SALLY-ANNE THOMSON

Sally-Anne was walking excitedly down The Mall clutching her parents' hands. She was five and it was in the early hours, and they were in the middle of a vast crowd, trying to find a place in the front row behind the barricades that had been erected for King George the Sixth's Coronation. After some time pushing towards the front, the family reached the barricades and sat down on the pavement. It was cold but they were warmly dressed, and Mum opened a flask of hot coffee and a bag of chocolate biscuits she had made. They all tried to sleep after their feast, but it was difficult. There was such a crowd around them, and people were still pushing down the Mall hoping to get nearer to Westminster Abbey.

The procession started at ten o'clock with the arrival of Mr. Baldwin the British Prime Minister in his car, followed by prime ministers of Commonwealth countries in theirs. And then it became more exciting as soldiers, airmen and sailors marched past with bands playing and then came the horses with the riders in their ceremonial uniforms. "Oh! Look at that horse – just like Black Beauty in my book!"

shouted Sally-Anne excitedly. Before long, coaches came with duchesses in their royal robes and their husbands, the dukes, riding horses behind them, and then the coach with Mary, the Queen Mother and the little Princess Elizabeth and her small sister Princess Margaret. “It must be wonderful to be a real princess,” said Sally-Anne wistfully. “But you are,” said Dad. “You are my and Mum’s own very special princess.” Soldiers marched between the carriages playing music joyfully. The last coach, covered in glittering gold, bore King George the Sixth on his way to be anointed and proclaimed King with his wife Queen Elizabeth. The crowd went wild, waving flags and shouting greetings. The Thomson family waved their flags and shouted until they were hoarse. They sat down and Mum gave them bread and ham sandwiches, more coffee, biscuits and crunchy red apples. They listened enthralled as the service was broadcast with commentary by the BBC from lampposts down The Mall, and around Buckingham Palace. No one dreamt that on 1 September 1939 Britain would be at war.

When the efforts of the Prime Minister, Mister Stanly Baldwin, failed to appease Hitler, he resigned, and Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. “We will fight them on the sea, we will fight them on the land, we will fight them in the air, but we will never surrender!” he declared holding up his fingers in the V for Victory sign. He set up underground headquarters in Whitehall so that the government could continue fighting the war in the event of an invasion and direct the war from this secret bunker.

The Thomsons lived in a small house in the East End of London. When Hitler’s Blitz started, large balloons were tethered in parts of London especially over the densely populated East End. These prevented Hitler’s planes from flying too low and forced them to fly higher. Despite this, the area was very hard hit. Sally-Anne was frightened as they fled to shelter in the underground Tube Stations. “I don’t like this, Mummy” she cried. One morning as they walked home stepping over rubble and looking at houses that had been bombed, they met their neighbors, and Pamela, Sally-Anne’s best friend, standing crying in front of where their

house had been. Nothing remained. “I will give you my best doll, Pamela,” she said. The next night sitting with the Nortons, their neighbors, Daddy said,” I want to send Sally-Anne to the country where she will be safe. A man at work sent his daughter and she is now safe and staying in a house billeted to look after children from the East End. Her parents visit her on weekends and say how happy she is there. There’s also no lack of food because so many people in the village grow their own veggies and some keep chickens which lay eggs every day and the roosters they roast for Sunday lunch, and others even have a cow, so they have milk and make their own soft cheeses.” “That’s a great idea” said Pamela’s mother, I think we should send Pamela with Sally-Anne, don’t you Sam?” “Yes,” he agreed, “the sooner the better.”

After all the formalities were completed, the Thomsons and the Nortons set off by train for the village of Apple Dumpling. It was about fifty miles south of London. After travelling across London, they reached lovely fields and villages with small, thatched houses. The girls were

fascinated, having never been outside of London. “Look at all the fields, apple trees and farms!” exclaimed Sally-Anne delightedly.

On reaching Apple Dumpling, the families said farewell to each other and went to the houses where the girls had been billeted. A smiling, plump woman opened the door. “Welcome!” she said, smiling broadly. “Come inside. Sally-Anne will be sharing with my daughter Tammy, who is at school now. I am sure they will get on famously, she is so excited to have a friend - she’s an only child and a bit spoilt, I must admit.” After a delicious tea with apple dumplings, Daddy and Mummy kissed Sally-Anne and said they would visit her next Saturday and take her and Tammy out to tea. Sunday was the Lord’s Day, and both families were attending church, the Thomsons in the Great Baptist Tabernacle in the East End and the Smiths, for that was their surname, in the 12th century ancient church in Apple Dumpling.

As Apple Dumpling was a small village, there was only one teacher, Miss Susan Philpott. She welcomed Sally-Anne and Pamela warmly. “Let’s give them a clap, children.” Toby yelled, “Nice to have two new girls. I want a girlfriend!” “Please behave yourself, Toby.” said Miss Philpott and take out your reading books while I teach the little ones to read, write and do arithmetic. And so, for five years life carried on smoothly, and then a terrible thing happened. The local policeman called at the Smiths’ house. “I am sorry to tell you that the Thomsons house was bombed and there is no sign of them. So, they are presumed dead.” When Missus Smith, whom Sally-Anne called Aunty Jane, told her she collapsed weeping uncontrollably. The powers that be decided that it would help her get over her loss if she moved far away from Apple Dumpling, in fact to New York in America.

Sally-Anne was met by the Simpsons and their only son Gregory who was four years older than Sally-Anne. They were a very wealthy family and lived in a sumptuous apartment overlooking Central Park. “We can never replace

your parents, Sally-Anne, but we shall do our best to make you feel loved. This is your bedroom. It has its own bathroom and a small balcony overlooking Central Park. I shall take you shopping after lunch for your school uniform. You will be going to the Christian School near us where Gregory is Head Boy. And I will also buy you lots of school gear, and lovely clothes. It is summer now and very hot in New York, but we have an indoor swimming pool." Sally-Anne stared at her bedroom. It was so big and so beautiful, there was a huge Teddy Bear on her bed and a Bible on the bedside table. "Thank you very much. You have been so kind to take me in. I love the Teddy Bear and the Bible next to my bed. What shall I call you?" "Call me Mum like Gregory does and keep Mummy for your real Mum, and Daddy for your real Dad. We shall all keep on praying that you may see them well and healthy one day. Our God is a God of miracles." After a delicious chicken salad and ice cream and coffee, Mum asked the butler to call her chauffeur, and they set off to buy Sally-Anne everything she needed. It was such a huge pile! "What pretty dresses! Mummy made all my clothes from offcuts she bought in the

market. And I love my uniforms and all the gear I need. They all have a cross on them. Mummy would have been so pleased," And Sally-Anne burst into tears. "Let's go and have afternoon tea in Macys. Their teas are delicious, and the store has many levels," said Mum. When they got home, Gregory was there, tall and handsome with brown hair and sparkling eyes, "Hello, little sis," he said giving her a hug. Sally-Anne looked at him and instantly fell in love for the first time in her life.

Some years later when Sally-Anne had grown to be a beautiful young lady with long curly blonde hair and sparkling big blue eyes, Gregory asked her to be his dance partner for a ball held for the University of New York's final year students. He had enrolled to become a doctor. Sally-Anne was very excited, and she and Mum went shopping. They both fell in love with a silk light blue sheath dress with a gold ribbon at the waist. "You look stunning!" exclaimed Gregory when he saw her. At the last dance, he bent over her and said, "I love you, Sally-Anne, will you marry me" O yes!" she exclaimed. "I have loved you for years." And they

kissed and kissed all the way home. Mum and Dad called for champagne, and there was much hugging and celebrating.

But what had actually happened to Daddy and Mummy in the World War? It was Mummy's birthday, and Daddy had saved up to give her a treat. He had hired a taxi to drive them to the seaside. On the way and some miles out of London, a car came round a corner of the road on the wrong side and crashed into them. The taxi driver was killed. Daddy had a broken leg and Mummy two broken arms. When they recovered the war was still being waged and Daddy was called up to fight and Mummy to work in a factory making uniforms for soldiers. They wrote a long letter to Sally-Anne telling her all that had happened, but she never received it having already sailed on the last ship taking children to America.

As soon as the war was over, they flew to America to search for Sally-Anne. But what a huge country it was! "How ever,

will we find her?" Mummy asked in despair. "I think we should start in New York," replied Daddy, "Let's go to the City Hall and ask if Sally-Anne was on the last shipload of children and where she went. We've been praying every day that we will find her." It was amazingly easy. "Yes," said the clerk, "she went to the Simpsons in an apartment overlooking Central Park. Take a cab there, won't cost you much."

The Thomsons entered the apartment building and asked the man at the information desk for the number of the Simpsons apartment. "What is your name? he asked. "I will call them and say you are on the way up." Dad put down the phone. "Darling," he said, "the Thomsons are on their way up. Our prayers have been answered!"

"Wonderful to see you!" exclaimed Dad shaking Daddy's hand. "We all thought you were dead." "No, it's a long story - we arrived in New York earlier this week." "Come and sit down and have some tea," said Mum. "Where is Sally-Anne please? asked Mummy, "We can't wait to see her." She's out

with her girlfriends for the day, and Gregory, our son, is playing golf with his best friends. They are getting married tomorrow." "Goodness me!" exclaimed Mummy. "My little Sally-Anne is getting married! How time has flown." Since we will be family tomorrow, I am Hilton and my wife is Serena." said Dad. "And I am Jack and my wife is Gladys," said Daddy. Over tea, Hilton said to Jack, "You must give your daughter away," "That's very, very kind of you," replied Jack, "but you must do it. You have been a wonderful Dad to Sally-Anne all these years and your guests would be most perplexed to see an unknown fellow with the bride." Gladys said, "We'll need some clothes. We have nothing suitable in our cases." Serena said, "Don't worry, I will organize that. Please accept it as a small thank you for giving us Sally-Anne. She has brought so much happiness into our lives."

There was so much to talk about over a delicious lunch of roast lamb and veggies, a fine couple of bottles of champagne and a delicious apple tart served with cream. Over lunch the happy foursome agreed not to tell Sally-

Anne about her parents but do it at the end of the service before the reception in the Balmoral Hotel. “I will put you in the guest suite,” said Serena. “Have a lie down and I will arrange the clothes. The suite is on the floor below, so the children won’t see you.” Serena phoned Mister August and Miss Silvia at Dior, “Please come to my guest suite and measure two of my friends for clothes and then bring some fashionable but quiet clothes – they don’t want to stick out in the crowd.” “Certainly, Madame, “responded Mister August. “We will be there in half an hour.”

They came and measured the Thomsons from top to toe, returning in a couple of hours pushing two racks of clothes with packages at the bottom. “Please follow me into the bedroom, Madame,” said Miss Silvia to Gladys. Please follow me into the dining room, Sir,” said Mister August to Jack. Taking the clothes from their covers and laying them on the bed, Miss Silvia proceeded to dress naked Gladys from top to toe. “Beautiful!” She exclaimed. Mister August did the same to Jack. “You look just right,” he said. And they did. Jack was wearing a beautifully cut light grey linen suit, shoes to match, a light blue shirt and a darker blue bowtie.

Gladys was wearing a silk sky blue dress and a small light grey straw hat with a blue chiffon rose at the back. And all from Dior!

The Thomsons dressed and left the guest suite through the kitchen, Gregory was already waiting in the nearby Methodist All Soul's Church. It was filled with huge bowls of flowers, roses and orchids, and many other exotic blooms. The organist was playing joyful voluntaries, and the three bridesmaids, Tammy, Susan and Felicity were waiting on the porch. Serena walked down the aisle and sat in the front row. She looked the picture of elegance in a green silk sheath dress and a tiny hat covered in white chiffon roses. Jack and Gladys sat in a pew at the back of the church and looked curiously at Gregory. "He's really so handsome," whispered Gladys. "Yes, and tall." answered Jack, "our son-in-law!" The organist stopped playing voluntaries and the organ rang out with Mendelsohn's great Wedding March. The congregation turned and stared as Sally-Anne entered on Hilton's arm followed by her bridesmaids in different shades of pink chiffon dresses and carrying small bouquets

of pink and white roses. Sally-Anne had grown into an exquisite young woman with short blonde curls. Her wedding dress was of white silk with long sleeves and a floor length crinoline skirt. The bodice was cut fashionably low and encrusted with tiny pearls, and round her neck was a golden cross set with small diamonds that her parents had given her that morning.

It was a beautiful Christian ceremony. Gregory was waiting at the front with his best-man. Both were dressed in formal attire with long tailed black trousers, white shirts, black bowties and a bright golden orchid corsage. Gregory kept turning around looking eagerly for Sally-Anne. At last, the organ burst out with Mendelsohn's great Wedding March.

Jack and Gladys held each other's hands as Hilton and Sally-Anne passed them. She had chosen two of her favourite hymns, Immortal, Invisible, God only wise, and Praise my soul the King of Heaven. Walking out of the church, they were showered with pink rosebuds. Standing

in the courtyard, Hilton took Sally-Anne's hand in his. "I have a surprise for you," he said as he led her to Jack and Gladys. "Your parents," he said. Sally-Anne took one look at them, fell into Glady's arms and, sobbing, cried, Mummy! Daddy!