

PERUSAL SCRIPT

RADIO VERSION

CLARA and the MERMAIDS

A Radio Play by

J.D. Newman

Part 3 of the Sandy Hunter Saga



Newport, Maine

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CLARA and the MERMAIDS

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This script is written to be performed as a radio play
by the Open Eye Theatre in Margaretville, New York on WIOX Radio in Roxbury.

CHARACTERS:

Clara Gentry	A twelve-year-old girl
Sandy Gentry	Clara's mother
Paisley York	Clara's sixth-grade friend
Britain York	Paisley's younger brother, a fourth-grader
Mrs. York	Paisley's and Britain's mother
Mrs. (or Mr.) Hamilton	Director of the school's production of <i>The Little Mermaid</i>

The sound effects (SFX) mentioned in the script are entirely optional. They can be used, augmented, or discarded as the director wishes.

CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS A Radio Play by J. D. Newman 2g 1b 3w 30 minutes. 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 inter-personal performance, and written to be presented in a radio 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 #3255.2**

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 currently serves as 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*. His stand alone young reader's story, *Make-Believe Friends* is also published by Leicester Bay Books.

CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS

Scene One — *(emailing) SFX Keys Clacking (different sound for each character)*

CLARA: Hey Mom. It's me. Clara. When I was mad, 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 email 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 wanted to take dance classes. I'm different! I'm sorry I didn't try out for *The Nutcracker*. But I'm not sorry I cut my hair! I didn't need your permission, and it doesn't make me look like a boy! It makes me look like a girl with short hair. And I don't wear black to be a rebel; I wear it to be neutral so I can put on other people. That will take some explaining, but not right now. I need to be alone! But then I want to talk.

SANDY: Hello Clara. Thank you for emailing me, even if you're not speaking to me. I understand what you're saying. You're not the first girl to ever be twelve. I'm trying to "get" you. I selfishly wish you "got" me. I'll stop making you take dance classes. Dance was my passion when I was your age; 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 I'm trying.

CLARA: Mom, I'm almost ready to talk, but not quite. I'll tell you more about putting on people. Yesterday, I put on Paisley. She's this quiet girl who sits next to me in class... when she's in school. She's absent a lot. I couldn't figure out Paisley, so I pretended that I was her. I felt her long hair on my shoulders and her long skirt on my knees and I almost danced as I walked. Paisley is the daughter you wish you had. I'm nothing like Paisley, but I know what it's like to be her. I guess I ought to talk to you now, but if I do, I'll miss writing to you.

SANDY: Clara, it's great you can imagine how other people feel. Some people call that empathy. I call it your superpower.

CLARA: Mom, I learned more about Paisley today. I watched her as she walked through the tunnel to the playground. As she went down the steps, Paisley reached out her arms and twirled. I was sure she was being Alice in the rabbit hole. Then she held out her elbows and walked straight ahead. I was sure that she was being Dorothy, walking down the hallway to the wizard. I linked elbows with Paisley and whispered "Courage!"

Scene Two — *(in person)*

PAISLEY: Let me go! Stop making fun of me!

CLARA: I wasn't! You were imagining something. I was trying to help you imagine.

PAISLEY: I'm trying NOT to imagine that the walls are closing in. I'm claustrophobic. I hold out my elbows in case I have to push back the walls.

CLARA: You could imagine something different. You could be Dorothy in the wizard's palace.

PAISLEY: I'm more like the Cowardly Lion! You could be Dorothy! You're brave!

CLARA: (*as Dorothy*) Listen, Lion: if you don't have any courage, you have to pretend you're courageous.

PAISLEY: (*as the Cowardly Lion*) All right. I'll do that! I can face that wizard. As long as you're beside me.

Scene Three — (*email*) SFX of keys clacking

CLARA: We walked through the tunnel, linking elbows, and we linked elbows again as we returned from recess. Maybe Paisley and I could pretend something else.

(texting)

PAISLEY: Hello Clara. Thank you for getting me through the tunnel today. Pretending helps.

SFX of phone beep

CLARA: Tomorrow you can pretend to be me and I'll pretend to be you. Wear something black and I'll wear a skirt.

SFX of phone beep

Scene Four — (*emailing*) SFX of keys clacking

PAISLEY: Hi Clara, I'm sorry I didn't pretend the way you wanted me to. You pretended you weren't disappointed. You told me to wear black, and I did, but my funeral dress is the only thing black in my closet. I wore it to my baby sister's funeral. She was still-born and we hadn't made any memories. On the playground today, I imagined I was watching her play. Imagining made me miss her less. 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.

(texting)

CLARA: Paisley, you don't have to apologize. There's more than one way to imagine.

SFX of phone beep

Scene Five A — (texting)

SANDY: Hey Clara. You usually wear black but today you wore your green tunic. I read that parents should be concerned if their children make sudden changes. Should I be concerned about you?

SFX of phone beep

CLARA: Mom, you read too much! I'm going over to Paisley's this afternoon. My black clothes scared her family. I'm trying to act normal.

SFX of phone beep

Scene Five B — (texting, another stream)

PAISLEY: Mother, Clara is coming home with me today. She's not wearing black. Please act like you're glad to see her.

SFX of phone beep

Scene Six — in person

CLARA: (*laughing*) You collect hats?

PAISLEY: You promised you wouldn't laugh!

CLARA: No, I think it's great!

PAISLEY: Hats help me imagine. My brother Britain imagines with me sometimes.

CLARA: What do you imagine?

PAISLEY: Different things. We mostly imagine we live in Downton Abbey.

CLARA: Downton Abbey? That English show that old people used to watch?!

PAISLEY: (*slightly offended*) Father says Britain and I have mature tastes. Do you want to play Downton Abbey with me? I've only ever played it with Britain.

CLARA: I guess so, but I don't know anything about the show.

PAISLEY: Downton Abbey is this old castle in England where this rich family lives with their servants. It takes place a hundred years ago.

CLARA: Do you want me to be your servant?

PAISLEY: No, you wear this fancy hat and be Lady Mary and I'll wear the maid cap and be your obedient servant Anna.

CLARA: Do you want me to help you tie that in your hair!

PAISLEY: (*alarmed*) No!

(*softer*)

Thank you. I can do it myself.

CLARA: So what's Lady Mary like?

PAISLEY: (*as maid*) Lady Mary, you can't wear a short skirt like that to your mother's party.

CLARA: (*out of role*) It's a tunic, not a...

(*in role*)

...and I don't care if my mother is shocked! She's too old fashioned!

PAISLEY: (*as maid*) But my lady, you're indecent, and you look like...

(*aghast*)

...a flapper! If you would at least wear a decent hat —

(*aghast.*)

My lady, what have you done to your hair?!

CLARA: (*as lady*) It's my hair, and I can cut it short if I want to!

PAISLEY: (*as maid*) Imagine what your mother will say!

CLARA: (*as lady*) I don't have to imagine. (*beat, out of role*) Britain! Hi! I'm Clara. Paisley and I were just...

BRITAIN: (*as old man with British accent*) Lady Mary! Do you take pleasure in shocking your poor mother? I must warn her --

PAISLEY: (*as maid*) Carson, you will do no such thing! I'll have Lady Mary properly dressed before she goes downstairs, and I'll make sure she wears a proper hat!

CLARA: (*as lady*) No Carson. I'll face Mother as I am! Among her guests, she'll have to pretend she approves.

PAISLEY & BRITAIN: (*in role*) As you wish, my lady.

Scene Seven — (*emailing*) *SFX of keys clacking*

CLARA: Hey Mom! I'm sorry to bug you at your writing conference but something wonderful happened at school: they've hired a drama teacher! We get to work with her for an hour a week! It's like imagining with our eyes open! We imagined we were rescuing seagulls from an oil slick. The seagulls we saved were imaginary but the feelings we felt were real.

SANDY: That's great, Clara. I knew someday you'd discover theatre.

CLARA: Mom, this is drama, not theatre. There's a difference! Theatre is imaging for an audience. Drama is imagining for ourselves.

SANDY: Forgive me, Clara. I'm glad you're enjoying drama. You might also want to try theatre. Isn't the school performing *The Little Mermaid*? If you want to audition, I could help you prepare.

CLARA: I'll think about it!

SANDY: You might want to read the original story by Hans Christian Andersen. There's a copy of his tales on my bookshelf.

(texting)

CLARA: *(after a beat)* THE MERMAID DIES?!!! Mom, what kind of ending is THAT?!!!

SFX of phone beep

(emailing) SFX of keys clacking

SANDY: Hey Clara. I got your text. I should have warned you about the ending of *The Little Mermaid*. Andersen's tales are filled with the joy and the pain of living. Disney keeps the joy and throws away the pain. I thought you'd appreciate Andersen's honesty. I've been missing you while I've been at my writers' conference. Maybe you and I should take a trip together, maybe to Disneyland?

CLARA: You took me to Disneyland when I was young. I remember it feeling really crowded.

SANDY: Then forget about Anaheim. Maybe I should take you to Aberdeen.

CLARA: I know Disneyland's in Anaheim. What's in Aberdeen? Wait! Don't tell me! I want to be surprised.

Scene Eight — *(in person)*

SANDY: Tada!

CLARA: The Land of Oz?! Is this supposed to be a theme park?

SANDY: It's a park that lets us walk inside the movie.

CLARA: Is it even open? We're the only ones here.

SANDY: This is South Dakota, not Southern California. And it's free.

CLARA: Toto, now I know we're not in Disneyland.

SANDY: L. Frank Baum used to live here in Aberdeen, before he wrote *The Wizard of Oz*. I'm researching him for an article.

CLARA: This looks like the Munchkin City, but I don't see any Munchkins.

SANDY: *(as Glinda)* Of course not, Dorothy. They're hiding. *(Beat. Out of role:)* Sorry, Clara. I'll wait in

the car. You're like the cat. You don't like to be watched when you play.

CLARA: *(as Dorothy)* But how will I find this great Wizard of Oz?

SANDY: *(as Glinda)* Just follow the yellow brick road.

CLARA: *(as Dorothy)* Follow the yellow brick road? This one that leads out of the square?

SANDY: *(as Glinda)* You'll find your way, and you might find some friends to join you.

CLARA: *(as Dorothy)* But Glinda, I want you to come with me.

SANDY: *(as Glinda)* Me? A fairy queen?

CLARA: *(as Dorothy)* I have a lot to learn, and so do you. Lose that pink ballgown and leave your wand behind.

SANDY: *(as Glinda)* I've never lived as an ordinary person.

CLARA: *(as Dorothy)* I'll teach you as we go. Through Oz?

SANDY: *(as Glinda)* To the Wonderful Wizard of Oz!

Scene Nine — *(emailing) SFX of keys clacking*

CLARA: Hey, Paisley, I'm back from South Dakota. While I was gone, I rewrote *The Little Mermaid* as a play.

PAISLEY: Didn't Disney already do that?

CLARA: My version tells the real story! The way Hans Christian Andersen told it! If I come over, will you and Britain read it with me?

Scene Ten — *in person*

BRITAIN: *(narrating)* The mermaid refused to kill the prince and leaped into the sea. Her body melted into seafoam, but her spirit rose high in the sky.

CLARA: *(reading as mermaid)* Who are you? And what have I become?

PAISLEY: *(reading as spirit)* I am a daughter of the air, and you may become like me.

CLARA: *(reading as mermaid)* Mermaids are born without souls. Have I earned one?

PAISLEY: *(reading as spirit)* If you do good deeds for 300 years, you can earn an immortal soul.

BRITAIN: *(narrating)* The end.

CLARA: *(out of role)* That was perfect, Britain. You made a great prince, and a great storyteller.

BRITAIN: Thanks for saying so. The boys in my class call me "Not So Great Britain" because I'm not so great at anything.

CLARA: Well you're great at imagining!

PAISLEY: Clara, we should perform this in class!

CLARA: No! My play is private, not public!

PAISLEY: The students need to see it if they're performing the Disney show.

BRITAIN: I could put oil in a glass dish with blue food coloring and put it on the math projector and we'd have a moving ocean behind us!

PAISLEY: I have a crown for the prince and a tiara for his bride, and I could make Clara look like a mermaid.

CLARA: Wait! I'm not hopping around in a pool tail!

PAISLEY: Oh no! I'll lend you a long dance skirt so you can glide across the stage, and --

CLARA: Hold on! This is my play. My imagination!

PAISLEY: But if we do your play together, we can all imagine with you. Please Clara?

Scene Eleven — *In performance onstage*

BRITAIN: (*narrating*) As the little mermaid cried into the salty ocean, her older sister appeared, with her head wrapped with seaweed.

PAISLEY: (*as older sister*) Sister, I have brought you this knife. Stab the prince with the blade. Do it and his blood will turn you back into a mermaid so you can live the rest of your 300 years. Do it not and you will melt into seafoam. Either he or you must die! Do it sister! I traded my hair for this knife...

CLARA: (*out of role, after a beat*) Paisley! You're bald!

PAISLEY: (*onstage, still in role*) Kill the prince or my sacrifice will be in vain.

BRITAIN: (*onstage, narrating*) And the little mermaid was speechless.

SFX of applause

Scene Twelve — (*emailing*) SFX of keys clacking

PAISLEY: Hi Clara. I'm sorry my wig fell off. I ruined your play. My hair isn't real. It's a wig made of other girls' hair. It fools everyone. It almost fools me.

CLARA: Paisley, you didn't ruin the play; you made it better! The older sister is supposed be bald. I didn't know you have cancer or that you lost your hair. Tell me about it when you're ready.

PAISLEY: Thanks for understanding. You're a true friend. Everyone will pretend they didn't see my bald head, just like I pretend I have hair. Now we're pretending together.

Scene Thirteen — (texting)

SANDY: Clara, the auditions for the musical are next week.

SFX of phone beep

CLARA: I know Mom! And I'm not trying out! And nothing anyone can say can make me!

SFX of phone beep

Scene Fourteen — (texting, different stream) SFX of phone beep after each line

PAISLEY: Clara, do you want to try out for the musical next week?

CLARA: You want to do the Disney show after doing the REAL version?!!!

PAISLEY: There are different ways to tell a story. Please Clara. I don't want to do it alone.

CLARA: If you want to audition I guess I will too.

PAISLEY: Great! But you won't be playing Ariel. Aimee Cartwright will.

CLARA: Did they already cast her?

PAISLEY: The director chose the show with her in mind.

CLARA: Fine! Aimee is Ariel! At least she doesn't say mean things to me. She doesn't speak to me at all.

PAISLEY: Some of her friends are kind of "clicky" but Aimee is nice.

CLARA: Do all the girls have to be mermaids?

PAISLEY: No, you could be a tentacle.

CLARA: L-O-L!

PAISLEY: No really! There's a whole chorus of Ursula's tentacles!

CLARA: Is there anyone who doesn't have to be onstage?

PAISLEY: They'll have a stage-crew but come on Clara! We could do it together!

CLARA: Okay, I'll try out! But don't be disappointed when I don't get in.

PAISLEY: Don't be surprised when you do!

NINE MORE PAGES TO THE END OF THE PLAY