

**PERUSAL SCRIPT**  
**ZOOM THEATRE**

# Clara and the Mermaids

by  
**J.D. Newman**  
**Episode 3 of the Sandy Hunter Saga**



**Newport, Maine**

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## **CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS**

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# CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS

A Zoom Play by J.D. Newman

This script has been written to be live-streamed and/or recorded on a video conferencing platform like Zoom. The stage directions are written with that performance mode in mind. The script could also be performed live onstage with social distancing between the actors or with a more traditional staged reading style in a post-pandemic world.

## CHARACTERS:

**Clara Gentry** A twelve-year-old girl with short hair and long imagination  
**Sandy Gentry** Clara's mother who writes to her daughter and shares her twelve-year-old self  
**Paisley York** Clara's sixth grade friend who has kept a secret  
**Britain York** Clara's younger brother, a fourth-grader and a gentleman  
**Mrs. York** Paisley and Britain's mother  
**Mrs. Hamilton** Director of the elementary school production of *The Little Mermaid Jr*

## BASE COSTUMES:

**Clara** All neutral black  
**Sandy** Befitting her age, and a previous age  
**Paisley** Girlish and subtle  
**Britain** As formal as a boy could wear without fierce teasing  
**Mrs. Y** Stylish but not pretentious  
**Mrs. H** Stylish and pretentious

## COSTUME ACCESSORIES:

**Clara** green tunic, lady hat, grey sweatshirt, book, notecard, knife, gauze strip, wig swim or bald cap  
**Sandy** book  
**Paisley** maid crown, white sheet, necklace, wig, swim or bald cap, scarf, knife, gauze strip, hair wrap, cup, note card  
**Britain** notecard

## CONVENTIONS:

- The cast members should all be on the call and should unmute their video when onstage.
- Letters, emails, and texts may begin with the character writing, typing, or texting but that can be abandoned or subdued once the convention is established.
- Characters generally play straight forward to their own camera.
- Character looks between boxes are hard to get right, especially with a livestream, but those moments can be golden if you can pull them off.
- Props may be passed between windows, more easily from the bottom than the sides.
- Musical underscoring may be used, especially in the fantasy scenes. The producer is responsible for any necessary permissions.
- The same actor could play Mrs. Y and Mrs. H if their personas can be made distinctive.
- Mrs. Hamilton could instead be Mr. Hamilton.

BACKGROUNDS behind the characters are optional but could be useful in establishing settings. They

reflect the location of the writer, except when imagination carries the characters away.

	<b>CLARA GENTRY</b>	<b>SANDY GENTRY</b>	<b>PAISLEY YORK</b>	<b>BRITIAN YORK</b>	<b>MRS. YORK</b>	<b>MRS. HAMILTON</b>
Clara's Bedroom						
Gentry Parlor						
Classroom						
Paisley's Bedroom						
Car Interior						
Front of School						
Gentry Attic						
Pedestrian Tunnel						
Oz Corridor						
Playground						
Britain's Bedroom						
Downton Abbey						
Neverending Story						
Universe						
Hotel Room						
Oz Park						
Blue Ocean						
York Kitchen						
Hospital						
Outside York House						
Backstage						
Hamilton Home						
School Library						

**CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS** by J. D. Newman 2g 1b 3w 40-50 minutes. Contemporary costumes and settings. Twelve-year-old Clara doesn't know what she wants to be, but she knows *doesn't* want to be a miniature version of her mother, Sandy Hunter Gentry. Clara imitates those around her, including a shy girl named Paisley, and her pretending leads her into the world of drama and theatre. She adapts and performs her own version of Hans Cristian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* and stage manages her elementary school production of Disney's musical version. Clara comprehends how the mermaid lost her voice by changing herself for others and how she found peace by being true to herself and her instincts. This third story in the Sandy Hunter Saga, presented through letters, emails, and text messages and written to be presented in a Zoom format, takes place 37 years after *Sandy and the Weird Sisters* and brings the story full circle as Sandy shares her twelve-year-old self with her own twelve-year-old daughter. **Order #3255**

**Dr. J. D. Newman** is a professor of theatre at Utah Valley University and the former director of the Noorda Theatre Center for Children and Youth, as he has now been appointed Chairman of the Theatre Department. He lives with his family in Sandy City, Utah. Dr. Newman became the first recipient of the Reba R. Robertson Award from the Children's Theatre Foundation of America. At UVU, Dr. Newman has directed *The Secret Garden*, *Princess Academy*, and *Androcles and the Lion* in the Noorda Theatre. He has also served as the director of the Noorda Theatre Summer Camp and has produced or co-produced touring productions including *A Village Fable*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *Honk!*, and *Pedro's Magic Shoes*. As a playwright, he has adapted scripts for Newbery medalists including Avi, Paul Fleischman, and Richard Peck. Newman taught and directed at Highland High School for eighteen years, from 1991 to 2010 with a sabbatical to Texas in 1998-99. He served as Artistic Director of the Salt Lake School for the Performing Arts during the 2009-2010 school year. Newman earned his B.F.A. and M.Ed. from the University of Utah, his M.A. from the University of Texas, and his Ph.D. from New York University. With Judy Matetzschk-Campbell, he co-authored *Tell Your Story: The Plays and Playwriting of Sandra Fenichel Asher*. Dr. Newman chairs the Playwrights In Our Schools Project and served three years on the board of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. *Sandy and the Weird Sisters*, his first novel, has been followed by 2 sequels, *Sandy and the Dance of Faith* and *Clara and the Mermaids (soon to be published)*. His stand alone young reader's story, *Make-Believe Friends* is also published by Leicester Bay Books.

## **CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS**

**by J.D. Newman**

**CLARA (letter, her bedroom)** Dear Mom. It's me. Clara. When I was angry, I swore I'd never speak to you again. You say I should keep my promises, and I will... but I never said I wouldn't write to you.

I've never had a daughter of my own, I mean, I'm twelve, right? But why do you want your daughter to be like you? When you were my age, you danced ballet and attended private school.

I'm different.

I'm sorry I didn't try out for *The Nutcracker*. I'm sorry I tore up the application for Memorial School. But I'm not sorry that I cut my hair without your permission. It doesn't make me look like a boy. It makes me look like a girl with short hair.

I know you're worried that I always wear black. You've said you've read it's a warning sign; a warning sign of what? If I pierce my naval, you can worry, but don't worry about my clothes.

Short hair and black clothes are about being neutral, so I can put on somebody else. Star Trek has holo-decks. I have a holo-body.

That's all I want to say. I need to be alone now, but later, I want to talk.

**SANDY (letter, parlor)** Dear Clara, Thank you for writing to me, even if you're not speaking to me.

I understand most of what you're saying. You're not the first girl to ever be twelve.

I've been thinking about you lately and I've been writing to you too. It started out as a letter but it's almost the length of a novel. I don't think you're ready for it yet, but when you are, it's here.

Every girl fears she's becoming her mother and wants to be more like her aunts. When I was twelve, I adopted my three great aunts. You know that aunts are cooler than mothers, unless you don't have a mom.

Clara, I'm trying to "get" you. I selfishly wish you "got" me.

If you want to stay in public school, that's okay with me. And it's fine if you don't love dance. That was my passion; it doesn't have to be yours. I just want you to love something as much as I loved dance.

If you don't believe I "get" you, I hope you believe that I'm trying.

**CLARA (letter, her bedroom)** Dear Mom, I'm almost ready to talk, but not quite

I'll tell you a little more about putting on people. Yesterday, I put on Paisley

*(Paisley is seen with classroom background.)*

She's this quiet girl who sets next to me in class, when she's not absent. I couldn't figure her out, so I pretended that I was Paisley.

I felt her long hair on my shoulders and her long skirt on my knees. I shadowed her on the playground until I noticed that she was shadowing me.

*(Paisley disappears.)*

Do you ever imagine what it's like to be me?

I guess I ought to talk to you now, but if I do, I'll miss writing.

**SANDY (letter, parlor)** Hey Clara. You said you still wanted me to write to you, even though we just talked. It's great you can feel what others feel. Some people call that empathy. Now that you understand Paisley, think you should invite her over.

**CLARA (letter, her bedroom)** I can't invite Paisley. We don't have anything in common, except we imitate other people and we've agreed not to talk about that, so there's nothing else to talk about.

**SANDY (letter, parlor)** Dear Clara, I don't want to interfere but I really think --

**CLARA (text, Paisley's bedroom)** Hey Mom. I'm over at Paisley's house working on an assignment. I'll be back in time for dinner.

**SANDY (text, parlor)** That's fine but I thought you said --

**CLARA (text, Paisley's bedroom)** She invited me to her house. That's different!

**SANDY (text, car interior... later)** Hi Clara. You wanted to walk to school this morning. Do you want a ride home?

**CLARA (text, front of school)** I'm walking!! AND DON'T PRETEND YOU DIDN'T SEE ME THIS MORNING!

**SANDY (text, car interior)** I won't pretend. You do that better than I do.

**CLARA (email, her own bedroom)** Hey Mom, I'm sorry I shouted in my text.

How long were you watching me this morning? You probably saw me braiding my hair, though I don't have enough hair to braid. Did you see me gather the eggs and water the horses? You might have guessed: I was pretending I was Laura Ingalls, and she always walked to school.

Yesterday I was Anne Shirley and pretended that Paisley was my bosom friend Diana. The day before that, I was Amy March and I kept a real lime in my desk. I pretended I could draw, like Amy does, but my picture of our teacher was so bad that Paisley thought I was making fun of her. Ms. Fabian came over and took the picture from me, but rather than using it for evidence, she smiled and stuck it to her file cabinet.

I'd be too embarrassed to tell you this in person, but I don't mind writing you about it.

**SANDY (text, parlor)** Thank you for forgiving me for seeing you pretending. Let me know if you want a ride tomorrow. Consider me your taxi driver.

**CLARA (text, bedroom)** Thanks Mom. I'd like a ride tomorrow, but no one uses taxis anymore.

**SANDY** (*text, parlor*) Okay. Consider me your Uber driver.

**CLARA** (*text, bedroom*) I'd like to put up some posters in my bedroom. Can I take down Aunt Clair's drawings?

**SANDY** (*text, parlor*) I guess they don't mean to you what they meant to her.

**CLARA** (*text, bedroom*) Who is the girl in most of the pictures?

**SANDY** (*text, parlor*) She's a child my Aunt Clair tried to adopt. My aunt imagined what she might look like when she grew up. You might notice that girl gets no older than twelve. That's when I entered the picture. You know you were named for Aunt Clair, well her and the girl in *The Nutcracker*.

**CLARA** (*text, bedroom*) Is that the girl you wanted me to be?

**SANDY** (*text, parlor*) It was the girl I imagined you might be, but a real daughter is better. Put Aunt Clair's pictures in the attic. There's an empty drawer in the wardrobe.

**CLARA** (*letter, attic*) Dear Mom, I disappeared for twelve hours and you didn't even call the police! Weren't you worried about me? Should I be worried that you didn't worry?  
I locked the attic door behind me and you didn't even knock. I had food in my lunch pail and I found an old bedpan so I didn't even have to come out to... O.K., T.M.I.  
I put Clair's pictures in a drawer in the wardrobe. It's stuffed with your aunts' old dresses, like pages of an enormous dictionary. I flipped to the beginning, with the dresses getting older and smaller until they were my size. I tried some on and pretended to be them. You haven't told me much about your great aunts, so I had to guess. Mary mostly read, Clair mostly drew, and Lily mostly sang. What were they really like?  
(*with realization*) You led me to the wardrobe, didn't you? I had a piece of the puzzle and I had to find the rest. I thought I was being original, but I only did what you expected.  
What was the name of the girl Aunt Clair tried to adopt?

**SANDY** (*letter, parlor*) I don't know what the family named her. Aunt Clair would have named her Lucille.

**CLARA** (*letter, front of school*) Dear Mom, I don't know what's keeping you. If I just sit here waiting, I'll be mad by the time you arrive, so I'll write out about my underground adventure.  
(*Background changes to tunnel.*)

The tunnel is the only way to the playground on the other side of the road, so it's not like we can avoid it.

(*Paisley appears, tunnel background.*)



As I came down the stairs, I watched Paisley pretending in front of me. She reached out her arms and twirled and I was sure she was Alice in the rabbit hole. At the bottom, she held out her elbows. She must have been linking arms with the Scarecrow and Tin Man. I couldn't resist! I linked elbows with Paisley and whispered, "Courage!" Paisley's eyes went wide until she saw me smiling.

**PAISLEY** (*live, pedestrian tunnel*) I try to hide it. I'm claustrophobic.

**CLARA** (*live pedestrian tunnel*) Oh. I thought you were imagining something.

**PAISLEY** (*live, pedestrian tunnel*) I hold out her arms to make sure the walls aren't closing in. When she gets to the bottom, I hold out my elbows in case I have to push back the walls.

**CLARA** (*live, pedestrian tunnel*) Imagine you're Dorothy, with the Tin Woodman on one arm and the Scarecrow on the other.

**PAISLEY** (*live, tunnel*) Oh no. I'd have to be the Cowardly Lion.  
(*Clara takes a deep breath and both backgrounds change to Oz corridor*)

**CLARA** (*live, Oz corridor*) Lion, if you don't have any courage, you'll have to pretend you're courageous.  
(*They walk together, reach the end, and might look and smile at one another. Paisley disappears. Clara background changes to front of school.*)

Paisley nodded seriously and walked down the tunnel without trembling. I'm glad she didn't leap out a side-window. Real concrete hurts. Maybe Paisley and I could imagine something else.

**PAISLEY** (*text, her bedroom*) Hey Clara. Thank you for helping me through the tunnel this morning. I can get through it on my own now and not get scared.

**CLARA** (*text, her bedroom*) You just needed something to imagine. Do you want to imagine something else with me?

**PAISLEY** (*text, her bedroom*) I guess so.

**CLARA** (*text, her bedroom*) Wear something black to school tomorrow. You pretend to be me and I'll pretend to be you.

**PAISLEY** (*e-mail, her bedroom*) Clara, I'm sorry I didn't pretend well enough. You pretended you weren't disappointed.

I wore black like you told me, but my funeral dress is the only black thing in my closet. Ms. Fabian asked if I was leaving school early and she said we could talk if I wanted to.

Of course, no one had died, at least not for the last two years. I've worn the dress to two different funerals. The first was for my grandmother. Everyone there acted so sad, but I hid my smiles because we had so many memories.

The second funeral was for my baby sister. It's not as sad as it sounds. My mother says she was still-born. There wasn't really a funeral but we had a graveside service. I cried because my sister and I never got to make any memories.

*(Background change: playground)*

On the playground today, I imagined I was watching my sister playing. I'm sorry I ruined your game, but pretending made me miss my sister less.

*(Background change: her bedroom.)*

Give me a second chance. If you want me to be neutral, I'll wear white, and I promise I won't wear my flower girl dress.

**CLARA (e-mail, her own bedroom)** Paisley, you don't have to apologize. There's more than one way to pretend.

I'm sorry about your sister and I'm glad you got to imagine her. I've never a sister to lose, but having a friend makes me less lonely.

**PAISLEY (e-mail, her own bedroom)** Thank you for understanding, Clara. I'm trying to get better at pretending. Today I pretended I was my brother.

*(Britain appears in his bedroom.)*

You didn't meet Britain when you visited. He keeps to his room, his "study" as he calls it. I was named for the town our ancestors came from; Britain was named for our country. He says we're "British Americans." He watches "Downton Abbey" on Sunday nights and sometimes I watch it with him. Britain is a gentleman, if a fourth grader can be one. His classmates call him "Not So Great Britain" and say he's not so great at anything. But Britain is a great writer. My mother thinks my brother is lonely but he's happy as he is, or who he pretends he is.

*(Britain disappears.)*

I wish I could pretend to be my sister but I don't know much about her. The gravestone says "Our Beloved Daughter." I wish she had a name. I tried calling her "Beloved" but it didn't feel right. How can you know somebody if I don't know her name?

**CLARA (e-mail, her bedroom)** Why don't you call her Lucille? You could call her Lucy for short.

**PAISLEY (e-mail, her bedroom)** Definitely Lucille!

**SANDY (text, car interior)** Hey Clara. You made less somber wardrobe choices this morning. You wore green! I read that parents should be concerned about sudden changes in their children's behavior. Should I be?

**CLARA** (*text, front of school, with a green tunic over black base*) Mom, you read so much! I'm going to Paisley's this afternoon. I think I scared her family the first time I met them. I'm just trying to pretend I'm normal.

**PAISLEY** (*text, front of school*) Mom, Clara is coming home with me today. She's not wearing black. Please pretend you're happy to see her.

**CLARA** (*letter, her own bedroom*) Mom, Paisley pretends even better than I do. Up in her bedroom, she showed me her hat collection. She pulled out a maid crown and a lady hat. If she'd given me the choice, I would have played the maid, but Paisley put the lady's hat on my head and tied the maid crown carefully into her hair, and she wouldn't let me help.

*(Paisley appears; Downton Abbey background. Paisley wears maid cap; Clara the lady hat.)*

Paisley started talking in a British accent. She was my "obedient servant Anna," who I think is someone from Downton Abbey. She addressed me as "Lady Mary." (*removes lady hat*) When she lifted my lady hat, she acted surprised that I had "bobbed my hair."

**PAISLEY** (*live to Clara, Downton Abbey*) Lady Mary! You'll shock your poor mother!

**CLARA** (*letter, Downton Abbey*) My mother wasn't poor; she was very, very rich, but I didn't argue. Paisley, well, "Anna," looked at my green tunic, pretending I wasn't wearing leggings.

**PAISLEY** (*live to Clara, Downton Abbey*) Forgive me for saying so, my lady, but you look like a.... a.... flapper!

**CLARA** (*letter, Downton Abbey*) I had no idea what a flapper is, and I couldn't google it then, but she made it sound worse than a goth! My maid stuffed the hat on my head and pulled out her best formal dress. It had so many buttons and ribbons I couldn't have gotten into it without her help.

*(Britain appears; Downton Abbey)*

We accidentally left the door open and her brother Britain looked in. I thought he'd laugh at us, but he moved stiffly, like an old butler, and played his part.

**BRITAIN** (*live to Paisley, Downton Abbey*) My dear Lady Mary! What on earth have you done with your hair?!

**PAISLEY** (*live to Britain, Downton Abbey*) Carson, let me know when the guests have arrived, then Lady Mary will make her appearance. Lady Grantham can't act shocked in the midst of her company.

**BRITAIN** (*live to Paisley, Downton Abbey*) As you wish. Lady Mary. If you were not my favorite...

*(Britain disappears.)*

**CLARA (letter, her own bedroom)** I wanted to break down in giggles, but Paisley was still pretending, so I had to do the same.

*(live to Paisley)* If I am going to shock my mother, I might as well shock her all at once. Bring me my flapper dress!

**PAISLEY (live to Clara, Downton Abbey)** Very well, my lady.

*(Paisley disappears.)*

**CLARA (letter, her own bedroom)** She helped me take off the fancy dress and put back on my green tunic. Then Paisley took off her maid crown, I took off the lady hat, and we fell on her bed laughing. It's the first time I shared a girl laugh and it felt good. Thanks for letting me tell you my story. I wouldn't share it with anyone else.

P.S. Do you want to watch a movie together tonight?

**SANDY (letter, parlor)** Dear Clara, Thank you for your letter yesterday. I owe you one in return.

And thank you for watching The Neverending Story with me. Aunt Lily took me to see it when I was in high school. Just as Bastian lived Atreyu's adventures, I lived Bastian's. I was the "Human Child" that Bastian brought on his journey.

*(Background change: Gentry attic)*

When Bastian goes to the attic window and shouts out the name of his mother, it sounded like it might have been my mother's name. One night, when I visited my aunts, when this was their house, I snuck into the attic, opened the window, and shouted "Mariah!"

My heart stopped when Aunt Lily appeared, wearing my mother's old sweater. At first, I was angry at Lily for taking my mom's sweater, but then my anger turned to my mother. "Why weren't you there for me? Where did you go? You left me all alone!"

Lily said nothing and my anger rained down as tears, and she held me. "It's okay, Mom. Dad takes care of me. My sister takes care of me. My aunts take care of me. I'm going to be okay."

*(Background change: parlor)*

Some daughters lose their mothers suddenly. Most mothers lose their daughters gradually. I guess girls have to reject their mothers in order to become independent, and maybe you'll have to do that too. If that happens, I'll be standing there waiting like Aunt Lily.

**CLARA (letter, bedroom, wearing gray sweatshirt)** Dear Mom, I pity any girl who doesn't get letters from her mother.

You must have noticed that I didn't wear black this morning. When Paisley saw my jeans and grey sweatshirt, she asked, "Are you keeping your feet on the ground?" I looked at her seriously and said, "not anymore." She knew I was pretending I was Bastian in The Neverending Story.

After school, when I went over to Paisley's, we went to her family room in the basement where she has this huge T.V. She turned down the brightness so the movie looked like a shadow of our pretending.

*(Background change: Neverending Story)*

Paisley let me be Bastian and she was great as Atreyu. She didn't invite Britain, so we imagined everyone else. When Atreyu returned to the Ivory Tower, I draped a white sheet around me and became the Childlike Empress. When the empress fell, I threw off the sheet and was Bastian again. I threw back the door of the video cabinet and shouted "Lucille!"

*(Background change: universe)*

Paisley turned off the movie. I thought I had ruined our pretending. She took the white sheet and draped it over her shoulders.

*(Paisley appears, universe background, wearing a white sheet)*

**PAISLEY** *(live to Clara, universe)* You gave me my name. I'm Lucille.

**CLARA** *(live to Paisley, universe)* Hi Lucille. Where have you been all this time?

**PAISLEY** *(live to Clara, universe)* In a magical place far away.

*(Paisley disappears. Clara background changes to her bedroom.)*

**CLARA** *(letter, her own bedroom)* Lucille did most of the talking. I can't share the rest. It was private pretending.

**SANDY** *(letter, parlor)* Dear Clara, Thank you for sharing, and not sharing. Some pretending is too special to share. I'll miss you while I'm off at my writers' conference. I'm sure Dad will take good care of you, but I'll leave you some money for pizza, just in case.

**CLARA** *(letter, bedroom sweatshirt gone)* Dear Mom, I need to write you a letter, but I don't know how to get it to you. It's too important for email. I checked the brochure but there's no mailing address. Doesn't anyone write letters to a writers' conference?

Something wonderful happened at school. Ms. Fabian took us to the multi-purpose room and instead of playing dodgeball, she introduced us to our new drama teacher. The school got a grant and we only get her for an hour a week, but the hour is magic!

The drama teacher said we should call her Ms. J because her last name is too long to remember. Ms. J explained that drama is different than theatre because there's no script and no audience; just us and our imaginations.

Ms. J had us imagine we were on a beach. We closed our eyes and imagined what would see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. I could sense everything in perfect detail. Then Ms. J had us imagine with our eyes open, which was harder for most of my classmates. She calls it "pantomime."

As Ms. J spoke the story, we imagined that a seagull flew off the water, landed near us, and ate the food that we offered. My seagull ate out of my hand and I could even feel its feathers.

Then Ms. J had us imagine it again, but this time, the seagull had landed in an oil slick. We had to clean

its wings before could fly away. Ms. J had us work in pairs, and Paisley was right next to me. We worked together to save the imaginary bird, but the feelings we had were real.

I figured out how to get you this hand-written letter. I scanned it on the printer and emailed it as an attachment. Of course, you knew that when you started reading my letter. You knew more than I knew when I wrote it. Do people ever know things about us that we don't yet know ourselves?

**SANDY (email, hotel room)** Dear Clara. I'm glad you've found something you love. Drama is great for public pretending. Isn't your school doing a sixth grade musical this year, and aren't auditions coming up?

In answer to your question, I sometimes know something will happen to you, but I don't always tell you because I want you to be surprised.

**CLARA (e-mail, bedroom)** Mom, the school musical is theatre, not drama. There's a difference! Yes, the school is putting on The Little Mermaid, or to be specific, Disney's The Little Mermaid Junior. I don't want to re-make the movie. I mean not in that way. Paisley and I re-made The Never Ending Story, but that was private, this is public, and Disney does all the imagining. I've liked the Disney movies I've seen, but Disney's a business. No one should charge us to wish on a star.

**SANDY (letter, hotel room)** Dear Clara, I think I owe you a real letter.

The Little Mermaid belongs to the public now but I knew it when it felt private. When the movie came out, I was in college. A speaker from Disney came to campus and gave a lecture about their new animated film. She showed us moving pencil drawings that hadn't yet been colored.

At the time, Disney's star was fading and others were telling better stories. After The Little Mermaid, Disney changed from an underdog to a giant. Disney used to pretend it was educational but the company stopped pretending.

We took you to Disneyland once, but you were probably too young to enjoy it. We thought about taking you back for fall break. Would you like that?

**CLARA (text, front of school)** Hey Mom. I got your letter. I need to reply before you buy tickets. Someday I'd like to go back to Disneyland, but not now. All I remember of Disneyland is lots and lots of people. I liked the quiet places, and here weren't many. Could we go somewhere else instead?

**SANDY (text, hotel room)** Instead of Anaheim, what if you and I went to Aberdeen?

**CLARA (text, front of school)** I know what's in Anaheim. What's in Aberdeen?

**SANDY (text, hotel room)** Do you want to be surprised?

**CLARA (text, front of school)** I guess so.

**SANDY (note in book, parlor)** Dear Clara, I'm giving you my copy of Hans Christian Andersen's tales. Some of them are Danish folklore but his best ones tell the story of his life. I wanted you to read The Little Mermaid as Hans Christian Anderson wrote it. Love, Mom.

**CLARA (email, her bedroom, holding up identical book)** THE MERMAID DIES?!!! Mom, what kind of ending is that?!!!

**SANDY (email, parlor)** Dear Clara, I should have warned you about the ending of The Little Mermaid. Hans Cristian Andersen's writing got him invited to the palace of the King of Denmark, but he never felt he belonged there and he felt he couldn't speak his mind. Andersen was like the Ugly Duckling, hoping that someone would see him as a swan. He was dangerously sensitive, like the princess who could feel the pea under all those mattresses. His stories show the joy of humanity as well as the pain. When Disney told his story, he used the joy and threw the pain away. As the Man in Black says in The Princess Bride: "Life is pain, Princess. Anyone who tells you differently is selling something." Whose story is more honest? Disney's or Andersen's? To be true or not be true... that is the question.

**CLARA (e-mail, her bedroom)** Hey Mom. I'm writing my own theatre version of The Little Mermaid and I'm telling it the way that Andersen told it. Paisley and Britain are reading it with me tomorrow.

**SANDY (e-mail, parlor)** That sounds wonderful, Clara! Do I get to read it?

**CLARA (e-mail, her bedroom)** Hey Paisley. Thank you for reading my script this afternoon. Britain's room was the perfect place to read it. I thought you said he loves England but his room looks like the inside of a ship. I think I hurt Britain's feelings when I said real sailing ships weren't so comfortable. I should know; I've read Charlotte Doyle! But maybe I didn't need to tell him. Tell Britain I'm sorry I hurt his feelings. I don't know how to unhurt them.

**PAISLEY (email, her bedroom)** I can tell my brother you're sorry but it would mean more coming from you.

**CLARA (notecard, her bedroom)** Dear Britain. Thank you for reading my script this afternoon. You make a great prince. You shared your private place and I was unkind. A captain's cabin was as comfortable as your bedroom and you're certainly the captain of your ship. Sincerely, Clara.  
*(The notecard might be passed from Clara to Paisley and from Paisley to Britain, with squares appearing and disappearing.)*

**BRITAIN (notecard, his bedroom)** Dear Clara, Thank you for your apology. Someday I'll share a story with you, but not today. Sincerely, Britain. P.S. You make a great mermaid.

*(His card might be relayed to Clara via Paisley.)*

**PAISLEY (email, her bedroom)** Hey Clara, maybe we should read your play for our class, or better yet, act it out. What do you think?

**CLARA (e-mail, her bedroom)** If my mom had suggested that, I would have said “NOOOO!!!! But since you’re asking, I’ll consider it. It’s kind of private but theatre is supposed to be public. Would the class like it?

**PAISLEY (e-mail, her bedroom)** The students should know the real story if they’re acting out Disney’s onstage. I realize it’s scary to share, but it would be great for my brother. His own classmates would tease him but ours would applaud him. They might even think he’s cute.

**CLARA (e-mail, her bedroom)** If Britain says yes, I’ll say yes too. Would we read it or act it out?

**PAISLEY (e-mail, her bedroom)** I vote we act it out, and I have some ideas about costumes.

**CLARA (e-mail, her bedroom)** I don’t want to be hopping around in a pool-tail.

**PAISLEY (e-mail, her bedroom)** Don’t worry! I have a better plan. And Britain says yes!

**CLARA (letter, her bedroom)** Dear Mom. We performed my play in class today. You would have been the only parent if you’d come and that would be awkward, and now I get to write you about it.

Britain was scared at first, but once he got into his role, he forgot about the audience, and so did Paisley and me.

We compromised on costumes. I had enough black for all of us and Paisley had all the accessories. She wore a huge necklace when she was playing my older sister and wore a shawl when she was being the sea witch. She had long skirts for me and her, so when we were mermaids, we looked like we were gliding through the water.

When I became human, Paisley untied my skirt and revealed my bare legs below my leotard. For a moment it felt like that nightmare where you forgot to wear clothes, but that’s probably how the naked mermaid felt. At the prince’s wedding, I danced on my bare feet and acted like I was like stepping on knives.

When we weren’t talking to each other, we took turns telling the story, using sentences from Anderson’s story. When the prince and his bride lay in the wedding bed, I spoke my thoughts as I decided whether I should save myself by stabbing them or whether or should let myself die. When I made my decision, I threw my knife and melted into sea-foam.

The class was as surprised by the ending as I was when I read it. I rolled up in a gauze curtain that I borrowed from the parlor as Paisley welcomed me as a daughter of the air.



I think the students really liked it because they started clapping before Ms. Fabian did. Britain was proud of himself and so was I. He's two whole years younger than me, so there's nothing romantic with us. But there's nothing romantic with the prince and the mermaid either.

Ms. Fabian says we should perform the play in a school assembly. We didn't say no but we didn't say yes. We'll see.

**SANDY (letter, parlor)** Dear Clara, You asked if I've ever known something before it happens to you. I knew you'd discover theatre. I wanted you to be surprised.

You're using your imagination not only as an actor but as a playwright and a designer. You learned to write a play like William Shakespeare did: doing what made sense and making up the rules as you go. I'll let you decide how you want to do theatre... and drama. I won't try push you; you'd only push back. But I'll support you however you let me.

**BRITAIN (letter, his bedroom)** Dear Clara, Thank you for letting me be in your play. I've never acted, although I pretend all the time. Paisley and I used to do it a lot and you got us doing it again.

I'm going to let you read my story. If you like it, tell me. If you don't like it, don't say anything.

**CLARA (letter, her bedroom)** Dear Britain, Thank you for letting me read your story. I like it a lot!

Your boy hero takes a ship to London where a girl treats him kindly. Have girls been unkind to you? Girls can be mean, even in England. Sometimes they're like hens, pecking each other so they don't get pecked themselves. They're often nervous and people aren't nice when they're scared. They want boys to notice them, not just for what they look like but for what they do and for who they are.

I don't know why I told you all that. If I'd written in pencil, I'd erase it.

You're a great imaginer, and I guess I am too. Your friend, Clara

**PAISLEY (text, her bedroom)** What did you write to my brother? He won't tell me but he hasn't stopped smiling.

**CLARA (text, her bedroom)** I just told Britain he's great at something. That's important to boys.

**PAISLEY (text, her bedroom)** And to girls!

**SANDY (text, parlor)** Make sure you pack tonight. We're leaving early tomorrow morning.

**CLARA (text, bedroom)** Okay, Mom. Give me a hint. Where is Aberdeen?

**MOM (text, bedroom)** It's in South Dakota, but nowhere near Mt. Rushmore.

**CLARA (e-mail, hotel room)** Hello Paisley. I'm emailing you from Aberdeen in northeastern South Dakota.

My mom wouldn't tell me why she brought me to Aberdeen. She said it was a surprise. We checked in at the world's first Super 8 Motel. I hoped that wasn't the big surprise.

Mom brought me to the Aberdeen library and a lady took us into a glass room where Mom could read old papers from their Special Collections. We looked at newspapers from 1888 that were written by a man named Frank Baum. Mom let me figure out that he wrote The Wizard of Oz.

That was kind of cool. I loved the book and I loved the movie more. Mom's writing an article about Frank Baum's newspaper and how it prepared him to write children's books.

That was kind of cool, but Mom made it sound like this big deal and it felt more like work than play. I tried not to act disappointed.

Before we went back to the World's First Super 8, Mom drove me out to Wylie Park. We spent too much time at the library and the sun was going down. We made our way through the hedges to a gateway that said "The Land of Oz." My eyes were as bright as my Mom's.

*(Background changes to Oz park.)*

The place looked closed but we wandered in anyway; we never could've have done that in Disneyland!

We met a teenage girl with a tray of popcorn who said the park was still open. She gave us each a free bag of popcorn because she didn't want to waste them, then we never met anyone else.

We walked into the Munchkin City. There weren't any Munchkins or buildings but the yellow brick road spiraled out from the square. "Just follow the yellow brick road," Mom said, imitating Glinda. "Follow the yellow brick road?" I asked, and that's how our journey began.

Mom stepped back so I could pretend alone, but I wanted her to come with me. I pretended Mom was Glinda and I was Dorothy. I told Glinda to change out of her ball-gown so we could go traveling together. Dorothy helped Glinda disguise herself as a peasant.

Glinda said she'd lived all her life in the fairy world and didn't know how to act human. As Dorothy, I did my best to teach her. She told me to take the ruby slippers from the feet of the witch who was smashed under my farmhouse. We passed statues of the Scarecrow and the Tin Man and the Lion and I gave them directions to the Emerald City so they could get there on their own.

We walked through the forest of talking trees and we were looking for the Emerald City when the flying monkeys carried us away as prisoners of the Wicked Witch of the West. We had to find our way out of an underground cave without using magic. I threw a bucket of water to distract the witch and she melted right in front of us.

The yellow brick road led us back to the Wizard who was preparing to escape in his balloon. The Wizard didn't explain why he was leaving- he was a statue after all. He flew off without me and I would have followed in my own balloon if the carnival ride had been running. Glinda couldn't get me home because she'd left her wand behind. I asked her if the ruby slippers could make me fly and she thought they might. I closed my eyes and said "there's no place like home" Glinda lifted Dorothy off of the bricks.

*(The background changes to hotel room.)*

When I opened my eyes, I saw how dark it had gotten. The gates had closed on the Land of Oz; no one knew that we were inside. The chain link fences kept us from getting back to the parking lot. I figured out how to get around them, walking on the train tracks that surrounded the park. My mother and I had a

private adventure. That never could've happened in Disneyland.

**PAISLEY** (*email, her bedroom*) Thank you for sharing your private adventure. You can have an adventure in Disneyland; you just have to know where to look.

Last summer in Disneyland, my parents let Britain and me go alone for an hour, and we found our way inside the castle! There wasn't a line and there was no one at the door, so we weren't sure we were supposed to be in there. Below us, thousands of families walked through the arches, and in the far end of the castles, dozens of girls became princesses, but Britain and I had the castle to ourselves.

There aren't many unexplored places, but they can all be new to us.

**CLARA** (*text, classroom*) Paisley! Ms. Fabian wants us to perform *The Little Mermaid* at the talent assembly!

**PAISLEY** (*text, front of school*) Great! It was fun to perform it in the classroom.

**CLARA** (*text, classroom*) But in front of the school???

**PAISLEY** (*text, front of school*) You'll be great. I'll tell Britain. When is it?

**CLARA** (*text, classroom*) This Friday.

**PAISLEY** (*text, front of school*) This FRIDAY???

**CLARA** (*text, classroom*) I KNOW, RIGHT!!! I'm not sure I'm ready to share it.

**PAISLEY** (*text, front of school*) If not now when? We shouldn't keep Andersen's story to ourselves.

**CLARA** (*text, in front of school*) Britain might be too shy to perform.

**BRITAIN** (*email, his bedroom*) Hi Clara. Paisley says we're doing our play for the school. If we bring down the screen, I can borrow my teacher's projector and make a blue backdrop that moves!

**CLARA** (*e-mail, her bedroom*) OK Britain. You take care of the scenery and Paisley will take care of the music. If you two are willing, I'm in too.

**BRITAIN** (*email, his bedroom*) It will be wonderful! What could go wrong?

**CLARA** (*letter, her bedroom*) Dear Dad, something went wrong. It's good you couldn't make it to the

performance.

*(Clara's background changes to blue ocean. We might hear musical underscoring. Britain appears for his opening line, also with a blue ocean background)*

**BRITAIN (narrating)** Far, far from land, where the waters are as blue as flowers and as clear as glass, so deep that no anchor can touch the sand, live the mer-people.

*(Britain disappears.)*

**CLARA (letter, blue ocean)** Britain's backdrop worked perfectly. He put a glass dish of blue water on top of a math projector and shone it on the screen from behind. It looked really cool till someone backstage made a shadow shark. But that's not what went wrong. That happened at the end of the story.

**PAISLEY (appearing, in role, blue ocean, hair in scarf, with knife)** Sister, here is the knife that the sea witch has given us. Before the sun rises, you must plunge it into the heart of the prince and you will be a mermaid again.

*(Paisley lowers her knife out and Clara raises an identical one, shakes her head.)*

**CLARA (email, blue ocean)** I took the knife from my older sister but I tried to give it back again.

**PAISLEY (in role, blue ocean)** Take it, use it, or you'll melt into sea-foam. I bought it at a great price.

*(Paisley tries to pull off the scarf but her wig comes off too. Her baldness is suggested by a swim cap or bald cap..)*

**CLARA (email, blue ocean)** Her scarf came off and her hair came off with it! She was bald! Was she trying to be funny? Was she trying to ruin our play? But Paisley looked as shocked as I felt, though she somehow continued with her lines.

**PAISLEY (in role, blue ocean)** I have given the sea-witch my beautiful hair but it's worth it if you use the knife. The prince should have loved you or should have been grateful. Will you die, or will he?

*(Britain appears and narrates as Clara and Paisley lift strips of cloth around them and dance as daughters of the air.)*

**BRITAIN (narrating, blue ocean)** The prince never knew that the mermaid girl spared him and melted like foam in the sea. But although a mermaid does not have a soul, she rose as a daughter of the air.

**PAISLEY (in role, blue ocean)** You have borne your suffering bravely. Do good deeds for three hundred years and an immortal soul will be yours.

*(Britain and Paisley disappear.)*

**CLARA** (*email, bedroom replaces blue ocean*) THAT's what went wrong. When the curtain closed, Paisley and I looked at each other. There was nothing to say, so we didn't say it.

**PAISLEY** (*e-mail, bedroom*) Hi Clara. I'm sorry we couldn't talk this afternoon. My mother said I could check out of school.

It's hard to lose a secret when I've worked so hard to keep it. I've pretended that I'm like everyone else but I'm not. I'm not embarrassed, but my pretending was private. The wig is made of other people's hair and it fools everyone, except for when it doesn't. Sometimes it even fools me.

The treatments made my hair fall out. The doctors say the treatments are working, but they make me sick to my stomach. I'm not afraid of death since I don't know what that's like but I'm afraid of my treatments because I know I exactly what they're like.

I want to tell you more about my sickness, but I want to tell you in person, when I'm ready. Is that okay?

**CLARA** (*e-mail, bedroom*) It's more than okay. You can share anything with me, or not share anything with me. I'm glad you kept going in the play. I guess that's what you do in life as well.

**PAISLEY** (*text, bedroom*) Clara, do you want to try out for the musical next week?

**CLAIR** (*text, bedroom*) You want to do the Disney version after doing the real story?!!!

**PAISLEY** (*text, bedroom*) There are different ways of telling a story.

**CLAIR** (*text, bedroom*) If you want to audition, I guess I will to.

**PAISLEY** (*text, bedroom*) Just so you know, Aimee Cartwright will be playing Ariel.

**CLAIR** (*text, bedroom*) Did they already cast her?

**PAISLEY** (*text, bedroom*) Not exactly.

**CLAIR** (*text, bedroom*) Can she sing?

**PAISLEY** (*text, bedroom*) She sang The Star Spangled Banner at the ballpark last week.

**CLAIR** (*text, bedroom*) OK. Can she act?

**PAISLEY** (*text, bedroom*) She's played Little Orphan Annie, Anne of Green Gables, Amy March,

**CLAIR (text, bedroom)** OK! I GET IT!!! Aimee is Ariel. She doesn't say anything mean to me. In fact, she doesn't speak to me at all.

**PAISLEY (text, bedroom)** Some of her friends are kind of clicky, but Aimee is pretty nice.

**CLAIR (text, bedroom)** Do the girls all have to be mermaids?

**PAISLEY (text, bedroom)** No, you could be a tentacle.

**CLAIR (text, bedroom)** LOL

**PAISLEY (text, bedroom)** No really! There is a whole chorus of Ursula's tantacles.

**CLAIR (text, bedroom)** Huh. Weird. Is there anyone who doesn't have to be onstage?

**PAISLEY (text, bedroom)** They have a stage-crew but come on Clara! We could do it together! It will be fun!

**CLAIR (text, bedroom)** OK I'll try out. But try to act un-disappointed when I don't get in.

**PAISLEY (text, bedroom)** Don't act surprised when you do!

**CLAIR (letter, bedroom)** Dear Mom. I'm not going to get a role in The Little Mermaid but I wasn't because I didn't try.

They had all the girls sing "Part Of Your World" and the director, Mrs. Hamilton, asked us to make the song our own, so I did. That was my mistake. When my time came to sing the song, I danced it. I explained that that's how Ariel would have sung it after she had lost her voice. Mrs. Hamilton was speechless. Strike one.

We had to read a scene. They gave half of us Ariel scripts and half of us Ursula scripts and told us to work it out ourselves. That was their mistake. Everyone was arguing about who they were going to read with until I told them to line up by audition numbers and paired them up. I was surprised that they listened because no one had put me in charge.

I read Ursula's lines, so Mrs. Hamilton could see that I could speak, but I played the sea witch the way she is in the story rather than the way she is in the movie. Mrs. Hamilton's mouth opened and shut but no sound came out. Strike two.

Then Mrs. Hamilton asked me who had paired up the other students and I had to admit I took charge. Strike three.

I'm sorry I blew my audition. Were you good at auditions when you were my age?

**SANDY** (*letter, parlor*) Dear Clara, I got my first role in a musical without auditioning. I was willing to step in when a girl-dancer twisted her ankle.

The first year I auditioned for The Nutcracker, they didn't give me a role as a party girl but they asked me to audition for the party boys. I wasn't sure what to make of that but they cast me as the toymaker's nephew. It wasn't what I was going for but it was better than I could have expected. Sometimes auditions are like that. See what you get before you lose hope. You might be pleasantly surprised.

***16 MORE PAGES TO THE END OF PLAY***

## ***The Sandy Hunter Saga***

**THE PLAYS** (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

*Episode 1 - Sandy and the Weird Sisters*

*Episode 2 - Sandy and the Dance of Faith (Future)*

*Episode 3 - Clara and the Mermaids*

**THE BOOKS** (*Leicester Bay Books*)

*Volume 1 - Sandy and the Weird Sisters*

*Volume 2 - Sandy and the Dance of Faith (Future)*

*Volume 3 - Clara and the Mermaids (Future)*

## **OTHER PLAYS BY J.D. NEWMAN**

[All's Well That Ends Well](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[Awakening Galatea](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

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[DeGruchy's Mantle](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[The Doctor In Spite of Himself](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[Gathering Grimm](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[The Gypsy Tree](#) (*Coming Soon to Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[Land of Oz](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[Liberation](#) [1-act] (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[Olympus On the Moon](#) [1-act] (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[Puzzles](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

[The Yearning Season](#) (*Leicester Bay Theatricals*)

## **OTHER PLAYS:**

**The Man Behind The Curtain** (a one-man play about L. Frank Baum) [email](#) us if you are interested in having him perform for your organization.

**The Secret School** (adapted from Avi's novel) Dramatic Publishing

**The Winter's Tale** (adapted and edited from Shakespeare) Eldridge Plays and Musicals

**The Tempest** (adapted and edited from Shakespeare) Eldridge Plays and Musicals

**Whirligig** (adapted from Paul Fleischman's novel) Rights Unavailable.

**Here Lies the Librarian** (adapted from Richard Peck's novel) Rights Unavailable.

**A Year Down Yonder** (adapted from Richard Peck's novel) Rights Unavailable.

**Princess Academy** (adapted from Shannon Hale's novel) Rights Unavailable.

**The Voyage of the Bassett** (adapted from the illustrated story book of James C. Christensen) Rights Unavailable.

## **OTHER NOVELS:**

[Make-Believe Twins: A Best Friends Story](#) (*Leicester Bay Books*)