

# Chapter One

My name's Sam Wallis, I'm thirteen, and my life is officially over. I'm not exaggerating.

You see, my best friend in the world, Gemma, has just moved a gazillion billion miles away, and without her I honestly don't know what to do with myself.

Me and Gems used to do everything together. One of our favourite things was to do Positives and Negatives lists about stuff. I don't remember how it started, but we would do these lists about anything and everything – from the best and worst things about school trips to the advantages and disadvantages of crisp sandwiches. We'd often end up lying on the floor, our stomachs hurting from laughing so hard.

Well, now I've done one about Gemma leaving.

## POSITIVES

• NONE whatsoever.

## NEGATIVES

- ⊗ My life will NEVER be the same.
- ⊗ Nobody else finds goats FUNNY.

Since we met in primary school, Gemma and I have been inseparable. Until now, that is. We went to school together. We helped out at the local stables together. We messed about being spectacularly stupid together. If we weren't actually together we were messaging each other. It was always us against the world.

Then her parents ruined everything just before the Easter holidays by taking Gems to the Outer Hebrides. (Which, for the geographically challenged like me, are remote islands so far north of Scotland it's like they're at the North Pole or something.) This is just about the worst thing they could have done, apart from actually murdering her.

I can't believe they've taken her away, especially right in the middle of the school year.

I thought I'd be OK, but now, on the first day back, I realize that without her, I'm lost. I'm not sure if I even know who I *am* any more.

So, this morning in history, I wrote a Positives and Negatives list about myself.

## POSITIVES

- ⊗ Longish legs.

- ⊕ BLONDE hair, which looks good in summer when I've got a bit of a tan.
- ⊕ HAZEL-COLOURED eyes which people say are an interesting colour.
- ⊕ GOOD teeth... (possibly my best feature?)
- ⊕ FRIENDLY personality.
- ⊕ Will laugh at anything.

## NEGATIVES

- ⊕ IMMATURE (according to Tania Hamilton, who is really popular and knows about this stuff).
- ⊕ GIANT hands.
- ⊕ ALMOST flat chest.
- ⊕ Hair a NIGHTMARE to manage due to being so flyaway.
- ⊕ Hideous NOSE freckles in summer.
- ⊕ BLUSH a lot.
- ⊕ Will laugh at anything - and often can't stop.
- ⊕ OCCASIONAL WIND PROBLEM.

Tania Hamilton says I'm immature because I've not had a proper boyfriend and because I laugh uncontrollably at things.

I suppose she has a point about the laughing. Once I start laughing, I find it hard to stop. It's like when you

have a coughing fit, except with me it's a sort of chortling fit. I once giggled all the way through maths, for almost an hour, because Mr Porter was wearing his cardigan inside out.

Another time I wept with laughter throughout most of a biology lesson. You see, when Mrs Nicolson put up a picture of two frogs mating, Gemma pointed out that one of them looked like our PE teacher, Mr McAllister. I was so out of control, I got sent out of the lab and had to laugh in the corridor instead.

The biology lesson incident led to me and Gemma snorting and sniggering all the way through the next few PE lessons, because every time we looked at Mr McAllister we remembered the picture of the frogs.

Maybe I *am* a slow developer. Which could explain why, while I supposedly had boyfriends when I was in Year 7, I've never actually kissed anybody. And neither has Gemma. We've been so busy mucking about and seeing the funny side of things, we're about a million miles behind everybody else when it comes to the boys thing. It's actually getting embarrassing now.

So from today onwards, I've decided that I have to make an effort to be more mature. And now that I don't have Gems around to talk things through with, I'm going to have to work it out by myself.

To make the first day back at school even worse, my history teacher, Mr Donovan (known as "Mad Eyes" Donovan due to his mad, staring eyes) was telling us all

about the horrors of medieval torture. He was going into great detail. Put it this way, I was glad I'd not had scrambled eggs for breakfast.

Today, for the first time, Gemma's seat next to me did not have Gemma in it. There was a new boy sitting there instead. I didn't pay him much attention. Instead I scribbled my Positives and Negatives list on a piece of paper torn out of my homework book.

"*Samantha Wallis!*" barked Mr Donovan in his angry-sarcastic voice, his scary eyes drilling into me. "I hope that you are taking notes about the lesson. I hope that you are *not* writing something irrelevant, like last time. What was it again? Oh yes, 'My twenty favourite things to do at the weekend'. That was *very* entertaining for the class. We particularly enjoyed 'Dressing my cat as a gangster'."

Yes, I do occasionally put my cat, Scuzzball, in his Al Capone outfit, which he got for Christmas. And yes, there may be other outfits for other occasions. It's not animal cruelty. It's very entertaining.

"I'm writing about medieval torture, Mr Donovan," I lied.

"I sincerely hope you are," he said, in a menacing and threatening way. Mr Donovan is extremely good at being threatening, due to his psycho eyes. In fact, he'd have been the ideal medieval torturer, because he'd have loved his job. He'd probably have done it for free *and* put in lots of overtime.

But because you don't get "Chief Medieval Torturer"

jobs any more, Mr Donovan makes do with torturing us instead.

As a precautionary measure, I folded my Positives and Negatives list up as small as possible and hid it up my sleeve.

As I did this, I sensed the new boy at Gemma's desk watching me, and for the first time I actually looked at him. The first thing I noticed was his very blue eyes sparkling with amusement, as if he thought me dressing Scuzzball as a gangster was the most entertaining thing ever.

He had shortish, dark blond hair and a friendly face. He was smiling . . . at *me*. To my complete horror, I felt myself blush. I bowed my head as low as I could in the hope he wouldn't notice.

I've had crushes on boys before, but this was so . . . sudden. I felt as if it was so obvious . . . everyone in the room would have to notice my huge blushing reaction. This, of course, just made me blush even more. The more I blushed, the worse it got. I couldn't believe how I was reacting. It took me completely by surprise.

### **Sam Wallis to Gemma Smith**

Still missing you enormously and immensely etc etc. I know it's only the first day back, but it's not the same without you. The corridors are too quiet without the sound of your unique squawking laugh . . . which I hope is now scaring off all the seals in the Outer Hebrides. Maybe if your dad's very strange and totally

unnecessary wildlife research is ruined you can come back. Ha! That would be excellent! How are the sheep, by the way? Still munching that grass? Have you bought a kilt yet? Och aye the noo!

I am sneakily writing this in the last lesson before lunch, which is I.T. Because I finished my work early I've been allowed ten minutes to do what I want. So I thought I'd message you.

Listen. Something HUGE has happened. There's this new boy. He walked into history this morning. His name's David Matthieson.

He smiled at me, Gems, and he had such a great smile!

At the end of the lesson, he came over to me and said: "You're Sam, aren't you?" as if he already knew me! It made me feel like I was the only person in the world. I didn't know what to say. I just stammered "Yeah" and ran out of the classroom!

I think this might be it. I think I could actually be ready to have a proper boyfriend!!!! The only trouble is, why would he look at me? Tania says I look ten, and I think she's right. But then again, he did smile at me in a way that made me think I might have a chance.

Please reply as soon as you can. This is an emergency.

After my message to Gems, I went into the lunch hall and sat on my own, missing her. I so needed to talk to her, and she wasn't there. I thought about the positives

and negatives of having a gigantic crush on someone I'd only just met and hadn't even had a proper conversation with.

## POSITIVES

- SOMETHING MORE INTERESTING THAN THE LESSON TO CONCENTRATE ON.
- SOMEBODY TO IMAGINE IN MY "DREAM WEDDING" FANTASY.
- A REASON TO TRY TO CONTROL MY OCCASIONAL WIND PROBLEM.

## NEGATIVES

- ACCORDING TO TANIA HAMILTON, I LOOK ABOUT TEN YEARS OLD.
- I DRESS LIKE SOMEONE WHO SPENDS THEIR WEEKEND MUCKING OUT STABLES, BECAUSE I DO.
- WHO WANTS TO GO OUT WITH SOMEONE WHO CAN'T CONCENTRATE OR THINK CLEARLY OR SPEAK PROPERLY BECAUSE THEY ARE SO OVERCOME BY YOUR AMAZING BLUE EYES?

"Hello, Little Miss No Mates!"

I looked up. It was Tania Hamilton. The last person I wanted to see when I was feeling down. It's typical of Tania to say the thing that you hope no one is thinking. She just somehow knows. Sometimes I think she likes seeing people upset.

Tania's super-confident, curvy in all the right places (unlike me), great at netball and good-looking, even if she does wear most of the make-up counter at Boots. She even manages to make our school uniform look vaguely fashionable, which is a major achievement, believe me.

There was no way I was going to answer back. Nobody wants to take Tania on; she's far too capable of shaming you in front of the whole lunch hall. Most of the boys fancy her, and some of the girls secretly wish they could be as outspoken as her – but *everybody* is wary of her.

Because nobody stands up to her, Tania carries on randomly picking on people and thinking that it's a great joke. Occasionally she is actually funny, annoyingly. Last year on non-uniform day, for example, she came in dressed as Miss Mooney. I have to admit, it was hilarious. In fact, I think I laughed for most of the day.

"Hello," I said, taking the safe option. I thought for one horrible moment that she was going to sit down, but to my relief she walked on and joined her two regular lunch buddies, Angela Murray and Becky Robinson. Angela is Tania's sidekick. She always laughs when Tania's mean.

I dislike Angela even more than I dislike Tania because at least Tania's got her own mind. Angela just follows whatever Tania does, like a sheep. In fact, Angela even looks slightly like a sheep.

I think Becky would rather not be in Tania's little gang, but she's scared to leave because Tania might murder her

or, worse, say horrible things about her. So she just goes along with things.

Angela and Becky are on the netball team with Tania, which is how they've got to be friends. Tania didn't bother asking if I'd like to join them, not that I'd have wanted to. She smirked at me as she sat down, then whispered something to Angela, who looked at me and laughed loudly.

I did what I always do when Tania is mean. I imagined her being chased by a goat. Me and Gems thought that one up: we've always found goats funny. So I imagined Tania, screaming in terror, running across the lunch hall with a big angry goat after her. I'd advise anyone to use what we call The Goat Scenario in such situations. It's very effective.

Darcie Clelland, my lab partner from chemistry, was sitting with her best friend, Hanna Kermack, at the other end of the lunch hall. Darcie's very straightforward and matter-of-fact, but with a quiet sense of humour. Hanna was at primary with me and Gemma, and is really good-natured and dependable. Me and Gems often had lunch with them.

They waved across at me, motioning for me to join them. I was just about to get up when I saw the last person in the world I expected to see, standing uncertainly in the middle of the lunch hall, holding a tray.

Catrina Malloy. Or Cat, as she's always been called.

I could hardly believe it.

Although I'd not seen her for six years, it was obviously



Cat. She was looking around as if hoping to find a familiar face. I waved, and when she saw me her face lit up.

From when I was tiny until I was seven, Cat was my best friend. Our mums met at the mother and baby group, and because they were friends, we were friends. I suppose you don't have much choice about who you hang out with if you're in nappies and unable to walk. Your mums decide, and that's that.

My very first memory is of being in a sandpit with Cat, fighting over a shiny red plastic beaker. She won, but I don't remember being upset about it. There are other memories, of sunlit back gardens, and ice cream, and running around in Snow White and Cinderella costumes, and sharing a beanbag, watching the Teletubbies. I liked La La the best; Cat preferred Dipsy.



I remember our mums and dads having dinner together. Me and Cat would play long elaborate games with hundreds of dolls and cuddly toys while they drank wine and laughed, and one of us would be carried home, which was only round the corner.

Another memory. The school nativity. Cat sang "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" so beautifully, all the mums were crying.

When I was about seven, Cat disappeared from my life. I vaguely remember that our mums drifted apart. Cat never came back to school after the summer holidays.

Then, three years later, out of the blue, I got a postcard. It was from Cornwall. I didn't know if she lived there, or if

she was on holiday. It said, in her neat and careful rounded handwriting, that she missed me, but there was no home address on it, so I couldn't reply. She never wrote again.

The girl now walking across the lunch hall towards me was stunning. She had the same flawless olive skin and long, thick glossy black hair that I remembered. Cat doesn't look anything like her petite, blonde mother; her looks come entirely from her father.

There was a loud wolf whistle. Cat ignored it, although it was clearly directed at her. And no wonder. I couldn't stop staring at her. She looked like a model. Her almond-shaped brown eyes were accentuated with black eyeliner, and her hair was swept up into an effortless ponytail. A short black skirt showed off her impossibly long slim legs. She was wearing non-regulation purple nail varnish. Everybody in the lunch hall was turning to look at her.

Tania Hamilton was no longer smiling. In fact she looked almost angry at the attention Cat was getting.

"Hello," Cat said, grinning, plonking her tray down and sitting opposite me, seemingly oblivious to the stir she'd caused. I sat looking at her, still shocked. I'd thought I'd never see her again.

"What are you doing here?" I managed at last.

"Well, thanks for the enthusiastic welcome," Cat said, still smiling.

I smiled back.

"It is so good to see you," I said. I meant it.

"Good to see you too," said Cat. "And you haven't

changed one bit! I can't believe I'm here. This is so weird."

"Where were you?" I asked, expecting her to say Cornwall or Spain or something like that. After all, she'd seemingly disappeared from the face of the earth.

"We were in Bredborough," she said.

Bredborough is the nearest big town to Greenfields. It's close enough that people can commute there for work. It's not a million miles away, but it might as well be if you don't know where to find somebody.

I couldn't believe it. All that time and she'd only been in Bredborough. Now it seemed even more strange that our mums hadn't got back in touch with each other.

"Bredborough?" I couldn't hide my surprise.

Cat looked down, finding it difficult to meet my gaze.

"Lots happened. That's why Mum never got back in touch. She wasn't . . . well," she said. "Then Dad left."

"Your mum wasn't well?" I echoed. I didn't remember her mum being ill.

She looked up and met my questioning look. I could see she was struggling with whether to say something. Eventually she decided to speak, and leant forward.

"Mum was really messed up," she whispered, "but she's OK now."

"So you're back in Greenfields," I managed, after a long pause. There's nothing like stating the obvious to fill a silence.

"Yes," said Cat. "Gran died just before Christmas, so we moved back because Mum inherited the house."

“Oh, sorry,” I said. So her gran had died, as well as her mum and dad splitting up. It made me realize what an easy time I’ve had in comparison. Maybe my life wasn’t so bad after all.

We sat in silence for a little while. Then Cat spoke again.

“Things are OK now, really. I mean, Mum and Dad are talking again, and Mum’s sorted herself out. She’s painting.”

I remembered that Cat’s mum was a painter. It was all coming back to me now. I still couldn’t believe that Cat was sitting opposite me. After all those years.

“So, what are you doing now?” I asked.

“Not much,” said Cat, “except I’ve just joined this band, you might have heard of them. They’re called Mr Bleaney.”

“*Mr Bleaney?*” I gasped, stunned.

Mr Bleaney are this band people are starting to talk about. They go to the upper school and are all about sixteen or seventeen. I first saw them last summer, at the Greenfields town festival.

“The singer left,” explained Cat. “Someone from my last school told me about it, so I tried out and they chose me. I still can’t believe it.”

I looked at Cat, who’s six months older than me, and thought how much older than thirteen she looks. She could easily pass for sixteen. With her looks and her singing voice, which was good even when she was tiny, it was no wonder the band wanted her.

“That’s so great!” I burst out, delighted. This, at least, was something to be happy about.

Cat smiled, pleased that I was pleased for her.

Some boys at the next table were clowning around. I knew it was to try to get Cat’s attention, because they kept looking over to see if she was noticing them. She wasn’t.

I noticed that, just like Tania, Cat seemed to have the knack of transforming our school uniform into something that looked good. I never seem to quite manage it. I think I’m too scruffy. My school shirt’s always coming untucked and my jumper’s covered in little bobbles from Scuzzball’s claws. But I do try with my hair, at least.

“It’s fantastic to see you again,” said Cat, her eyes shining. It was exactly the way she smiled when we were little, as if she were lit up from the inside. This was the Cat I remembered. Suddenly it was as if the six years we’d been apart never existed and we were starting again where we’d left off.

Tania Hamilton was looking across, practically seething with jealousy. She was not appreciating the way the boys were putting on a show for Cat.

“Why were you sitting on your own?” asked Cat.

I could tell she was puzzled.

“My best friend . . . Gemma . . . left,” I said. “Her parents took her to the Outer Hebrides. She’s not happy about it.”

“That’s how it works,” said Cat, looking sorry. I didn’t know what to say. I’m not good at sad stuff. There was another silence.

I had just decided to cheer Cat up by telling her some funny stories about Gemma when we were rudely interrupted.

“Fair maidens . . . mayest your humble servant dine with thee?”

I looked up. It was Taylor Griffen, of all people. He was obviously desperate to check out the new girl. He’s been speaking in that stupid Ye Olde English way ever since he heard we were going to study *Romeo and Juliet* this term.

Taylor’s one of these people it’s impossible to ignore. While he’s on the small side, his personality is enormous. He has this round face, round blue eyes and corkscrew-curlly blond hair so he looks quite angelic, but he’s far from it. He’s a mischief-maker extraordinaire. He’s like an attention-seeking missile, working his way around Year 8 causing hilarity and mayhem, flirting outrageously with all the girls.

Everybody loves Taylor – even Tania can’t help being amused by him. But he can be quite tiring to be around, because he’s constantly making some sort of a scene.

“Verily, Sam, prithe present us to thy most fair companion!” boomed Taylor. For someone who is smallish, he’s got a very loud voice. People around us were sniggering at Taylor’s over-the-top display. Taylor was oblivious. It’s like he’s got a rhinoceros hide instead of skin.

I couldn’t believe he was making even more of an idiot of himself than normal, thinking it would impress Cat.

“This is Cat. Cat, this is Taylor,” I said.

Taylor's round eyes widened with the shock of recognition. "Catrina Malloy? It's you! We were at primary school together! Do you remember me?"

"Taylor, we're just having a bit of a catch up, it's not really a good time. . ." I said, hoping he'd take the hint.

"Of course I remember you," said Cat. She smiled again, showing her perfect white teeth. "You're not someone it's easy to forget!"

She was right. Even at primary, Taylor was a force to be reckoned with. I remembered him trying to kiss all the girls, even then. And come to think of it, he'd followed Cat around for quite a long time in Year 3.

This was just like Cat, I remembered, to be kind even to the most annoying people. She never liked to see anybody excluded. Even at nursery school she would go out of her way to make sure nobody was left out.

I wondered if she understood the danger of being kind to Taylor Griffen.

I could see he was spellbound. He dropped to one knee and kissed her hand, as if he were Sir Lancelot. As I might have guessed, one smile from the beautiful Cat, and he was instantly her slave.

In chemistry, Darcie did everything while I idled. I stared into the flame of the Bunsen burner.

"What's *wrong* with you?" she asked at one point. I'm usually quite keen in chemistry, as I secretly hope that I might

accidentally make some major breakthrough scientific discovery. Like something that will reverse the ageing process, or make you invisible, or give you the power of flight.

“Life,” I said, “can be just *so strange*.”

“Nonsense,” said Darcie, in her usual matter-of-fact way, “it all makes perfect sense. Everything’s governed by cause and effect.”

I thought about her cause and effect theory and tried to apply it to my immediate situation.

**Cause:** First day back at school without Gemma.

**Effect:** Major crisis.

**Cause:** Gorgeous new boy in history gives me amazing smile.

**Effect:** My first major crush.

**Cause:** Cat turning up at school after my not seeing her for six years.

**Effect:** Surprised and pleased.

No wonder I was feeling confused. This was quite a lot for one morning.

## **MY STATUS**

### **Sam Wallis**

Is missing Gemma loads.

 **Gemma Smith** likes this.