Samantha Strewth, Supersleuth

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: CASE CLOSED

A group of Year Eight girls wearing Barnaby Fripp School uniforms are gathered round Samantha Strewth at the bus stop; there is Imogen Allsop, Jade Denton, Mia Tibbetts and Chelsea Moss. Standing to one side, listening, is Samantha's best friend, Harriet Chumley.

SAMANTHA: (*In mid-flow, reading from a notebook*) . . . which brings me to the very first message that Alfie Tuplin received; the private message sent from, what we have now established to be, a fake Twitter account.

CHELSEA: What's so important about the first message? He got loads of them, he's still getting them. Someone is trying to steal my boyfriend.

SAMANTHA: The first message is so important because, through my extensive investigations, I have managed to deduce where all my prime suspects were at the time that the first message was sent.

CHELSEA: And who are your prime suspects?

SAMANTHA: Why do you think I've gathered you all here today?

JADE: You're not seriously suggesting we're your suspects.

MIA: We're Chelsea's best mates.

CHELSEA: These are your main suspects? Jade, Mia and Imogen?

IMOGEN: You're having a laugh, right?

SAMANTHA: This isn't a laughing matter.

CHELSEA: You're dead right it's not a laughing matter. If one of my best friends is behind these messages, I'll go off my head.

SAMANTHA: Jade Denton, where were you at the time the first message was sent?

JADE: I've already told you. I was at my dance class.

SAMANTHA: But your dance class finishes at seven thirty.

JADE: So?

SAMANTHA: The message wasn't sent until seven fifty-seven, plenty of time for you to get home and send the message. However, you do still have an alibi.

JADE: I do?

SAMPLE

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HARRIET: Yes, you do. My neighbour Henry was in McDonalds on the evening in question and saw you purchasing a Big Mac and fries just before eight o'clock.

MIA: (*To Jade*) I thought you were a vegetarian?

SAMANTHA: Precisely why we think she was reluctant to admit her whereabouts in the first place. (*To Imogen*) Imogen Allsop, you claimed to be doing your homework at the time and told us your mum was witness to this. However, your brother Tufty . . .

HARRIET: Who is in the year below us at our school . . .

SAMANTHA: Told us your mum nipped to Tesco between seven forty-five and eight fifteen on that evening, providing you with a significant window of opportunity.

IMOGEN: The little snitch. I'll get him for that.

SAMANTHA: Before you do, please bear in mind he also told us that you couldn't possibly be responsible for the message because he was on your home PC at the time and your dad had confiscated your phone.

IMOGEN: I'm in the clear.

CHELSEA: (*Looking at Mia*) Which means it must be . . .

MIA: Well don't look at me. It's got nothing to do with me. I don't fancy Alfie.

CHELSEA: Why what's up with him?

MIA: Nothing. He's just not my type.

CHELSEA: So, who can vouch for you?

MIA: No-one. I was in my room by myself but that doesn't prove it was me.

HARRIET: Actually, that's not strictly true, is it?

SAMANTHA: No, we have a statement from your younger sister . . .

HARRIET: Who is also at our school, in year two . . .

SAMANTHA: Saying that you were playing with her and her dolls downstairs at the time the first message was sent and this provides you with a solid alibi.

IMOGEN: You were playing dolls?

JADE: (*Amused*) No wonder you didn't want to say anything.

MIA: (*Annoyed*) I'll kill Maisie when I get home.

JADE: (*To Samantha*) So if you've proved it was none of us, why have you brought us all here? Who has been sending all the messages?

SAMANTHA: (*Turning to Chelsea*) Chelsea Moss, I put it to you that you are the actually the person who has been sending these messages to your boyfriend.

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CHELSEA: What are you talking about? Why would I do that?

SAMANTHA: You were trying to set Alfie up. You wanted to see if you could trust him. We have spoken to numerous people in your year group who all corroborate the fact that you suspected Alfie of flirting with other girls.

MIA: (*Catching on*) So if he responded to her fake messages, she would have the evidence she needed to confront him?

SAMANTHA: Exactly.

CHELSEA: This is rubbish.

HARRET: You were seen on your phone by three independent witnesses at precisely the time the first message was sent.

CHELSEA: I was probably texting someone.

IMOGEN: Who?

CHELSEA: I can't remember.

SAMANTHA: I can. You told us right at the start that you were texting your cousin Holly in Scotland . . .

JADE: Conveniently far away . . .

SAMANTHA: Unfortunately for Chelsea, her auntie and cousin paid them an unexpected visit last week and Harriet was lucky enough to bump into Holly.

HARRIET: I followed her to the corner shop and pretended to be Chelsea's friend from school.

SAMANTHA: They got chatting and she soon found out that Chelsea had not been in touch with Holly for months.

CHELSEA: (*Shamefully*) Oh no.

SAMANTHA: Another mystery solved I think Harriet. Case closed.

SCENE TWO: SAMANTHA STREWTH SUPERSLEUTH

As the other girls exit, Harriet Chumley moves to an area of the stage where a laptop is set on a small desk. She sits at the desk and types as she speaks.

HARRIET: My best friend just keeps getting better and better, another baffling mystery has been successfully solved by this eleven-year old girl. Who needs the police and private detectives when you've got Samantha Strewth? Her keen eye and natural intuition make her the best in the business. What did the little town of Humbleford do before Samantha came along? If you have any case, no matter how big or small, don't hesitate to contact the town's very own supersleuth . . .

SAMANTHA: (*From offstage*) Harriet? Harriet, where are you?

HARRIET: (*Calling off*) I'm in my room. Come up.

Enter Samantha

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SAMANTHA: What are you doing?

HARRIET: I'm just updating my blog – another conundrum cracked by the world's youngest amateur detective.

SAMANTHA: I couldn't do it without you, Harriet. Holmes had Watson and I've got you.

HARRIET: I'm no help. I wouldn't have the first idea where to start. You see things that everyone else misses, or that I miss anyway.

SAMANTHA: Ever since I was little, I've always focused on the fine detail; a hair on a shoulder, a broken finger nail, a loose thread. Never underestimate the smallest point. It could be important and hold the key to unravelling an entire mystery.

HARRIET: This is good. Let me write it down.

SAMANTHA: We haven't got time.

HARRIET: Why? Have you got another case to solve?

SAMANTHA: No not yet. Mum said you could come 'round for tea tonight if it's ok with your mum.

HARRIET: Cool. I'll go and ask.

SAMANTHA: I hope isn't too long though.

HARRIET: Me too. I'm starving.

SAMANTHA: I mean until we get another case. My fingers start to twitch and my brain starts to itch if I'm not being kept busy.

HARRIET: I'm sure it won't be long before your mind is occupied again. Somewhere in Humbleford something will be brewing, the next mystery will be forming and you'll soon be called in to solve the riddle or unveil the secret. What are we having for tea?

SAMANTHA: Fishfingers and chips. And you're right of course, there's always something waiting for me around the corner.

SCENE THREE: TUFTY'S NEW HAMSTER

Another area of the stage is lit to reveal Tufty Allsop staring intently at his hamster through the bars of its cage. Tufty is a scruffy nine-year boy with a tuft of unruly hair on the top of his head.

TUFTY: I'm sure I recognise you. Let me get a closer look.

Tufty takes his hamster out of the cage and brings it up to his face.

TUFTY: You seem very familiar to me.

Enter Imogen, texting. She looks up from her phone and notices her brother staring at his hamster. She looks at Tufty with disdain for a while, until eventually she speaks.

IMOGEN: What are you doing, Tommy?

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TUFTY: Looking at my hamster.

IMOGEN: I can see that. What are you looking at it for?

TUFTY: Come over here.

IMOGEN: I'm not getting too close to you. I don't know what I might catch.

TUFTY: I'm sure I've seen this hamster before.

IMOGEN: What are you on about?

TUFTY: I recognise its face.

IMOGEN: One hamster looks pretty much like next.

TUFTY: But this doesn't look like a hamster. It looks like Miss Cropper.

IMOGEN: Miss Cropper?

TUFTY: Yeah.

IMOGEN: Miss Cropper from next door?

TUFTY: Yeah.

IMOGEN: Miss Cropper the geography teacher from my school who's just retired and gone on a six-month cruise?

TUFTY: Yeah.

IMOGEN: You're mental.

TUFTY: Have a look if you don't believe.

IMOGEN: Oh, for goodness sake! If it'll shut you up.

Imogen moves closer and studies the hamster.

TUFTY: See what I mean?

IMOGEN: (*Reluctantly*) Kind of. It's got the same piggy eyes I suppose.

TUFTY: And the same pinched nose.

IMOGEN: (*Amused*) It's definitely got the same hairy chin. (*To Tufty*) Look if you're not happy with it, take it back to the pet shop and get different one.

TUFTY: Have you noticed how it keeps sniffing all the time? Sharp, little disapproving sniffs. Just like Miss Cropper used to.

IMOGEN: So, what?

TUFTY: Well I know it's going to sound daft, but I wonder if this hamster could actually be Miss Cropper.

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IMOGEN: You think this hamster is my old geography teacher?

TUFTY: A bit.

IMOGEN: You want locking up.

TUFTY: Miss Cropper disappeared the day before I got it.

IMOGEN: She's gone on a cruise.

TUFTY: But what if she hasn't?

IMOGEN: I'm going downstairs.

TUFTY: Imogen please!

IMOGEN: Look if you're that bothered, go and tell what's-her-name from your school about it and she can sort it out.

TUFTY: Who? Samantha in year six?

IMOGEN: That's her. She fancies herself as a bit if a detective. Get her to look into it.

TUFTY: That is a great idea.

IMOGEN: But I warn you, Tommy, do not breathe a word of this to anyone else. If you do, people will think I have a lunatic as a brother and I will have to disown you, or possibly even kill you. Do you understand?

SCENE FOUR: FISHFINGERS AND CHIPS

Samantha and Harriet are eating fishfingers and chips in front of the television. Mrs Strewth is in the background as if in the kitchen.

MRS STREWTH: (*Calling to the girls*) Anymore baked beans, Harriet?

HARRIET: (*Calling back*) No thanks, Mrs Strewth.

MRS STREWTH: What about you Sam?

SAMANTHA: No thank you!

MRS BRIGGS: (*From offstage*) Hello?

MRS STREWTH: Come in Fiona.

Enter Fiona Briggs, their smart and snooty neighbour.

MRS BRIGGS: Are you busy, Joanna?

MRS STREWTH: No. I've just given the girls their tea and was about to wash up. Do you want a cup of tea?

MRS BRIGGS: No thanks. I shan't keep you long. Just wanted to know if you'd seen who's back in town?

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MRS STREWTH: Who?

MRS BRIGGS: Julie Pinkerton.

MRS STREWTH: Julie from school?

MRS BRIGGS: And her friend Diane Crouch.

MRS STREWTH: Really? Must be nearly twenty years ago since I last saw them? They moved away after sixth form. Did they go to university?

MRS BRIGGS: If I remember rightly, they went off travelling together.

MRS STREWTH: They were inseparable at school. Mind you, they didn't have many other friends.

MRS BRIGGS: They were a very strange pair. Still are by the look of them.

MRS STREWTH: When did you see them?

MRS BRIGGS: I spotted them in town. They've taken on that empty hairdresser's shop at the end of the High Street.

MRS STREWTH: Are they hairdressers then?

MRS BRIGGS: No. They've changed it into a pet shop. It opened the other day.

MRS STREWTH: Wonder why they've come back here after being away for such a long time. Have they still got family here?

MRS BRIGGS: No, I don't think so. Julie lived with her grandparents and they're both dead now and Diane's mother left town not long after her daughter.

There is a knock at the door. Mrs Strewth answers it to Tufty.

MRS STREWTH: Hello.

TUFTY: Hi. Is Samantha there please?

SCENE FIVE: TUFTY ALLSOP

Tufty apprehensively approaches Samantha and Harriet

HARRIET: (*To the audience*) As soon as Samantha saw the year four boy, she knew he needed to talk in private. We went up to her bedroom.

SAMANTHA: (*To Tufty*) So what can we do for you Tufty?

TUFTY: You remember me?

SAMANTHA: Of course. We interviewed you last week on a matter concerning your sister, Imogen.

TUFTY: (*To Samantha*) Yes that's right.

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SAMANTHA: Your actual name is Tommy Allsop, but most people refer to you as Tufty on account of the unruly tuft of hair on the top of your head that just won't lie down.

TUFTY: Thank you for seeing me.

HARRIET: What can we help you with?

TUFTY: This.

Tufty takes his hamster out of his pocket.

HARRIET: A hamster?

SAMANTHA: A rodent that feeds primarily on seeds, nuts and vegetation which has become a popular house pet due to it being relatively low maintenance and inexpensive to keep.

TUFTY: This is Miss Cropper.

HARRIET: Interesting name.

TUFTY: No, I mean, I actually think this is Miss Cropper.

HARRIET: Who's Miss Cropper?

SAMANTHA: Am I right in saying she used to be the Geography teacher at Barnaby Fripp Secondary School? Recently retired?

TUFTY: Yes, that's her. She taught my sister. She used to live next door to us as well.

SAMANTHA: Used to?

TUFTY: She lives in a cage in my bedroom now.

HARRIET: (*Pointing to the hamster*) You think that is Miss Cropper?

TUFTY: Yes. That's why I'm here.

HARRIET: Is this a practical joke?

TUFTY: No. Look at her. (*Holding the hamster up*) She's the spitting image.

HARRIET: I don't know what Miss Cropper looks like. I've never met her.

TUFTY: You have now! Say hello.

SAMANTHA: When was the last time Miss Cropper was seen as a human?

HARRIET: (*To Samantha*) You're not taking this seriously?

TUFTY: A few days ago, the day before I got my hamster.

SAMANTHA: And she's not been seen since?

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TUFTY: No. My mum got a note pushed through the door, apparently from Miss Cropper, asking her to water her garden because she'd gone on a six-month world cruise. But I don't believe it was from her.

SAMANTHA: Where did you get the hamster from?

TUFTY: That new pet shop on the high street.

SAMANTHA: (*To Harriet*) Must be the one my mum and Mrs Briggs were talking about just now.

HARRIET: There's nothing unusual about that. Pet shops sell hamsters to little boys all the time.

SAMANTHA: (*To Tufty*) Is there anything else about the hamster that makes you think it's your next-door neighbour?

TUFTY: Yes. Miss Cropper had an annoying habit of sniffing all the time; short, sharp intakes of breath that made her sound like she was disapproving of everything. My hamster does the same thing. Listen.

Samantha and Harriet lean towards the hamster to listen, then lean back. Samantha ponders the situation for a moment before speaking.

SAMANTHA: We'll take your case.

HARRIET: (*Surprised*) What?

SAMANTHA: Trust me.

HARRIET: I do.

TUFTY: Thank you, thank you so much.

SAMANTHA: Have you told anyone else about this?

TUFTY: Only my sister. But she won't say anything, she thinks I'm crazy.

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