

Sam's shadow

by Kyle Mewburn

Chapter One

Every morning Sam and his shadow ran all the way to school together. And every afternoon, they ran all the way back home again.

They didn't run all that way because they were keen to get where they were going either. Not at all! They ran because the entire way there and back was like an obstacle course, dotted with dangers.

Of course Sam's Mum would never have made him go to school alone if she knew just how dangerous it was. But he never told her about any of the dangers because he didn't want to worry her.

Every morning he pretended he didn't have a care in the world. His Mum always stood at the front door waving. So when Sam reached the footpath, he'd give her a big smile as he waved back.

But as soon as she disappeared inside, he took a deep breath then set off down the street as fast as his legs would carry him.

Sam knew all the dangers off by heart.

First came the Riddle twins - third house on the left. They were in his new class. They looked harmless enough. But Sam wasn't fooled. At his *first* school he used to think Daisy and Dotty Dalrymple were harmless too. Until he discovered them making fun of him behind his back.

But Sam zapped past so fast, they didn't even notice him.

Next came Jason Badly - fifth house on the right. Jason was the school captain and the fastest runner in the whole district. To everyone else, he looked like a friendly, polite young man. But Sam knew if he didn't whiz

past Jason's house like a blur, Jason would try to make him cry so everyone thought he was a wimp. Just like Bobby Dribble did at Sam's *last* school.

Once Sam was past Jason's, he just had enough time to catch his breath before he had to face the biggest danger of all - Eric.

To everyone else in the neighbourhood, Eric was a real pussycat. He'd roll over at the drop of a hat and let *anyone* scratch him under the belly.

Anyone, that is, except Sam.

As soon as Eric saw Sam, he charged with his long fangs dripping saliva and his ears pinned back. He looked so ferocious Sam feared for his life. It didn't matter that Eric was a poodle small enough to fit in a shoebox. Sam couldn't have been more scared if there was a tyrannosaurus standing at Mrs Schmaltz's gate with its teeth bared and fire snorting out of its mouth. (OK! So it's a tyrannosaurus *dragon* then!)

The only thing that gave Sam enough courage to brave Eric every day was seeing his shadow running beside him.

It was like having a best friend.

Chapter Two

As Sam reached the corner of Mrs Schmaltz's yard, he stopped a moment to catch his breath. Then, with a loud cry, he set off as fast as his legs could carry him.

Eric was waiting for him on the front steps. As soon as he heard Sam's cry, he rushed towards the gate, snarling and barking with all his might.

Eric always timed his run to perfection. He reached the front gate just as Sam drew level. With a ferocious snarl Eric leapt, his back claws

scratching furiously trying to propel him over. He didn't take his eyes off Sam for an instant.

Sam's mouth turned as dry as a desert and his heart pounded in his head. But he didn't slow down for a second. He kept running and running until he heard Eric's barking fading in the distance.

When he reached the end of the block, he bent over double to catch his breath. He could hear Eric still yapping furiously.

"Ha! Beat you again, Eric," Sam said.

He turned to smile at his shadow...

...but there was nothing there! Just a blank patch of sunlit footpath.

Sam shook his head and squeezed his eyes shut.

"I must be hyper-ventilating," he thought. (His Dad had told him about that last night. He said if you breathed too fast you could get too much oxygen in your blood and started hallucinating - seeing things that weren't there. Or in this case, not seeing things that should be there!)

Sam slowly opened one eye. Then the other.

He looked left. He looked right.

There were lots of shadows of all shapes and sizes - trees, fences, parked cars and lamp-posts - but not one of them looked like Sam's.

He located the sun to calculate where his shadow should be. Then crouched down and scoured the ground. Maybe it had fallen down a crack... or something?

But there was no sign of it anywhere.

Sam started to feel a bit scared. And not-a-little-bit lonely.

Maybe his shadow was even more scared of Eric than Sam was, and had kept running all the way home?

He didn't really think that was possible. But ten seconds ago he didn't think it was possible to lose your shadow either.

He decided to hurry home to see if his shadow was there.

But when he glanced back the way he'd come, he thought he saw a strange dark.... *something* waiting at the corner of Mrs Schmaltz's yard. From that distance it looked kind of like a shadow. A suspiciously Sam-shaped shadow. Or so he imagined.

Maybe his shadow had got stuck? Or maybe it had been too scared to run past Eric today?

There was only one way to find out.

Even if that meant braving Eric one more time.

Chapter Three

Sam hid behind a tree for ages, waiting for Eric to leave. Every time things went really quiet, he started creeping back. But he never got far before Eric started barking ferociously once more.

Each time Sam got such a fright he almost leapt out of his skin.

Finally he heard Mrs Schmaltz's voice. "Eric poodlekins! Din-din!"

Eric refused to leave his post - until Mrs Schmaltz rattled his bowl with a spoon. With a low, disgruntled growl, he hurried into the house.

As soon as Sam heard the front door closing, he hurriedly retraced his steps and, sure enough, it really *was* his shadow leaning against the fence.

"Sorry for leaving you behind," Sam said. He felt a bit strange talking to his shadow. He'd never done that before. But then his shadow had never stayed behind before either. "Come on. Let's hurry before Eric comes back."

Sam took two paces before he realised his shadow wasn't coming.

It must be stuck, he decided.

But how was he supposed to get it unstuck?

He tried to scoop it up. But his hands went right through it.

He tried to scrape it off the fence with his fingers. But he just got lots of paint flakes under his fingernails

He even sprawled flat against the fence hoping his shadow might somehow get peeled off when he stood up again.

But nothing worked.

In the end he got so frustrated, he started stamping his feet...

... and that's when he noticed something very strange. With every stamp, his shadow seemed to flinch. Like it was trying to pull its foot out of the way.

That gave Sam an idea.

Lifting his foot as high as he could, Sam stamped it down on top of his shadow's foot. Hard. Then he carefully dragged his foot across the pavement, making sure it never once left the ground.

Yahoo! he thought as he saw his shadow's foot dragging underneath.

He repeated the process with the right foot. Then again with the left. It was hard, slow work. Sam's shadow was a lot heavier than he expected. It took all his effort to drag it forward, one step at a time.

At this speed it was going to take him all night to get home! But at least it was working.

He was so busy concentrating on dragging his reluctant shadow, he forgot all about Eric. But Eric hadn't forgotten about Sam.

He quickly gobbled his dinner, then hurried back outside. Eric couldn't believe his luck when he saw how slowly Sam was moving. But he

didn't hurry. He waited patiently until Sam was almost at the gate, then leapt to his feet and plunged down the path.

He timed his run to perfection, reaching the gate just as Sam drew level. With a fierce growl he threw himself against the fence.

Sam got such a fright he forgot all about his shadow. In fact, he forgot about everything except escaping Eric's clutches.

As he raced down the street with his legs kicking up clouds of dust, he took one last glance back over his shoulder. He felt a bit guilty leaving his shadow draped over Mrs Schmaltz's gate. Hopefully Eric didn't tear it to shreds.

But he couldn't stop. Not now.

He kept right on running. All the way home.

Chapter Four

That night Sam had a terrible dream. It was almost the same dream he had *every* night. Even though it was a dream, it was sort of like a memory too, because everything happened almost exactly like it happened in real life.

He was sitting on the side of the pool at his old school dangling his feet in the water. Because he was born a couple of months premature, he wasn't as strong as most kids in his class, so he still had to wear floaties. He felt a bit silly sometimes. But he knew if he didn't wear them, he'd sink straight to the bottom.

Mister Salmon, the swimming teacher, made Sam sit on the edge until the rest of the class finished swimming widths. He said he didn't want Sam to get hurt. But they both knew that wasn't true. He just didn't want Sam to get in the way.

Sam was too busy watching his shadow floating on the top of the water to notice everyone else was finished. He didn't hear Mister Salmon call him either.

Suddenly someone gave him a hard shove from behind, sending him toppling forward into the pool. As he hit the water with a splash, he gasped with surprise... which was the absolute *worst* thing to do! His lungs filled with water instead of air.

Even with the floaties he sank down to the bottom.

Somehow he managed to struggle back to the surface, spluttering and gurgling and trying not to swallow any more water. But as he tried to gasp a big lungful of air, a hand clamped over his head and pushed him under again.

He fought as hard as he could, but the hand was too strong.

Just when he was sure he was going to drown, the hand let go.

Sam bobbed back up into air, flailing and spluttering for breath. His face was red and his heart was beating so fast he could hardly think.

But worse was to come!

As he wiped the water and tears from his eyes, he saw all the kids in his class crowding around the edge of the pool. But instead of being worried, they were all laughing. Especially Bobby Dribble. And even though Mister Salmon was telling Bobby not to be stupid, Sam saw he was smiling too.

Sam felt so scared he couldn't stop crying. It wasn't just that he almost drowned. It was the fact nobody lifted a finger to help him. Nobody.

That's what happened in real life. His dream was like an action replay that played in slow motion night after night. But tonight, the dream was even worse! Because when he looked up at the crowd of laughing faces, he saw his shadow standing at the back. And it was laughing too!

By the time Sam realised it was a dream and woke up, his heart was racing and he felt so scared, he turned on the bedside light.

He looked around, hoping his shadow might have returned while he slept. But it was nowhere to be seen.

He felt so alone and scared, he slept all night with the light on.

Chapter Five

Next morning Sam was in such a hurry to get to school, his Mum couldn't help but laugh.

"How's your new school going, sweetie?" she asked. She felt a bit relieved too. This was the last school in the whole district, so if Sam wasn't happy there, she didn't know what they'd do.

"Alright," Sam lied. Not that it was really a lie. Nobody had done anything nasty to him in his new school yet. But that was just because he was always running so fast nobody had a chance to do anything, not even talk to him.

"Isn't it sports day today?" his Mum asked.

Sam's face fell. He'd forgotten all about that.

He hated sports days. Mainly because he didn't think he'd be very good at anything. He was too afraid of hitting his head on the bar to try high jump. And too worried about landing on something sharp to try long-jump. Team sports were also out of the question since nobody would ever want him on their side.

But Mrs Dullwinkle the principal insisted *everyone* took part in at least one event. No exceptions.

Sam thought about playing sick. His Mum always believed him if he said he wasn't feeling well. But he didn't want to lie to her. And, more importantly, he needed to retrieve his shadow. As soon as possible.

So he gobbled his breakfast and ran off.

He only slowed down when he got to Mrs Schmaltz's house. At first he thought he was in luck. He couldn't hear Eric anywhere. But suddenly he heard a door open. Then a bark.

"Oh, oh!" he thought, swallowing hard. "Eric's coming."

A second later he saw Eric's head poke through the gate.

But just as Sam got ready to run, he noticed Eric was on a leash. With Mrs Schmaltz on the other end, walking behind.

Sam hid behind the tree and watched Mrs Schmaltz lead Eric away. Eric had his tail up like a periscope and was strutting along like he was the king of dogs. He didn't even notice Sam hiding behind the tree.

As soon as they were out of sight, Sam hurried to the gate.

The gate was still there. But his shadow was gone.

He couldn't imagine what had happened to it. Did it get blown away? Did Eric drag it over the fence and bury it in the garden? Did somebody steal it? Sam searched all along the fence. In the gutter. Under the bushes. Up in the trees. He even snuck into Mrs Schmaltz's yard to see if there were any freshly-dug holes.

But there was no sign of his shadow! He couldn't imagine how he was going to survive without his shadow.

But there was no time to worry about that now.

He had a sportsday to get through first.

Chapter Six

Sam was so busy wondering where his shadow might have got to, he hardly noticed where he was going. He was on auto-pilot all the way to school. As he cut across the school playground towards his classroom, he wasn't even running. He was sort of drifting along, like a tumbleweed.

He didn't notice the group of kids from his class playing spin-the-bottle on the netball court until it was too late. Normally Sam would have run past so fast nobody would have noticed him. But they couldn't help but notice him this time.

Everyone looked up, waiting to see what Sam was going to do. Nobody had had much of a chance to talk to him since he arrived a week before. He was always running here and there. They all thought he looked friendly enough, but there was no way to be sure unless he talked to them.

Sam looked around the circle of faces, wondering what to do. His eyes growing wide, like a deer trapped in the car headlights.

"Hello Sam," the girl who was holding the bottle said.

Sam didn't know her name. But when she smiled he felt butterflies fluttering in his stomach. Sam's instincts started getting ready to run away without saying a word before anyone had a chance to tease him.

His hands tightened into fists. His feet started twitching. But just as he was about to flee, he saw his shadow on the ground behind the boy beside him. At least he *thought* it was his shadow. It certainly looked much more like Sam than it did the other boy. Besides, there was no other explanation why the other boy should have TWO shadows.

While Sam stood there like a statue wondering how he was going to get his shadow back, the girl span the bottle.

Round ... and round ... and round it went. Then slowly, ever-so-slowly, came to halt - with its point pointing directly at Sam.

"It's pointing at Sam!" everyone yelled.

Hearing his name, Sam turned his head.

S-M-A-C-K! The girl planted a big kiss right on his mouth.

Everyone cheered.

"Now it's your turn," the girl said, smiling like an angel.

Sam gulped. He didn't want to spin the bottle. All he wanted to do was get his shadow back. But he didn't want to upset anyone. Especially when they were being friendly.

So he bent forward and span the bottle. For a few seconds, while he stared at the bottle spinning round and round, he forgot all about his shadow. When the bottle finally came to a halt, he couldn't believe his luck. It was pointing at the same girl again!

"It's pointing at Kalamira!"

Everyone laughed as Kalamira jumped up, closed her eyes and puckered her lips.

Sam stepped closer, preparing himself to give her a really big kiss.

But as he glanced down, he saw his shadow get hooked on the leg of a passing teacher. As it got dragged away across the netball court, Sam automatically turned to follow it. But he halted halfway as he remembered Kalamira. He couldn't leave her standing there with her eyes closed and lips puckered. So he gave her a quick kiss.

"Sorry," he said. "But I just remembered I've got something very important to do. Thanks for letting me play."

"You're welcome to play with us any time," Kalamira said, smiling.

Sam felt his head turn hot as he set off after his shadow.

Chapter Seven

Sam caught up with his shadow on the basketball court, at the end of a long line of boys from different classes. Two older boys were standing in the front, choosing teams.

"Hey," Sam whispered as he joined the end of the line. "You've got my shadow!"

The other boy thought he was joking.

"Look," Sam persisted. "You've got two shadows!"

Rolling his eyes, the boy finally looked behind him. He was very surprised to discover Sam wasn't trying to fool him at all. He really *did* have two shadows instead of one.

"It must be the light," he said, frowning. He was stumped. And it was clever of the new boy... Sam his name was, wasn't it?... to notice.

"But I haven't got *any* shadow!" Sam protested.

Naturally the boy thought Sam was joking again.

But when he looked behind Sam his eyebrows lifted high in surprise. Even though it was a sunny day, Sam wasn't casting any shadow at all.

The other boy was very impressed. He knew it had to be some kind of trick. But he couldn't figure out how Sam was doing it.

"Maybe you're just too small to have a shadow," he said, scratching his head. He didn't say it meanly either, he was just wondering aloud. "Or maybe it's too small to see."

Sam was about to argue, when the captain of one team called - "I pick Zeb!" - and the boy shuffled over to join his team-mates.

Sam started to follow, but was halted by the captain of the other team.

"C'mon Sam," he said. "That means you're on our team!"

Before Sam knew it, everyone was running up and down the court, chasing the ball. Sam had never played basketball before. So he didn't have a clue what he was supposed to do. All he could think about was staying close to his shadow, trying to step on it and trap it whenever he got the chance.

"Good job, Sam!" his captain called. "That close marking's keeping Zeb right out of the game."

No matter how hard Zeb tried to get away, Sam stuck to him like ... well, like a shadow. Suddenly Sam's team had the ball. Everyone raced down the other end of the court, with Sam close behind.

"Here Sam!" someone called.

Sam looked up just in time to see the basketball flying straight for his head. Luckily he had good reflexes and managed to catch it. He didn't break any fingers either.

He didn't know what to do. Then a voice yelled - "Shoot!"

Sam's arms shot out. The ball went sailing into the air. He expected everyone to laugh. But the next second there was a huge cheer. He looked up just in time to see the ball fly through the hoop.

His team-mates all gave him high-fives. It stung his hands a bit, but he didn't mind. The game got so exciting after that, he forgot all about his shadow until the bell sounded.

The game was over. Sam had scored three goals. And his team had won! The captain of the other team even said he'd make sure Sam was on *his* team next time.

As everyone scattered to get ready for sportsday, Sam hurried to catch up with Zeb. But by the time he got there, his shadow was gone!

Chapter Eight

While everyone else was doing sports, Sam pursued his shadow all over the school. Each time he thought he had it cornered, it hooked onto someone else and headed off in a completely different direction.

Every now and again he got so excited watching a race he forgot about his shadow a while. Especially when he saw Kalamira running. She was very fast and won all her races. And every time she looked round and saw Sam watching, she gave him a big smile.

When the high jump started, Sam saw Zeb was competing. So he stayed to watch and cheer. The higher the bar rose, the more exciting the competition got, and the louder Sam cheered. He was very pleased when Zeb won.

As the morning wore on, he started feeling quite good about his new school. Everywhere he went kids called out and said hello or made funny comments. Not a single person said anything nasty.

At lunchtime Kalamira came over and sat beside him. She was very interesting to talk to. Not that Sam talked much.

"So what event are you going in, Sam?" Kalamira asked.

Sam felt his face flush in embarrassment. He didn't want to tell her he was no good at sport and wasn't going to go in anything if he could avoid it.

"It's a secret," he lied.

Kalamira smiled. She liked secrets.

Sam didn't want to disappoint Kalamira.

If only he was good at *something*. He didn't have to win or anything. He just didn't want to come last by so far that everyone would laugh at him and realise how feeble he was. Especially not Kalamira.

He made a mental list of every event. Then crossed them all off, one by one. They were all either too difficult, or too dangerous. He even considered running home or hiding. Then reluctantly crossed them off his list too. That would be just as embarrassing as coming last. And besides, he might never get his shadow back if he waited much longer.

He was still wondering what to do when a shadow loomed over him.

"So young man," Mrs Dullwinkle said. "We haven't seen you competing in anything yet today, have we?"

She sounded quite angry, but when Sam looked up he realised she was smiling. Now that he looked closely, she actually looked quite friendly.

"No Mrs Dullwinkle," he said. He was about to confess he wasn't going to compete at all, but he realised he didn't want to disappoint her either. "I've been saving my energy," he said instead.

"Well, that's the spirit," Mrs Dullwinkle said, looking pleased. "I shall look forward to seeing you on the track later."

As Sam watched her leave, he felt a terrible sinking feeling in his stomach. Just when things were going alright, everything was about to come crashing down all over again.

Chapter Nine

Sam felt his old fears returning. If he could only find his shadow, he'd run home and tell his Mum he didn't like his new school at all. His Mum would be disappointed, of course, but he was sure she'd understand.

In the meantime, he just had to make himself scarce so Mrs Dullwinkle wouldn't remember he hadn't been in any event. If he could hide in the crowd until the final event was over, maybe he'd get out of competing.

Then his family wouldn't have to move to another house, maybe even another city, and Sam wouldn't have to start all over again at another school.

Finally there was an announcement over the loudspeaker - "Would all competitors for the five kilometre open cross-country run please proceed to the starting line."

"Phew!" Sam thought. "Sportsday's almost over..."

The open cross-country was the final event. There were no age restrictions. Anyone at all could compete. But because all the older kids were running too, none of the younger kids bothered entering.

Everyone began gathering near the start line to cheer the runners off.

Sam knew his shadow had to be somewhere amongst the throng of spectators and competitors, but it was impossible to tell any shadow apart. There was just one huge blob of shadow staining the end of the track.

Even though Sam was shorter than most kids, he stayed right at the very back of the crowd. He couldn't risk being seen now.

Every now and then he jumped as high as he could, peering over the wall of shoulders. He saw Kalamira standing at the front of the track looking very excited. The only thing she loved more than running herself was watching other people run. But there was no sign of his shadow yet.

"Take your mark!" the starter yelled.

Sam couldn't take his eyes off Kalamira. She was rubbing her hands in excitement as she got ready to cheer.

"Set!"

The runners at the front started jostling for the best position.

Then : BANG! The gun went off. A wave of runners leapt off the starting line. One runner got a better start than everyone else. Sam

recognised him straight away. It was Jason Badly - the fastest runner in the school.

After ten metres Jason was already pulling ahead. He ran so smoothly, Sam couldn't help but stare. But as Jason pulled clear of the pursuing throng, Sam's mouth gaped open. Because there wasn't just *one* shadow racing ahead along the track, but *two*! And the second one looked distinctly like Sam.

Before Sam knew what he was doing, he pushed his way through to the front of the crowd and set off in pursuit.

Chapter Ten

Sam might have been the smallest competitor. But he wasn't the slowest. He was so used to running everywhere, he never even realised how fit he was. Or how fast.

He quickly caught the trailing pack. And by the time they'd completed one lap of the track, there were only a dozen runners ahead of him. But his heart sank as he glanced across the track and saw Jason disappearing out the front gate. His lead seemed to be getting longer with every stride.

"I'm never going to catch him," Sam thought. But he kept going. After all, it might be his last chance to get his shadow back.

The runners started spreading out as they began climbing the first hill, huffing and puffing loudly. Sam didn't have a clue where they were headed. All he could do was stick as closely to the leaders as he could. If he lost sight of them for a second, he might go completely astray.

At the top of the hill the route could either veer left, leading them around the lake, or right, back into town. Sam dearly hoped it would head to the left because ...

"Oh no!" Sam groaned as he saw the runner ahead veer right.

It was the worst possible thing that could happen. Instead of a nice, safe run around the lake, they'd now be running right down Sam's street - and right past Eric!

As soon as he reached the corner of Mrs Schmaltz's block, Sam gulped. Just up ahead, a group of runners was passing Mrs Schmaltz's house. The front gate was swung open. And there was Eric, standing right in the middle of the footpath, wagging his tail and barking happily like he was cheering the runners on.

The other runners passed without any fuss.

Then Eric turned to greet the next runner.

As soon as he recognised Sam, Eric's ears went back and he bared his teeth in a ferocious snarl. Sam felt his blood pumping through his head. His feet started to slow.

For a few heartbeats they faced each other like a gladiator and a lion at the Coliseum. Then Sam felt something inside him growing. A sort of determination he'd never felt before. He was going to get his shadow back no matter what. And no pint-sized poodle was going to get in his way.

Eric opened his mouth to growl.

Before he snapped, Sam yelled - "Stop it, Eric!"

It didn't sound like his voice at all. Eric was so surprised his mouth fell open and he rolled over onto his belly.

Sam didn't really have any time to waste, but he stopped to stroke Eric under the belly. Eric licked his hands as if to say - we're friends now.

"I'll see you later Eric," Sam said.

Then he set off after the leaders.

Up one hill. Down another. Across fields and through forests they ran.

Sam gritted his teeth and kept his legs pumping as fast as he could. Before he knew it he'd overtaken all the other runners. Except Jason.

As he came over the last rise and saw the school in the distance, a loud cheer erupted from the schoolgrounds. He knew it could only mean one thing. Jason was already on the track with just two laps to go.

Sam's legs were getting more weary with every stride. They felt like they were made of lead. But he gathered up the very last of his reserves. As long as there was still a chance of catching his shadow, he had to keep going.

Chapter Eleven

Sam knew he'd lost as soon as he ran onto the track. Jason was almost a lap ahead, with only one lap to go. As Sam passed the finish line for the first time, he heard Kalamira yell - "Come on Sam! You can do it!"

And the next thing he knew the whole crowd was calling his name.

"SAM! SAM! SAM!"

It made him even more determined to keep going.

The next time he looked up, he almost couldn't believe his eyes. Jason's lead was shrinking with every breath.

He must be getting slower, Sam thought. Or maybe I'm getting faster?

Sam summoned all his strength. His arms started swinging faster and faster. His feet swept across the grass in a blur.

Half a lap left.

Quarter of a lap.

He started to believe the impossible - he was going to win!

Then an enormous cheer erupted at the finish line. Sam glanced up as Jason broke through the tape. Sam still had a hundred metres to go.

He'd lost the race.

He felt like collapsing in a heap, but he kept going. He couldn't stop now, not when he was so close. When he crossed the finish line there was another cheer.

Sam felt disappointed. But then Kalamira came running up and gave him a big hug.

"That was amazing!" she sighed. "You came second against all the big kids."

It was only then that Sam stopped long enough to think about it and he realised it really was quite an amazing feat.

Then Jason came towards him. Sam felt like running away. Jason would probably be embarrassed he almost got beaten by someone a lot younger than him. But Jason held out his hand.

"That was the toughest run I've ever had," Jason said. "Well done Sam. You should join our running team. And maybe we can run to school together in the mornings?"

Sam shook his hand. It might be a good idea after all.

"Three cheers for our new arrival!" Mrs Dullwinkle cheered. "Who would have guessed we had another champion runner in our midst. We're bound to win the interschool championships with these two in the team!"

Everyone cheered.

Sam felt happy and content. This school might be the right one after all. He didn't feel like running at all anymore. Except for practice.

Then he remembered his shadow. He looked at the ground at Jason's feet, but his shadow wasn't there. He turned his head this way and that. But there was no sign of it anywhere.

He felt a little disappointed at first. But at least he wasn't scared anymore. Even without his shadow he knew he'd manage somehow.

Then something totally unexpected happened.

As the crowd slowly parted and sunshine spilled all around him, there was Sam's shadow, as clear and strong as daylight, in the very last place he ever expected to find it - back at his feet.

Just where it belonged.