CHAPTER 2

UPPITY

Sam had first discovered that Oscar could speak the day after he'd arrived on a number 9 bus. His very first words were: 'I'm not an idiot, you know.' Actually, those were his second words because on the first evening he'd murmured 'Goodnight,' just as Sam was about to go to sleep. Sam hadn't believed his ears that time, but by now he was used to the fact that Oscar could hold a conversation. It was a secret known only to the two of them. Sam hadn't told his parents or even his best friend Louie, although sometimes he wondered if Louie suspected.

Next door the removal men trooped in and out as the morning wore on, carrying carpets and items of furniture. Sam saw white rugs, table lamps and even a couple of statues that had forgotten to get dressed.

Eventually a car drew up and Mrs Bentley-Wallop herself got out. Sam had to admit she was more interesting than Mr Trusscot who was about as glamorous as a cardigan. Mrs Bentley-Wallop had thick blonde curls, bright red lipstick and a double chin. She wore a long, grey, fur-trimmed coat. Sam thought she looked like a film star – although obviously quite an old one.



Back inside, he told his mum about their new neighbour.

'Bigley-Wallop? Are you sure that's her

name?' asked Mum.

'Bigley or Bottomly, I don't remember,' said Sam. 'But Mr Trusscot says we ought to keep Oscar indoors so we don't upset her.'

'Mr Trusscot can mind his own business,' said Mum. 'All the same we ought to make Mrs Whats-her-name welcome. Maybe I'll pop round later to say hello.'

'I'll come!' said Sam, eagerly. He'd never actually been next door. He wanted to know what the naked statues were for. Besides, he was keen to find out if their new neighbour had a dog. That would be the final straw for Mr Trusscot – two dogs on the road in barking distance of each other. He might even have to move to Australia.



After lunch they called next door. Mum took

a tin of her homemade flapjack. Oscar came along but at the gate he stopped and hung back, leaving Mum to go ahead.

'What's wrong?' asked Sam.

'There's a funny smell,' said Oscar, wrinkling his nose.

Sam sniffed. 'I can't smell anything.'

'Your nose doesn't work,' said Oscar. 'I know that smell and it means trouble.'

It was too late to go back now. Mum had rung the bell and Mrs Bentley-Wallop was opening the door. Sam hurried to join them. Their new neighbour wore quite a lot of make-up but that wasn't what caught Sam's attention – it was the enormous white cat sitting in her arms. It was as big as a pumpkin with green eyes that glittered when it saw Oscar.

'We live next door,' said Mum. 'We brought

you a little welcome present.'

'Oh, how terribly kind of you!' cried Mrs Bentley-Wallop in a plummy voice. 'Flapjack! I haven't eaten that in years!'

'Mum made it. Her flapjack's the best,' Sam informed her.

'I'm sure it tastes delicious!' said their neighbour. Her face fell when she spotted Oscar. 'Oh goodness, you have a dog!'

'Yes, this is Oscar,' Sam told her.

'Doesn't he have a lead?' asked Mrs Bentley-Wallop.

'He doesn't need one, he's very well behaved,' said Sam. He shot Oscar a warning look.

'Of course, I'm a cat-lover myself,' Mrs Bentley-Wallop was saying. 'This is Carmen, isn't she a darling pusskins?'

The big cat purred as Mrs Bentley-Wallop



stroked her head. She narrowed her eyes at Oscar whose ears twitched. Plainly he didn't think Carmen was a darling pusskins at all.

'I'd *love* to ask you in, but as you can see the place is such a state,' trilled Mrs Bentley-Wallop. 'And I'm afraid I don't have dogs in the house. Carmen doesn't like it and they do



make a mess.'

'Oscar isn't messy,' said Sam.

'Well, only a little,' laughed Mum. 'But he is quite clever, sometimes we wonder if he understands what we're saying.'

'Heavens! I hope not!' laughed Mrs Bentley-Wallop.

Carmen wriggled in her arms and she set her down on the floor.

'It's all right, princess,' she cooed. 'No one's going to hurt you. Carmen's a Persian, they're *terribly* sensitive.'

Sam didn't think Carmen looked sensitive. If anything she seemed to be enjoying the fact that Oscar couldn't get at her. She hid behind her owner's legs and peeped out now and then, playing a game of peek-a-boo.

'I'm sure Oscar wouldn't hurt her,' said Mum.

'Perhaps they'll be friends?'

Carmen dared to venture a little closer. She rubbed her back against her owner's legs, purring loudly and swishing her long tail. It was almost as if she was daring Oscar to come after her.

Oscar had seen enough. He barked.

'OSCAR!' cried Mum.

Mrs Bentley-Wallop scooped up Carmen in her arms and stepped back from the door.

'Well, perhaps I ought to get on,' she sighed. 'It was so sweet of you to pop round. I'm sure we'll bump into each other again.'

'Yes, of course . . .' began Mum – but the door had already closed.



They walked back down the path.

'Well that didn't go very well,' said Mum.

'I know,' said Sam. 'I'm not sure she even likes flapjack. And she called Oscar messy!'

'We should never have taken him,' said Mum.

'It wasn't his fault!' protested Sam. 'Carmen was showing off the whole time.'

'She's obviously nervous around dogs,' said Mum. 'You'd better keep Oscar away from her or there's going to be trouble.'



Oscar waited until Mum had gone inside and the door had closed.

'I warned you,' he said. 'I knew I smelled a cat, the worst kind too.'

'What's the worst kind?' asked Sam.

'The uppity kind,' replied Oscar.

Sam had never thought of cats as uppity,

although it was true you couldn't tell a cat what to do. Most dogs would happily fetch a stick if you threw one. A cat would just stare at you as if you'd lost your mind.

'Is she going to stay long?' asked Oscar.

'Probably,' said Sam. 'But there's nothing we can do about it. Anyway, what's so terrible about cats?'

'If you're asking that, you don't know many cats,' replied Oscar, darkly.

'Well you heard Mum, you'll just have to behave or you'll get us into trouble,' warned Sam.

Oscar gave him a look.

'I'm a dog,' he said. 'And dogs chase cats – if we didn't they'd get too uppity.'

CHAPTER 3

WALL GAMES

Over the next few days the Shillings' new neighbour settled in at Number 20. Mr Trusscot wasted no time in calling round with a large bunch of flowers. Unlike Sam and his mum, he was invited in and stayed for half an hour.

The two naked statues eventually appeared in the garden. They were a pair of plump angels, one holding a harp and the other a little bow and arrow. From Sam's house you got a good view of their backs and bare bottoms. He wondered what else Mrs Bentley-Wallop had planned for her garden – maybe a fountain or a boating lake?

However it was Carmen who was Sam's greatest concern. The big white cat appeared every morning and took a leisurely tour of her kingdom. Once she'd seen off any sparrows, she hopped up onto the wall and settled in her favourite spot overlooking the Shillings' garden. Her long white tail swished back and forth like a fan. This routine drove Oscar crazy. Carmen was sitting on 'his' wall where she was maddeningly just out of reach. To make matters worse, he was forbidden to bark or chase her off.

'She's doing it deliberately,' he grumbled.

'Take no notice,' Sam advised. 'She's only doing it to annoy you. Just ignore her.'

But Oscar couldn't ignore it. Up until now this part of Beach Road had been his private territory. Other dogs were welcome to visit but

he wasn't sharing it with some snooty-nosed cat.

Matters came to a head on the Tuesday after Mrs Bentley-Wallop arrived. Sam was keeping one eye on Oscar through the kitchen window when Carmen made her entrance. She hopped up onto the garden wall and padded along it, paying Oscar no attention. Oscar sat up. His eyes followed the cat, watching her every move.

'Sam, have you seen my ruby ring anywhere?' asked Mum.

'Er, what?' asked Sam, not really listening.

'I'm sure I left it in the bathroom last night, but now it's vanished,' said Mum. 'You're absolutely sure you haven't seen it?'

Sam looked round. 'I don't even know what it looks like,' he said.

'It's gold with a small red stone,' explained Mum. 'Are you listening to me, Sam?'

Out in the garden, Carmen did something she hadn't done before. She suddenly sprang onto the roof of the Shillings' shed. Oscar barked. This was going too far. The shed belonged to him, or at least to Mr Shilling, who used it as his workshop.

'Sorry,' said Sam, jumping up. 'I just need to check on Oscar a minute.'

By the time he got outside, things were getting out of hand. Oscar was barking excitedly. Carmen sat on the shed roof with her back to him, dangling her tail and swishing it back and forth. Oscar jumped up but the roof was too high to reach. Carmen gave him a pitying look and began to wash her paws. She was clearly enjoying the situation.

'Oscar! Come away,' cried Sam.

But Oscar had other ideas. He suddenly leapt onto the compost bin and from there managed to scramble onto the shed roof. Sam had no idea he could do that.

Carmen backed away up the sloping roof.



Now the tables had turned and Oscar had her trapped. He stood his ground, waiting to see what she would do. Carmen had reached the top of the roof and had nowhere to go.

Suddenly she did something unexpected. She sprang high over Oscar's head and landed on his back, digging in her claws. Oscar yelped in pain as she jumped off. In one great leap she made it back over the wall and into her own garden. Sam thought that was the end of the matter, but Oscar wasn't finished. No mean-eyed moggy was using him as a trampoline and getting away with it.

Sam ran to the wall, just in time to see Oscar land on Mrs Bentley-Wallop's lawn. Then the chase was on. A white ball of fur flew past with Oscar close behind. The two of them whizzed round the garden using the statues as

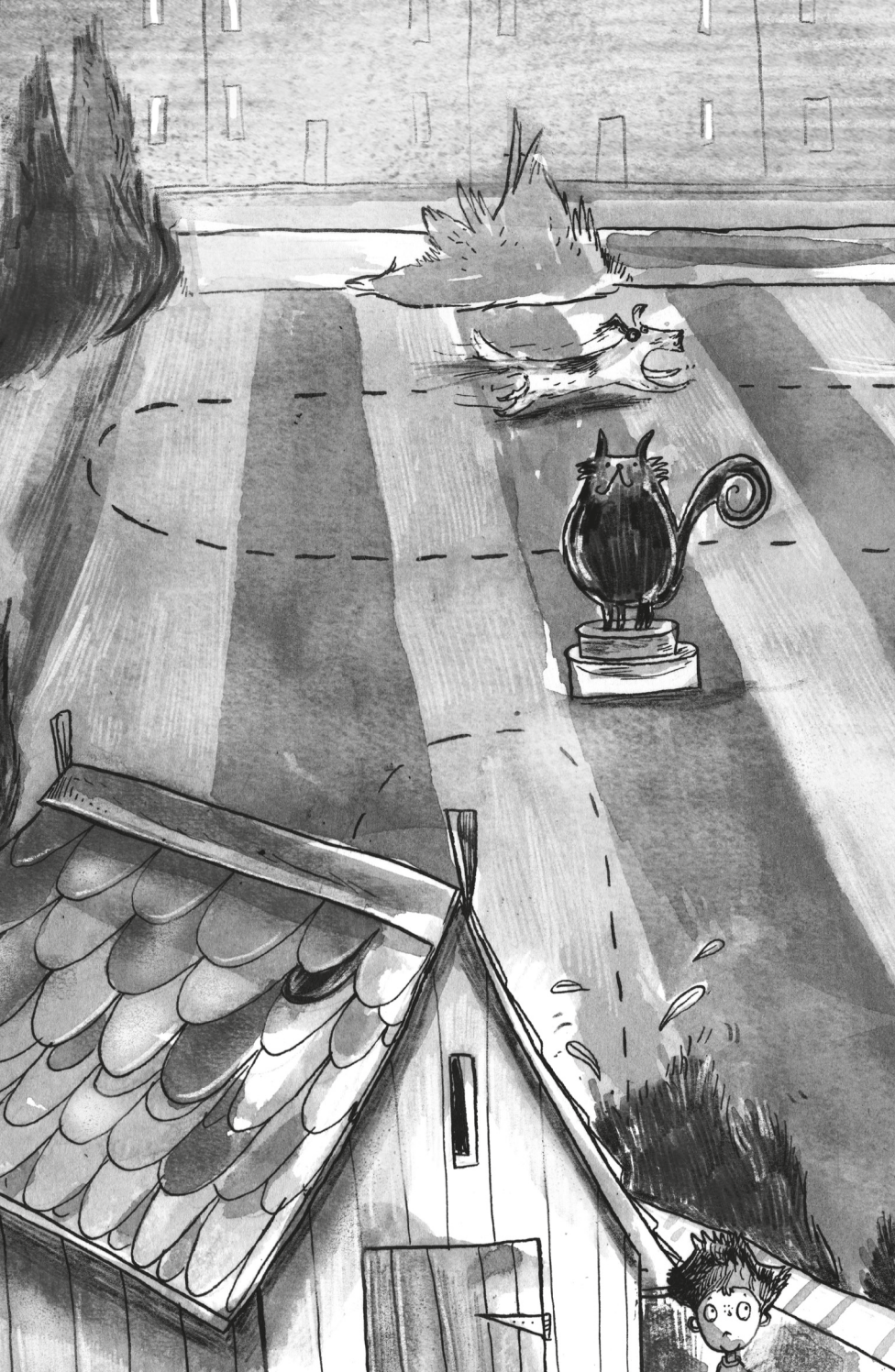
a roundabout. They shot under a garden bench and trampled through a bed of purple lavender.

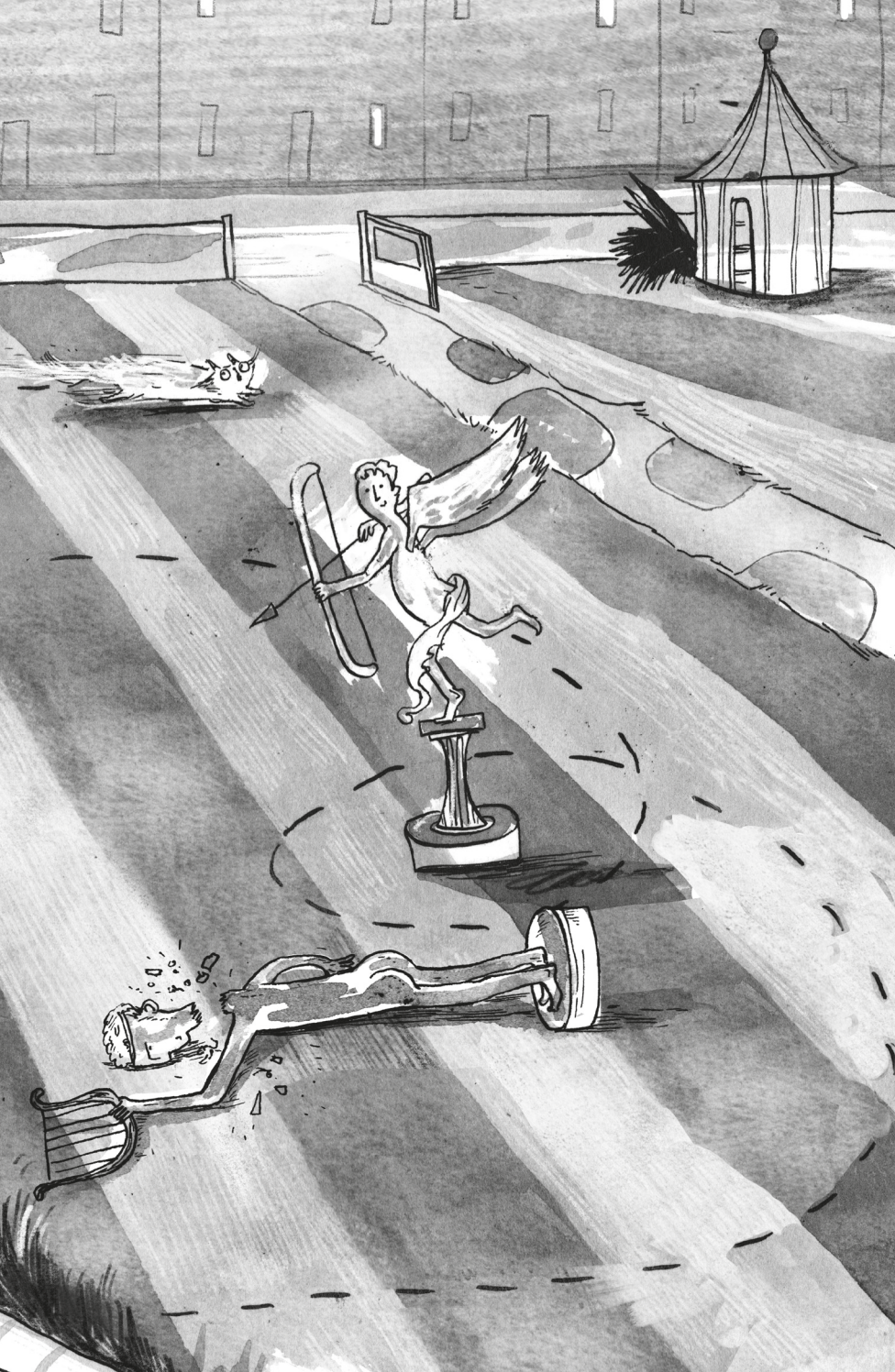
Finally, Carmen decided to make a stand. She hopped up onto a block, which supported one of the two statues. Sam didn't like the way this was going.

'OSCAR!' he cried.

But Oscar pretended not to hear. As Carmen yowled and darted away, he made a flying leap after her. Sam saw the statue wobble like a tower of jelly, then it toppled over and hit the ground.

He buried his face in his hands. The statue lay on its front with its bottom sticking in the air. Luckily, its arms and legs were still attached. The head, however, had rolled across the lawn where it was smiling up at the sky. Oscar trotted over and prodded it with his paw.





Sam felt a wave of panic. Oscar needed to get out of the garden before anyone saw him.

There was no sign of Carmen, who'd vanished from the scene of the crime. Sam wondered if there was time to climb over and drag the statue back onto its stand. But even if he succeeded, it would be pretty obvious it was missing a head. Maybe he could stick it back on with superglue?

'OSCAR!' he hissed as loudly as he dared. Oscar looked round. But before he could move a door banged open and footsteps crunched on the gravel. Mrs Bentley-Wallop stormed into view with a shoe in one hand. Sam ducked below the wall, out of sight.

'Out of my garden, you horrible beast!' roared Mrs Bentley-Wallop, sounding far less plummy and polite.

A high-heeled shoe flew over the wall and landed in a bush. Sam heard Oscar bark and race away. A minute later he trotted back in through the front gate, looking pleased with his morning's work.



For the rest of the day, Sam decided to keep well out of his parents' way. He called for Louie and they took Oscar to the park to play football. He didn't know how much Mrs Bentley-Wallop had seen but she was bound to make a complaint.

When they finally returned late that afternoon Sam's worst fears were confirmed. Through the window, he could see his mum and dad talking to someone. But it wasn't their next-door neighbour. It was Sergeant Wilkins from the police station. Sam knew he should

have come clean about the broken statue, but he never imagined that Mrs Bentley-Wallop would call the police!

He trailed into the lounge with Oscar at his heels. Dad looked up. 'Ah Sam, you know Sergeant Wilkins, don't you?' he said.

Sam hung his head. 'It was an accident,' he said. 'He didn't mean it.'

'Who?' frowned Mum. 'The sergeant's been telling us about a burglary.'

Sam stared. 'A burglary? But I thought . . . never mind,' he mumbled.

So the police weren't here about Oscar at all! Maybe Mrs Bentley-Wallop hadn't even noticed that one of her statues was missing a head?

'Anyway, if you think of anything get in touch,' the sergeant was saying. 'I just thought I'd better warn you.'

From what Sam gathered, a house on Hillcroft Drive had been burgled last night. Only one thing had been taken – a gold necklace with a teardrop diamond. Stranger still, the police hadn't found any damage or signs of a break in.

'It's certainly an odd one,' said Sergeant Wilkins. 'But don't you worry, we'll get to the bottom of it.'

'Didn't you say you'd lost a ring?' Sam reminded his mum.

'Yes, but I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. It'll turn up soon,' said Mum.

'Well, if it doesn't, let me know,' said the sergeant.

Sam could hardly take it in. Little Bunting wasn't the kind of place where robberies usually took place – unless you counted seagulls pinching ice-creams out of peoples' hands.

'Anyway, thanks for the tea, Mrs Shilling,' said Sergeant Wilkins, getting to his feet. He headed into the hall with the rest of them following.

'Oh yes, I knew there was something else,' he said, turning round. 'We had a complaint from your neighbour.'

Sam's heart sunk.

'Not Fusspot again!' groaned Dad.

'No, a Mrs Beastly-Wallop,' said the sergeant, squinting at his own handwriting. 'Trespassing in her garden, she says.'

'Sam!' cried Mum.

Sam stared at the hall carpet. He caught sight of Oscar's head poking round the lounge door.

'Actually it wasn't Sam, it was Oscar,' said Sergeant Wilkins. 'I'm told he's been terrorising

your neighbour's cat. He broke a statue, too.'

'Only the head!' protested Sam.

Mum and Dad both stared at him.

'So you *do* know about this,' cried Mum. 'Why on earth didn't you tell us?'

'I was going to,' sighed Sam. 'But it wasn't Oscar's fault. Carmen started it, she was on the shed roof . . .'

'Nevertheless, I'm afraid you'll have to pay for the damage,' said the sergeant. 'Your neighbour's not very happy. If I were you I'd keep Oscar out of her garden in future.'



The front door closed at last and Sam was left to face his parents.

'Honestly Sam!' groaned Mum, shaking her head. 'Why did you let Oscar go next door?'

'I couldn't stop him!' protested Sam. 'Dogs chase cats, they can't help it.'

'Well he'll have to learn to help it,' said Dad, grimly. 'I'm afraid from now on Oscar will just have to be kept on a lead like other dogs.'

'*ON A LEAD?*' cried Sam.

Oscar walked off in disgust, muttering something under his breath. Fortunately no one heard him.

'Sometimes you'd almost swear he understands what we're saying,' said Mum.

