

LISA M BILLINGHAM

A BOOK
OF SHORT
STORIES

SEDRICK'S ADVENTURES IN

HOPELAND



ILLUSTRATED BY STEPH POUND

Lisa and Steph met in 2013 when they worked for the same company. Lisa was made redundant in 2017, and they lost touch, reconnecting in 2021. During a random catch up in early 2024, Steph let on that she loved to draw. 21,000 words and 168 hand drawn illustrations later and the result of that conversation is this book. Both Lisa and Steph hope that you enjoy immersing yourself in Sedrick's adventures.

If you would like to connect with Lisa or Steph, their Instagram details are below:

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WARNING

May cause thoughtfulness, smiles & laughter.

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Sedrick's
Adventures in
Hopeland
A Book of Short Stories



SEDRICK'S
HOT CHOCOLATE



SEDRICK'S HOT CHOCOLATE

Sedrick was behaving himself (for once). Only because he was drinking his all-time favourite drink. A huge cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows, whipped cream and a big lump of milk chocolate. All topped with grated cheese. And because he's Lucy's favourite customer, a large helping of chocolate drops.

The cup was so big it had two handles, and Sedrick wrapped his chubby little fingers around them. Hugging the cup for warmth. It was minus five outside and Sedrick was looking around the tearoom, bored, but warm.

There were no other children in Lucy's tearoom today. No one for Sedrick to play with or look after, so he played with the cream on his drink instead, flicking it onto the table.

"Sedrick, stop that!" Trina, his mum, shouted at him. "I thought you were being good today!"

"I'm bored," he huffed.



Trina finished sending yet another text message on her brand-new mobile telephone. “Here, play this game for a few minutes. And don’t break it!” She warned as Sedrick was responsible for the demise of her previous one.

Sedrick rolled his eyes. *Mum’s answer to everything: play with a phone. Where’s the fun in that?* Sedrick thought to himself.

It didn’t take long for him to get bored with several games, so he turned his attention back to his hot chocolate. Keen to drink it before it went cold, he shovelled cheese and cream in his mouth using a tiny spoon. (But when his mother was not looking, the tip of his finger.) Ignoring the phone and still bored to tears, Sedrick lifted the cup to his mouth and took his final gulp. The cup covered his face. Sedrick’s eyes rolled around and around looking for a chink of light before the cup swallowed him. Whole.

“Ooh, yummy.” Shouted the cup.



Hopeland

“Woo hoo, where am I?” Sedrick asked as he bounced around the cloud-like shapes swirling and gently falling like soft fluffy snow. As he slowed down, he thought he saw frost on the ground, but his feet didn’t seem to touch the floor.

He looked down, but he could no longer see his feet. His legs were short and stumpy, and his body was a light grey ball of fluff. Short stumpy arms protruded from his sides. He could no longer hug himself; his arms were too short.

“Wooo, this is strange. I’m floating on air.” Sedrick called out to no one in particular.



“Shouldn’t you always feel like that?” A voice behind him asked.

Sedrick turned around to face the voice. “Oh, hello, who are you?”

The voice wavered, “You can see me?”

“Of course, I can see you. What’s your name?”

....“I call myself Sofia. What do you call yourself?”

That’s a funny way to say your name, Sedrick thought but replied, “My name is Sedrick. Where am I?”

“Where do you want to be?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” He contemplated. “A world where people are nice,” he finally responded, still drifting in the air.

“You mean a world built on love?” Sofia asked.

“Yes, that would be good. My family are always fighting, and I don’t like it.”

“Well, you’ve come to the right place, Sedrick. I’ve been here for years. At least, I think I have. I’m not sure now. I’ve lost track of time.”



Time, what's that?" Sedrick asked.

"It's what you Earthers like to live by. That and money, I believe. I prefer it here. It's all about love."

"Where are we though, and what is that? Love?"

"We're in Hopeland. Come on Sedrick, I'll show you what love is. Let's go and explore."

Sofia held Sedrick's hand as they floated through the air. Sedrick was mesmerised. He was sitting on top of a tiny purple cloud. Sofia seemed to be driving it. She whizzed around, careful not to collide with the differently shaped and brightly coloured suns, moons, and stars.

"This is lovely, Sofia, I feel so...free, like I'm floating on a cloud."

"Ah, that's because you are." Sofia laughed as she watched Sedrick's eyes taking everything in.

"I feel like I'm soaring to new heights, Sofia."



Sedrick looked down through the clouds, "Ooh, look, Sofia, there are more people down there." He pointed below him. Sofia's eyes followed the line of his finger.

"Those aren't people, they're Hoppers."

"Hoppers. Do they live here?"

"Yes, of course they do."

"How come they all look different? That one has pink hair and a blue body."

Sofia laughs, "They are all being themselves, Sedrick. They're part of the Freeverse, that's where Hopeland is based."

"What's a Freeverse?"

"THE Freeverse, Sedrick - the land where everyone is free to be themselves. Where there is no hate, anger, or money. Everyone is happy here, and we all look after each other. This is what love is, Sedrick. Come on," Sofia grabbed Sedrick's podgy hand and they continued flying.



Sedrick was lying back on the cloud, enjoying the ride, and pondering Sofia's words.

"Look at all that food, Sofia." Sedrick flapped his arms in excitement as they stopped mid-flight and looked up to see the most beautiful array of fresh food. Fruit, vegetables, pulses, meat.

"It looks like it's never-ending."

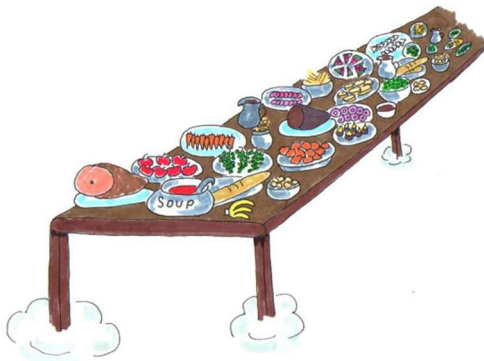
"That's because it is. Everyone helps themselves when they're hungry, then stop when they're full."

"That sounds fabulous."

"We all eat from the same banquet."

Sedrick clapped his hands, "Can we get some, please? I finished my huge hot chocolate with all the extras, but I'm hungry."

"Of course, we can get some. It won't taste anything like you're used to. It will taste soooo much better."



....They floated up to the banquet, and each grabbed a few pieces of everything. They took as much as they could carry and sat back on top of the cloud to eat.

“Mmm, yummy, yummy,” Sedrick called out, rubbing his tummy in glee, “I’ve never tasted anything like this before. And I’ve never seen so many people, but the pile doesn’t seem to be going down.”

“No, it never goes down. Everyone here contributes something daily to the pile so there’s always enough to go round.”

“Ah, that’s such a wonderful thing to do, Sofia.” Sedrick was fascinated by the sight before him and the deliciousness of the food. His big brown saucer-like eyes were on stalks as he watched the Hopers going about their days.

Tilting his head to the side, a thoughtful look on his face, “What day is it, Sofia?”

“Why, it’s today, of course.”

“What do you mean? I know it’s today, but what day?



"We don't do days here. Or times. We just do... today. That's all there is. Today. We just 'be.'"

"Oh." Sedrick looked confused. "I don't understand. What about playschool and nursery and the adults going to work?"

Sofia laughed, "Oh, there's none of that malarkey, we all chip in and work and play. Everything we do, we enjoy. If we don't enjoy it, we don't do it. Come on, let's go. I'm stuffed." Sofia grabbed his hand.

"Mmm, me too, that was delicious, thank you."

"I told you it would be. Different from your Earther food, isn't it?"

"Mmm," Sedrick mumbled as they flew away.

"Come on, let me show you some of the dwellings."

"Dwellings? Don't you mean houses?"

"Oh, no, we call them dwellings here, Sedrick. And they're much better."



They left the cloud behind and flew around, Sedrick stared in awe. “What are they made from?” he asked, “they look beautiful.”

“They’re just basic dwellings. They’re made from whatever you can find. Wood, metal, glass, mud. Anything.”

“But how would you build one? I couldn’t build a dwelling, I’m too little.”

“Oh, little ones just play, the big ones build the dwellings. Everyone chips in and helps until each one is finished. Look, there’s one being built.” She pointed to a hive of activity. Flying down below other clouds, stars, suns, and moons, they hovered and watched the Hopers building. They looked like little worker ants, all working in unison. In what to Sedrick felt like just a matter of minutes, one dwelling was complete. Most of the Hopers returned to their own dwellings, leaving a young family to enjoy their new home.

“Isn’t it cold in these?” Sedrick asked.



“No, the dwellings adapt to their surroundings, there is no weather here.”

Sedrick stared, dumbfounded at this wonderful Freeverse.

“Wow, Sofia, that didn’t take long.”

“I know, it’s awesome, isn’t it? And it never takes long when everyone chips in. Come on, I’ll show you the woodland now.”

Sedrick followed Sofia. “Ooh, Sofia, look at all those wildflowers, trees and, is that a bird?”

“Yes, there are hundreds of varieties of birds. Let’s go in for a closer look.” Soaring down at speed, Sedrick was overcome with excitement.

“This is wonderful, Sofia, there are so many birds and animals. And lots of Hoppers. They are all together in amongst the trees. It looks like they’re playing.”



“They are. Can you remember when you were a child, Sedrick and you used to play out in the fresh air, in the fields like that?” Sofia pointed to a group of tiny Hoppers, playing in a sand pit.

Sedrick stared at her and laughed, “I am a child, Sofia.”

“You don’t feel like a child,” Sofia said, “your energy is low. You don’t seem to be having any fun.”

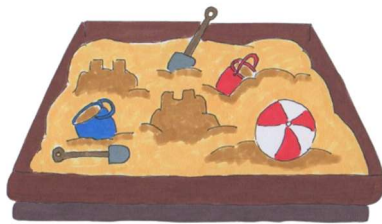
“Mmm, I was enjoying my hot chocolate.”

“Yes, but what else were you doing?”

Sedrick placed his pudgy first finger against his lips, pondering. “Erm, I was kicking my feet against the chair. And throwing the sugar packets on the floor just so mum had to stop talking to pick them up. Oh, and I was poking buttons on mum’s phone. Trying to break it, again, so she wouldn’t spend so much time on it. She’s always on it. Even when she’s in the tearoom with her friends.”

“So, you weren’t really having fun, were you?” Sofia asked.

“No, I guess not.” Distracted, Sedrick asked, “Can we join in with those Hoppers?”



"Yes, of course we can, let's go."

"Ah, hello, Earther, have you come to play?"

"Ooh, yes, please. I'm Sedrick, who are you?"

"I call myself Bart but I'm just me, really."

Sedrick shook his head, confused by Bart's response.

"Oh, okay, hello, Bart."

Bart laughed, "Do you like your name?"

Sedrick stuck out his chest, "Of course I do, why wouldn't I?"

"Curious, that's all. I wouldn't be called anything, but we have so many Earther visitors it confuses them when we say we're just being ourselves. Come on, Sedrick, let's play."

"Is this what you do all day?" Sedrick asked.

"Er, pretty much, yes."

"Everyone is so happy here," Sedrick stated, matter-of-factly.

"Of course they are, that's the whole point of living, isn't it?" Bart questioned.



“Well, I guess so, I hadn’t thought about that either.”

“How old are you, Sofia, Bart?”

“In your world, I would be 7,” Sofia replied.

“And I would be 8,” Bart answered. “How old are you?”

“I’m 7 too, and what do you mean, in my world?”

“Well, there’s no age or time here, so we have to guess when an Earthier visits. We might be wrong, of course. I think I was only five last week,” Sofia said.

Sedrick laughed, “How can you have been five last week and be seven this week?”

“I’m a Hoper, I can be whoever and whatever I want to be.”

“But you are all so different. Look, there’s another one with blue skin.” Sedrick shouted excitedly as he watched a Hoper carrying tools up a hillside.

“I know, that’s the point,” Sofia said, “those over there have pink skin,” she replied, pointing in the opposite direction.



“So, what are they then?”

Sofia looked confused, “I told you, Sedrick, they’re Hoppers. Come on, let’s go and play while the adults make stuff.”

“I can’t play, I don’t have a mobile telephone with me.”

“What are you talking about, what’s a mobile telephone?”

Now Sedrick looked confused, “You know, it’s a thing... I use it to play games. Mum uses it to send messages to her friends and post on social media.”

“Oh, Sedrick, you are talking nonsense now, we don’t need a... what did you call it, a mobile telephone? We just play.”

“Eh? How, Sofia?”

“Come on, I’ll show you.”

Sofia grabbed Sedrick’s hand and took him to a huge play area with swings, slides, tyres, and a merry-go-round. Plus, lots of other odd shaped structures.



“Wow, Sofia, what’s that?” Sedrick asked, pointing to a funny shaped bench type object with a wonky end.

“That’s a seesaw. Come on, I’ll show you how it works.” Sofia pulled Sedrick to the seesaw. Clapping her hands excitedly, she told him to sit on the end which was resting on the floor.

“No, not that way, turn around and face me,” Sofia turned him around then skipped to the opposite end of the wonky bench. “You’re a bit heavier than me so we may need some help to get this working.”

Sedrick looked worried, Sofia reassured him, “Relax, Sedrick, it will be fun.” She climbed onto the other end of the bench and as she did, Sedrick’s end rose a little.

“Ooh,” squealed Sedrick, “this is weird, now what do I do?”

“You need to push your end back down.”

Their screams of delight attracted an audience, “Come on, Hopers, help me get this working, he’s too heavy.” Sofia called to the curious eyes watching them. A few of the crowd joined in and before long, they were all squealing with delight.



“Ooh, stop,” Sedrick called after a few moments, “I’m getting tired.”

“Tired!” They all laughed, “Come on, let’s try something else.” Sofia called as she jumped down from the seesaw.

There was a crowd of Hoppers moseying around the play area.

“Is that a pirate ship?” Sedrick asked. “We have those in our big fairgrounds back home. I’ve only ever been on one, can we try it, please?”

Shouts of delight came from the back of the group, which had been steadily growing as they’d been walking around.

“Yes, let’s!” Bart called from the back.

Sofia and Bart both grabbed Sedrick’s hands as they skipped to the entrance of the pirate ship. The last Hopper to climb on, pressed a few buttons and the ship moved. Sedrick was too excited to speak.



The rocking motion of the boat, gentle at first, took him back to when he was a baby. His mum, mobile telephone in hand, used to rock him backwards and forwards in his cot to get him to sleep. As the speed picked up, Sedrick clapped his hands together. "Ooh, Sofia, Bart, this is wonderful, thank you. I haven't had this much fun for a long time. Can we do the swings next, please?"

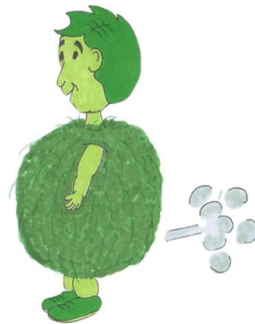
"Yes, we can do whatever you like." The three of them did all the swings, slides, tyres, and merry-go-rounds more than once before they fell exhausted to the ground.

"That was a wonderful day, Sofia, Bart, thank you so much. I'm tired. I think I'd like to do some reading now, please."

"Day?" Bart asked, "What do you mean by day?"

"Well, we have day and night. It's light during the day and dark at night. Depending on the weather of course."

"Oh, there's none of that here, Sedrick, we eat, sleep, drink and fart whenever we feel like it." And just to prove a point, Bart farted.



Sedrick shook his head, laughing. "What?" Bart asked when he saw the grin on Sedrick's face. "We are just being ourselves, Sedrick. Come on, we'll take you to the reading room."

They all walked together, hand in hand, "How far away is it?"

"Oh, about five miles," Sofia replied, skipping along the path.

"Five miles! Are we walking all the way?"

"Of course we are, how else would we get there?"

"Oh, I don't know," Sedrick answered, somewhat sarcastically, "Bus, train, cloud.... Maybe even fly, like we did before."

"Oh, yes, but we don't always fly, and we haven't any buses or trains, Hoppers prefer to walk."

"Oh, okay," slightly disheartened Sedrick ambled along behind Sofia and Bart.

"Sofia," he called.

"Yes, Sedrick."

"Hopeland is very clean and tidy, who does the cleaning?"



“You are such a strange child, we all do of course.”

“But there’s no rubbish, no overflowing bins, no scrap at the side of the road.”

“What are you talking about? There is no waste, so we don’t need bins.”

“How on earth can you have no waste?” Sedrick queried, astounded by Sofia’s comments.

“We use everything, it’s as simple as that. We don’t have anything we don’t use.”

“So, you don’t have, I don’t know, er, old magazines, or books, or... I know, you must have your old baby clothes.” Sedrick said, certain he’d caught them out and they’d be sure to have kept their baby clothes.

“No, why would we? We pass them on or use them for other things.”



“Oh,” Sedrick was lost for words and fascinated by this odd place. As they walked on a little further, curious, he asked, “Who’s in charge here then?”

“What a funny thing to say.” Bart and Sofia cried in unison, laughing as Sedrick stood with his arms crossed, upset that they’d laughed at him.

“No one’s in charge, Sedrick.”

“How is that even possible? Isn’t it chaos without a captain?” Sedrick asked, thinking back to the pirate ship ride, he imagined a place like this would have a captain.

“No, quite the reverse. They tried it once, didn’t they, Bart?”

“Yes, it didn’t work out too well though. It was too stressful for the captain, as you call him, and no one did as they were told, so we’re all in charge now.”

Confused, Sedrick asked, “How does it work then? Surely someone has to make decisions about things.”



“What things? We all do what we enjoy and enjoy what we do. We sometimes have to do things we don’t like doing but, not very often.”

“What about education, the police, the forces and science?” Sedrick asked, unable to think of other important things but felt sure these were the main ones.

Sofia and Bart, still giggling to themselves, “We read, write and talk to each other, mainly, that’s how we learn.”

“But don’t you have teachers? Like, adult teachers?”

“Yes, they are all teachers. But I’ll let you into a little secret,” Sofia whispered in Sedrick’s ear, “the adults learn more from us than we do from them.”

“Don’t be silly, Sofia,”

“It’s true, isn’t it, Bart?”

“Sure is, we all do all the above, we all teach, we all learn. We all police and we’re all scientists.”



Sedrick loved the feel of the place. He had so many questions. "So, what if someone is poorly and they can't...work?"

"Someone else takes over from them, but it isn't often a Hoper goes off the rails. It's only usually when they're doing something they don't enjoy. Once they've found someone who does enjoy what they're trying to do, they hand the task over. That way, they can get on with something that they do enjoy. Or, if they can't hand it over, they finish it quickly so they can then do something they enjoy. Normal 'being' is then resumed." Sedrick was aghast at how easy it all seemed; he couldn't imagine ever living in a world like this one.

They continued walking and he noticed the flowers, trees, animals, and the lack of litter. He was even more astonished when they reached the reading room. His eyes popped out of his head like saucers on stalks.



“You look shocked, Sedrick, are you okay?” Bart asked as Sofia wandered off to grab a book from the vast display adorning the cavern-like space.

“Wow, this goes on for miles,” Sedrick stated as he spun around and around, in awe.

“Yes, it does, fabulous, isn’t it?”

“So, Bart; everything I need to know is in this room, is it?”

“No, Sedrick. Everything you could ever need to know is in your heart and soul, but there is enough reading here to last many lifetimes. What’s most important is the connections we make throughout our lifetime.”

“Connections, what, you mean like social media and games and stuff?”

“I don’t know what that is but, it doesn’t sound right to me, no, I mean connections with and to each other.”

Bart noticed Sedrick’s blank expression.



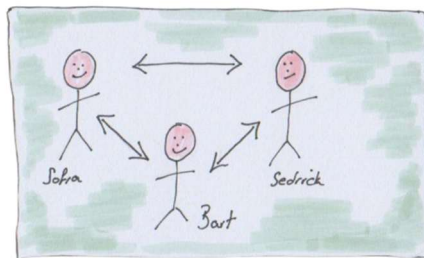
"Look," Bart grabbed a piece of paper off one of the many tables in the reading room and drew stick people. "We've connected, Sofia and I have connected, you and Sofia have connected, and I've connected to her too. We may never see each other again, but we've all experienced something from our connections. Whether it's education, enlightenment, entertainment, or something completely different. It's the connection that's important. The more connections you make, the more you grow."

"I'm lost, Bart."

Sofia, who had been ambling behind them, had caught up. She was listening intently to them. Seeing Bart struggling, she picked up the conversation.

"Since you met us, you've grown, haven't you?"

"Mmm, yes, I suppose I have." Sedrick pondered. His finger was on his lip again.



"You're learning all the time. Have a look around, and speak to other Hopers, they'll tell you the same. Read a book, but just be yourself." Sofia said.

Sedrick's eyes were drawn to a knitting book. He took the book from the shelf and sat in a comfy armchair to read. *Why am I reading a book about knitting?* Once he'd started, he couldn't seem to put it down. He was fascinated by the different patterns and stitches. The colours of the toy animals in the pictures caught his eye and gave him a warm glow inside. Sofia and Bart watched him intently. He didn't put the book down until he'd read it all.

"Do you think we've converted him, Bart?"

"I hope so, Sofia. The path he was on could have been a bit dodgy."

"A bit. Don't you mean a lot? I still feel bad though, he does have free will after all."

"Yes, he does, we all do, but now he has choices. It's up to him what he does now."



“That’s true, Bart, that’s true. Look, he’s talking to Edgar now.”

Bart laughed, “Oh, that will be interesting for him, come on, let’s rescue him from wise old Edgar.”

“Hello, Edgar, Sedrick.”

“Ah, Bart, Sofia, how are you both?” Edgar asked. His wizened face beamed as the youngsters gathered around him. I guess you’ve come to take Sedrick for some food.”

“Yes, Edgar, if that’s okay?”

“Of course, I will join you if I may? I want to show Sedrick the silent room afterwards. I think he’ll gain a lot from it.”

Sedrick, mesmerised by the old man’s purple beard, followed them from the reading room. (It’s fair to say at this point, by the way, that Edgar was the ripe old Earther age of 31.) Sedrick was suddenly feeling very hungry, he was glad they were taking him for something to eat.

“Delicious again, was it, Sedrick?” Sofia asked.



“Yes, it was, thank you. Can we go to the silent room now, please?”

Sedrick has an older brother and a younger sister. His parents were always squabbling, so the idea of a silent room appealed to him.

“Are we walking, Bart?” he asked.

“Yes, there are quite a few silent rooms and the nearest one is only a few paces away.”

Settling himself in, the chair seemed to cocoon Sedrick like an old duvet. Snuggling further into the chair he closed his eyes. There was no sound. None at all. Not even the sound of a pin dropping. He strained his ears, *there must be some sound*, he mused to himself. Nothing. *So, this is what silence sounds like then*. Sedrick said to himself. *I rather like this*.

As Sedrick lay cocooned in the chair, his mind wondered. *What would Earth look like, if it was like this? Mmm, wouldn't it be a great place to live?*

