

**BOOK 3 OF THE SANDY HUNTER SAGA**

**CLARA**  
**AND THE MERMAIDS**  
**BY J.D. NEWMAN**

**PREVIEW PAGES**



Newport, Maine

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**To my father**

E. Dilworth (Tim) Newman  
an elementary school principal  
who supported theatre and drama



**CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS**  
by **J.D. Newman**

Book Three of the Sandy Hunter Saga



## PREVIEW PAGES – CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS

*Dear Mom,*

*I'm writing you this letter because when I was angry, I swore I'd never talk to you again. You always say I should keep my promises, so I will, at least for a while, even though I'm not mad anymore.*

*I have so much I want to tell you that I decided to write it out. I didn't get your passion for dancing, as you are painfully aware, but I did get your passion for writing.*

*I've never had a daughter of my own, I mean, I'm twelve, right? But it seems like every mom wants her daughter to be just like her. You were a ballerina. You went to Memorial Catholic School and got an English scholarship in college. I'm different!*

*You keep enrolling me in dance classes. I know you were disappointed when I refused to try out for The Nutcracker, but for me, dance is my exercise, not my passion. And I know you were disappointed today when I tore up the application you brought me to attend Memorial Catholic School next year. The girls there wear uniforms - skirts and dresses and white cotton blouses - and that's just not me! Who I am I don't really know, but I am trying to find out.*

*I don't know why you got to attend Memorial. You weren't Catholic and Aunt Roxie went to a regular junior high and high school. Grandpa doesn't spend money for anything un-necessary. Why would he pay tuition when there was a perfectly good junior high school that you could*

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*attend for free? And Grandpa always plays fair, even with Christmas gifts, so why did he pay for you to go to private school when he didn't do the same for your sister?*

*I know you're worried about what you call my "somber wardrobe choices," and you even sent me to that psychologist. She couldn't figure it out either. I know I wear a lot of black, all black if I have enough of it clean. You said you read that it's a warning sign that I'm depressed or experimenting with drugs or worse. If I pierce my nose or naval, you can worry about me, but my choice of clothing has nothing to do with the things you worry about.*

*I know it broke your heart last week when I cut my hair so short. I paid for the haircut with my own money and hairdressers don't need parent permission. No, my haircut doesn't make me look like a boy; it makes me look like a girl with short hair. I refuse to wear dresses, but boys don't wear leggings, and I'm shaped like a ballerina, without the tutu.*

*Short hair and black clothes aren't about being boyish; they're about being neutral, like a paper doll, so I can put on other people.*

*Okay, that will take some explaining, but I still have plenty of paper.*

*Until about a year ago, I tried to be just like you. I took dance classes, even though it wasn't really my thing. I read every book you gave me. I liked most of them and acted like I liked the rest. When you took me back-to-school shopping, you thought I was making choices, but I was just trying to*



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*guess what you wanted me to choose. I styled my hair like yours and thought I'd grow up to look and walk and work and play like you.*

*But something changed.*

*You probably blame it on Ms. Fabian. You say that Ms. Fabian is a different bird, and you don't mean that as a compliment. You even tried to get me into a different sixth grade class with a teacher who has been there longer. It's true that Ms. Fabian has switched schools a lot, but she doesn't get fired, she just likes new experiences. I do too.*

*The reason I try to look neutral is that makes it easier to see myself as someone else. In Fahrenheit 451, people put video screens on all four walls so they can imagine themselves in an imaginary world. In "Star Trek" a person can go into a holodeck where places appear on the gridded walls. They're now making "virtual reality" glasses that let a person see themselves in an imaginary space.*

*I can see myself from the outside. Maybe some people can't do that. I imagine myself wearing different things. I just can't block out what I'm wearing. Black clothing gives me a holo-body instead of a holo-deck.*

*Anyway, that's all I have to say for now. If I kept my promise, I wouldn't say anything. I need to be alone for a while but then I want to talk. For now, I can only write.*

*Clara*

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*Dear Clara,*

*Thank you for writing to me, even if you're not talking to me. I couldn't really talk to my sister until I started writing. If you don't want to share what you're writing with me, tuck it away and share it in thirty or forty years. It's up to you.*

*I know you don't want to hear this, but I understand most of what you're saying. You are experiencing some of the same things I experienced when I was your age. I don't want to burst your bubble, but you didn't invent adolescence. You have to rebel in order to become yourself, but I'll let you imagine you're 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 I just checked the word count and it's almost the length of a novel. You probably don't want to read it yet, so I'll tuck it away till you do.*

*Every woman fears she's becoming her mother, and every girl does too. I was an exception because I never knew my mother. When I was twelve, I adopted my three great aunts. An aunt is always cooler than a mom, unless you don't have a mother. Your Aunt Roxie is cooler than me and your dad is more fun than I am. He's "good cop," so I have to be "bad cop," but you need both of us.*

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

*I'm okay with you not loving dance. That was my passion; it doesn't have to be yours. A mother secretly hopes that her daughter will want to be like her. Deep down she*

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*knows that won't happen, at least not for long. What I want is for you to love something as much as I love dance.*

*I think I understand what you meant when you said you try on other people. I've played that game myself. When I was your age, I got to audition to be a "party boy" in The Nutcracker and I tried on the movement of the boys I watched. But you must be better at shadowing than I am because it sounds like you've never been caught.*

*Putting on roles is what teenagers do and what pre-teens try. Once you figure out who you want to be, I hope you'll let me know.*

*If you don't believe I understand you, I hope you believe that I'm trying.*

*If I surrender, you can break your vow of silence, so consider this letter my white flag.*

*Mom*

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*Dear Mom,*

*I'm almost ready to talk to you again, but not quite.*

*I'll tell you a little more about putting on people.*

*Yesterday, I put on Paisley.*

*That's the name of a girl in my class. Can you believe it? She was named for those amoeba-shaped patterns on clothing that look like something in a microscope. Why not Plaid or Argyle? Anything less biological?*

*Anyway, if I wanted to be the girl you wish I were, I'd be Paisley, so I tried her on for size. I liked how her long hair felt on my shoulders, or at least how imagined it would feel. Even though I wore leggings, I imagined I was wearing a skirt. I followed Paisley out to recess, and I imitated the way she walked through the tunnel and up to the playground.*

*On the playground, I played soccer like I always do, and played goalie as I often do. While the ball was at the opposite end of the field, I watched what Paisley was doing. She didn't watch her phone, like the other girls do when the teacher's not watching. Paisley was looking at the other kids and trying them on, one by one. Then I noticed she was imitating me. It was spooky, like looking through a knothole and seeing someone's eye looking back.*

*I don't talk to Paisley, even though she sits next to me in class, and I realized that no one else talks to her either. She acts like she's better than us. Paisley spends all her time posing and fussing. But as I pretended to be her on the*

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*outside, I could feel what she feels on the inside. She's lonely and tired and sad and scared.*

*At the end of the day, as everyone was putting on their jackets, I took off Paisley. Since I was myself again, I smiled at the real Paisley and said, "nice jacket." It might have been the first nice thing anyone said to her that day. She smiled back.*

*I don't want to be Paisley; it takes too much effort. But at least I know what it's like to be her, or least I think I do.*

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

*I guess I'll talk to you again, but if I do, I'll miss writing you.*

*Clara*

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*Hello Clara.*

*You said you still wanted me to write to you, even though we just talked. I'm proud that you can feel what others feel. Some people call that empathy. I think of it as your superpower.*

*I have to wonder if you've ever pretended you were me.*

*I'm telling you again: I think you should make friends with Paisley. Invite her over to do a homework assignment. That way, you'll feel like you have to be together. Those are my thoughts; you have plenty of your own.*

*I'm glad you're talking again, and writing too.*

*Mom*

## PREVIEW PAGES – CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS

**From:** Clara Gentry <clarag03@posthaste.com>

**To:** Sandy Gentry <sandyhg@posthaste.com>

**Subject:** This Afternoon

Mom, I'm sending you an email instead of a letter. I'll still write you letters when I have something important to say. Letters feel more real because they're harder to write. Thank you for writing me letters, but you can write me emails if you need to.

You don't understand my "superpower" as you call it. Once you understand someone else, you have to see the world through their eyes, as well as your own eyes, and that makes things really complicated. I'd never try on a family member. It would blow my mind!

I can't invite Paisley over. I thought of doing that yesterday, but she was absent, and when she got back, I realized it wouldn't work. We don't have anything in common, except that we pretend we're other people. We've sort of agreed not to talk about that, so what else could we talk about?

Thanks for trying but you really don't get me.

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**Mom >**

Hey Mom. I'm going over to Paisley's house to work on an assignment. I'll be back in time for dinner.



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**From:** Clara Gentry <clarag03@posthaste.com>

**To:** Sandy Gentry <sandyhg@posthaste.com>

**Subject:** This Afternoon

You don't understand, Mom! I told you I couldn't invite Paisley to my house, and I couldn't. She invited me to her house. That's different.

Paisley's house is spotless, like the ones in Sunset Magazine. Don't worry, I wouldn't want to live in a perfect house. It would make me too nervous! I'm not being critical. You keep the parlor (anyone else would call it a living room) in perfect shape but the rest of our house looks more lived in. With Paisley's family, I keep thinking there's a mess in there somewhere. There has to be! When she wasn't looking, I peaked in the closets, but they're perfect too. What would it be like to live a perfect life?

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**From:** Clara Gentry <clarag03@posthaste.com>

**To:** Sandy Gentry <sandyhg@posthaste.com>

**Subject:** RESPECT MY PRIVACY!

Mom, you really need to respect my privacy! I shouldn't have left my door partly open, and you didn't come into my room, but how long were you watching before I saw you in my mirror?

I pretended I didn't see you and you pretended you didn't see me see you. I'm good at pretending, as you might have noticed this morning.

Most mothers wouldn't have been surprised to see their daughter braiding her hair, but I don't have enough hair to braid.

How long were you watching? Did you see me do my chores? Did you watch me gather the eggs and water the horses? You probably saw me put on my petticoat, stockings, bloomers, dress, and bonnet before I wrapped Dad's belt around my books.

I got up early so I could walk to school. I wasn't snubbing you by not letting you drive me. It's not that far to walk to school. Laura walked further every morning!

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That's right! I pretended to be Laura Ingalls today. I have to be more subtle at school. I've been a different character every day this week. Well, Laura was real, but she wrote about herself as a character.

On Monday, I was Anne Shirley. I don't usually raise my hand in class, but Anne of Green Gables was the smartest girl in class. I pretended that Paisley was my bosom friend Diana. I've never had a bosom friend before, and Paisley hadn't either, until then.

On Tuesday, I was Diana and pretended that Paisley was Anne. I took pride in my long, dark hair and I enjoyed my puffed sleeves. I almost felt sorry for Anne, who wanted both but had neither. But I envied my friend's imagination.

On Wednesday, I wanted to go to school as Jo March, but Little Women doesn't show Jo in school, so I had to be Amy instead. Amy is spoiled – she gets everything she wants, including Laurie – but she doesn't feel like she gets anything. I cut up a real lime and hid it in my desk, sneaking sucks during class. Amy is an artist, so I tried to draw our teacher. Paisley saw my picture and laughed, thinking I was making fun of Ms. Fabian. At first, I was mad, but it did look kind of funny. I can imagine I have artistic talent, but that doesn't mean I really do. Ms. Fabian came to see what we were laughing about. Another teacher would have sent us to

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the office, but Ms. Fabian laughed, took it away, and framed it on her desk. I guess you'll see it at parent-teacher conferences.

On Thursday, I decided to be Jo March in school, even though that never happens in the book. I pretended I sold my hair at age twelve, instead of age seventeen. Rather than hiding my short hair with a bonnet, I decided to display my picture openly. I pretended the girls were pointing at me, the way they did when I cut my real hair.

It's easier to tell you things in writing than in talking. How many girls would share something like this with her mother? I'm old enough to walk to and from school, but I do enjoy our talks in the car. If I want to talk, I might get up late and make you drive me to school.

## **PREVIEW PAGES – CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS**

**From:** Sandy Gentry <sandyhg@posthaste.com>

**To:** Clara Gentry <clarag03@posthaste.com>

**Subject:** re: RESPECT MY PRIVACY!

Clara, thank you for forgiving me for watching you pretending. And thank you for telling me what you were doing. I'm honored by your gift.

Consider me your taxi driver. I'll be glad to provide you with a ride. I'm ready to listen when you're ready to talk and I will let you alone when you're not.

**J.D. NEWMAN**

***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***



## PREVIEW PAGES – CLARA AND THE MERMAIDS

**J.D. Newman** — Dr. Newman is a professor of theatre at Utah Valley University and the Director of the Theatre for Youth and Education (TYE) Center, and currently serves as Chair 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 such plays as *The Secret Garden*, *Princess Academy*, and *Androcles and the Lion* in the Bastian 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*; and his book *Playwriting in Schools: Dramatic Navigation* received the 2020 Distinguished Book Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE). Dr. Newman chairs the Playwrights In Our Schools Project and served three years on the board of the AATE. *Sandy and the Weird Sisters*, his first novel, has been followed by two sequels, *Sandy and the Dance of Faith* and *Clara and the Mermaids*. His stand-alone young reader's story, *Make-Believe Twins* is also published by Leicester Bay Books.

**J.D. NEWMAN**

**Books in the SANDY HUNTER SAGA**

*(available from Leicester Bay Books)*

Sandy and the Weird Sisters (Book 1)

Sandy and the Dance of Faith (Book 2)

Clara and the Mermaids (Book 3)

**Plays in the SANDY HUNTER SAGA**

*(available from Leicester Bay Theatricals)*

Sandy and the Weird Sisters

Sandy and the Dance of Faith

Clara and the Mermaids

**Another book by J. D. Newman**

Make-Believe Twins *(Leicester Bay Books)*

**Plays by J.D. Newman**

*(available from Leicester Bay Theatricals)*

All's Well That Ends Well (adapted)

Awakening Galatea

Crowns and Commoners (short)

DeGruchy's Mantle

The Doctor In Spite of Himself (adapted and translated)

Gathering Grimm

The Gypsy Tree

Land of Oz

Liberation (short)

Much Ado About Nothing (adapted)

Olympus On The Moon (short)

Puzzles

The Yearning Season