

# 1 Sally's Spectacular Sunflower

*Tom's Homegrown Giant* read the caption under the faded photograph of a boy holding a silver cup beside the tallest sunflower that Sally had ever seen.

"That's your Daddy," said her Grandmother proudly. "Every year at the annual Flower Show in the village they always have a competition for the tallest sunflower. The winner gets a cup and a photograph of themselves with their sunflower put in the local paper."

"Gran, could I enter the competition this year?" asked Sally.

"I don't see why not. You'll have to grow it all by yourself. But I'm sure I could give you some advice," smiled her Gran.

"How do I start?" begged Sally.

"You'll have to prepare the soil first. Be sure it is somewhere that will get lots of sun. Your Dad put in some fertiliser. He used horse manure from the field where Mrs Jones keeps her ponies."

"What's fertiliser?" asked Sally.

"It's material rich in good things that helps build strong roots and make the flowers grow big and tall," said Gran.

"Where did Dad plant his sunflower?" asked Sally.

"Take the photograph outside and see if you can find it," suggested Gran.

Sally ran outside into the garden looking for the place where her dad was standing. She found it on the corner of the house. The sun was full on her face and the earth looked rich and brown.

"I've found it," shouted Sally. "I've found the place for my sunflower."

Gran came round the corner carrying a spade, a fork and a rake.

"You must now dig the ground with your spade, use the fork to break up any big lumps, then rake the soil to make it fine and smooth."

Sally worked hard all afternoon. When she had finished she called her Gran to come and look.

"That's good Sally," she said. "I've rung Mrs Jones' daughter who now owns the stables. She's got some manure you can have."

After their trip to the stable they came home with a small bag of manure to dig into the earth. Sally opened the bag. "Oh! What a smell," she said.

"You'll have to get used to that if you are going to be a gardener," said her Gran laughing.

When Sally had finished she watered her flower bed and when she had finished she stepped back to admire her work.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" asked Gran.

"I've done everything you said," said Sally.

"Yes, but why are you making the ground ready?"

"For my sunflower, of course!" said Sally fiercely.

"So where is it?" asked Gran.

"Oh, I haven't got one. I've done all this work for nothing!" Sally began to cry.

"Good thing I remembered then," said Gran opening her hand to show the two sunflower seeds she was holding.

Sally smiled. "Thanks, Gran."

"I would plant them both. Just in case one doesn't grow."

Sally carefully made two holes with a fat stick, well apart so the plants would have room to grow. She dropped a seed into each hole and covered them over. She raked the soil over them and gave them some water. She marked them with sticks so she would know where to look for them. Sally came everyday to her Gran's to see how the plants were doing. She watered them and peered at the earth. After a fortnight Sally was getting disappointed.

"There's nothing there," she said to Gran. "My sunflowers aren't growing."

"Patience, you must give them time to germinate."

"Germinate, what does that mean?" asked Sally.

"It means that when the seed is in the earth the good things in the soil work on the seed. When it is ready the seed begins to send out shoots through its skin. Roots push down into the ground and soft green shoots push up towards the sun. They break through the earth so we can see them. Then we know the plant is growing."

"Are my seeds doing that?" asked Sally excitedly.

"I am sure they are."

Sally went outside to her sunflowers. She imagined them in their dark bed pushing out shoots through their hard skin. It was then she had the idea. She ran to the garden shed where Gran kept her spade. Sally dragged it back across the lawn. She began to dig. Up popped one of her seeds. She lifted it from the earth and put it in her hand. She could just see a tiny white shoot striking from the side of the seed. She rushed indoors to show Gran.

"It's germinating, it's germinating," she shouted.

Gran looked up from her mixing bowl.

"Oh, Sally!" she said. "You mustn't dig it up. It won't grow like that."

Sally looked downhearted.

"Never mind. Let's hope the other one germinates" said Gran.

Sally didn't disturb the other seed and soon it began to appear above the surface. As the summer went on it grew and grew. At last the day came when the judges were to measure it.















"Um," said one of the judges, "this one's 6 1/2 metres high."

"Is that good?" asked Sally.

"It could be but we still have three more to measure."

Sally was too excited to eat her lunch. The telephone rang just before tea. She heard her Gran say: "Tomorrow at ten will be fine."

The next day Sally had her photograph taken in exactly the same place as her Dad had done all those years before.

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# 4 The Little Angel Who Could Not Sing

She had only just been made an angel. She was beginning to get used to the wings but had not yet learned to fly. "Tomorrow," the Chief Angel had said. "I'll take you flying tomorrow."

Everyone seemed to be rather pre-occupied. There was a lot of commotion and angels seemed to be arriving from everywhere.

"What's going on?" she asked. Nobody seemed to know.

"We've got a special mission," said another young angel as he swept past practising his flying technique. "It's something to do with shepherds and Good Tidings to All Men. That's all I know."

"It's all very strange," thought the Little Angel. "I thought heaven would be quieter than this."

As she was rearranging her left wing for the umpteenth time that day, a host of angels came down from the clouds and nearly knocked her over.

"Come along, little one," said a kindly voice. "You'll be late for choir practice."

Before she knew what was happening the Little Angel was swept along by the crowd. From somewhere behind her music began and all around her voices began to sing. In beautiful harmonies the music rose and fell. She had never heard anything so magical in all her short life.

"Why aren't you singing?" said the kindly voice. She turned to her partner who smiled at her with a radiant smile.

"I don't know how to," said the Little Angel.

"Of course you do. All angels can sing. Open your mouth and try."

So she opened her mouth but a beautiful sound did not come out. Only a very high-pitched shrill squeak. Everything went silent. All eyes seemed to be on the little angel.

"Who is making that dreadful noise?" said the Chief Angel who was also the conductor of the wonderful choir.

"You, you in the middle. Come here at once."

The Little Angel didn't know what to do.

"You must go to him," said the kindly voice.

The Little Angel pushed her way to the front and stood before the Chief Angel.

"If you can't sing in tune you must leave," he said. "Our mission is too special to be spoiled by someone who can't sing."

With a heavy heart the Little Angel left the choir practice and found an empty cloud. She sat down and cried. Through her tears she heard the choir, this time far away.

"It's so beautiful. Oh, why can't I sing?" she said miserably.

"Don't cry, little one," said the kindly voice who had followed her.

"You will find you can sing when you've learned to fly."

At the next moment everyone was on the move.

"Quick, quick. It's time. We mustn't be late."

The kindly voice vanished with the others and before she knew

what had happened the Little Angel found herself entirely alone. The whole place was quiet, not a sound to be heard. They had forgotten she couldn't fly. In their hurry she had been left behind.

"What shall I do now? I can't miss this extraordinary event. I'm an angel! There was nothing for it. She couldn't wait for the Chief Angel, Gabriel, she thought she'd heard someone call him. She would have to reach herself to fly. She stood up on her cloud and rearranged her wings. She flapped them up and down as she had seen the other angels do. They didn't seem to make the right sound. Their wings fluttered in a gentle murmuring — hers just flapped. Far too noisy like her singing!

"I won't give up," she said determinedly. "I won't." She didn't know how long she had taken, for time is different in heaven but before long she found herself floating in the air.

"I'm doing it," she shouted. "I'm flying!"

She listened as her wings gently murmured and she began to soar swiftly through the air. Cloud after cloud brushed against her wings as she tried to find the others.

"I've no idea where they went," she thought sadly. Then, through the clouds she heard music.

"That must be them," she concluded and she began to fly towards the sound. As she got closer she realised it wasn't angels singing but a raucous band of strolling musicians. As she flew over the towns and villages she heard the sounds of humans going about their everyday work: Singing in the fields as they tilled the soil. Children playing and the noises of carpenters sawing and nailing wood. She almost forgot why she was flying when suddenly she found herself in the dark. She heard the jingle of harness and the snorting of horses and camels.

"Why are these people travelling at night?" she wondered. She saw in front of this long caravan of men and women, three proud rich men riding expensively harnessed camels. She flew close to hear their speech.

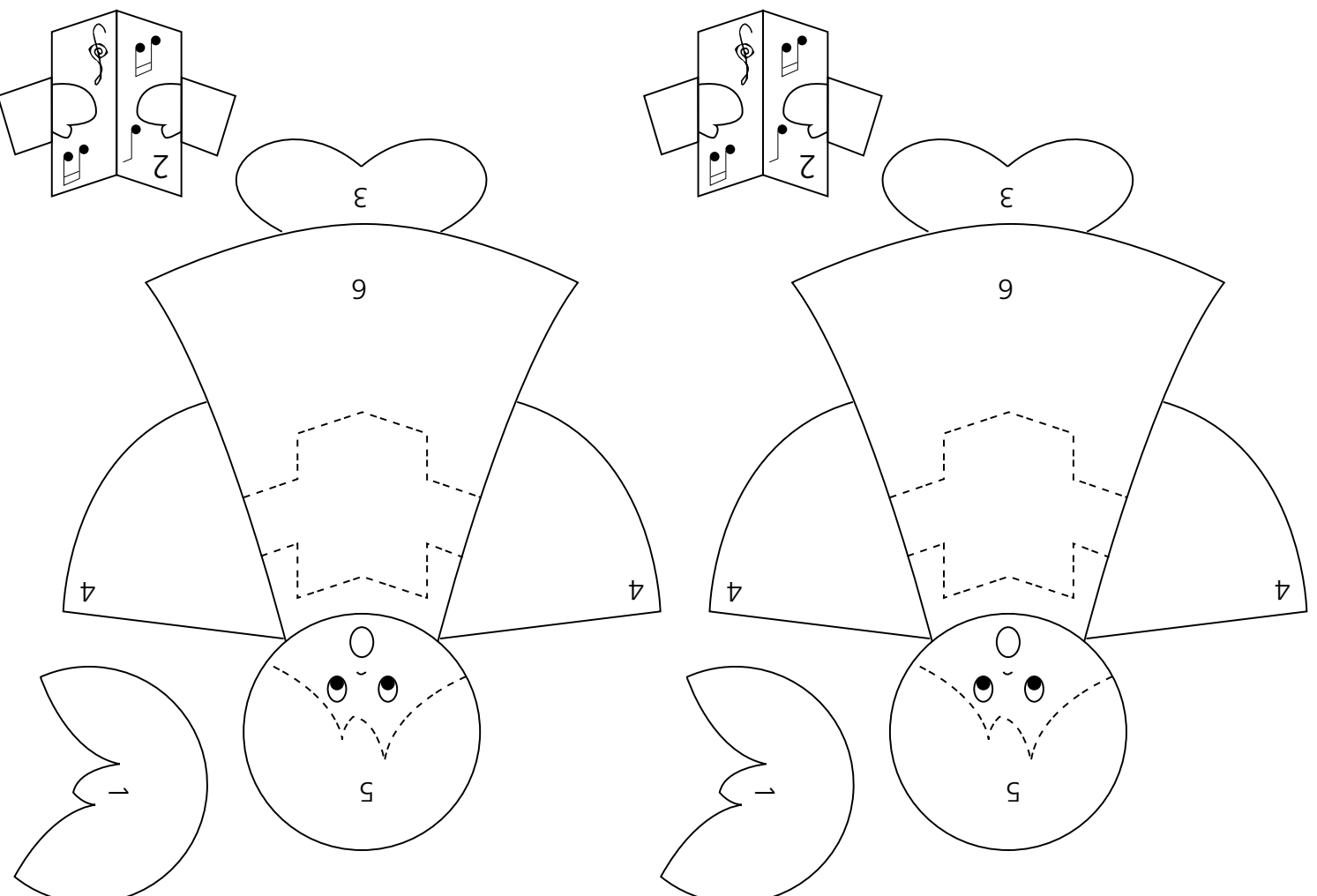
"The star is bright tonight," one said. "How much longer must we travel?" said another. "It won't be long now for see the star has stopped over that village yonder."

"King Herod is not a man to be trusted," said the third. "When we reach the child, we must journey home a different way."

"Child, what child?" she asked herself. She now saw the star they were following. It was brighter than any other. Beyond it she heard singing. It was angel singing. They were here, here in this poor place. She flew on to find them and as she passed over a stable she heard a baby crying and a mother hushing him to sleep. She landed gently on the roof and looked in. There he was lying in a bed of straw. She smiled at him and he at her. Around his head she saw a burning light.

"This is God's Son," she said. "I must go at once and praise his name." She set off again and just over the hill she saw them. The multitude of the heavenly host praising God and singing "Glory to God in the Highest and Peace to All Men".

She slipped into her place beside the kindly voice and began to sing.



# 6 The Mother's Day Present

The twins, Jilly and James, loved making things, especially out of Plastocene. They had been given a large box for Christmas and had made a whole zoo complete with cages. Everyone agreed this was the best thing they had ever made. When friends came to the house they were shown the splendid zoo. It had stood on the kitchen table for ages until their Mum got tired of working around it and she had taken it upstairs. It now lived in James's bedroom but neither of the twins had touched it for ages.

"It's about time you made something new," their Mum had said. "You haven't played with your Plastocene for a long time."

Jilly and James liked the zoo and did not want to make it into anything else so they made things out of boxes and junk, annoying their Mum by covering her kitchen table in glue and bits of paper.

"I wish you would go back to the Plastocene," she said. "It was so much cleaner."

The weeks passed and the twins forgot about the zoo until Mother's Day approached.

"What about making another big model for Mum on Mother's Day?" said Jilly. "What shall we make this time?" asked James, looking up from his book.

"As it's spring, what about a farm, with sheep and lambs?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. There's a book here somewhere with a picture of sheep and lambs and things," said James searching through the piles of books spread all over his room.

"Is this the one?" said Jilly, opening a book on nature showing a field full of sheep.

"That's it," said James. "Let's get started."

Jilly and James carefully took all the zoo animals and their cages apart, putting all the Plastocene back into its separate colours. When they had finished they realised they had a problem. They only had enough white to make about two or three sheep.

"How much money have you got in your money box, Jilly?" asked James. She went to her room and brought back her money box. There were only a few pennies inside. The same went for James. They only had 79 pence between them.

"We'll have to ask Dad for a loan," said Jilly. That night when Dad came home the twins told him what they were doing. "No problem," he said. "I'll get you some on my way home tomorrow."

The next day he arrived home with his purchase and smuggled it upstairs without Mum seeing. They now had so much white they could have made two or three flocks of sheep, not one. Every night after school they had their tea and crept upstairs to work on their model. They stretched and pulled the Plastocene into the shape of sheep and lambs. They had to roll the softened Plastocene into balls. Jilly was good at pulling up little bits all over the ball to make it look like wool. James made four black legs to stick on the bodies and he rolled smaller balls for their heads. One evening they borrowed Mum's rolling pin to flatten some green to make the fields. As some of the dye came out it marked the rolling pin so Jilly had to give it a good scrub in the bathroom to make it

clean. Mum had nearly caught her when she brought some ironing up to put in the airing cupboard. "What are you doing in the bathroom, Jilly?" she had called through the door. "Nothing," said Jilly, hoping her Mum would not come in and look. When they had nearly finished they asked Dad to come and have a look while Mum was out at her evening class.

"It's wonderful! The sheep look really life-like," he said. "The brown and black fences are a nice touch and I like those trees as well. You have done well. What about a farmer on a red tractor just to finish it off?"

Together they fashioned the tractor, using the bright red for the bodywork, rolling and pulling some black to make fat circles for the wheels and Jilly made a little seat out of some brown. As Dad leaned forward to pick up some pink for the farmer's face he lost his balance and knelt on five sheep squashing them flat.

"Oh Dad," shouted Jilly. "Look what you've done!"

"Sorry!" said Dad apologetically. "Can you make them again?"

"Of course I can. But do look where you're kneeling in future."

At last it was ready. James had hidden it under his bed. He had made his bedroom extra specially untidy so his mother wouldn't come and clean. She had scolded him several times about the state of his room but he had just smiled. Jilly smiled too.

"What are you two up to?" she had asked one morning.

"Nothing," they replied.

"Leave them alone," said Dad. "They're only kids."

"Have you seen the state of James's room?" she asked angrily.

"He'll clear it up soon, probably after Sunday" said Dad giving James a wink.

"What is going on?" asked Mum.

"You'll see," said the twins as they got their school things together.

"I hope she doesn't go into my room," said James as they walked to school. "Perhaps we ought to have hidden it in a safer place."

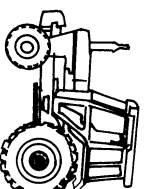
All day long they wondered whether their Mum would find their surprise. Jilly hardly ate any of her packed lunch she was so worried. It would be all right, James assured her. When they got home they vanished upstairs. All was well. There was no sign that Mum had tried to tidy James's room. At last Mothering Sunday came. Jilly and James helped Dad give Mum breakfast in bed. He then helped them lift their farm downstairs onto the kitchen table. It was bigger than the zoo and took up more space. When Mum came down she was amazed. "Happy Mother's Day," the twins shouted.

"Goodness!" said Mum. "Did you make all this?"

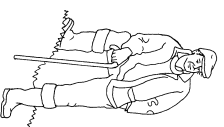
"Dad helped with the tractor," said Jilly and she told the story of Dad squashing five sheep. Everybody laughed. Mum looked carefully at all the models. It was then she noticed a small string of flags between two of the trees. On one side it said 'Happy Mother's Day' but on the other in very small writing it said 'I will tidy my room, promise'.



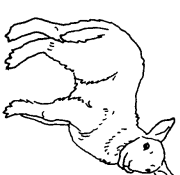
sheep



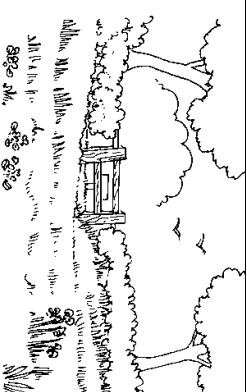
tractor



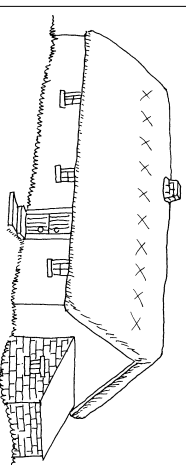
farmer



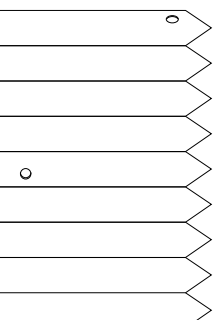
lamb



field



cottage



fence



sheep dog



# 12 Going to the Seaside

"There are lots of different sorts of places where we can find plants and animals," Mrs Collins had said. "You can find them where is little shelter like a field or open grassland and where there are lots of trees like a wood or a forest. Another place is where there is lots of water like a pond or the seaside. Tomorrow we are all going to where there's lots of water. We are going to the seaside to find out what plants and animals live there. Don't forget to bring your packed lunch and something to put your finds in."

Lucy was excited. She had never been to the seaside before. Her class was going on a coach for their school outing and her Mum was coming too as one of the helpers.

"What's it like at the seaside?" Lucy asked her Mum at tea.

"Well, usually there is a long stretch of sand called the beach. Sometimes there are lots of pebbles and rocky places where there are pools of water. I remember finding water shrimps in the rock pools when I was a girl. We'll see if we can find some tomorrow."

Lucy found it difficult to sleep. She was so eager to see the sea. Morning soon came and she jumped out of bed and opened the curtains. The sun was shining and the sky was blue.

"It looks like a lovely day," said her Mum popping her head round the door to see if Lucy was awake.

The journey on the coach took several hours and Lucy thought they would never get there when suddenly she saw a large expanse of blue water.

"Look Mum, the sea!"

Everyone piled off the coach and Mrs Collins, the headteacher, made sure everyone was in a small group.

"We'll have half-an-hour making observations and collecting things," she said. "Then we'll meet over by those rocks and go to a little sheltered beach the other side to eat our lunch. Has everyone got their notebooks?"

The little groups of children and their helpers scattered all over the beach. Lucy was in her Mum's group with her friends Danny and Deborah. They went onto the pebbly bit which her Mum told them was called the 'shingle' and they collected some stones. Some were round and smooth, others were sharp and flat. They all looked grey when you looked at them all together but when you picked them up some were grey and brown and some were speckled. The children drew pictures in their notebooks and Lucy chose some she liked and put them in her bag.

She found some coloured shells as well. Lots were chipped and broken so she put those back. But some were whole and beautiful. Her favourite was ridged with different coloured pinks on the outside.

They paddled in the sea and looked in the rock pools. They didn't find any water shrimps. Mum said it might be the wrong time of year. They saw the other groups making for the rocks on the far side of the beach and they went to join them.

Everyone had found some exciting things and they were showing each other:

"Are we all here?" said Mrs Collins, counting people's heads. "Yes. Okay, let's go and have our lunch."

As they rounded the rocks they saw lots of men on the beach. They had ropes and there was a boat just off shore.

"I wonder what's going on," said Lucy. "My goodness," said Mrs Collins. "There is a young whale on the beach."

One of the men came over. He was a fisherman and it was his boat just off shore.

"Sorry, madam," he said. "I'm afraid we've got a beached whale. We are trying to pull her back to sea. They do this sometimes, silly creatures."

"Can the children watch?" asked Mrs Collins.

"If you stand back over there you should be in no danger," said the fisherman.

"Why does she have to go back into the sea?" one of the children asked.

"She's a water animal," said the fisherman. "If she stays out of the water for too long she'll die."

The children watched as the whale was pushed into a large net and dragged to the edge of the water. Ropes were attached and the men in the boat started the engine and began to tug the whale back into the deeper water. The net was released from her body and the whale began to swim free.

The children all clapped and ran down to the shore to watch her swim away. They went and looked at the large mark she had made in the sand. It was huge.

"You can see how heavy she was," said the fisherman. "Look at the big hollow she has made."

The children measured her length by striding the mark. They made notes in their notebooks.

"Time for lunch, after all that excitement," said Mrs Collins.

As they sat eating their lunch they could still see the large tail of the whale appearing now and again above the waves. She seemed to be swimming around in circles but soon she was making for the open water. She disappeared from sight and Lucy felt glad.

"Do you think she's looking for her Mum?" asked Lucy.

"Probably," said Mrs Collins.

"Well," said Mrs Collins as they clambered back on the bus. "What an exciting adventure. I didn't expect to see a whale today. We will have to find out about whales when we are back in school tomorrow."

All the classes in Lucy's school found out about whales and they built a huge one out of boxes and paper. It was too big for any of the classrooms so it lived in the hall for the rest of the term. A reminder of their adventure at the seaside.

