



History

'Jane Sawyer?'

Jane recognised the teacher walking towards her.

'Miss? Miss Reynolds?'

'Oh good, Jane, you remembered me. It's so hard on a first day at school isn't it? I've been asked to find you out and make sure you know where to go.'

The teacher held out her hand and Jane stared at it before realising that she actually expected her to hold it. She was fourteen for goodness sake. What would the other kids think if she turned up holding a teacher's hand?

'Well, er, follow me then, Jane. We have a little ritual here first and last day of every term. It will give you an idea of what Brooklands is all about.'

Brooklands was smaller than her old school, but had big grounds. Mum said one of the reasons they had moved was to get her out of Westgate. The place with all her friends.

They walked over the hard play area and onto the big field. Over in one corner, by some trees, children were congregating - mostly girls but a few boys too. They all looked so stuck up in their uniforms. Jane glanced down at herself, disgusted at the grey pleated skirt, the white blouse and maroon blazer and, worst of all, the grey and maroon striped tie. Mum had been moved to tears for

entirely different reasons when Jane had come down stairs wearing it this morning.

'Not like the old place with the horrid sweatshirts and trainers, eh Janey?'

The crowd parted a little to let Miss Reynolds through.

So polite, thought Jane.

Even so it was clear that there was competition to get the best view. If it hadn't been for Miss Reynolds being there she could have imagined that she was back in Westgate about to watch a fight. Four cherry trees seemed to mark out an area that was the centre of attention and no-one entered the pitch until a cheer went up and seven girls, all older than Jane, walked out into the middle. Three of them held skipping ropes.

Skipping! She rolled her eyes, not that anyone was watching her. She hadn't done skipping since she was eight years old.

The girls laid their blazers down under the trees and a tall girl with long dark hair took one end of the rope and spun two elegant cartwheels across the pitch with the rope trailing behind. The girls applauded. A couple of boys whistled. Jane saw Miss Reynolds smile and clap with the rest.

A shorter, blonde girl stood with legs either side of the rope and held her hand up for silence.

'As you can see Kelly Jenkins left at the end of last year so we need an eighth. It's been three terms since anyone new made it, girls. You know the rules - anyone wanting to try the History Song line up by Bella. She'll call you in to try out when the time comes. Okay? Okay!'

The four girls not on rope or jumping began to clap and then started to chant.

Brooklands' girls can do no wrong,

Swing it low and swing it strong

Rope it short or rope it long

This is Brooklands' History Song.

The rope was swinging in an easy loop with the jumper leaping on the beats. On the last line she did a cartwheel out but the song went on, changing tempo, as another girl jumped in. This was an old rhyme that Jane remembered from long ago.

*I like coffee, I like tea,
I like Lexy to jump with me.
One, two, three, change places, seven, eight, nine, change places.*

Even though she knew the rhyme she noticed that the girls weren't just doing the easy jumps she remembered. As Lexy jumped in next she leapfrogged the girl who jumped out and did some complex cross leg jumps as they repeated the rhyme twice more, each new girl performing acrobatics in and out of the rope.

After *Coffee and Tea* they switched to another song all to the same clapping beat and this time one of the line of new girls jumped in. But she only lasted a few jumps then tumbled out laughing. The seven carried on without a break to their rhythm. It was obvious that each routine was carefully rehearsed and some the steps were incredibly intricate, especially when another rope joined the first, so close that they would have tangled together if the swinging hadn't been in time. Jane recognised a few songs, while others were completely new to her. Some were about Newbrook town itself and some about the school. She spotted a variation on *Jack Be Nimble* but the Brooklands version was more complicated and involved two girls throwing another high while they did the technical skips

at the end: *Mumble, Kick, Sizzler, Split.*

Several more new girls tried out. The next two lasted only a few swings before falling out laughing. The fourth girl lasted through five rhymes before jumping out herself to a round of applause. Miss Reynolds turned to Jane.

'That's Liz Connor. She doesn't know the whole Song yet but she'll make the team one day soon.'

The performance lasted nearly an hour and Jane couldn't believe that the seven girls had the strength and stamina to go on that long doing the precision jumps and gymnastics.

'Won't we miss lessons, Miss Reynolds?'

'It's a Brooklands' tradition, Jane. On the first day of every term we miss the first lesson for the History Song. It's been going on nearly a hundred years although that first verse, the bit about the Brooklands' History Song, is only seventy years old, I believe. It really needs a team of eight to do it properly but it's not often we have eight girls who can do it all so perfectly. Last year, before Kelly left, we had a full eight for the first time in years. Next year the captain, Vikki, leaves although it looks like little Liz might be able to step in. When she does she gets to add her own routine see. The girls who make the team make their own bit of history and it gets longer each year.'

An hour before Jane would have given anything to be back at Westgate, swapping gossip with the girls, exchanging glances with the boys. Suddenly she knew where she wanted to be. She looked around at the old Victorian school buildings, the ivy growing up the walls facing the field and she imagined that she could see girls streaming out in pinafore dresses and boaters, like she had seen in the old pictures on the walls the day they looked around. All

running to the old cherry trees, ropes in hand. For the first time that day, she smiled - rather determinedly it seemed to Miss Reynolds. One day Jane Sawyer would write her own verse of the Brooklands' History Song.

