

THE TALE OF HOW CAPTAIN SAM REACHED HIS RANK By David Kennett ©

This story is mostly of a cat, a very special cat as members of his species go, but it also includes some of his friends.

Although Sam was special, he was not yet famous, and the 'Captain' as he eventually became known, preferred it that way. Although it has to be said he certainly ought to be known in that vein, as he always was in the eyes of his mistress, of whom we shall hear more shortly.

In fact, it has just been suggested by the above mentioned Sam that I get on and not keep the readers waiting. In that case it is my pleasure to introduce Miss Evelyn, also known to her friends as Eevee. She is the granddaughter of a much loved grandmother and it's from her that Eevee has inherited her love of the animal feline. She is rarely found without an absolute gang of them when not occupied with school work and other such unavoidable matters.

As well as Sam there were two others in the group who held special places in Eevee's life. They were twin boy and girl kittens who shared her birthday and were named Bonus and Rope.

No good will come in asking why they were so christened, as only Eevee knows this, and she says it is a deadly secret known only to her and will be passed on to her daughter. When she has one.

The particular adventure I want to tell you about occurred one day at the start of the school holidays and Eevee was sprawling on her bed daydreaming about sitting by the river and trying out the new fishing rod she had just made from a willow branch. Or perhaps just sitting and watching the Dragonflies who would be sure to be going about their concerns as they flew to and fro just above the water. Eevee needed to study them in detail because she had decided that she might become a dragonfly one day. Unfortunately, her dreams had to be abandoned when her bedroom door was flung open to reveal Sam. He was the only cat privileged to enter without knocking, and this time he was accompanied by the twins Bonus and Rope.

'I don't care what it is, but the answer is no! I intend to have an untroubled and lazy day doing precisely nothing!'

'No, you're not,' said Sam emphatically, 'There's a cat at the door with an urgent message from your Uncle, the one who lives on the other side of the Wild Wood.'

'From the other side of that dreadful place? I haven't got an Uncle living there,' replied Eevee emphatically.

'Yes, you have,' said Sam equally insistent, 'and his name is Bartholomew.'

'Oh! That Uncle! I hate him because he was always unkind to me when I was a baby.'

'Well, you're not a baby now so hurry up and get ready 'cos his cat said your Uncle has fallen into his Well and needs you. So, you will need him to show you the way,' said Sam.

Uncle Bartholomew's cat, when Eevee eventually got to the door, proved to be a large Tabby. He was 'sniffy' and full of his own importance.

'I 'ave been waiting 'ere for far too long my man,' he drawled, trying to look down at Eevee with a self-important sneer.

'I'm not a man, nor am I yours! Now get your muddy paws off my clean doorstep and lead us to my Uncle.'

'Oh! H'I do beg your pardon! H'I didn't realise who you was a'being like. See, your Uncle 'an h'I.... was as far as he got.'

'What's your name?' snapped out Eevee.

'Er.. um.. er yes, it's Plunkett...'

'Right Plonker, stop talking and start leading!'

It had to be said that stuffy and full of himself as he was, Plonker did a pretty good job of leading Eevee and her group safely through the Wild Wood. The worst they saw was the occasional pair of glowing eyes staring at them from the deepest undergrowth. And now and again a rustling sound came from that same place accompanied by rather strange grunting and snarling sounds that none of the group wanted to think about what might be making them.

However, as has been said Plonker knew what he was doing, and they all emerged in safety on the other side of the wood. Once there it felt wonderful to bask in the bright sunshine and Eevee actually began to feel kinder towards Plunkett as she asked, 'Have we much farther to go now?'

'H'indeed no, just another couple of miles.'

So, it proved, for after a further thirty minutes or so of marching they found themselves looking down into a hollow where Uncle Bartholomew's farm was laid out before them.

After Sam shouted, 'We'll find the well!' together with the twin's he dashed off.

Eevee followed slowly with Plunkett as she really wasn't looking forward to renewing her acquaintance with the nasty Uncle.

'H'I shall go to the 'ouse and prepare something to eat once the rescue is completed,' said Plunkett.

'No! No,' Eevee gasped taking hold of his arm, 'Please stay with me until I've got over meeting my Uncle again.'

As they approached the Well the victim's voice could be heard shouting up at Sam who was leaning over the wall to look down. Whilst Eevee was preparing herself to confront her Uncle, Plunkett stepped forward to call, 'Ello sir, it's me. H'I 'ave brought your Niece h'as h'instructed... Before he could get any further he was interrupted, 'Go down to the cottages and get young Tommy to come up here, and be quick about it!'

Plunkett hurried off without wasting another second, so Eevee took her turn at the Well to present herself.

'Hello Uncle, it's me, Evelyn.'

'Good, at last! Glad you got here, now listen. I don't want to come up, I want you to come down!'

'Oh dear, I'm afraid I'm not dressed for working in water....'

'No! No! There is no water, that's why I came down here in the first place, to find out why. Instead, what I found was so exciting I'm no longer bothered about water. Then on reflection it dawned on me that this is very much a family matter and I simply had to send for you.'

'Well, what did you find Uncle,' asked Eevee. 'I'd rather know before I climb down there.'

'Please stop asking unnecessary questions young lady and get yourself here as soon as you can,' barked Bartholomew.

Just at this moment young Tommy arrived, breathless after running up from the cottages. 'Oh my goodness, has the old silly really gone down there on his own as he always threatened!'

'Yes,' said Eevee, 'and he wants me to join him down there. Says there's something I must see.'

'Right,' said Tommy, 'I'd better tell him I'm here,' and he gave a shout down into the Well, 'Hello boss, I'm here. What do you want, do you want me to haul you up?'

'No, you fool! I keep saying I want my niece down here with me! Does nobody listen!'

'Oh! I'm listening alright it's just that I can't believe what I'm hearing! But you're the boss so I'll send her down!'

'Wait a minute there young man! Said Eevee, I'm not going anywhere without my friends.'

'Don't worry,' said Tommy, 'I'll get you all down in a jiffy. Get your friends in the bucket, and you hang on to the rope.'

Sam and the Twins squeezed into the bucket, and Eevee climbed onto the wall to grab the rope with both hands as well as wrapping her legs tightly round it. Almost before they knew it they were moving down out of the bright sunshine into the gloom. They just had time to notice the old brick walls sliding up passed them when with a thump they landed on the not quite dry mud floor.

'Are you all okay,' demanded Eevee anxiously.

'Yes!' confirmed all three as they scrambled to their feet. By now Eevee was pretty annoyed and turned to her Uncle and shouted, 'Why on earth have you dragged us down to this ghastly place!'

Surprisingly the Uncle did not reply in his usual hot tempered manner but merely said, 'Just do yourself a favour, and follow my eyes.'

Eevee then realised he was staring fixedly over her shoulder. At this she jerked back to confirm that what she saw was every bit as exciting as the Uncle had said for there, set in the brickwork of the wall, was a large round wooden doorway

There was no doubt that as doors go this one was huge and with it's beaten iron hinges, looked really old. More intriguing was what, for goodness sake, was it doing at the bottom of this Well.

'Hmm,' said Sam, 'A strange place to put a cupboard, which I take it to be.'

No one commented on Sam's suspicion about a cupboard being in such a strange place, instead there followed an eerie silence, until the Uncle spoke up again.

'We shall never know the answer to why it's here, and what purpose it serves until we open it.'

'Is that what you intend doing,' asked Eevee.

'Certainly, this property has been our family's for more than four hundred years. Unfortunately, during that time, because of wars and other such things, we have lost most of the family records. Among them there would doubtless have been the explanation of everything about the door.'

'Yes Uncle,' said Eevee, 'I think you are right that we have leave to open it.'

'Then,' said Sam, 'let's get on with it!'

'Steady on there, my young buckaroo!' said the Uncle, 'How do you think we will open it without tools. We can't go at this 'Willie Nilly.' It needs proper planning and that's the first job to undertake.'

'Hallo! Tommy!' he shouted, 'stand by to begin hauling them up!'

'Gosh! After we've gone to all that trouble to get down here,' grumbled Eevee. 'And what do you mean by 'haul them up,' aren't you coming?'

'Ah!' said the Uncle, sneaking a crafty glance at his niece, 'I really don't think you need me to tell Tommy to gather together tools adequate for opening a stuck cupboard.'

'I suppose not, but I'll have you know it's no fun going up and down hanging on to that rope.'

'I'm not at all sure,' said her Uncle, 'why you are complaining. If I hadn't insisted on you coming down, you wouldn't be looking forward with such enthusiasm to going on an adventure now, would you?'

Eevee knew then that her relative was right and she had no choice, so together with Sam and the twins, she was hauled up to the surface once more.

Once she had explained to Tommy what was required, although he was somewhat surprised to hear that there was a cupboard in the bottom of the Well, he wasted no time in collecting what was needed.

So, within half an hour Eevee and the others were back below with the Uncle, but before any of them could speak there came a slithering sound and half falling, Tommy arrived amongst them.

'Oh no!' shouted the Uncle, 'You fool! Who is going to pull us up now!'

'I will sir, I've fixed the rope at the top so that it won't move, I can climb up it in a trice.'

'Right, that's different then,' said the Uncle, 'so let's not waste any more time. Get that door open!'

Everyone made room for Tommy as he dragged his tool bag over to the cupboard. First, he tackled the bolts on the hinges, but after several minutes he'd made not the slightest difference, so he switched his efforts to the padlock.

Since he had his back towards them none of the others could actually see what Tommy was doing, but they all heard the sound of the padlock as it gave up its struggle to resist Tommy and fell at his feet.

Everyone cheered, all except the Uncle who merely said, 'At last, now we can get on with it. Open that confounded door!'

Tommy pulled on the door, but there was no movement. With that Sam went up to join him and their combined efforts began to slowly swing the closure open. Everyone crowded forward but stopped in surprise when they saw that it wasn't the inside of a cupboard they were looking at, but the beginning of a dark tunnel furnished with steps cut out of natural rock. The steps were clearly descending and disappeared into inky blackness.

Everyone stood in silence looking at each other and it was the Uncle who spoke first and strangely the shock of discovering a tunnel rather than a cupboard seemed to make him suddenly mild in manner, 'Well. Well,' he said quietly, 'this is a surprise.'

'I hope we're going to explore where those steps go!' said Sam, keen as usual for excitement.

'Yes, I think we should, as well,' said Eevee.

'Of course,' said the Uncle, 'as this property is ours, then so is the tunnel, and we have a duty to discover why it's here.'

'Okay,' said Sam, 'how should we get ready for it.'

'By thinking about things we might need, like torches for example as it's so dark,' suggested the Uncle. 'I think you Tommy, with Eevee and Sam, should go up and each of you fill a haversack with what you think we'll need. Don't do it together, then we'll have a good cross section of items!'

No further discussion was required, and the three who'd been nominated were soon up on the surface, hurrying around as they thought of another item that would prove useful.

Half an hour later saw the first of them come down in the bucket. It was Sam and he was struggling with a bloated rucksack. Next to arrive was Eevee, and she was similarly burdened with heavy luggage. Finally came Tommy, who was wearing his haversack on his back thus enabling him to use both arms in the climb down the rope.

'Oh!' Eevee said, 'I'm relieved to find you all still here. I feared you might have got bored waiting and gone into the tunnel without us.'

'Oh dear me no,' said the Uncle, 'there was no fear of that without the bits and pieces you three have brought down!'

With that he moved to Eevee's bag and, tipping everything out, said, 'Now let's see what sort things you thought would be useful on our trip.'

Then bending down he began to rummage through the pile naming each item as he did so.

'Torch, yes, ah! spare batteries excellent! Hello! What's this!' And he held up what looked a hammer, with its head sharply pointed at both ends. It was about eight inches long and made totally of steel.

'Oh!' gasped Eevee, 'That's my geologist's hammer, it's used for splitting rock samples when looking for examples of fossils. Grandma taught me all about it when I was a little girl. That hammer she gave me on my last birthday. I put it in my pack because I might get a chance to use it wherever we're going.'

'I'm afraid not, my dear, we'll soon find our packs heavy enough without the extra weight of a steel hammer.'

The Uncle continued to search through everyone's luggage, rejecting some things and congratulating the owners on the inclusion of others. What no one, except Eevee, noticed Sam quietly picking up her rejected hammer and slipping it into his bag that had already been examined.

Once everything had been examined to the Uncle's satisfaction, he said, 'Right, I was pleased to note that you all had the wit to include food in your selection of what to bring, so I think we should all have a bite now before we go any further.'

There was some scuffling sound as everyone unwrapped what they had brought, and then Eevee was heard to exclaim 'Oh blat! Bother! And blow!'

'What's the matter,' asked Sam, ever attentive of Eevee's needs.

'It's my peas!'

'What about them.'

'They were frozen when I put them in the bag, and now they are all horribly soggy!'

'Well, what's wrong with that,' Tommy wanted to know.

'I never eat peas unless they are frozen hard' she answered haughtily.

'Why ever would you do that,' Tommy wanted to know.

'Because that's when they are crunchy,' said Eevee turning away as if tired of explaining the obvious.

When all had partaken of their snack the Uncle called for attention. 'Now then, I want to tell you the order in which we shall march when in the tunnel. I want Sam to go in front, with Bonus.'

'I get it,' said Tommy, 'where he will be able to give warning by sending the kitten back if he sees or hears something suspicious up ahead.'

'Correct,' said the Uncle, 'In that way we won't be taken by surprise, the same applies for the rear. I want Tommy to follow us there as rearguard. I shall be just in front of him with Rope. I will have her for the same reason that Sam has her brother. It is so I can dispatch her forward should I need to contact Sam.'

'Do you think we will meet someone or something in there,' asked Eevee.

'I can't answer that until I've been in there, so let's stop wasting time and make a start,' was the answer.

The column marched into the tunnel and proceeded to descend the steps. Almost immediately their torches had to be switched on to combat the darkness.

To begin with no one spoke as it somehow seemed that they might disturb something waiting in the dark. However, they soon became adjusted to the fact that there was no reaction to their bouncing beams and gradually they began to make comments to each other about their situation, for instance it was Rope who said, 'Have you noticed that the steps are becoming longer and not so deep and if it continues like that the steps will disappear to become level floor.'

'No, I hadn't my sweet kitten!' said Eevee, 'How clever of you to notice!'

It was exactly as Rope had suggested, as time went by the floor of the tunnel became quite flat, and the Uncle spoke to say, 'We have reached the full depth of the tunnel and eventually the floor will become steps again as we head for the surface.'

This supposition almost became a correct one but not quite. First Bonus arrived with a message from Sam, written on a page from his notebook. The Uncle smoothed out the paper and read out loud, 'I could see light at the top of the stairs and when I got up there, I found it came from a room. I will wait your arrival before entering.'

'Ah ha!' exclaimed the Uncle, 'a room before we reach the surface. Most decidedly interesting!'

'Really, why is that?' asked Eevee.

'I won't know that either until we get there, so we'd best get on!'

It was several minutes before the column reached Sam on the landing at the top of the stairs. Once there, true enough, through a partially open door could be seen a room although from where they stood, they were unable to determine if it was occupied by object or person.

The Uncle wasted not a moment to say, 'Right, make way, I shall be the first to enter.'

'Wait a moment, you have no weapon!' uttered Sam.

'Yes,' replied the Uncle. 'And if there's anyone in there, they will see that I'm unarmed and with my force of personality I will convince them I come in peace.'

'That could be true,' said Tommy, 'but I'm not taking the chance! With that he pushed the door wide open, and strode bravely in. Eevee and the twins rapidly followed, and the Uncle had no choice but to enter last.

To their joint surprise, and disappointment the room proved to be devoid of either object or person. However, facing them on the opposite wall, were two doors. On each of them could be seen two labels. They crowded round in order to read what was attached to them. The label on the first door said, **THE AXE OF LORD DE FIRM** then in brackets (a gift for any who can accept it). The other label read, **OKSOKO** Found in the Gobi desert. (to be approached with great caution).

'I suggest we stop now for a tea break,' said the Uncle, 'and discuss which of the doors we try first.'

'I think it should be the one with the Axe,' said Sam.

'Why is that?' asked Eevee.

'Because we neglected to bring any sort of defensive weapon with us and this is a chance to put the matter right, with an axe!'

'Something tells me that the old chopper won't be leaning against the wall just waiting for you to pick it up,' suggested Tommy.

'That's right!' squealed young Rope, 'Just see what it says on the label, *A gift for any who can accept it*. What does that mean eh!'

'Yeah, the youngsters right, there's a hidden message in those words I bet you!' insisted Tommy.

It was probably to satisfy Sam that Eevee voted with those who wanted the door behind which lay the axe to be opened first. It was Tommy who grasped the door-nob and turned it until the door silently opened. On entering they saw the only thing occupying the room was a large rock. Buried in the top by half its blade was a serious looking weapon in the shape of a double headed axe.

'There you are,' said Tommy to Sam, all one has to do is pick up and it's theirs. So, what are you waiting for.'

'I'm waiting for you, actually. You are doubtless the strongest of all of us,' said Sam.

'Tommy almost blushed at such a complement but quickly pulled himself together to say, 'Very well, although I doubt that strength has much to do with it, I'll have a go' he said as he walked forward to grasp the axe handle.

Although he proceeded to put up a grand show, with much pulling and pushing of the axe handle, Tommy did not move it by even a fraction. This is how it remained when everyone except Sam had given it a go.

Sam rolled up his sleeves and pretended to spit on his paws as he approached the rock. In fact, the Uncle and the twins were chatting and were not even looking when Sam gently rested one paw on the axe handle and quietly withdrew the weapon from it's imprisonment.

The first to notice that Sam was standing with a smile and the axe over his shoulder for all the world like a walking stick, was Eevee, and she rushed to his side to congratulate him. For several minutes there was quite a hubbub as everyone surrounded Sam in an effort to see the axe.

'May I hold it,' asked Tommy.

'Sure,' said Sam, holding out the weapon for Tommy to take. When he did so, he dropped it immediately with a cry, 'Good heavens! That's so heavy, I can't hold it!'

'Really,' said Sam, 'and I was just thinking how light it is!'

Sam now placed the axe on the ground and everyone, one by one, attempted to pick it up. Everyone failed, finding it just too heavy to lift.

'That really is remarkable,' said the Uncle. 'There appears to be some inexplicable connection between you Sam, and the axe.'

'All I can say is it's jolly good we met each other, then!' said Sam.

'Perhaps,' said Tommy, 'it is a good thing, but aren't you at all concerned that there's some kind magic going on here.'

Sam bent to retrieve the axe and shake it thoughtfully in one hand, 'Well, I suppose there must be something odd, like magic involved, but it doesn't appear to do me any harm so, no, I'm not concerned. However, I'm the opposite to that when I re-read the label on the second door where it says it is to be *approached with great care*.' 'I imagine we will be approaching whatever it proves to be.'

'Yes, indeed,' said the Uncle, 'Tommy, will you do the honours.'

Several minutes passed as everyone watched Tommy wrestle with the door, and he really gave it his all. However, once more it was without success.'

'As Tommy stepped back to apologise for his failure, Sam half accidentally pointed the axe at the door and it flew open.

'Coo!' gasped Sam, 'seems no end to the talents of this thing!'

The surprise created by Sam's unexpected opening of the door, caused everyone to remain rooted to the spot for a moment, until that is, Tommy, saying 'Here we go again!' marched into the room. Sam was the next to move and jumped in after Tommy, axe at the ready.

By the time the others followed it was to find the first two adventurous standing and staring at the walls that were covered with photographs all depicting fossils of various kinds. The one that eventually claimed most of their attention was a large picture of the one mentioned on the label, the Oksoko.

'Hmm,' said the Uncle, studying the construction of bones that showed a kind of Dinosaur. It was depicted standing upright on its hind legs. The pair of forelimbs each had only two fingers, or claws. The surprise was the head that was more like a parrot, without teeth, but with a huge beak. 'Yes,' continued the Uncle, 'that beak looks as it would have no problem in chopping a man in half with one bite hence the warning!'

'I'm sure you are right Uncle, but it would need to be alive to do that. What we are looking at here is a fossil of what it once looked like millions of years ago.'

'True,' the Uncle replied, 'but the warning on the door would suggest there is one still alive.'

'Well then,' said Eevee, 'where is it!'

Those words were hardly out of her mouth, when there came a roar that seemed to rattle their very bones.

'Look out!' shouted Tommy, 'get ready to run!'

'No!' yelled Sam, 'stand your ground and get ready to fight!'

'Oh! what can we fight with!' called Eevee in a frightened voice.

'Sticks! Stones! Anything you can get hold of young lady,' ordered the Uncle.

By now the dinosaur, following its echoing roar had reached them, its great parrot like beak snapping to left and right. What was amazing was the beast was transparent, being just the bones of a creature from millions of years ago. Nevertheless, just the bony structure was proving to be a terrible danger and at the moment it was looking like the end of the Uncle and all those with him.

However, as you might be imagining dear reader, this is where Sam earned his spurs. With a cry of 'Stand back!' He strode unhesitatingly straight at the rampaging Oksoko and with one ferocious swipe of his axe, removed its head together with the great snapping beak.

With a clatter the beast's bones fell into a heap together with a silence that was broken seconds later by everyone's cheers. 'Well done, my Captain!' said Eevee giving Sam a huge hug, 'and that is how you will be addressed from this day on.'

The end.

Foot note One other strange thing occurred whilst Eevee was hugging the victorious Sam. The axe suddenly became so heavy Captain Sam had to put it down, from where it could not be lifted again, and it hasn't to this day.

2nd foot note What happened to the tunnel? Who was Lord De Firm? How did he come to own such an axe? Ah! Dear reader, those are stories for other occasions.