

## The day Samantha had two clever ideas

In a faraway place called Holcombe—well not that far away—lived two sisters, an older one named Sophie and a younger one, named Samantha. They lived with their mum and dad, and a horse, and a dog. The horse was called Smudge, because she kept on walking through muddy puddles, and the dog was called Thumper, because he kept thumping his tail on the verandah floor as he lay at the front door to the house.

Each morning the girls went to school. It was a small school, and this was just as well, because the girls were small too. They were in Year Five and Year Three and there were only 83 other children in the whole school.

They travelled to school in a car and a bus. Mum drove the two girls down a long, winding, bumpy, dirt road to the gate. This was because their house was in the country, and next to a big forest. Mum had to drive slowly because of William the Wombat. Mostly William slept in the morning, in his burrow, but you can never tell with wombats. Mum would always say that sometimes wombats like to run out in front of the car.

On the other side of the gate was the proper road and that's where the bus travelled. The girls jumped on the bus, met their friends, and went to school, just like that. And this happened every day, but last Tuesday it didn't.

This particular Tuesday began badly. Everybody seemed to be in a hurry. Mum was in a hurry, Dad was in a hurry, and Sophie was in a hurry. And now Samantha was in a hurry because she couldn't find her socks, and she did so want her favourite pair, the socks with extra thickness on the bottom. In the end she had to wear an ordinary pair.

Mum hurried the 4WD down the dirt road. It was just too bad about William the Wombat. Besides, Samantha secretly hoped that one day William would be squished. He is such a selfish wombat, she thought, always wanting the whole road to himself when he has miles and miles of grass and trees to play in. And of course he didn't have to go to school. He should be squished just for that.

They arrived down at the front gate barely in time for the bus. Mum had to rush off to work and the children could see the school bus coming in the distance. But it didn't stop. It was the wrong bus. It was not Samantha and Sophie's bus. So they waited and waited. Sophie was very good at telling the time on her new watch so she knew it was very late.

Samantha suddenly had a clever idea. "Why don't we ride Smudge to school? I'm sure she can do it".

"That would be fun—but do you think we would get into trouble?" wondered Sophie. But all she heard were chicken noises, coming from Samantha, who was already leading Smudge over to the gate.

"Lucky Smudge was down this end of our road", Samantha said. The girls took Smudge through the gate, locked it, and then got Smudge to stand right next to the gate. Samantha and Sophie climbed up the rails and straight onto Smudge's big back. There was plenty of room, and besides, Smudge was a tub-tub as she was always eating, like Thumper the dog.

They headed off down the road, in and out of the trees, through the bushes, up and down holes and around drains. Samantha knew she had to keep Smudge going, keeping her away from the road and away from the fence. Horses are not

very good at seeing fences.

Clip, clop, clip, clop. "We'll never get there," sighed Sophie. "I wish Smudge would go faster". Both girls had already tried kicking Smudge but it was like kicking an elephant. It didn't make any difference.

"I have an idea," announced Samantha, and this was her second clever idea. She grabbed a small but strong branch. Whack, whack, whackitty-whack, right onto Smudge's big back.

"Hey, careful!" shouted Sophie. "You nearly hit me then." But Sophie knew that Smudge needed some clear and firm instructions. Both girls had learned that from their mother, who was a very good horse rider.

Now Smudge might have been a bit fat, and quite lazy, but she wasn't stupid. She knew she had to go more quickly, well at least a bit more quickly. Clippety-clop, clopperty-clip, clippety-clop. That's better, thought the girls. We are going to get there.

And they did. They turned left, turned right, down to the corner shop, across the railway line, another turn, up the hill, and straight through the school gate. Smudge was going slowly now but it didn't matter. The girls could just tie Smudge up outside the classroom and then sneak in.

Oh, oooh—it was the school principal. Why does the principal always appear just when there is some type of trouble? All children know that this happens, and expect it, but Sophie wondered if principals have some type of magic power. This one certainly seemed to.

"I'm glad to see you both have arrived, safe and sound", said the principal, but he didn't look that glad. After talking to the children's teacher, the principal told Samantha and Sophie that he would be having a little talk with them later. Suddenly their adventure seemed to lose some of the fun.

Finally lunch time came, and the children filed out of the classroom, best row first as always, to get their lunches out of their bags, and start out munching. Most of the children went over to Smudge, of course, who was also eating.

"Where's my lunch?" wailed little Rebecca, who lost her lunch so often that no-one ever listened. But she wasn't the only one, and indeed about ten children couldn't find their lunches, but they could find their lunch boxes and paper wrappings. It didn't take long, even for the silliest boy in class, Sam, to work out who had taken the lunches. It was that horse, the one which likes eating.

Unbelievably, but true, the principal magically appeared. Sophie was now quite certain he was some type of wizard. Samantha started explaining that Smudge didn't really mean to eat the lunches but the principal wasn't listening. He was leading Smudge away to the piece of grass just next to the Principal's office. Smudge didn't seem to mind. Perhaps there would be more food, she thought greedily.

Before the principal went he told the children that more lunches would be ordered straight away, and that they would be collected by Mrs Lawson, who was helping out in the library. And the children with missing lunches would be given extra lunchtime to make up for waiting. Samantha wondered how grown-ups could think of these sensible things.

The children were having finger painting in the afternoon but Samantha and Sophie had their minds on something else.

Around and around, and around and around, went Sophie's fingers, but the colours were turning into mud, and she didn't really care. Samantha was getting the paint onto her clothes, and she didn't care about that either.

Knock, knock. It was the message person, the lucky boy or girl who gets to do all the messages for one day. "The principal would like to see Samantha and Sophie." The two girls walked slowly, but not too slowly, to the principal's office.

"Well, you girls have had quite an adventure but it wasn't a safe one," the principal started, and then said a whole lot more, on and on, but for Samantha and Sophie it wasn't going in. The last bit did though, "and I have telephoned your mother, and she will be coming after school to collect your horse with the horse float, and you two as well. So you won't be getting the school bus this afternoon."

But what did happen to the school bus that Tuesday morning? Why didn't the bus come? Well, that was explained by the children's teachers, on the day before but Samantha and Sophie weren't listening. There was also a note sent home. Usually when children don't listen to their teacher nothing much happens. But this time it did.

That Tuesday night it was very quiet at the house. Samantha, Sophie and Smudge all went to bed very early. Soon they were fast asleep, dreaming of their next adventure. But just before Samantha went to sleep she thought that maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't be nice to squish William the Wombat.