

Scene 1

Sam had a book in one hand and the front door knob in the other when his mom called out from the front room.

"Sam, are you going outside?"

"Just to read out on the porch."

Sam's mom, Emily, had the day off from her nursing job and was spending it cross-stitching on a very comfy red sofa. Sam's house was built a long time ago when space wasn't a problem in a town that never had too many people. There were six very big rooms on each floor of the two-story house, with a long a hallway connecting each six. She walked into the hallway from the front room, which was right next to the front door.

"Put on your jacket, will you?" Emily asked Sam.

Emily reached up to the coat rack and took off Sam's favorite jacket. It was black and soft with two red stripes running down each arm. Emily called it Sam's very own racing jacket.

"But, Mom, it's not that cold."

"For me?" she asked with a smile.

Sam's mom wore her brown hair in a short bob that Sam always thought went really well with her smile. She was very tall and thin, which his dad said came from running track for so many years. Sam never really knew what track meant.

Sam smiled back with an "Ok" as he took the jacket from her. He slipped it on as she held his book. Sam's hair mimicked every movement he made. Unlike Emily's short hair, Sam's hair was a wild mess of red curls. Emily couldn't remember the last time she had even tried to comb it. Neither could Sam, which he quite liked.

Emily handed the book back, saying, "Great Choice, Sam. Enjoy!"

"I will -- promise!" he said over his shoulder as he walked outside. Before Emily closed the door, Albert slinked outside, too.

Scene 2

The second Sam stepped outside, he was glad to have a jacket. Winter was officially gone, but Spring still hadn't fully sprung into the gentle warmth that he loved so much. He walked across the light blue porch until it gave way to the house's front brick steps. The blue of the porch highlighted the bright pink Tony and Emily painted the house. The pink was so bright it was the first thing any friend or visitor commented on. When they asked "why pink?", Tony always responded with just a wink and a smile.

The porch had two brick ledges with white tops, and five white columns that supported the porch roof. Sam's favorite spot to read was on the first brick step from the porch, on the left side. He never really thought about why he always chose the left side, but it was probably so he could be the first to see his mom drive in after a shift at the hospital, if he was still awake.

Above Sam, on the ledge, was a small but vivacious Japanese Red Maple tree. It always provided the best shade from the sun, even though Sam would have enjoyed the warmth today. He zipped up his jacket and got comfortable in his favorite spot, watching several cars drive past. His school friends always thought it was too bad the house was so close to Chase Street, the busiest street in town. But Sam liked the noise; the same way he liked to listen to the rain fall during a storm.

Sam had finished the first sentence on the fortieth page of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn when a black furry something bumped into his hand. Sam looked up from his book to find Albert staring down at him from the porch with big, yellow eyes. Albert was a big, black alley cat with dense fur and a long tail. His ears were a little small for such a big cat, but Albert was too old to let that bother him.

If he were any other cat, Sam would have guessed Albert wanted to cuddle. But Emily was the only person Albert cuddled with. And even then, the big, black alley cat didn't cuddle that often. So Sam gave Albert a quick head scratch and went back to his book.

Albert didn't let a minute go by before bumping Sam's hand again. Sam looked up from the first sentence on the forty-first page, this time using a finger as a bookmark and closing his book. Albert was not the type of cat to seek attention for no reason. Something was up. Sam and Albert stared at each other.

A 7-year old with curly red hair and a black cat nearly as big as Sam having a staring contest was no doubt a strange sight to anyone walking by. But Sam was used to how Albert liked to communicate. Sam knew he had to just keep on staring until whatever Albert felt should be done was done. If there was one animal who deserved to speak, it was Albert. He always had so much to say.

Sam did his best to think about what Albert could want. But he didn't have a clue!

Sam couldn't imagine what Albert wanted. All he could think about was finding out if Huck and Jim actually set off on the river together [SYNCHRONISE REFERENCE TO GETTING ON THE RIVER WITH THE PAGES MENTIONED]! He was just about to tear his eyes away when Albert meowed. Albert's meow wasn't something you could just ignore. It was loud and deep, like a foghorn -- but from a cat.

When Albert meowed, Sam knew there was no chance of reading again until Albert's puzzle was solved. Sam laid Huck Finn down, trying his best to remember the page number he was on. So they continued their staring contest; Albert waiting for Sam to think of the right thing and Sam trying his hardest to think of the right thing.

"You know, I bet this has something to do with Mom, doesn't it?"

Albert's tiny ears immediately perked up. Albert was only ever really concerned about Emily.

"Yes!" Sam exclaimed.

Sam was delighted he'd figured out a part of Albert's puzzle. But of course, he had just found that what Albert wanted had something to do with his mom, not what exactly.

"But, what about Mom, Al?" Sam asked.

If ever there was a moment a cat should have been able to roll his eyes, this was it. In

fact, Sam couldn't be entirely sure that Albert hadn't rolled his eyes. And then, just like that, Albert got up and left.

"Hey, wait!" Sam cried out.

Sam wasn't used to Alfred giving up on him so easily. But Albert turned to look at Sam with yellow eyes peering over his black shoulder.

It was as if Albert was saying, "Wait yourself. I'm going to try something else."

Albert lumbered across the porch, over to the white ledge opposite where Sam was sitting. On this ledge Sam's Dad, Tony, kept three clay pots arranged in a triangle. Tony loved bright colours so he filled each pot with a collection of yellow daffodils, red tulips and vibrant bluebonnets. Albert looked back at Sam to make sure he was watching -- he was!

Albert leaned onto the edge of the pot closest to him, which contained the tulips. Albert nosed his way through the red flowers with his tail twitching all the while. Albert was looking for something, his head occasionally surfacing from the sea of flowers. Albert's tail twirled suddenly in a circle, his head ducked into the fiery red flowers, and emerged with a red tulip head hanging from his mouth!

Albert perched his front paws on the brown lip of the pot, wiggled his bottom, and looked for a place to set his forelegs down. With a heavy "oomph!" Albert found himself on the steps and padded his way over to Sam. Albert plopped himself down right in front of Sam, looking up at the 7-year old. Albert sat like a Sphinx, looking at Sam and twitching his tail back and forth, quite pleased with himself. Sam knew it was up to him now, even though he still had no idea what Albert was trying to say.

The sight of his mom's big cat with a flower in his mouth made Sam think of a flamenco dancer from one of the old black and white musicals Tony and Emily loved to watch. But he was pretty sure Albert didn't want him to think about flamenco dancers. The flower was Albert's big clue.

"But what does a flower mean?", Sam wondered out loud.

Sam thought. *You give someone flowers when they get married.* But he didn't know anyone getting married. Sam was only 7, after all. *You receive flowers when you graduate from school.* But Sam didn't know anyone who was close to graduating! *And you might receive flowers on your birthday.* Did he forget a birthday?

If a flower and a birthday were parts of the puzzle, what was the final piece? Sam was so lost in thinking he didn't notice the sun setting. It wasn't quite Spring enough for the sun to be out very late. But Albert did notice how dark it was getting and started to flick his tail faster. He even put a paw on Sam's knee to get his attention. That did it.

"Albert!" he shouted. "I have it!"

The cat looked more than a little concerned at Sam's shout.

"You're the final piece of the puzzle! Someone has a birthday, which you told me about with the flower. And that someone is Mom -- because you're Mom's favorite cat!"

Sam let out a big whoop of delight. Albert dropped the flower stem from his mouth, and

almost looked like he was smiling. But then Sam realized his mom's birthday was tomorrow! It's never fun when you suddenly remember something you need to do when there's very little time left to do it. He looked at his Incredibles watch: almost 6 PM!

Sam needed to make a decision, and fast!

Sam grabbed his book and raced to the front door, opening it. Albert followed him. But instead of following him into the house, the black cat sat next to the white rocking chair that was to the right of the door.

Scene 3

"Mom!" Sam shouted as he put his book down on the table just inside the house and below the coat rack.

"No need to shout, Sam," came her response.

Emily was still in the living room, right next to the front door. She was still cross-stitching and laid her project down, and patted the empty sofa spot next to her.

Sam shook his head, blurting out, "May I go to Uncle Jon's?"

"You've got ten minutes before Jon locks the door. But why do you..." She trailed off and smiled. "Just make sure you're home before dinner at 6."

"I will!"

Sam gave his mom a quick kiss and raced outside, shutting the door behind him with a solid clap.

Sam leaped down the steps, jumping them all at once. He landed lightly, but not lightly enough to hear Albert land right beside him. Sam ran up his driveway, passing his parent's red car and the lamppost at the drive's entrance. He turned to run to the left through the back yard. He had to make it to the shop as fast as he could!

Sam ran across the recently mowed yard, sadly not stomping on any fallen leaves, until he reached the end of the white picket fence that surrounded the yard. He brushed past the Crepe Myrtle bush, grabbed two of the pickets from their points and put his foot onto the bottom rail. Sam had to squeeze his right red boot between the two white pickets to make sure he could push off the bottom rail. Actually, these weren't just any red boots. They were red *galoshes* his auntie Clare from Wales had given him for Christmas. He hadn't stopped wearing them since!

Hoisting himself up onto the top rail, Sam jumped over the fence and onto the sidewalk. Sam didn't notice Albert joining him there. Thankfully he didn't have far to run to the store, which was just down the street from Sam's house on Chase St.

Sam's uncle owned the best flower shop in town, at least as far as Sam was concerned. He reached the shop's two front glass doors in no time at all. Each door was covered in etchings of ships. A viking long ship filled the left door, which no one ever opened. The long ship had its oars out, straining against a huge wave that looked like it was about to throw the ship up into the air. The ship in the right door was a large sailing cutter that looked to be riding deep in the same wave that was giving the longship such problems. While the

ships were quite different, they did share a peculiar trait -- each was overflowing with many colorful flowers.

Sam loved looking at the ships, especially since he helped Jon paint the flowers! But he had no time to spare and pulled open the right hand door without a second glance at the pretty doors.

Scene 4

"Uncle Jon, are you here?" Sam called out to the seemingly empty shop.

The door bell's cherry chime accompanied Sam's voice with its airy tone. The bell also masked Albert's snarl when the closing door almost caught his tail. Albert flicked his tail in annoyance as Sam looked around the shop, both looking for his uncle and appreciating the rainbow of flowers on display. Sam could never tell how big Jon's shop was, because he could never tell from the inside if there were any actual walls. Jon took great pride in every nook and cranny with every color and type of flower.

"In the back arranging some flowers." came Jon's familiar, deep voice. "Come on back, Sammy!"

Sam headed toward the back of the shop to find his uncle. Walking through the store was as close as he could imagine walking through the Amazon jungle would be like. The smells were as if you were standing outside just after it stopped raining -- fresh, clean, and new. And the whole store looked as if you had stepped into the middle of the rainbow, with more green than any other color, of course. Sam didn't know the names for all of the flowers, but there wasn't a flower Jon grew and sold that he didn't like.

Little did Sam know that Albert was thinking about the Amazon jungle as he amongst the flowers as well. Though, really, Albert prowled more than he walked. Albert was thinking that if this were a real jungle, there'd be so many birds for him to chase. But there weren't, so Albert had to content himself with all the unusual flower smells. Not that he gave up hope he'd find a bird hiding among the petals, mind you.

As Sam neared back of the building he found his uncle hunched over a long white table in a small alcove Jon called his work room. The table was covered in vases of every size, ribbons of every color, and, of course, a variety of flowers. Jon used the table to do all his arranging of the flowers his customers wanted.

Sam was about to announce his presence when he saw some very strange flowers, so strange that a shout to his uncle vanished like a whisper. The big display was of many of the same small flower. But one especially drew his attention. The flower had five petals that were a very bright pink. Each petal had a long strip of muddy red, which was blocked on both sides by small strips of white. Sam leaned in so close to one flower that his nose almost came away yellow from the pollen. The way the petals curved together, the flower looked like a mouth hungry to gobble him up!

"Uncle Jon, what's this flower called?"

"Eh...?" came the reply as Jon looked up from his work. "Oh, Sam. There you are."

Jon set down the flowers he was working with and came out of the back room. Jon was a big man, with a big bushy blond beard and happy blue eyes that appeared to be laughing all

the time. He leaned against the frame of the door that lead to the work room to look at his nephew staring at the vibrant flowers.

His deep voice boomed through the small store, "Ah! Those little beauties. Do you like them?"

"They're kinda strange, but yes," Sam said, looking up at Jon. "They're fun!"

"That they are." Jon leaned down to look at the flowers with Sam. "They're called boat orchids. But you see how the openings look like mouths. I'd rather call them dragon orchids. In fact, I might just have to.

"Now what are you doing here, little sir?" Jon asked, straightening up. "On a Friday no less. Nearly dinner time, too."

Sam thought about what how he had figured out what he had forgotten, with Albert's help of course. He didn't quite know how tell his uncle without it seeming more than a little silly. And then there was the jolt of it almost be 6 o'clock. How much more time did he have before dinner?

But Jon saved him from those thoughts, with a conspiratorial smile and wink, "I bet I can guess why you're here."

Sam didn't believe it, looking up at his tall uncle and crossed his arms to prove it. "No you can't!"

Jon laughed to himself, crossing his arms to mimic Sam.

"I bet I can. If I can, you come help me tomorrow on Saturday with my flower arrangements. And if I can't, you can have whatever you'd like from the store, Sammy. The world's your oyster. Deal?"

"Deal!"

The two shook on the bet quite solemnly, Sam's hand completely disappearing in Jon's.

Jon straightened up, "So, it's your mom's birthday and you haven't a got her a present?"

Sam looked up at his towering uncle with complete surprise.

"A viking always knows, Sam!" Jon exclaimed, touching his nose

Sam smiled in spite of his surprise. Jon's laugh was so deep and loud, it echoed through the small store. Whenever he heard it, Sam was immediately happy. Almost like a warm blanket on a cold night. It was also nice to be reminded that his uncle was his own personal viking, a family joke about his uncle's Scandinavian ancestry.

Jon leaned against the door-frame.

"So what kind of flowers would you like?"

"Well, mom loves pink. And the orchids are mostly pink in them; and they look like dragons!"

"Does your mom like dragons?" Jon asked, clearly skeptical.

"No..." Sam hesitated. "The dragons are for me. But she will like the pink. And it looks pretty with the red and the white!"

Jon laughed, "That they do, brilliant boy. So my lovely orchids in a bunch. Anything else?"

Sam paused to think, looking around the store to help him. He caught sight of Albert's tail disappearing behind a big orange bush, which made him smile. Albert must have followed him here to help him find a present! Then he remembered his uncle was waiting for an answer.

"Don't you think the dragon flowers will be enough?"

"Could be," Jon said, clearly thinking now himself. "But one thing I like to do with my flowers is to combine not only colours but different shapes. You said yourself how the orchids have a lot of pink, a little bit of red, and the tiniest bit of white on the petals. You see?"

Sam looked closer at the little dragons and nodded.

"Sure."

"Maybe this, then" Jon suggested.

Jon went to a shelf just behind Sam. He picked up a big pot filled with a wispy looking plant. Sam didn't think it looked like a flower, but on top of each green stalk it looked like there was a piece of lace.

"This, my boy, is Queen Anne's Lace."

"Cool!" Sam said, excited to hear the name made so much sense since the top of the plant looked like lace.

Sam's mom always brought out a whole bunch of lace for special occasions.

"But, Uncle Jon, it doesn't look like a flower. Is it? And who's Queen Anne?"

"Remember," Jon replied, "I sell all types of plants, not just flowers. And almost all plants flower, not just the pretty things everyone thinks of for decoration."

Sam nodded, as if he understood it all. His red hair bobbed slightly with each nod.

"As for Queen Anne, you should ask your dad about her. I'm sure it'll be a fun story to hear him tell."

Sam thought about when he could next ask his dad for a story. *Bedtime!* While Sam thought about who this Anne lady could be, Jon gathered a bunch of the dragon orchids and then Queen Anne's Lace in each hand.

"Come with me, kiddo," Jon said over his shoulder as he walked back to the work room.

Jon laid the two bunches on the white cutting table, pushing aside the pretty arrangement he'd been working on before Sam's arrival. He then lifted his nephew up to sit on the table off to Jon's right side so Sam could see properly. Sam shifted himself away from the many green stalks that littered the table so he wouldn't stain his pants. His mom could never understand how Sam's pants got so dirty. To be honest, neither could Sam. So he figured the least he could do was to take this one opportunity to avoid something dirty.

"Now watch this, Sam."

With that, Jon went to work putting the orchids and Queen Anne's lace together. He began by taking a huge handful of the orchids. Sam figured he couldn't even hold that many in two hands cupped together. Jon looked over at Sam and gave him a big wink.

With the dragon orchids in his left hand, Jon picked one stalk of Queen Anne's lace. Jon thought for a moment before pushing it into the orchid bunch. He did this several times, and in no time at all, Jon held up the flowers and nodded to himself. He then flipped his wrist so Sam could see the arrangement.

"So what do you think, Sammy?"

Sam thought for a quick second, knowing immediately his mom would enjoy all the colours and textures his uncle had brought together. After that, he thought about how Jon was the only person who call him Sammy. Sam often got lost in his own thoughts.

Remembering his uncle was waiting for him, Sam smiled widely, "She'll love it!"

"Perfection, kiddo," came Uncle Jon's reply as he and Sam high-fived.

"Now, do you want to put these pretty things in a vase?"

"Mom has so many vases. Could we just tie a bow around it?"

"Always with a good idea, Sam."

In the middle of the long, white table, Jon kept 10 rolls of ribbon to tie together the flowers he sold. There was red, blue, white, black, orange, pink, purple, yellow, grey, and a very sparkly white number. Sam pointed at the pink, since it was his mom's favorite color.

Jon thought for a few seconds.

"Well, we already have a lot of pink. And a lot of white now with the lace. What do you think about red?"

Sam didn't really understand how colors matched just yet. He kept looking from the ribbons to the flowers, unable to make up his mind. As he tried, Albert came into the work room, clearly done with his explorations. Albert caught Sam's eye with a subtle nod. That was all Sam needed.

"If Al likes it, and you do too, then we'll go for the red!"

Jon let out a big belly laugh, and cut off a long piece of the bright red ribbon. After putting the flower bunch on the table, he looped the fabric around the flowers.

"Now, Sam, put your finger right where the ribbon crosses itself."

Sam did, and with two quick turns, his uncle tied a very smart looking bow around the flowers.

Jon helped Sam down from the table and placed the large bunch of flowers in Sam's outstretched hands. The flower heads towered over his own head. Sam was the smallest in his class at school, though his hair almost made him the tallest. He gripped each elbow with his opposite hand to make sure he wouldn't drop his mom's birthday present.

They walked to the front of the store, Jon's big hand on Sam's head guiding all the way. Jon held open the front door for Sam who could barely see.

"You sure you got it, Sam?" Jon asked, a little concerned.

"Nope!" he replied enthusiastically. "But Al will help me get home, won't you?"

Albert replied with a big meow.

Jon laughed, and scratched behind the big cat's ears. "I'm sure he will, little man. Don't forget about tomorrow to help me sort out the new arrangements."

Scene 5

Sam and Albert had already started walking home.

"I won't!" Sam shouted out through the mesh of flowers in his face. "Thanks again!"

Sam and Albert were quite a sight as they walked down Elm St., which connected the flower shop with Chase. It's not every day that people saw a 7-year carrying a bouquet of bright flowers nearly as big as him; to say nothing of that 7-year old with bright red galoshes and a shock of curly hair being led by the biggest cat they'd ever seen. At Chase St. Albert made sure Sam turned right onto the sidewalk on Chase St. instead of straight out into the middle of the intersection!

Sam couldn't see, but he could hear the roar of an van's engine as it sped past through the intersection. "Thanks Albert!"

Albert meowed back in reply, though it could have easily been a shout at the speeding van to watch out for a red head carrying flowers that were nearly a foot over his head!

Some people, the cat no doubt thought to himself, shaking his fury head.

Even though Sam was blind from the flowers, when they were close enough even he could see the front door through the flower stalks. He let out a WHOOP -- they made it!

"But wait," Sam wondered aloud. "My hands are full. How am I going to get in?"

Scene 6

Suddenly the door opened, with a smooth but deep voice behind it. "Well, I wonder who ordered flowers?"

"Dad!" Sam shouted.

He might not have been able to see his father, but he'd recognize his voice anywhere. His dad, Tony, had an accent unlike any he'd ever heard before. Well, except from Sam's cousins in Wales, where his dad was from.

Tony bent down and separated the flowers ever so slightly so he could see his son's face. Sam saw the familiar big glasses, wispy black hair, and lightly tanned skin. Emily was always jealous of Tony's ability to look like he had a tan, no matter the presence of the sun.

"Did you have fun with Jon?"

"I did!" Sam replied. We even found something for mom's birthday. But how did you know I was there?"

"Jon rang when you left and mentioned you had your hands full and might need some help getting into the house. He was right, but he didn't say how pretty the flowers you picked are. Your mom is going to love them!"

"Thanks," Sam said excitedly. "But since her birthday isn't until tomorrow, can you help me hide them? Maybe in my room or something..." Sam trailed off as his dad started chuckling.

"Sam, my forgetful boy -- her birthday is today! Why do you think I've been cooking all day?"

Sam couldn't hide the relief in his voice, "So I don't have to hide them?"

Tony laughed even more, "They're doing a better job of hiding you than I think you could do of hiding them.

"Now why don't you go find your mom. I think she snuck into the kitchen when I came to the door. She might even be sampling my chocolate eclairs, which I think you should help her with. How does that sound?"

"Great!"

Tony opened the door for Sam to dart through. But before Sam could get very far, he turned around remembering something his uncle had said.

"Hey, dad, who is Queen Anne?"

Seeing his dad's confused face, Sam added, "You know, the one with the lace."

Thinking, Tony put together his son's unintentional riddle. He laughed, since he could only see his son's hair, arms and legs, everything else being so well hidden by the flowers.

"The story of Queen Anne's lace? I think that'll be perfect for tonight's story."

"Cool," Sam said, satisfied with having to wait. There were chocolate eclairs to be had!

Sam ran to into the house, toward the kitchen and his mom. He even started singing "Happy Birthday" as he caught sight of his mom by the kitchen sink, licking some chocolate icing off her fingers.

Tony smiled, turning away from his running son and back to the big black cat still sitting in the door frame.

"Good job, Al," was all he said, giving Albert a big scratch behind each each.

"Now let's get inside before all the eclairs are gone."

Albert meowed his agreement and the two disappeared behind the dark mahogany door of 106 Chase St. The door, surrounded by the pink walls and blue porch, reflected some of the colors in the oval of stained glass in its middle.

The odd door with glass in it closed that day on Sam and Albert's adventure. But don't you worry, it would soon open again for Sam and his friends on Chase St.