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Opening extract from
**Starmaker's Club:
Sam in the Spotlight**

Written by
Anne-Marie Conway

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Sam
in the
Spotlight

The text "Sam in the Spotlight" is centered and written in a grey, rounded, cursive-style font. The word "Sam" is on the top line, "in the" is on the second line, and "Spotlight" is on the third line. The word "Spotlight" has a yellow glow effect. The text is surrounded by several decorative elements: grey stars of various sizes, grey musical notes, and grey flowers. Two of the letters in "Spotlight", the 'i' and the 'l', have a small white starburst graphic above them.



sam in the Spotlight

Anne-Marie Conway



USBORNE



For everyone at Full Circle -
my inspiration for the Star Makers series.
Miss you loads! x

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My favourite book ever when I was a little girl was *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss. Not because I like weird food or anything, but because of the opening lines: *I am Sam. Sam I am.* I bet I thought Dr. Seuss had written it just for me! My big sister Crystal used to read it to me over and over until I knew every word by heart. We would cuddle up together on my bed, with my beautiful kitten Bella, and I'd join in with all the rhymes. And then, when I learned to read by myself, I would read it out loud to Mum or Dad or Auntie Mags – or anyone else who was willing to listen. Crystal says I used to wear this silly red hat just like Sam in the book and whenever she read it to me I would always



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shout out the words, “*I am Sam! Sam I am!*” as if I was the most important person in the world.

I actually found my old copy of *Green Eggs and Ham* today, stuffed at the back of my bookshelf. I was sure I’d given it away years ago, to a school jumble sale or something, but there it was squashed between my Oxford dictionary and one of my Jacqueline Wilson books.

I took it down off the shelf and wiped away the dust. I’d read it so many times the pages were almost furry; all soft and curled up at the edges. Tucked inside the front cover was a photo. It was of me, Crystal *and* Bella – all sitting on my bed – reading *Green Eggs and Ham*.

I stared and stared at the photo. I’m wearing my little red hat just like Crystal said and I’ve got this look of total happiness on my face. Crystal’s got her arm round me and she’s laughing into the camera, her eyes sparkly and

bright. *Crystal by name and Crystal by nature*, Dad always used to say. She must’ve been about eight in the photo, but she already looks so grown-up for her age.

I rushed downstairs to show Mum. I don’t know why but I just wanted her to see how happy we were. I burst into the living room shouting, “*I am Sam! Sam I am!*” like I was three again. Mum glanced up from her ironing and gave me a tight smile.

“Hey, look what I found,” I said, holding the photo up to show her. “It’s me in my silly red hat, remember?”

“What do you think you’re doing, Sam?” She snatched the photo out of my hand and slapped it face down on the ironing board. “I thought you said you were sorting your things out for school. Term starts next week and I want you to be properly organized.”

“I know, I was, but then I came across my old *Green Eggs and Ham* book and this photo

was stuck inside and it just got me thinking about Crystal and..." I trailed off.

Mum hates it when I talk about Crystal. She left home four months ago, the day after her eighteenth birthday, and ever since then I only have to mention her name and Mum goes off on one.

"This is all part of your problem," she grumbled, waving the iron about in the air. "I send you upstairs to do one simple job and two seconds later you've got caught up doing something completely different. That's what your teachers keep saying, isn't it? That you can't concentrate."

"No they don't." I picked up the photo and started backing out of the door. "Who actually said that anyway? Who said I can't concentrate?"

Mum set the iron down, sighing heavily. "Look, the point is, Sam, you're going into Year Eight and you're a clever girl. It's time to

knuckle down and show us what you're capable of, isn't it, Dave?" She looked over at my dad. He was sitting across the room with Bella on his lap, reading the paper and humming the same tune over and over. He's been funny since Crystal left as well. It's like he's there but not there. I could probably dance around the room wearing a black bin liner, with a bucket on my head, and he still wouldn't look up.

Mum strode over to him and pulled the paper down. "Dave! Are you even listening to me? I was just saying..."

I took the opportunity to slip out of the room. When Mum gets in a mood like that she could easily go on all night. We used to get on okay most of the time, but not any more.

Next morning at breakfast Mum picked straight up where she'd left off. I hadn't even poured my cereal before she started going on about

my grades and my homework and my A-tti-tude. That's her favourite word at the moment, "Attitude" – and according to Mum, mine's all wrong!

It's ever since Crystal left. Ever since she *turned down a place at one of the top universities in the country and moved in with her low-life boyfriend* – Mum's words by the way, not mine! Just because Crystal didn't want to follow the path Mum had carved out for her, Mum had decided to turn all her attention on me.

"I know you think I'm going on, Sam," she said, handing me a glass of juice, "but I just want you to make something of yourself, that's all. Anyway, I've got a big delivery at work, so I'm going up to get ready. As soon as you've eaten, I want you to finish sorting out your school stuff."

I sat there nibbling on a slice of toast. I don't know exactly what Mum thinks I'm going to do when I leave school. It's not like I'm going to be

a brain surgeon or some sort of physics professor. The truth is, the only thing I've ever wanted to do is to be on the stage – but as far as Mum's concerned, acting is just a *hobby* and not something you do as a Proper Job. I was still sitting there thinking about my glittering future as a *Broadway Star* when there was a knock on the back door and Aunty Mags burst in.

"Hello, gorgeous," she said, throwing her bag down and giving me a big kiss. "Any chance of a cuppa?"

Aunty Mags is Dad's sister and we're really close. She only lives two streets away and she's always popping in to see me. I flicked the switch on the kettle and took down a mug. "My mum's in a mood," I said. "She wants me to be the next prime minister or something."

Aunty Mags smiled. "She's just worried about you, Sam. You know what she's like. Where's your dad?"

"He's already left for work. That's all he

does these days – work work work! Hey, you couldn't have a word with Mum, could you? Get her to ease up on me and tell her how serious I am about wanting to be an actress..." I clasped my hands together under my chin. "Please, Auntie Mags. For me. She's just in her room getting ready."

"Well, I'll try," she said slowly, popping a slice of bread in the toaster. "But she won't thank me for interfering."

I love my Auntie Mags so much. She's only a few years younger than Dad but she's always up for a laugh. Even when things go wrong she still manages to see the funny side. She poured another cup of tea for Mum, plonked everything on a tray and disappeared upstairs.

I waited for a few minutes and then followed her up. I didn't really expect it to do any good, but I was so sick of Mum nagging me all the time. I could just about hear Auntie Mags's voice through the door. She was telling Mum

that it was time to give me a bit more freedom and let me make my own mistakes. That she couldn't live my life for me. I leaned in even closer, dying to hear what Mum would say to that – but just then my phone began to ring. It was my best friend, Ellie, back from her holiday in France.

"Come straight over!" she squealed down the phone. "I've got so much to tell you!"

"What? What's going on? Tell me now!"

"No, I can't! Just get over here!"

I popped my head round the door to ask Mum if I could go, and her and Auntie Mags both stopped talking in that really obvious way – like when you know you've interrupted some big secret.

"Can I go round to Ellie's?" I said. "She's just got back from holiday. I'll sort out my school stuff when I get back, promise."

Mum opened her mouth to say something and then closed it again. "Don't be too long,"

was all she managed. I backed out of the room before she could change her mind. The second the door closed behind me they started talking again and the last thing I heard as I trailed downstairs was Auntie Mags saying, “Of course Crystal’s still upset, Rosy. What do you expect? I know you didn’t mean it, but you can’t expect Crystal to understand that...”

It was such a relief to get round to Ellie’s. She’d been away for three weeks and I’d missed her like mad. She flung the door open and we threw our arms round each other as if we’d been separated for years.

“My holiday was *a-mazing!*” she cried. “It was boiling hot and the hotel had the best pool ever, and you’ll never guess what... There was a disco and this boy asked me to dance and we ended up dancing all night and...” She stopped to breathe and then she hugged me again and

whispered something in my ear, but I couldn’t understand a word.

“What?” I said, laughing.

“He asked me out!” Her face turned crimson. “*And* the weirdest thing is he lives right near here. It’s like the most unbelievable coincidence but he’s practically my neighbour.” The doorbell rang behind us and I jumped.

“Who’s that? It’s not him, is it?”

“Don’t be daft. It’s Phoebe and Polly,” she said, ducking under my arm to let them in.

Phoebe and Polly came spilling through the door, laughing about something.

“Ellie’s got a boyfriend!” I announced, before Ellie could tell them. “She met him on holiday and he asked her out at the hotel disco.”

“*Sam!* He’s not my *boyfriend* and don’t start telling everyone!”

“No way,” breathed Phoebe. “What’s his name?”

“Eddie,” said Ellie, blushing even more.

“And before you say anything, I know it sounds ridiculous, *Eddie and Ellie*, but you should see him. Honestly, I can’t stop thinking about him.”

“Well, I hope you’re not going to forget all about *us* now you’ve got a boyfriend,” I teased. “It’s **Friends First**, remember?”

Ellie laughed, her eyes shining. “Of course I remember, silly. And for the hundredth time he is NOT my boyfriend!”

We grabbed some snacks from the kitchen and went upstairs. Polly told us all about staying with her mum in Spain and Phoebe had us in fits describing how awful it was sharing a tent with her little sister Sara on their camping holiday. And Ellie just went on and on about Eddie. I was pleased for her, but for some reason I always thought *I’d* be the first one to have a proper boyfriend. Not that Mum would ever let me. I could just imagine her face if I came home and said I had a date. She’d probably call the police and have him arrested!

“Did you all get a letter from Mandy about starting back at Star Makers?” I said, trying to change the subject just for a second. Star Makers is the drama club we go to on Saturday mornings. It’s run by our drama teacher from school, Mandy, and it’s totally brilliant.

“Mine was here waiting for me when we got back from the airport,” said Ellie. “It had some weird poem in it.”

“I reckon it’s a clue about the new show. It must be a murder mystery or something,” said Phoebe.

Ellie pulled a face. “I didn’t understand a word. You know what I’m like, I don’t even understand *normal* English half the time.”

She picked up her letter, which was lying on top of a pile of clothes, and read the poem out to us.

The question of trust is one that you must
Be sure of – or you’ll be in trouble!

So can you be sure
That the friend at the door
Isn't secretly somebody's double?

The clues don't make sense.
You're frightened and tense
A phantom – a warning – a light.
You try to get out,
You scream and you shout,
But who is that face in the night?

“I think it sounds really exciting,” said Phoebe. “I’ve been trying to work out what it means all week.”

“Maybe it’s about a vampire,” I said, jumping on top of Ellie and pinning her down on the bed. “Maybe the face in the night is a vampire come to suck your blood.”

“Or *maybe* it’s Eddie!” said Polly, jumping on top of me.

“Get off!” cried Ellie. “I can’t breathe!”

“Yes, maybe it’s Eddie,” I said, “and he’s after your blood! But don’t worry, Ellie, we’ll protect you.”

“Get them off me, Phoebe,” Ellie spluttered. But Phoebe jumped on too and knocked us all flying off the bed. We sat in a heap on the floor, laughing.

“I don’t really care what show we do,” said Polly. “I just can’t wait to go back.”

“Me neither,” I agreed. “I know it’s only been six weeks since we broke up but it feels more like six years.”

I walked back home feeling so much happier. The new show would be brilliant whatever it was – and it was the perfect opportunity to show Mum, once and for all, how serious I was about acting.