He’s only a little lad,” he said. “Just a little lad.”

The woman tut-tutted. The policeman carried me out to a car.

“I want my Mam! I want my Mam! I want my Mam!” I was fighting him really hard.

“Aye, I know lad, but I have to do this –you’ll be all right when you’ve settled down.”

My face felt very wet and I gave in to an urge to snuggle into his sleeve. I felt his arms tighten round me and soon I smiled into a kind face. When the car stopped he took off his hat and became an ordinary man. Mam had warned me that life was full of ha – boo’s and boo – ha’s. That night it was ‘boo’ because I was taken into a large house and put into a strange bed in a strange room. But it was ‘ha’ because it was a warm bed and the room had pretty curtains at the windows.

“You’ll be looked after here, lad, then in the morning you’ll be going to school with other lads.”

“Don’t wanna go to school. I want my Mam.”

“You have to go to school lad. I had to when I was your age and look how clever I’ve become.”

“You’re O.K. Mister, but weren’t you scared?”

“Out of my wits.”

“So am I.”

“Tell you what. I’m off duty tomorrow so I’ll take you to school myself.”

I wasn’t sure what made me jump out of the comfy warm bed

Chapter One

and run to him. I was hugging his legs and he bent down, lifted me up and sat on the bed with my legs dangling off his knees. I'd never felt that close to anyone before, except my Mam. But lately she had seemed always too tired or too busy to do things like that. Right now, it felt good to be hugged even though he was a policeman.

"Your real name's Bobby, isn't it?" I said.

"The kids call us all Coppers, but we do have special names as well – like you do."

"Mam always says you're called Bobbies, not Coppers."

"She sounds nice then."

"When Uncle Jimmy isn't around she's nice."

"And Uncle Jimmy, is he nice?"

"He shouts and throws things till Mam lets him have some money. Then he goes away, happy like, and things are nice – just me and Mam."

"Is Uncle Jimmy kind to you?"

"He gives me money sometimes and tells me to get lost."

"And do you?"

"Sure I do. There's an old hut at the bottom of the yard and I hide in it. It's really smelly though and when I go back in the house he calls me 'little horror' and sends me away again. So you see I've been called a lot of things. Sometimes it's 'kid' – you called me 'lad'. I hate it most of all when adults call me 'young man'."

"And what does your Mam call you?"

"Depends whether I've behaved or not."

"She called you 'love' back at the house."

"I know, but I get teased when other boys hear her. I'll let you into a secret." I put my mouth close to his ear. "I'm called Tim."

Albert dittoed the close to ear business with me. "And I'm called Albert," he said.

"You won't tell that horrid woman who wouldn't leave me alone that I'm called Tim, will you?"

"No, I won't. But she already knows you're called Tim, and anyway it isn't important now. She's not such a bad old cow." Albert