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## Chapter One

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# *News from England*

## The Adventure Begins

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Polly was finding the song more and more interesting because she thought she was beginning to see the connection between the music and the things that were happening.

“old your noise, everyone,” said the Cabby. “I want to listen to the moosic.”

*C. S. Lewis*

The kitchen door flew open with a bang. Lanky, blond-haired Drew Willis bolted into the house clutching the mail in his hands, his face flushed with excitement.

“Annie!” he yelled, dropping the pile of letters and tearing into a thin blue envelope. “It’s from Mrs. Beccles!” he said, as his sister came rushing into the kitchen.

“Don’t read it without me,” she said, finishing a braid in her shiny blond hair, while straining to see over her younger, but now clearly taller, brother’s broadening shoulders.

The children had met Mrs. Beccles last summer when they traveled with their mother to Olney, an ancient English market town, where they had expected to spend the most boring summer of their lives. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Mrs. Beccles owned and operated “Beccles Bakehouse,” and Drew didn’t think anyone made pastries as delicious as kindly Mrs. Beccles. From their first day in the village she had become their friend.

Drew read out loud:

My dears, Annie and Drew,

The most astonishing thing happened today in my little shop, and I simply had to be writing you

about it, for as near as I can tell, it concerned you both.

Mr. Pipes and Dr. Dudley called in for tea at half-past four—they often do, as you’ll no doubt remember—but very soon their conversation became rather heated, leastwise, heated on Dr. D’s part, as you’d be expecting. Your dear friend and companion, Mr. Pipes, seemed to be proposing some adventure, of which Dr. D clearly did not approve. I couldn’t be hearing the details, of course, not being given to eavesdropping, but I did hear them mention your names more than once, that’s sure, and I’m feeling it in my bones this bodes well for your upcoming summer holidays!

—Oh, you’ll have to hold that thought for a moment whilst I pull some of my jelly-fills out of the oven—My, how I do wish I could send you some, Drew, knowing how much you be liking them and all....

Here, a dark red splotch interrupted the letter. Drew scratched at the splotch, sniffed it, then carefully tasted it.

“Well?” said Annie.

“Currant jelly,” said Drew, scratching again at the little splotch. “Umm-m, what I wouldn’t do for one of Mrs. Beccles’ jelly-fills! What do you think Mr. Pipes has up his sleeve?” he went on.

“Whatever it is,” said Annie, “it’s got to be good if Mr. Pipes came up with it.”

“—And good,” said Drew, “if Dr. Dudley doesn’t like it.”

“Behind his stiff, British way,” said Annie, smiling as she remembered Dr. Dudley’s jutting chin and long, sniffing nose, “he really means well—I’m sure of it. I think Dr. Dudley just cares so much for Mr. Pipes he doesn’t want to see anything—well, you know—anything bad happen to him.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Drew doubtfully.

In the rest of the letter Mrs. Beccles filled them in on all the latest news from Olney:

Beatrice Faulkner won this year's Pancake Race—the five-hundred-and-fifty-fifth anniversary race—I say, how time does fly! Mrs. Broadwith has new lodgers, imagine it, who flatly refused to eat her stewed tomatoes for breakfast; the local radio station is exerting considerable pressure on the vicar to be placing a ghastly antenna on the very spire of St. Peter and St. Paul's—our parish church, of all places! What would Mr. Newton have thought! English Heritage has threatened to fine the Cowper Museum 100 pounds sterling for repainting dear Mr. Cowper's door the wrong shade of red (how they know it's the wrong shade I'll never know, that's sure!). Lambing season for the Howard family is very busy, as always, but the mild spring weather means fewer lambs are being lost to cold. Bentley and Clara send their love....

Annie and Drew's minds flooded with memories from the narrow, cobbled streets of Olney (cars whizzing by on the wrong side of the street), their fishing and sailing adventures with Mr. Pipes along the Great Ouse, Lulu the white pony, Lord Underfoot the cat, their good friends—Bentley and Clara Howard and all their sheep, the great stone church built so long ago, and Mr. Pipes's stories told around the old organ. Life in Olney was so unlike their life in America, but how they had grown to love that life. What could Mr. Pipes be planning that would involve them? They both wondered.



A week later Annie lay on the floor of her bedroom, her bare feet propped up on her bed, a page of her sketchbook—full of crossed out lines—open in front of her. She looked dreamily at the ceiling, took a deep breath and sighed. Mr. Pipes told her how to begin writing a poem, but no matter how hard she tried

the words seemed to have a mind of their own. How did the hymn writers, that Mr. Pipes had told them about last summer, do it? “Remember, my dear,” he had said in his clear gentle voice, “the rhyme must serve the meaning, not the other way round.” Somehow, recalling Mr. Pipes’s instruction only made her more discouraged as she gazed at her own efforts—

There was a man with whitened hair  
Who for his friends so much did care.

—”Ugh!” she groaned.

A clinking sound suddenly interrupted her muse as the mailman dropped letters through the slot in the front door. With regular letters from Clara—some of them written in an elaborate code they’d worked out over months of using dancing paper doll-like symbols, every arm and foot position corresponding to letters of the alphabet—she’d trained herself to listen for the mail everyday. After a dash across the hall and a quick shuffle through the pile of mail, she opened, with trembling hands, another blue envelope from England, this one from Mr. Pipes himself. Now, receiving a letter from Mr. Pipes was not so strange. He wrote often, letters filled with reminiscence of their adventures, and filled with encouraging words and helpful solutions to the questions they asked in their replies. But this letter seemed somehow different. Her eyes raced down the page.

“Drew! Oh, my goodness, Drew!” she called, jumping up and down with excitement. She reread the last paragraph of the letter to be sure her eyes had not deceived her.

The piano playing from the den abruptly halted and a moment later Drew burst into the living room.

“He wants us to come back!” she squealed.

“Who?” asked Drew, scowling at her, irritated that she’d interrupted his practice.

“Mr. Pipes, silly,” said Annie.

Mr. Pipes was Drew’s long-distance music teacher who assigned hymns through the mail for Drew to practice. He’d just

been struggling with learning “Minstrel Boy,” the tune Mr. Pipes preferred for Reginald Heber’s hymn, “The Son of God Goes Forth to War.” Sometimes he wondered about Mr. Pipes’s insistence that he begin piano lessons again. It was hard work!

“Let me get this straight,” said Drew, the excitement growing in his voice. “Mr. Pipes is inviting us back to Olney?”

“Not exactly,” said Annie.

“Let me see that,” said Drew, grabbing at the letter.

“Look at the last paragraph,” said Annie.

“Naturally this is all conditioned upon your mother and stepfather’s approval...” Drew read aloud. He read on, skimming the rest of the paragraph silently. His heart beat more quickly as he read through the paragraph again. Could it actually be true?

“Annie,” said Drew, calming his voice with considerable effort. “Annie, do you realize what this means?”

“You bet I do,” said Annie, spinning around on her heel, her pigtails sailing behind her. “If Mom and Dad let us, we are off to Germany and Switzerland for the whole summer—and with Mr. Pipes! Just think—mountains, cowbells, castles—it’s too good to be true!”

“Don’t forget the Swiss chocolate,” said Drew, his eyes rolling back in his head as he flopped onto the couch with a laugh.

“No wonder Dr. Dudley had another of his heated talks with Mr. Pipes,” he went on. Sitting up, Drew cleared his throat and jutted out his chin. “I say, old fellow,” he began, doing his best imitation of Dr. Dudley’s accent. “My dear man, I’ll be dashed if you take those American children gallivanting all over the Continent—little blighters! They’ll have you in your grave before your time, that’s sure.”

Annie sank to the floor laughing as Drew continued.

“Of course, I’d simply never dream of interfering—” Here Drew, too, burst into laughter.



Their parents did not entirely understand the change that had come over the children since spending last summer with Mr. Pipes. For a time they tried to discourage it, to divert the children's attention back to their old life and friends, but their mother couldn't help noticing how positive the old man's influence had been on her children. Barring the hymns they almost continually sang—*dirges*, as she called them—they quarreled much less than before, were more helpful around the house, and approached their studies at school with much more enthusiasm. But another whole summer under Mr. Pipes's influence? They did so want their children to be open-minded and free-thinking. However, after some discussion—while Annie and Drew huddled anxiously at their parents' bedroom door—they gave their consent.

The last weeks of the school term seemed to last forever. Annie and Drew spent every spare moment talking excitedly about the adventure that lay ahead. They packed and repacked their knapsacks. Mr. Pipes had written that they needed to travel light, but they would also need sailing and fishing clothes.

"You see, my dears," he explained in his last letter, "one must make every effort to pack clothing that can be used for more than one purpose. For example, I will bring only two neckties—the best one for church and musical performances, and so forth, and my second best one for sailing, fishing and generally pottering about the countryside."

Annie and Drew smiled. It was so like their dear, proper friend, Mr. Pipes. They repacked again. Drew even experimented with packing a necktie—but only one.

"How can time drag by so slowly," asked Annie the night before their flight to London, "and then all of a sudden what you've been waiting for is here? Oh, I'll never get to sleep tonight."

"Me neither," said Drew, trying on his knapsack for the hundredth time. "But maybe we can get some rest on the airplane—I can't believe we're actually going!"



Annie and Drew swallowed hard as the powerful jet engines roared and the airplane raced down the runway. Suddenly the plane lifted off, climbing steeply into the blue sky above; Annie gulped as she waited for her stomach to catch up. Drew worked his jaw back and forth trying to relieve the popping feeling in his eardrums. Annie scrunched her eyes closed and gripped the armrest as the plane jolted through a layer of fluffy white clouds.

“Another airline seat bites the dust,” said Drew, watching Annie’s fingernails dig deeply into the armrest.

In a few moments Annie relaxed as the plane leveled off and flew more smoothly. Seeing the sunlight flash on the shiny wings of the plane, she managed a smile as it carried them north and east toward England and Mr. Pipes.

With a “pling-pling” the fasten-your-seat-belts sign flicked off. After several minutes, a woman wearing a dark blue suit and matching hat stopped in the aisle and smiled at Annie and Drew. Holding something wrapped in plastic toward Drew, she asked, in Dr. Dudley English, “Might I interest you in headphones for music listening? Here are the selections available.” She handed him a little card. Drew scanned down the list: “Garage Mirage, Pragma Magma, and Mr. Wild-Man Band,” he read silently. He looked again at the headphones. There was a time when an opportunity to sit for hours soaking up music—this kind of music—would have been like eating his favorite ice cream—with all the toppings.

He looked out the window for a moment and thought of a phrase Mr. Pipes once quoted in a letter: “Worldliness makes sin look normal and righteousness look odd.” He turned back to the flight attendant. “No thanks—but—” he hesitated, “—do you have anything to eat?”

Annie scowled at him, “*Drew?*”

But the flight attendant laughed. “I’ll be back in a moment with drinks and a little snack. Dinner will follow shortly, after which time dessert will be served, then tea.”

“Sounds great!” said Drew, licking his lips.

“It sounds like we’ll be eating most of the flight,” said Annie.



The flight attendant laughed again. "We do want our passengers happy!" She disappeared behind a little curtain for a moment then reappeared balancing two trays. Annie and Drew flipped down their seat trays in anticipation.

"Here now, this ought to hold you until dinner," she said, setting before them several bags of peanuts, a currant scone each and an assortment of jams and jellies. "I suppose you prefer soda?" she continued, reaching for two cans of pop from the other tray.

"What's in the pot?" asked Drew.

"Tea—*hot* tea," she said. "We English can't live without the stuff, but I'm given to understand you Americans don't think much of it."

"Oh, but we like tea," said Annie, "with milk and sugar, please."

"How lovely!" said the flight attendant as she skillfully balanced the tray while filling two cups with the steaming liquid.

"May I have more sugar, please?" asked Drew, gazing into his cup before sipping.



Darkness spread rapidly as the airplane raced northeast and the sun raced the other way, finally disappearing over the horizon. Annie passed the time by looking at her drawings and poetry written last summer with Mr. Pipes in Olney. She breathed the faint but still fragrant aroma of the dried flowers she'd gathered and pressed in her book. Chewing on her pencil, she scowled at several lines she'd written. Why couldn't she write poetry like Mrs. Alexander or William Cowper? She sighed deeply. Oh well, she'd keep trying.

The hours passed as Drew, a puzzled expression on his face, watched a rugby match on the small TV monitor in the back of the seat in front of him. They both fell asleep somewhere over the frozen wastes of Greenland.

"This is your captain speaking," jolted them awake. Drew stretched and yawned. Annie wiped the sleep out of her eyes with

both fists. "Breakfast will be served momentarily," continued the captain. "Do enjoy. We will arrive at Heathrow about 11:00 a.m. London time."

"Oh no!" said Drew, sniffing the air and looking hungrily down the aisle. "You don't think they'd serve us stewed tomatoes for breakfast, would they?"

"Better get used to it again, Drew," said Annie, who didn't like stewed tomatoes any better than Drew, but who also didn't feel—probably never felt—as hungry as her brother. "Maybe they will ease us back into British cuisine slowly and just serve fried mushrooms and soft-boiled eggs—with a side of baked beans and deep-fried toast. You never can tell." She seemed to be enjoying his distress.

"Ugh!" said Drew.

Breakfast proved to be much more of an American affair than Drew had feared, and after the trays were cleared away the plane began its steady descent through the broken clouds toward London. Drew grabbed the map from the seat pocket in front of him and studied it carefully.

"Where are we?" asked Annie.

Drew glanced out the window at the red sandy tideland below. "We must be near the Solway Firth just here." He pointed to the map.

"What on earth is a *firth*?" asked Annie.

"Don't know—maybe British for some amount between four and five," said Drew. "But it's the name of this notch of water that marks the western border between Scotland and England—a firth must be like a bay, I'd guess."

Annie looked more closely at the map. "So, if we stay on this route, how close to Olney will we come as we fly toward London?"

Drew traced a line from the border of Scotland and England down to London. "It looks like this time we'll go almost right over Olney!" he said, his excitement growing.

Annie and Drew sat with their faces plastered against the window on the left side of the plane. Green pastures, separated by