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By Louis L. Buitendag

Benjamin Bloomswell is pleased to be staying with his uncle in America while his parents are off on another business trip. But when a series of newspaper articles, telephone calls and mysterious disappearances result in his being sent to – and having to escape from – a sinister orphanage and the criminals who run it, he knows he’s got to find a way back to England. He has to get to his sister’s boarding school before anyone else does. And, somehow, he has to find his parents, who are also in trouble. But how?



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THE  
BLOOMSWELL  
DIARIES

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*Ben had only ever seen tinmen from afar and then only in England. He had secretly been impressed by them, by their austere presence and abilities. But because his father had always refused to take even a domestic model into his employ – had so mistrusted them – Ben had also been wary of them.*

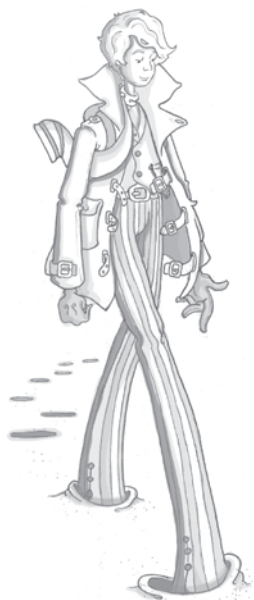
*American tinmen, the so-called “second generation,” were different from the original British ones. They were hardly ever seen with the visible familia insignias that imbued them with their loyalties. They were streamlined and sleeker than their English counterparts. And in Ben’s very limited experience, they were also a lot meaner.*

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Originally from Pretoria, South Africa, **Louis L. Buitendag** has lived and written all over the world, filling copious journals with story ideas, one-liners and sketches. After receiving his acting training in London, he began writing *The Bloomswell Diaries* in his dressing room amidst costume changes and curtain calls. Louis currently lives in New York City.

THE  
**BLOOMSWELL**  
DIARIES





Louis L. Buitendag

**Kane Miller**  
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To my sisters  
For always moving mountains for me

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**W**ho I am is not important.  
Simply allow me to tell you the story...

# Chapter 1

## AN ORPHAN OF SORTS

**B**enjamin Sebastian Bloomswell lay in the unfamiliar bed, wide awake, looking at the warm slip of light coming in through the open crack of the bedroom door.

He was listening to his parents repack the last little forgotten bits and pieces from around their bedroom, the tinkle of trinkets sounding as they went back into his mother's vanity case, the tissue paper crinkling softly as clothes were folded and repacked. He listened to the sound of his mother's bracelets as she moved about, the low tones of his father's voice, both of them speaking softly. He knew those sounds very well.

They were the sounds that heralded his parents' departures,

and they woke him up every time. He knew that his parents would soon come into his bedroom to say goodbye. He knew that he would be left with a list of things to do and, more importantly, declarations of their love for him. They had done it countless times before.

But unlike the trips before, this one had the added promise of being the last one for a very long time. It was also different from all the others in that, with his older sister Elizabeth away at her new boarding school in Switzerland, Ben had been brought to stay with his Uncle Lucas in New York City instead of being left back home in England with Olivander and the other servants. He was even allowed to miss school.



Never had Ben been to stay with his uncle by himself for such an extended period of time. In fact, he had never been this far away from home before at all – except for that time when he had accompanied his parents to India. But he had still been a baby then.

The seemingly endless possibilities of what might happen while in America (made somewhat more fanciful by his mother) excited him greatly, but also unsettled him slightly. He simply had no idea what to expect.

Luckily he had always held a deep-seated feeling that he would like his uncle very much. Because the truth was, he hardly knew him. Lucas Bashford had followed a family trend and traveled a great deal because of his job, representing

king and country the world over. He was more often than not stationed in far off places for indefinite periods of time, making it seem by contrast as if Ben's parents merely dabbled in foreign travel.

And although this meant that he could always be depended on for exciting tales about exotic locations and daring, if somewhat bizarre, characters, it also meant that to Ben, he was both a stranger and a relative at the same time.



As always, Ben's mother came in first, light from the hallway streaming in after her, playing tricks with her silhouette. She was a tall, slender woman, her long blonde hair pinned up neatly at the back of her head. Ben had quickly shut his eyes and pretended to be asleep the moment he heard her at his door, and he listened as she came towards him. It was their routine. She would sit down next to him and prove she knew he was pretending by making him laugh in some way.

But this time nothing happened. He could sense her standing close to him.

"Faker," was all she said, and he opened his eyes.

She smiled at him and sat down. She regarded him for a moment, and said, "You know I'm going to miss you very much, don't you?"

He nodded.

"And that I love you very much?"

He nodded again.

“And you know that you have to behave yourself and mind your uncle at all times?”

Another nod.

“And you know that I love you very much?”

“You said that one already.”

“Oh.” She sighed. She thought for a moment. “Well, do you know that I love you very much?”

“Mum!” He smiled. She ran her fingers through his hair and leaned in to give his forehead a kiss.

“I love you, very much,” she said quietly.

“I love you, too,” he said.

Ben could see that his mother was sad about having to leave him again, and that made him feel a bit better.

“I want to give you something, something I want you to keep safe for me,” she said, as she took something out of the folds of her dress.

“What is it?” he asked, sitting up.

His mother opened her hand to reveal a brass key with a small wooden fob attached to it.

“It’s the key to No. 4,” she said. “It’s also a promise.”

“A promise?” he asked, taking their London house key from his mother.

“The promise that we won’t go home without you.”

Ben smiled at this, knowing that his mother meant it. “What about Liza?” he asked.

His mother smiled. “We won’t go home without her either. She has the key to Forbes House.”

Their country house. “That’s okay then,” he said, and placed the key on top of his favorite book of stories on the nightstand.

Just then, his father leaned in against the doorway.

“Katherine, the car is here.”

“Is it time?” Ben asked.

“Seems like it,” she answered. “Ben, you will mind your Uncle Lucas, won’t you? He’s a busy man. Don’t get under his feet. You’ll do whatever he says?”

Ben nodded.

His father walked in and put his hand on his wife’s shoulder. “We’ll see you in time for Christmas, Son. You and Liza,” he said.

“And then we can all go home,” his mother added.

“Promise me something,” Ben said.

“I promise you the moon, my love,” she replied, as always.

His parents gave him a hug and a kiss each, his father tucking him back into bed before leaving. When he heard them going down the stairs he got out of bed and slipped out of his room. He stood by the railing and watched his father help his mother with her traveling coat. Barlow, the butler, took the last of the bags out to the car. After his father and uncle shook hands, Katherine Bloomswell embraced her brother tightly, gave him a kiss on the cheek and made for the door. But she happened to glance around and saw Ben standing on the landing.

“You’ll see us again soon, my darling,” she said, and blew him a kiss.

“See you soon, Son!” said his father, with a wave.

Then they were gone.

Ben heard the car drive off. His uncle waved at them from the doorway, and once they were around the corner and out of sight, he closed the door almost solemnly. He looked up at Ben, his hands in his pockets. He smiled, a bit sheepishly.

“Everything all right? Your room satisfactory?” he eventually asked.

“Yes, thank you,” Ben answered.

“Warm enough? I could have Mrs. Pool bring up a hot water bottle, or an extra blanket, perhaps?”

“No, thank you.”

“Right.”

Another awkward silence. Then, “If you were a bit older I’d offer you a nightcap, but...” he trailed off.

“No, of course not,” Ben replied. “Well, I’d best be going back to bed.”

“Right you are then,” his uncle said.

“Good night, Uncle Lucas.”

“Good night, Ben.”



Barlow woke Ben up early the next morning by drawing the bedroom curtains. As Ben’s eyes adjusted to the morning light, he saw that his clothes had already been laid out for him, next to the pitcher and basin of hot water with which he was expected to wash.

“Good morning, Barlow,” said Ben.

Barlow nodded his head and headed for the door. His terse manner unsettled Ben; he acted as if he was annoyed to have to wait on a child.

“Master Bashford awaits you in the conservatory,” he said flatly. And with another curt nod, he left the room.

Ben looked around his still unfamiliar room. He felt the uneasy tinge of homesickness lingering somewhere between his chest and his stomach. He reminded himself of his resolution to be brave. There was the excitement of a brand-new city to explore. He gave his neck and face a quick once over with the cloth, got dressed, pocketed the key to No. 4, and ran downstairs to the conservatory, only to find his uncle drinking milky coffee behind an open newspaper.

“Good morning, Uncle Lucas.”

For a while there was no response. Then his uncle lazily peered over the top of the newspaper, and it was as if he suddenly recognized Ben. He lowered his newspaper fully.

“Good morning!” he replied, almost making Ben jump. “Sorry! Sorry. Haven’t quite gotten used to the fact that there’s someone else in this house yet. Sorry. Curse of the bachelor, I guess. When you live alone for too long, you start to think you’re the only one around. Especially with the help being as quiet as they are.”

“I get like that with Liza when she’s back at the end of term,” Ben offered. “For the first few days, I keep forgetting she’s in the house.”

His uncle smiled as he listened, and when he realized that there was no more to Ben's story, he quickly gestured to a chair.

"Do have a seat. Mrs. Pool will be in shortly with your breakfast, I'm sure."

"You're not eating?" Ben asked, as he sat down.

"Oh, I've eaten. Sorry that I couldn't wait; I have to get to the office shortly. Just finishing off some reading before I head out," he said, and he picked up his newspaper again. "Which reminds me..." He placed an extra newspaper in front of Ben. "This is for you."

Ben eyed the fat newspaper with a certain amount of bewilderment. No one had ever just assumed that he read the newspaper, much less bought him one of his very own! He simply didn't know where to begin.

"Is something wrong?" Uncle Lucas asked.

"No, not at all," Ben said. Pulling the newspaper towards himself, he tried to ignore the heavy feeling that suddenly filled his stomach. It was the same feeling he got when he was about to begin a serious amount of homework. "Thank you," he said. He read the headline, and the familiarity of the title struck him. "But this is —"

"*The Evening Standard*, I know!" his uncle confirmed. "I read a British paper every morning. Well, at least, I try to. Why break with tradition? Now don't get too excited, it *is* a few days old." He pointed to the date printed in the corner. "That's the only problem — I have to wait for the shipment to come over. Actually, I've been lucky lately: Up until recently

I used to get a few days' worth in one go — it sometimes took me all weekend just to read them all. Now I'm getting them one at a time." He could see the slight confusion on Ben's face. "You see, it always helps me...with the homesickness and all...having something from home close by, even if it is just a grubby, old newspaper. I thought, you know, maybe it might help you, even if just a bit."

Grubby or not, the newspaper suddenly had a lot more meaning. It was a gift from one homesick person to another. Ben ignored the blazing headline telling of a death in the Royal Family and flipped through the different sections, looking for familiar names and places. He found an article about the British rugby team headlining the sports section. He read a few sentences, but instead of improving his homesickness, it made it worse.

Just then, his uncle stood up and wiped at his mouth with his napkin. "Right, I'm off. The house is yours, explore all you want. Plenty of books in the library. Help yourself."

"Thank you."

"Mrs. Pool has her instructions about tea and such." He made for the doorway, but stopped and turned to Ben. "Perhaps this weekend we can explore some of the city together. Maybe we can take a cab, and, I don't know..."

"That would be nice," Ben replied. He soon heard the front door and his uncle's footsteps on the gravel outside as he walked to the street to hail a cab. Then, as if on cue, Mrs. Pool exploded into the room in a flurry of activity with a tray

heaped with silver serving dishes.

“Ah, good morning, Master Ben!” Her cheeks were a bright red, her eyes sparkling and blue under her crisp white bonnet. “Thought I’d forgotten about you, didn’t you?” she said, and laughed as if hearing her favorite joke. “Never! Never has a man gone hungry when Mrs. Pool was in the house!”

She placed the tray in front of him and lifted the lid grandly. Two slices of ham, cut thick, lay next to two glistening fried eggs and a mound of crispy fried potatoes that smelled of rosemary and pepper. And on the neighboring plate were four plump pancakes with the pat of butter already halfway melted. Ben’s mouth started watering.

“Your uncle insisted I make something nice for your first day here with us. On your own, I mean. Yesterday hardly counts. I barely got to lay eyes on you, much less talk to you! Oh, you do look like your mum, don’t you? Handsome as she is pretty!” She was talking a mile a minute! All Ben could do was smile. He couldn’t get a word in edgewise.

“I’m sure your sister must be a beauty!” she said, and poured him a cup of hot chocolate. “And your father! Handsome devil, isn’t he? Of course, he’s no Mr. Pool, but then again, lately neither is Mr. Pool!” She laughed and laughed. “Well, do dig in, my boy. It won’t be as good when it’s cold,” she said, and put the fork into his unresisting hand.



Jack and Katherine Bloomswell had been fully aware of the

danger involved from the beginning. But lives were depending on them.

What they did not expect was such a quick, such a severe and well-planned, retaliation. They were caught off-guard because their priority up to that point, up to leaving Ben in the very capable hands of his uncle, was to ensure the safety of their own children above the safety of anyone or anything else.

All they could do was pray that their preventive measures would hold.