

Street Kid Fights On

She thought the nightmare was over



Judy Westwater

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**Street Kid Fights On: She
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How can you forget your past when it keeps coming back to haunt you? Judy Westwater, the Sunday Times bestselling author of *Street Kid*, was determined to turn her back on her cruel and violent childhood. She didn't stand a chance. All too soon hope turned to fear and she knew she'd have to run again. Judy was only 11 years old when she was forced to live on the streets. Beaten, half-starved and horrifically abused, she finally escaped to a life in the circus and fell in love with one of the circus hands. But the charming man who seemed so perfect had a dark and sinister side. If she wanted to survive she had to get away. Judy fled to South Africa, taking with her her two young children. But the streets of South Africa were just as cruel. One day a man took her five-year-old daughter and her violent past was replayed in front of her eyes. Judy's incredible story of courage and determination will inspire as it will amaze.

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Judy Westwater

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *STREET KID*



FOR ALL SURVIVORS

Hold fast that strength of courage

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Prologue

I never had anyone looking after me – I always just looked after myself from when I was very young.

My father, a phoney spiritualist preacher, used me as a punch bag from the day he abducted me as a two-year-old from his estranged wife's home in a spiteful gesture of revenge. His partner Freda treated me like her slave, starving and beating me daily and locking me out in the back yard in all weathers. Things weren't any better when they took me to live in South Africa then abandoned me, so that I ended up sleeping rough on the streets of Johannesburg at the age of twelve. When I was seventeen, I came back to the UK to look for my Mum but found she didn't want to have anything to do with me; she and my sisters had their own lives to lead by then.

I was pretty streetwise and knew how to keep myself alive. I wouldn't starve or die of cold so long as I could forage in dustbins for food and find an old shack to sleep in. But I didn't have a clue about how normal human relationships worked. I didn't have any social skills or instincts about character. If someone was nice to me, I thought that meant they were a good person and I gave them my trust. If they treated me badly, I thought it was my fault, that I must have done something wrong. As for love, I didn't know what that meant.

A whole new learning curve was about to begin.

Chapter One

The advert in the *Manchester Evening News* read: ‘Trapeze artist wanted. Belle Vue Firework Island and Amusement Park.’ I’d worked in a circus before, in South Africa: once, when I was eleven, I ran away from my father and stepmother’s brutal regime and joined Wilkie’s Circus for two months until I was apprehended. I looked back on those days as some of the happiest of my life, when I felt part of an extended family of fairground folk. Now, in 1962, I was seventeen, homeless and needed a job badly, so I rang the number in the advert and arranged an interview.

Speedy Barham was a short, stocky guy with a cheeky grin. He’d been a pilot in the air force but now he owned an aerial circus act that he called the Australian Air Aces. He came forward to greet me in the tent when I arrived, holding out his hand.

‘So, you must be Judy.’

‘That’s me.’

I liked him immediately – he seemed really comfortable with himself, which set me at my ease. I also loved the smell of the place – the bales of hay and animal cages and the lingering sweetness of popcorn and candy floss.

‘It’s not like a regular job interview, you know,’ he grinned. ‘Is it OK if you hang around till Thursday?’

‘Sure,’ I said. I had nowhere else to be.

Speedy put me through my paces for a couple of days. I was skinny, but strong and very determined. I dived right in and hauled equipment, helped to set it up and spent hours swinging upside down on the trapeze as Speedy called out instructions. I made mistakes a couple of times and was terrified he would be cross with me. At home if I got something wrong my father had thought nothing of hurling me across the room, but Speedy just said ‘Whoa! I think you’d better try that one again.’

‘Don’t you feel nervous?’ he asked after one session. ‘That trapeze is pretty high.’

‘It’s OK,’ I said, but I couldn’t really explain to him why I had such steely nerves. The truth was that where I had grown up, getting badly hurt was a certainty. My father beat me almost daily on any pretext. I was used to being covered in bruises. Standing on a swing just didn’t hold the same threat, even if I was high up and without a safety harness. I shrugged. Sometimes being on the trapeze took my breath away, but it was no comparison to the kind of terror I had lived with when my father flew off the handle, hurled abuse in my direction and beat me black and blue.

When Speedy offered me the job I was so delighted that my face flushed with happiness. I could feel my cheeks glowing. It was like being accepted into a big happy family – like a dream come true for me. Speedy said I could stay on the fairground site in a 1930s brown coach with a yellow stripe painted all round it, so that solved my accommodation problem. We agreed a wage of eight pounds a week, which was a fortune for a seventeen-year-old in 1962. As Bobby, one of the other aerial artistes, put it ‘It’s not half as bad as working in Walls’ sausage factory.’

The act I was to perform in was an amazing type of aerial acrobatics. Speedy rode a motorbike round a track that was suspended forty feet up in the air. The bike was connected to a narrow platform that see-sawed up and down, causing the bike to somersault through the air with Speedy clinging onto it. Meanwhile, two other girls – Speedy’s girlfriend Vicky and Bobby, a glamorous blonde – and I would do a trapeze act above him. At the climax of the act, I had to leave the trapeze and walk slowly along the central platform until my weight caused Speedy’s wheels to descend once more onto the track. The show was to be performed outdoors so we’d have to watch out for gusts of wind, or rain making the platform slippery, and everything happened at high speed, without a safety net. There was no margin of error. One lapse of concentration could cost everyone their lives. So when I started we rehearsed the act over and over – it felt like a thousand times.

Speedy was very patient, teaching me how to count between the moves and be very aware of where everyone else was. We rehearsed on the ground first and I got the hang of it quickly. Then we had to get the timing right for Speedy's somersaults.

'I'll call out to you when I'm ready,' he said.

We tried that a couple of times without much success. I'm deaf in my right ear because my eardrum was burst by Dad's girlfriend Freda in one of her vicious attacks when I was just four years old. I couldn't make out Speedy's instructions over the roar of the motorbike.

'I'm sorry,' I said, nervously. No matter how kind everybody seemed I had been brutally tutored to expect a violent reaction if I didn't please. Now I had to come clean about my disability. Fortunately, Speedy was very understanding.

'Don't worry about it, love,' he said. 'There has to be a way round that.' After a bit of thought, he fixed a light to the back of his bike and when he wanted me to move, he switched the light on. It was a signal I could easily follow.

I was incredibly grateful – I couldn't quite believe that everyone was being so nice to me, something I just wasn't used to at all.

Gradually we started rehearsing the more dangerous tricks high up on the equipment and before I knew it Speedy announced that we were ready to face the public.

Belle Vue's Firework Island was an enormous entertainment complex, and huge audiences were normal at the shows. The first night I listened to the crowd arriving and peeked out from the bus where we were getting ready. Everyone was laughing and joking, staring towards the island with anticipation. The atmosphere was fantastic. Now I realized I had to prove that I could hold my nerve in front of an audience. I pulled on a leotard I'd been given, slapped on a bit of stage makeup and tied my dark hair back in a ponytail.

As we came out the crowd were cheering like crazy. I got a tingly feeling of excitement as I looked up at the rig. Speedy went first to get himself ready on the bike, then Bobby and Vicky climbed to their stations while I got into place. The faces of the audience turned towards us as we moved higher and higher and I could feel the tension mounting as the crowd grew quiet. It was obvious how dangerous the act was – just being so high up without a safety net was risky.

Vicky gave the thumbs up once we were all in place then Speedy got on the bike and began to ride. From that moment on, I shut out the audience and just counted carefully. Because we had rehearsed as much as we had, it meant that I hardly had to think. I span on the trapeze for ten counts and then I had six seconds until my next move. At just the right moment, I let go and dropped upside down, catching the bar with my feet and spreading my arms like an eagle over Speedy's head as he zoomed past. A surge of excitement coursed through my whole body – an adrenaline rush that comes with flinging yourself into a dive, and having time stand still until you know you're safe. Then as I surfaced into real time again, I caught the reaction of the audience. Everyone was clapping and cheering and I felt exhilarated from the rush of the dive and then the thrill of having everyone applauding me. A smile crept across my face and I couldn't have wiped it off if I'd tried. As I moved carefully along the platform to lower Speedy, who was still somersaulting with the bike, I knew that all the hard work was more than worthwhile. The crowd went wild again and my face glowed with satisfaction.

'This is it!' I thought. 'I can't believe that I get to do this every day!'

After that first performance I felt so proud of myself. I was the youngest on the team by miles and I had done it. The show left me on a high. In fact, I was dying to get out there and do it all again. The others were more experienced and consequently calmer so I tried not to show just how excited I was.

'That was fine,' Speedy said thoughtfully. 'I think we can go on tour now. I'll see if I can get some dates organized.'

I hadn't realized that we'd get to go away as well. 'Where will we tour to?' I asked keenly.

‘I’ll see what I can line up. Just round the country a bit. Anything within a day’s drive.’

I told them that I had no ties at all, nothing keeping me in the Manchester area. I could travel anywhere they wanted me to, round the world if need be.

Every few weeks Speedy got a booking and the four of us would set off in the bus, with our gear packed into the boot or tied onto the roof. Travelling around was hard work because of all the setting up that had to be done – I don’t think I’ve ever been quite so exhausted. On top of hauling the equipment we performed in two shows a day. But it was fun and I loved it. I wouldn’t have swapped my job for anything.

It was sunny that summer and we drove with the bus door open. I loved sitting in the breeze on the steps with the road whizzing by below me. Of course, these days the police would go crazy about that kind of thing.

‘You better not fall asleep there, Judy,’ Speedy teased. ‘We don’t want to lose you!’

Actually, a couple of times it was a close thing.

‘I’ll be fine,’ I said. ‘You just worry about the driving.’

Most people at the fair had more than one act and it wasn’t long before I was asked to expand my repertoire. On top of the Australian Air Aces, Speedy was a knife thrower and shooter and Vicky was his target. She wore a green, spangly bikini with cowboy fringes on it. I agreed to fill in for her sometimes.

‘Don’t worry,’ she told me. ‘It’s only gone wrong once.’ She showed me a three-inch scar on her arm where Speedy’s aim had gone awry. ‘That was a while ago,’ she said. ‘He’s much more experienced now. The main thing is to stay absolutely still.’

I swallowed nervously and tried not to think too much.

Speedy set up the board he used as a backdrop and winked at me as I climbed onto the podium and took my place. As I stood there waiting for the first of the razor-sharp blades, all I could think was, ‘I hope he doesn’t miss!’

Speedy lined up and threw the first knife fast, with deadly accuracy. A bead of sweat trickled slowly down my forehead as every sense in my body came alive. I couldn’t see it but I heard the blade whizzing past me and embedding itself in the cork backdrop with a thump. My instincts were bristling. My father had thrown things at me all the time. Anything he could lay his hands on, in fact. I had learned to watch the path of the object as it whizzed towards me and move quickly out of the way. The difficulty here was to trust Speedy and stay absolutely still. I heard the second knife whoosh past and land deep in the cork on the other side of my head. Time seemed to stop. I realized that if I was going to hold the position I just had to block it out. The third knife landed in between my legs and I focused hard on my breathing.

‘Stay still,’ I willed myself. As far as I was concerned this was a test of my courage and I wasn’t going to chicken out now as, one after the other, I was circled by the blades.

‘You’re a cool one,’ Speedy said with a grin at the end.

‘Thanks.’ My skin was clammy with sweat and I could feel the adrenaline pumping round my body as I stepped away from the outline of knives behind me. I’d done it.

‘Fancy trying the revolver, then?’ he asked.

‘OK. Why not?’ I think in some ways I was always looking for challenges to stretch me a bit and test my own strength. If Speedy had asked me to walk on a tightrope over Niagara Falls, I’d have done it just to prove that I could.

Vicky helped me into a tunic that had balloons attached to it. I took up my position again and Speedy tied a blind-fold round his eyes and began to shoot at the balloons. The gun shots were very loud and came in quick succession. I did my best to stay calm. As the balloons burst one by one, my tunic fell to the ground, revealing me in a sequinned bikini. Though my heart was thumping I lifted up my hands and gestured triumphantly as I’d seen Vicky do. Then I took a bow to an imaginary audience and Speedy jumped up beside me and bowed too.

‘Well done, Judy,’ Speedy said. ‘It’s as though you were born to it.’

Little did he know.

The audience loved that act. Speedy was so reliable that I came to trust him completely. I loved the act and felt greatly honoured when asked to fill in for Vicky. Their belief in me gave me a real feeling of acceptance.

After the show Bobby often went out on dates with boys she’d met, but I stayed behind on the bus. I hadn’t a clue about romance. At the age of seventeen, most people know about physical attraction and dating but I was emotionally stunted by my early life. I guess the fact I was so young made them feel protective because Speedy and Vicky took me under their wing and kept an eye on me during those first idyllic weeks of my new job.

The easy happiness wasn’t to last, though. A new challenge was about to come into my life, one that I had absolutely no resources at all for dealing with. His name was Roger Lethbridge.

Chapter Two

One day when we got back to Belle Vue after a week of touring, Speedy asked me if I'd be interested in another job.

'You'd be working with the boys in a different act of mine,' he explained. 'It used to be called The Hell Drivers, but I renamed it. Now it's The Globe of Death.'

'What?' I asked. 'Like The Wall of Death?'

Speedy shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. 'Nah,' he said, 'The Wall of Death is easy. You just ride a bike up a wall. This is much more interesting. Come and have a look.'

The Globe was a spherical wire mesh cage, about sixteen feet in diameter, with an entrance on one side. Speedy explained that the boys drove a motorbike round the inside and I was incredulous at first. How was that possible?

'Roger!' he shouted. 'Come and show Judy, would you?'

Roger emerged pushing a black motorbike. He was more or less my age, dressed in leather trousers and a jacket. He had still, blue eyes and seemed very confident. I thought he looked nice.

'Hi,' he smiled and he pulled on his helmet.

I nodded back.

Inside the Globe, Roger began to ride in low circles, then as he built up momentum he zoomed upside down over the top.

'Wow!' I was gobsmacked. This guy was an amazing rider.

'It gets better,' said Speedy, like a gleeful kid. 'We got two bikes.'

The second rider, Noggi, had to go in the opposite direction from Roger. It was another split-second timing stunt as the bikes missed each other by a fraction of a second on each revolution. I watched as Noggi came out and Roger and he started the act again, this time together. In seconds they were zooming around the inside of the cage, running loops past each other, upside down. I could see the act was very, very dangerous.

'So what do you want me to do, Speedy?'

'You, love, are going to go-go dance right in the middle and let them ride round you.' Speedy nodded to himself. 'Crowd puller.'

It looked like a bit of fun. There wasn't any skill in it, after all. I just had to stand there and keep my nerve. I was always up for that kind of challenge.

'Sure,' I said. 'No problem.'

Noggi and Roger stopped in the base of the Globe and pulled off their motorcycle helmets. I climbed in and stood on the metal base plate in the centre. Speedy demonstrated what he wanted me to do, waving his thick arms in the air, then the boys put their helmets back on and began to ride around the base just as before. I could feel the wind whistling past me as they built up speed. I lifted my arms and began to dance on the spot, just ignoring the bikes as they flew by. Close up I realized exactly how fast they had to ride in order to circle upside down inside the cage. It was noisy in there and the air was full of petrol fumes that caught in my throat. I held my ground and danced on the marked spot. After a few minutes the boys made it back down to the bottom, one on either side of me, the engines still fired up.

'Good one,' Roger said and gave me a smile.

So I was in. During the days we rehearsed and carted the equipment to and from the garage shed while maintenance and repairs were done. Sometimes we had costume fittings to do. Vicky could whiz up stunning new costumes at the speed of light, and I let her make all the decisions for me because she knew what colours worked best under the lights. When she measured me, she sighed, jealous of my twenty-four-inch waist and skinny figure.

That summer the Globe really caught the public's imagination and Speedy had a big hit on his hands. The local papers came to Belle Vue and took photographs of Roger, Noggi and me standing at the front of the cage, sitting on the bikes, and then posing inside with the bikes' engines started up.

'Smile,' the photographer said. 'You're going to be a pin-up girl!'

The truth was that I had no notion of myself that way. I'd always avoided being the centre of attention so the thought of being a pin-up girl made me very uncomfortable.

'Not me,' I mumbled shyly, staring at the ground.

At night I slept in the compound on my own because everyone else had homes to go to. I loved it there by myself in the dark. There were high walls all around and the gates were closed and locked. It seemed really quiet in contrast to the rest of the day, which was filled with hurdy-gurdy music and the chattering of the crowd, punctuated by the screams and gasps of the audience during performances. Once everyone had gone the only noise was the animals in their cages – marsupials, bears, horses, dogs – and that was about it. I sat out on the steps to look at the moon and drank a cup of cocoa as I listened to the odd growl or bark or whinny. I was at peace.

One evening I was hovering in the shadows beside the bus, peeking at the last of the audience as they made their way out at closing time. The stalls were almost empty and it was late. I had done all my chores and everything was put away. I was still wearing one of my showgirl costumes with a big, brown coat pulled over the top because the nights had started to get chilly.

Suddenly Roger appeared. He hesitated for a moment and then came to join me. I was always glad to have a chat with Roger. It was a nice time of night to have a chinwag about everything that had gone on during the day.

'They're in right high spirits tonight,' he said, lighting up a Senior Service and flicking the match onto the ground. 'There was a guy down in Paddock Wood last year got his timing wrong with a motorbike stunt. I heard he lost his leg.'

'We took the Aces to Paddock Wood,' I said. 'A couple of months ago.'

Roger took a deep draw on his cigarette. We waved to Bobby who was leaving with a couple of her friends. The public were almost completely gone.

'Nice night,' he said.

Then a couple stopped only a few feet away from us. They couldn't have noticed we were there. The girl was carrying a teddy bear, which they'd won on one of the stalls. Roger and I instinctively stayed hidden in the shadows. He turned his cigarette into the palm of his hand. Suddenly the man reached out and kissed his girlfriend passionately. She laughed and they walked off.

Roger had a grin on his face. 'Wonder where they're off to?'

I shrugged my shoulders. I didn't have any curiosity about those things at all. The couple might as well have come from another planet. I'd never had a boyfriend or felt any urge to get myself one. That was something other people did – not me.

'Maybe they're going dancing,' Roger suggested. 'Do you like dancing, Judy?'

'Yeah. I suppose.' I had never been to a proper dance.

'Well, we should go some time,' Roger stubbed out his cigarette. 'It'd be a laugh.' He walked off after the couple, in the direction of the gates. Then he turned.

'Saturday night,' he said. 'I'll come and get you.'

I was pleased. I loved music and going dancing would be a first for me. It may sound strange but I was so naïve that it genuinely didn't occur to me that Roger might see this as a date in a romantic sense. I felt like such an outsider that I was just surprised to find someone who actually wanted to spend time with me. Roger seemed nice – and, as he'd said, it was only a bit of fun.

Chapter Three

Speedy had never said that I shouldn't go out on the town after hours – we'd never discussed it – but still, it felt mischievous. This would be my first time out in Manchester at night. On the Saturday of the dance, Roger borrowed a long ladder to get me out of the locked compound, as if I was escaping from prison. We arranged to meet at the wall beside the horseboxes at nine o'clock.

'You there, Judy?' he called over.

'Yeah.'

I heard him position the ladder against the wall and a few seconds later his face appeared at the top. Then he hauled himself up to a sitting position, pulled the ladder over and motioned for me to climb up towards him. 'I'm a right minx now,' I thought to myself, looking over my shoulder as if someone might be watching. But there was nobody there. I launched myself at the ladder, thinking, 'This is going to be a laugh.'

I scaled the wall and sat on top next to him.

'Nice up here,' he said and climbed down the other side ahead of me.

We hid the ladder in the scrubland like escapees and headed off to the Belle Vue Ballroom.

It was dark by the time we arrived and the dance hall was very busy. Everyone seemed so glamorous and in-the-know. I'd worn my only dress – a red and white check with scoop neck and a wide, red belt – and I had my hair tied back. Some of the women looked amazing with sparkling jewellery, high heels and beautiful make-up. I caught a whiff of perfume as they passed. Roger had dressed up too. He looked really smart in his shirt and trousers.

'Come on,' he said, grabbing my hand and pulling me onto the dance floor.

The band was playing the Twist and everyone was dancing full pelt, gyrating like crazy. We flung ourselves into the crowd and joined in. It was fantastic. I loved dancing like that, losing myself in the music without any of my normal self-consciousness. As a kid I had always loved classical music but the Twist was fun and it was an amazing feeling to be part of the crowd with everyone dancing together. Because of the way I'd grown up I always felt separate to other people as if I was a different species entirely. Dancing like this was an incredible experience for me because it was something normal that I could join in and feel part of.

Up at the bar there was so much to look at – the rows of bottles and the waiters with their bow ties and all the people, chattering and excited and dressed up. Roger got me a tomato juice then we leaned against the bar and talked for ages. He told me he had lived in Manchester all his life and came from a big, close family – the eldest of ten kids. I lapped up his stories of an idyllic childhood playing in the street and going to the local school. Then he started talking about motorbikes. Like lots of young guys, Roger was fascinated by bikes. He was a great stunt rider though he said what he really liked best was driving on the open road. Fast.

'I like it when we're touring in the bus,' I told him. 'I sit on the steps and watch the road whiz past.'

'Yeah,' he said 'that's it exactly. Open to the road.' He finished his pint.

'Come on, Judy,' he said. 'Let's get back to the floor.'

I couldn't wait and eagerly followed him so we could join the crowd once more. It wasn't long before we were pink-cheeked and out of breath with the best of them. It was exhilarating, a real high for me.

Walking away from the ballroom at the end of the night Roger lit a cigarette. The stars were out. I hummed a couple of the dance tunes and he caught my hand and twirled me round.

'That was amazing!' I exclaimed.

Roger took a deep draw of his cigarette and regarded me closely. 'You're all right, Judy,' he said.

We ran the last hundred yards or so and grabbed the ladder from its hiding place, propping it up against the wall. I had had a good time, but I wasn't sure what to say to Roger now we were on our own. I felt slightly awkward. Relating to other people was difficult for me because I had had no role models. Now the night was over I felt slightly out of my depth.

'Thanks,' I mumbled and scuttled up the ladder.

'You want to pull it over? I can come up and help,' Roger offered.

'No. I can jump from here. It's fine.'

He gave me a wave and walked off with the ladder over his shoulder, the glowing ember of the cigarette bobbing along beside him.

After that night at the Belle Vue Ballroom, Roger took an interest in me. Sometimes when I came off stage from an Australian Air Aces performance he'd be waiting outside the bus for me, and sometimes he helped me when I was moving the gear. Unlike Bobby, I hadn't a clue about the rules of the game and I still thought he was just being friendly.

When Speedy announced we were touring to Southampton, Roger surprised me by going in a sulk. 'You'll be up to all sorts down there,' he said gloomily.

'What do you mean?' I had no idea what he was on about, but he didn't enlighten me – just stomped around in a mood.

He came to wave us off the night we left and said 'Have a nice time,' but his voice didn't sound very cheerful.

'If I can't be good, I'll definitely be careful,' Bobby joked and Roger glowered at her. We waved at him from the window as we drove off.

I enjoyed Southampton. Vicky and I went to see the boats in the dock and watched as a huge liner came in. The shows went really well and at night I fell asleep listening to the horns of the ships on the Sound.

A week later, after a run of shows, Roger was waiting when we got back after the long drive north. He was standing in the space right beside where the bus parked and he had a face like fizz.

'What the hell happened to you?' he demanded. He seemed really upset.

'What do you mean?'

'You could have called, you know. I was worried.'

'But you knew where I was,' I said, astonished. It had never occurred to me to call. No-one had ever cared where I was. When I moved to Belle Vue, my mother didn't even ask where I was going to be staying.

'What did you do?' Roger quizzed me.

'You know what I did. We did the show.'

'And after?'

'Had something to eat. We had showers over at this house. Speedy organized it. I went for a bath two nights.'

Roger had a tortured expression on his face. 'I bet Bobby went out.'

'Yes.'

'With men?'

'Yes.'

'But not you?'

'No.'

'Are you sure?'

I thought that Roger caring about where I was and what I was up to was sweet. I didn't mind at all. I'd seen Bobby playing one guy off against another and making herself tantalizingly unavailable but that kind of thing was in a different league. I was extremely naïve. I don't think Roger ever realized that.

'Next tour you have to ring me every day,' he insisted.

‘OK,’ I said. ‘If you like.’

A couple of weeks later Speedy organized a few days at Paddock Wood in Kent. We’d been there before and I liked it. There was a phone box just up the road and I made sure I had lots of change so I could call Roger. When I rang him in the evening he quizzed me about every second of my day and sulked when I told him that Bobby had gone out with a couple of guys after the show.

‘And what did you do?’

‘Nothing.’

‘What are you going to do now?’

‘Go back to the bus to bed.’

He didn’t believe me. ‘You’re staying in on your own?’ he asked in disbelief.

‘Yes.’

No matter how much I tried to reassure him, he never seemed satisfied and I simply felt confused. I was desperately trying to figure out what was going on. I knew he must like me. We spent a lot of time together; surely he wouldn’t do that if he didn’t enjoy my company? So why was he quizzing me like this? I concluded that he must care about me and that in some way, I was doing something wrong. ‘I must try harder to please him,’ I decided. There was something about it all that felt forbidden and dangerous. I knew I was out of my depth, but I couldn’t quite put a finger on it.

When we got back to Belle Vue after that run, I went to find Roger. He was polishing his bike but as soon as he saw me he leapt up and pulled me towards him, wrapping his arms tightly around me. No one had ever hugged me that way before and my eyes welled up with tears. I could hear my heart pounding. It was a very powerful feeling, being surrounded by him and held like that. In the past if anyone had got that close to me it meant things were about to turn violent. By contrast Roger’s arms felt tender.

‘I missed you so much,’ he said and he kissed me.

My knees almost gave way and I kissed him back and put my arms around his waist. There was no room for any doubts. I felt completely engulfed. This was something very private and very beautiful.

Roger drew back. ‘I’m glad you’re home,’ he said with a grin and I couldn’t stop smiling either.

A few minutes later I was watching the show from the sidelines. Roger was practically fearless and very, very accurate. You had to admire his riding skills. When the show had finished and the audience were clapping, he looked over to me and he winked. I had never felt so special.

‘So is this it?’ I thought to myself. ‘Is this what everyone goes on about, what all the pop songs are written about? I suppose this must be what love is.’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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