

*What Goes Up Doesn't Necessarily  
Come Down*

**W**e walked over to where Mum and Aunt Gloria were having coffee.

'Let's lie,' hissed Kat. 'About taking that ticket from a stranger.' She grabbed me by the wrist so hard it hurt.

'Lie,' I repeated. 'Hrumm. Lie.'

'We could say that Salim got lost in the crowds, that he—' She let my wrist go. 'Oh, forget it,' she said. 'I know telling a lie with you is useless. And stop doing that duck-that's-forgotten-how-to-quack look!'

We reached the table where Aunt Gloria and Mum sat talking up another storm. We stood by them in silence. A pounding started up in my ears, as if my blood pressure had shot up above normal, which is what Mum says happens to her when Kat drives her distracted.

'There you are,' Aunt Gloria said. 'Have you got the tickets?'

Kat waited for me to say something.

I waited for Kat to say something. 'Where's Salim?' asked Mum. 'Not still in the queue?'

'Hrumm,' I said. 'No.'

Mum looked as if Salim might be behind us.

'Where then?'

'We don't know!' Kat blurted. 'This man – he came up and offered us a ticket. For free. He'd bought it and then decided he couldn't face the ride.'

'He had claustrophobia,' I said.

'That's right. And the queue was terrible. So we took the ticket. And gave it to Salim. And Salim went up on his own. And he didn't come down.'

Aunt Gloria shaded her eyes and looked up. 'So he's up there somewhere,' she said, smiling.

Kat had a hand to her mouth and her fingers were wriggling like worms. I'd never seen her act like this before. 'No,' she said. 'He went up ages ago. Ted and I tracked his pod. But when it came down – he wasn't on it.'

Mum's face scrunched up, which meant she was



a) puzzled or b) cross or c) both. 'What on earth do you mean, he wasn't on it?'

'He went up, Mum,' I repeated. 'But he didn't come down.' My hand flapped and Mum's mouth went round like an O. 'He defied the law of gravity, Mum. He went up but he didn't come down. Which means Newton got it wrong. Hrumm.'

Mum looked more cross than puzzled by now. But Aunt Gloria's face remained smooth like paper without a crease. 'Bet I know what happened,' she said, smiling.

'What?' we all said.

'He probably went round one more time.'

The simplicity of this solution struck Kat and me at once.

'That's it. He just stayed on,' said Kat.

I looked at my watch. 'In which case he'll land at twelve thirty-two.'

We went back to the Eye, this time with Mum. Aunt Gloria said she would stay where she was, because Salim would know where to find her if we missed him.

We watched several pods open and close, but no Salim. 12.32 came and went. No Salim. Mum asked the staff if they could help. A woman from customer services came to talk to us. She said she'd like to help but couldn't. She said that the London Eye management policy states that children are not supposed to ride without an adult accompanying them.

Mum's eyebrows met in the middle. 'Kat,' she said, 'I relied on you. You should never have accepted that ticket. You should never have let Salim go up on his own.'

Something terrible happened then. Kat started crying. She hadn't done that in ages. She pressed her knuckles up against her cheekbones. 'It's always my fault. Never Ted's. I'm always to blame. Ted never does anything wrong.'

'You're older, Kat. But obviously not much wiser.'

Mum bit her lip and they both stared at each other.

'Why don't we call his mobile?' I said.

Mum frowned as if I'd said something stupid; then



her face cleared (which is what you say when someone's been looking unhappy and then they suddenly cheer up, and I like this phrase because it is another weather metaphor. A face can clear just like the sky can when a dark cumulonimbus cloud has passed over and the sun comes out again). 'Of course! Ted,' Mum said, smiling, 'you're a genius. We should have thought of that right away.'

We hurried back to where Aunt Gloria was waiting at the table. There was no sign of Salim. When she saw us come back without him, she gave a big sigh. 'Where has that boy got to?' she said.

Mum picked up Aunt Gloria's handbag. 'Call him. Get your mobile out. Give him a call.'

'OK,' Aunt Gloria said. 'He's probably only a few yards away.'

She pressed some buttons and put the phone to her ear with a smile and a nod of her head. Then her expression did the opposite of 'clear'. It clouded over.

'The mobile phone you are calling has been switched off,' she repeated. 'Please try later.'

She dropped the phone down on the table. Her lips trembled.

'Why's his phone off?' she whispered. 'Why?'

Kat said later that we spent the next hour darting around the South Bank like headless chickens. It is a puzzling fact that chickens can run around in a frenzy for some seconds after being decapitated, but I do not think they do this for a whole hour. We looked everywhere but there was no sign of Salim. We went back to the staff, who called in the police. A constable took our names and addresses. He asked if we thought Salim knew his way back to our house. Probably, we said. Then he told us to do three things:

- a) keep trying his phone
- b) go home and wait, and
- c) try not to worry.

He said he would report Salim's disappearance to the rest of the squad on duty in the area. If he hadn't reappeared in a few hours, an officer would visit us.



Kat tried to explain about how Salim had vanished sometime after getting on the wheel and before getting off. He looked at her as if she was imagining it.

'Children don't evaporate into thin air,' he said. 'Not in my experience.'

So then we did b) and went home to wait. We were hoping to see Salim in our front garden but he wasn't there. So Aunt Gloria did a), that is, she pressed and repressed the redial button on her mobile phone. Mum got her inside and made tea. Kat fetched a china plate and arranged some chocolate fingers on it. This was Mum and Kat's way of trying to do c). But nobody ate any. We all tried not to worry but nobody succeeded.

Then Mum called Dad and told him what had happened. He said he was round the corner at the Barracks and nearly finished for the day. He'd come home to see if there was anything he could do to help. Mum hung up. Immediately the phone rang. Aunt Gloria grabbed it.

'Salim!' she said loudly.

She listened for a few seconds and her face turned into a mini ice age (that's my own expression and I hope you can guess what it means). She slammed the phone down.

'Some man,' she said, 'selling conservatory windows.' She made it sound as if selling conservatory windows was a crime against humanity. She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece.

'Three hours,' she said. 'He's been gone three hours. This hasn't happened before.'

Then she started pacing up and down the room, punching one fist into the palm of another. It was very interesting to watch. I wondered what kind of weather she could be compared to and decided on a thunderstorm, very localized, with forked lightning.

'Salim,' she said, as if he were in the room, 'I'll have your guts for garters.'

I had never heard this before and wondered what garters were. Kat told me later that they are what women used to wear around their thighs to keep their stockings up and they are elasticated. I do not think guts would be a tidy way of doing this.



Then Aunt Gloria said, 'Oh, my boy, what have they done to you?'

I wondered whom she meant by 'they'.

Then, 'You'd better be back by Wednesday or we'll miss our flight to New York.'

Then, 'That stupid policeman. Saying not to worry. I'll bet he doesn't have children.'

Then, 'Supposing some terrible gang has abducted him? Oh, mercy, mercy, no!'

Then she noticed me watching her.

'What are you staring at?' She pointed a pink-lacquered fingernail at me and jabbed the air. 'If you hadn't suggested going to the London Eye, this would never have happened. You and your bloody bicycle wheel in the sky!' She flopped onto the sofa and made a wailing sound. 'Oh, Ted. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.'

'Glo!' Mum said, rushing to sit beside her. 'Calm down, love.' She flapped her hand at me as if I was an annoying fly. I figured out that this meant she didn't want me anywhere nearby.

I went to see Kat, who was in the kitchen sitting

at the table. She had her headphones on and her head down on her arms so she couldn't see me or hear me.

So I went up to my room.