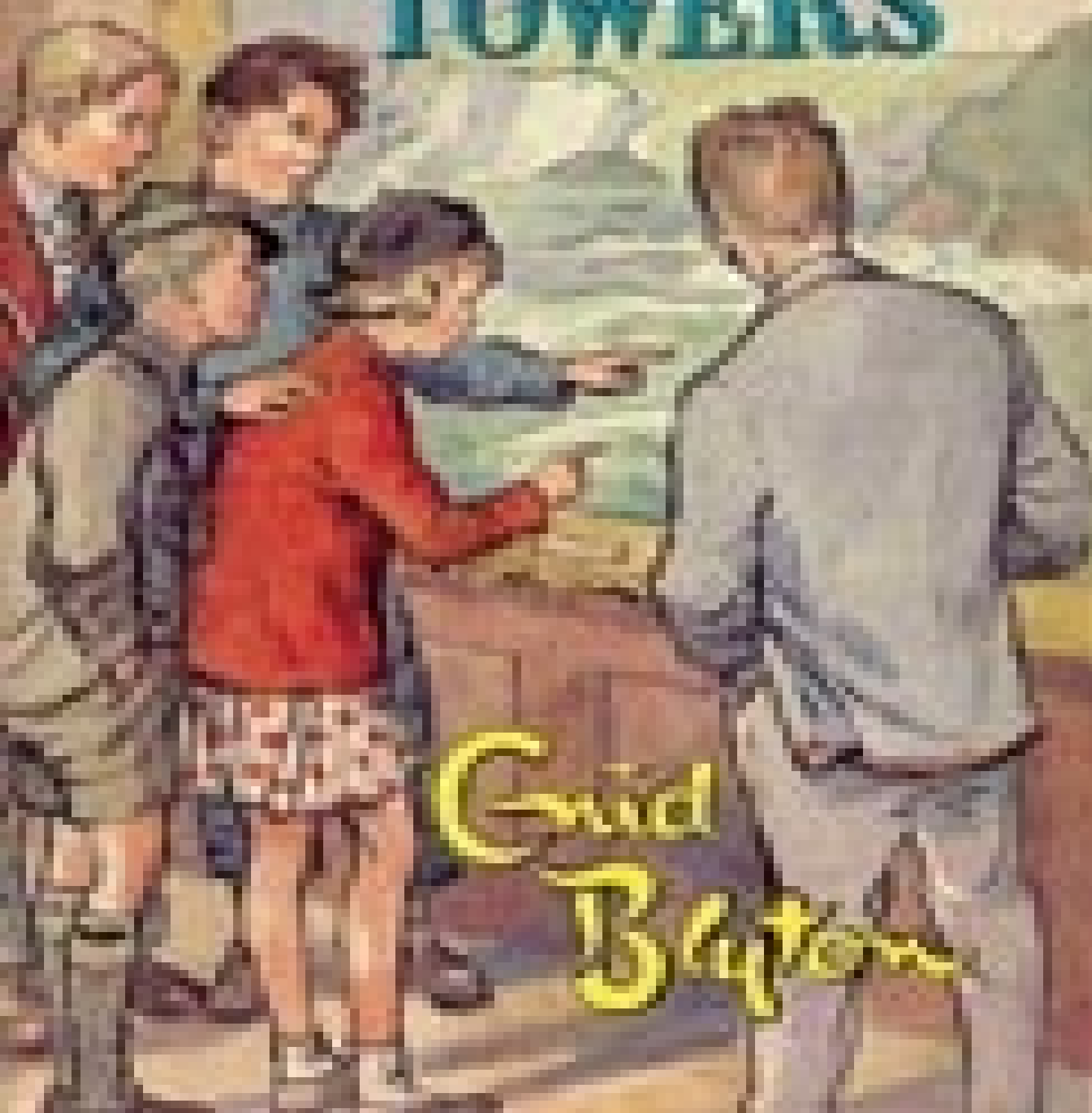


THE MYSTERY OF BANSHEE TOWERS



Good
Bay

1 - OFF TO MEET OLD FATTY

"I do wish old Fatty would buck up and come back from wherever he's staying," said Bets. "We've had almost a week of the holidays without him already - such a waste!"

"He's coming back today," said Pip, passing a postcard across the breakfast-table to his young sister. "Here's a card from him. Three cheers!"

Bets read the card out loud. "Back tomorrow by bus from Warling. Meet me at bus stop if you can. What about a nice juicy mystery? I feel just about ready for one. Fatty."

"A nice juicy *what?*" said her mother, puzzled.

"_Mystery_," said Bets, her eyes shining. "You know how something always seems to happen when Fatty's about, Mother - there was the mystery of the Pantomime Cat - and the mystery of the Vanished Prince - and..."

Her father groaned. "Look, Bets - I'm tired of all these adventures and strange happenings that seem to pop up whenever your friend Frederick is about. Just try and steer clear of any trouble these holidays. I was hoping that Frederick was staying away for a nice long time."

"I wish you wouldn't call him Frederick, Daddy," said Bets. "It does sound so silly."

"I should have thought that Frederick was a much better name for a boy in his teens, than the absurd name of Fatty," said her father. "I wonder Frederick allows people to call him by that old nickname now."

"But Fatty *is* fat, and the name suits him," said Pip. "Anyway I don't think *my* nickname is very suitable for me now that I'm a bit older. Why can't I be called by my proper name of Philip, instead of Pip?"

"Simply because you're a bit of pip-squeak still and probably always will be," said his father, disappearing behind his newspaper. Bets gave a sudden laugh, and then a groan as Pip kicked her under the table.

"Pip!" said his mother warningly. Bets changed the subject hurriedly. She didn't want Pip to get into any trouble the very day that Fatty came home.

"Mother, where's the bus time-table?" she said. "I'd like to find out what time old Fatty's bus arrives."

"Well, seeing that there are only two in the morning, and the bus from Warling takes two hours to get here, I should think he'll be on the *first* bus," said Pip, "otherwise he'd be jolly late!"

"It should be about a quarter to ten," said his mother. "That means you'll have plenty of time to clean up the fearful mess in your playroom first. I could hardly get into it yesterday."

Pip groaned. "WHY do we always have to tidy the playroom when we plan to go out?" he demanded.

“I really do think it’s...”

“Enough said,” said his father, from behind his newspaper, and Pip became silent at once. He looked across at Bets, and she grinned at him happily. Fatty was coming back! Fatty with his wide grin, his twinkling eyes, his mad jokes - and his extraordinary habit of suddenly finding himself in the middle of peculiar mysteries! Oh the time they had had with Fatty - the excitement - the adventures! Why was it that some people *always* found themselves in the middle of something thrilling?

“If Fatty was cast away on a lonely desert island something extraordinary would immediately happen,” thought Bets. “A mermaid would pop up and let him swim away on her back. Or a submarine might arrive and...”

“Bets, what are you dreaming about?” said her mother. “You’ve carefully buttered your bread on *both* sides!”

Pip and Bets tore upstairs as soon as breakfast was finished, only one thought in their minds - Fatty was coming back! “Let’s buck up and tidy the playroom,” said Pip. “I want to go round to Larry’s and see if he and Daisy know that Fatty’s coming back today.”

He began to throw everything into the big toy cupboard, higgledy, piggledy, bang, crash, wallop!

“Mother won’t like that,” began Bets, but Pip only laughed at her. “All right - *you* do it properly, old slowcoach. Goodbye - I’m off to Larry’s. See you later!”

But Bets couldn’t bear to be left behind, so she shoved in the last few things, flew to get her hat and raced down the stairs after Pip, falling over the cat sitting on the bottom stair.

“Sorry, Puss!” she panted, and raced down to the front gate. “Pip! WAIT for me!”

Soon they were at Larry’s house. The front door was open, and they could hear Daisy calling to her brother. “Aren’t you ready to meet Fatty? You’ll be late!”

In a few moments all four children were on their way to the bus-stop. “What do you bet that old Fatty will play one of his tricks on us, and come in some kind of disguise?” said Pip.

“Well, I hope he does,” said Larry. “We’d soon see through it. Fatty can’t disguise his plumpness!”

“Look, we’re *just* in time,” said Bets. “Here comes the bus. Let’s run!”

The bus, a double-decker, came to a stop, and the four children ran to the exit at the back. People were crowding off, and the conductor was shouting loudly, “Hurry off, please, and mind the step!”

Larry suddenly nudged Pip. “Look, that’s Fatty - he’s disguised himself, just as we guessed he would. He’s carrying a dog-basket too, and I bet old dog Buster is in there. Stand back - don’t let him see us!”

The fellow who was carrying the dog-basket was stout, and wore a bulky overcoat, a yellow scarf round his neck and chin, and a cap with a large peak pulled down over his nose. He coughed hollowly as he stepped down from the bus, and held a large green cotton handkerchief to his mouth.

Bets giggled. "That's Fatty all right!" she said in a low voice to Pip. "Let's not say a word, but just follow him solemnly home!"

They set off, keeping just behind him. The fat fellow went off at quite a pace, limping slightly with his left foot.

"Yes, that's Fatty!" said Larry. "Sort of thing he *would* do, in disguise - put on a limp or something! He can't fool *us*, though!"

They followed the limping youth down the street, round a corner and up the hill. Then Larry shouted to him.

"Hey, Fatty! Stop! We know it's you!"

The youth swung round and glared at them. "Don't you dare to call after *me*!" he shouted. "Cheeky young brats!"

"Go on, Fatty - we can't *help* knowing it's you!" said Pip. "And we know you've got old Buster-dog in that basket, too. Let him out!"

"Buster? Who's Buster?" said the fellow. "Are you mad? There's a *cat* in here, not a dog! Have a look!"

He slipped the catch of the basket, and opened the lid. Out sprang a most enormous ginger cat, spitting and hissing!

The four children stared in the greatest astonishment. A CAT - not Buster! So this fellow *wasn't* Fatty after all. Gosh - what an awful mistake!

"Er - we're very sorry. It's all a mistake," stuttered poor Larry, his face scarlet. "We do beg your pardon."

"Now you just listen to me," said the fat fellow, angrily. "See that bobby over there? Well, I'm going to complain of you, see? Following me about! Whispering behind my back. Calling me names! I can't help being fat, can I? Come here, Pussykins - that's right, you hiss at these little varmint. Scratch them if you like!"

To the children's horror, the fellow went across the road to a corner - and who should be standing there but Mr Goon, the village policeman. Mr GOON! He was no friend of theirs! What in the world could they do?

"Better get away quickly, before Mr Goon comes after us!" said Pip. "Gosh - what a mistake we made!"

He turned to run, and bumped hard into someone standing just behind him, grinning, a little Scottie dog in his arms.

"FATTY! It's you! Fatty, we thought you were that fellow over there, with the dog-basket!" cried Pip, overjoyed to see his friend gain. "We followed him, and now he's gone to complain about us to

Goon!”

“And *I* followed *you!*” said Fatty. “I was on the top deck of the bus, and I saw you, though you didn’t see me! I carried Buster because I was afraid he’d go careering after you, and give the game away. Give your friends a lick, Buster!”

He held up the little Scottie, and Buster most ecstatically licked all his four friends, whining in joy. Then Fatty put him down on the pavement, and alas, Buster suddenly spotted Goon the policeman, who was staring angrily at the children from across the road.

Buster gave a yelp of delight and raced across the road at top speed. Ah, here was his old enemy! What about dancing round his ankles and pretending to nip him? Buster felt just like a little exercise after his long ride on the bus!

Mr Goon glared at the excited Buster in disgust. “Ha - you little pest of a dog! So you’re back with your master, are you? Get away, now! Clear-orf!”

“Buster’s only telling you how pleased he is to see you,” said Fatty, as the burly policeman tried to skip away from Buster’s attentions. “My word, Mr Goon, you ought to learn dancing! You’re really nippy with your feet - almost as nippy as Buster is with his teeth! Heel, Buster! The Dancing Lesson over!”

Goon went purple in the face. That boy! That toad of a boy! What wonderful peace and quiet there had been in the village for at least a week, with That Boy away! Now he was back, and something would turn up to make things uncomfortable, Goon was sure. That fat boy was always in the middle of Peculiar Happenings of some sort!

Fatty joined the others, who, feeling sure that the fellow with the cat had complained about them to Mr Goon, were keeping well away from the angry policeman.

“I must say that I think you were all a bit fatheaded - following a chap-with-a-cat instead of a boy-with-a-dog!” said Fatty.

“All right - don’t rub it in,” said Larry. “I’ll stand us all ice-creams to make up for our mistake.”

“Sorry - but I think I *must* get home first.” said Fatty. “Mother will be looking out for me. But let’s have a Meeting this afternoon - A Meeting of the Famous Find-Outers and Dog! Come to my workroom about half-past two. Come on. Buster old thing! To heel! and DO remember to be polite and shake paws with my father and mother as SOON as you see them!”

Larry and Daisy went off together and so did Pip and Bets. Bets’ mother was amused to see the little girl’s happy face. “I can see that you met Frederick all right!” she said.

“We’re having a Meeting at Fatty’s this afternoon,” said Bets, her face glowing. “It’s the first Meeting the Find-Outers have had for ages!”

“Find-Outers?” said her mother. “Let me see now, that’s...”

“Oh, *Mother!* You *know* we’re the Five Find-Outers - and Dog!” said Pip. “Don’t you remember all

the mysteries we've solved? I daresay we'll find out another and solve it *these* hols!"

"_If_ one turns up!" said Bets.

Don't worry, Bets. Things always happen when Fatty is around. I don't expect you will have to wait *very* long before a nice "juicy" mystery looms up for every one of you!

2 - DOWN IN FATTY'S WORKROOM

Bets felt excited when at last the time came to go to the first Meeting of the holidays. Her mother had not allowed her to race off immediately after dinner, but had sent both her and Pip up to their playroom.

"I don't know if you think that what you did this morning to tidy up the room was anything *like* enough," she said. "Throwing things higgledy-piggledy into corners and cupboards isn't *my* idea of clearing up. Please do the job properly before you go!"

"Oh *blow!*" said Pip, exasperated. "Now we shall be late. Come on. Bets, you do your share."

It was soon done, and they raced off down the garden path, happy to be on their way to Fatty's house. They joined up with Larry and Daisy, and were soon in Fatty's workroom at the bottom of his garden well away from everyone, and *almost* out of range of any shout from the house!

"Grown-ups want an awful lot of things done if you're within shouting distance, you know," Fatty said. "But if they have to go and *fetch* you, they're sure to decide it's too much bother - so they do the things themselves!"

The shed was certainly well tucked away, and very, very comfortable. An oil-stove gave quite enough warmth and on the floor was an old tiger-skin, complete with its head. Bets had been scared at first of its open mouth, showing such fierce teeth, and of its glassy eyes - but now she didn't mind it a bit, and often sat on the great head itself.

"This tiger is getting a bit moth-eaten," she said. "We ought to powder him - that's what Mother does to *our* fur-rugs. Oh, Fatty - you've still got the old crocodile skin stretched on the wall too. I do think this is a most exciting shed. It's lovely to be back again, after so long at school."

"Nice to have you here, little Bets," said Fatty, in the "special" voice he sometimes kept for the little girl. "Be careful the old tiger doesn't nip you!"

"Woof," said Buster at once, and showed his teeth.

"He says *he'd* nip the tiger if he did a thing like that!" said Bets, and cuddled Buster round the neck.

"Got anything to eat, Fatty?" asked Larry. "I had quite a good dinner, but somehow I always feel hungry when we meet down here."

"There are some chocolate biscuits in the cupboard," said Fatty, who invariably seemed to be provided with a vast variety of good food, wherever he was. "By the way, please look firmly the other way if Buster tries to beg any food from you. He is on a diet - slimming, you know. He over-ate himself while he was away. Too many cats about!"

"But surely he hasn't begun to eat *cats!*" said Daisy, shocked.

"No, ass! But with plenty of cat-dishes around always ready to be licked clean, he did far too well," said Fatty. "Buster, stand up. Show your tubby figure - oh what a middle you've landed yourself with

disgraceful!”

Buster certainly had a tummy. His tail dropped when Fatty scolded him, and he went sadly into a corner and curled himself up, eyeing the chocolate biscuits sadly. Bets felt very sorry for him. “I’ll just let him *lick* my chocolatey fingers, Fatty,” she said. “That’s all, I promise. I just can’t bear to see him looking so left-cut. Here you are, Buster - lick my fingers.”

Buster was pleased. He licked Bets’ fingers and then sat down as close to her as he possibly could. He loved kind-hearted little Bets. She put her arm round him again.

“Fatty - is this meeting about anything special?” she said. “I’d be just as pleased if there wasn’t any Mystery to solve at the moment, I mean - I do like mysteries, but I do like a bit of peace, too.”

“Well, really, Bets - don’t you *want* to belong to the Find-Outers?” said Daisy, quite amazed. “What’s the good of being a Find-Outer if you don’t want to find out anything?”

“Yes, I see all that,” said Bets. “But what I mean is - do we *have* to snoop round and look for problems and mysteries to solve - can’t we just not bother for once?”

“You mean - just play about and enjoy ourselves?” said Daisy. “Well - it does sound rather nice for a change. You know, Fatty, solving mysteries *can* be quite hard work.”

“Well, I’m rather inclined to agree with you,” said Fatty, lazily. “You know. I’ve just been staying with two cousins - both first-class footballers - first-class boxers - first-class cross-country runners - and first-class bores, to tell you the truth! My word, the excuses I had to think of to get out of kicking a football from morning to night - running for miles in shorts uphill and down - and putting on boxing-gloves and having sparring bouts. Thank goodness *that* didn’t last long - *q*the sparring. I mean.”

“Why - were you knocked out?” asked Larry.

“Knocked out! Don’t be fatheaded,” said Fatty. “The tiring part about the boxing was that *I* kept on doing the knocking-out - I tell you, it got boring!”

“You’re boasting, Fatty,” said Larry. “Ha - you’ll never get rid of *that* habit! That’s one thing you do better than any of us - boast! You’re superlative at that!”

“Don’t be rude, Larry!” said Daisy, shocked. “Why, Fatty might knock *you* out, if you talk like that!”

“No, I shan’t.” said Fatty. “Larry’s quite right. I do boast just a bit. On the other hand, I do actually do what I boast about. I really *did* knock out my two cousins. I’ll show you the blow I used. You swing out like this with your left, and then - ooh, sorry. Buster! What on earth made you get in the way? Did I hurt you?”

“Funny - you didn’t even knock *him* out,” said Larry irritatingly. Bets cuddled poor Buster, who had received a blow on his fat tummy that had quite winded him. He stared at Fatty unhappily, really puzzled.

“Listen,” said Pip. “Let’s go exploring a bit these hols. My father made a list of interesting spots we

could go to see. He said we shouldn't just mess about doing nothing, he said..."

"He *said* that - but what he really meant was that he didn't want you under his feet all the time," said Larry. "My father's like that too - I mean, he's an absolute sport, and I'm frightfully proud of him - and he is of me - but I do notice that after about ten days of the hols he always gets this idea of us going off for the day - not just one day, but every day. And *mine* made out a list too - here it is. I'll read it out."

He took a neatly written list from the pocket of his flannels and read from it. "Old Water-Caves at Chillerbing. Museum of Age-Old Fossils at Tybolds. Norman Tower at Yellow-Moss..."

"Gosh - those are down on *my* list too!" said Pip, scrabbling in his pocket for it. "Yes - all those are down - and two or three more. Roman Remains at Jackling Museum. Sea-pictures at Banshee Towers at the top of Banshee Hill. Old Musical Instruments at..."

"I don't want to see *any* of them!" said Bets, suddenly looking very woebegone. "I wouldn't so much mind the sea-pictures - I like sea-pictures - but I *don't* like those ugly fossil things, or those..."

"All right, Bets - you shan't spend lovely spring days in Museums or Norman Towers or Caves," said Fatty putting his arm round her. "But we might go and see Banshee Towers. You know why it's called that, don't you?"

Nobody knew. "Well," said Fatty, "a banshee means 'a woman of the fairies' - and it shrieks and wails when any misfortune or unhappiness comes to the family in whose house it lives."

"How very unpleasant," said Daisy, at once. "I'm very glad *my* family doesn't own a banshee. I should be scared stiff. Does Banshee Towers own a banshee, then?"

"I suppose it did once, when the family lived in it," said Fatty. "But now that it's a museum - or a picture-gallery or something - I expect the banshee has retired!"

"I don't want to go to see Banshee Towers if the banshee still lives there," said Bets, decidedly. "So you'll have to find out, Fatty."

"I honestly shouldn't worry," said Fatty. "It would be a pity to let an old-time 'woman of the fairies' frighten you from seeing wonderful sea-pictures. And I believe they really *are* wonderful!"

"Well, we'll make a few expeditions to show our parents that we really are not the lie-abeds they think we are," said Larry. "It should be rather fun, actually. We could picnic in these places - and I could use one of them for my holiday essay. It would be something to write about - especially the banshee howling. I hope it wails like anything when we're there!"

"I shan't go if it does," said Bets at once. "Hallo - who's that at the door? Golly, that loud knock made me jump!"

"Who's there?" demanded Fatty.

"It's me - Ern," said a well-known voice outside. "I've been sent to stay with my Uncle Theo - Mr Goon, you know - because one of my sisters has measles and I haven't had it - at least, Mum can't

remember me having it. Can I come in?"

"Of course I Come along in, Ern, we're all here," said Fatty, and opened the door. Ern stood there, shock-headed as ever and as plump as Fatty, grinning in delight to see his friends again. Buster at once made a great fuss of him.

"Coo, it's nice to see you all again," said Ern, sitting down on the floor and hugging the little Scottie. "I didn't want to come and stay with my uncle - I don't like him and he doesn't like me - but I don't mind putting up with him if you'll let me be with *you* now and again. Any mysteries going?"

"Not so far, Ern," said Fatty. "Help yourself to the chocolate biscuits, but DON'T give Buster any. He's slimming."

"Luvaduck - is he really?" said Ern. "I must say he feels a bit solid-like. You look a bit balloony too, Fatty."

"Ern - please remember your manners," said Fatty, in a shocked voice. "You must *not* refer to people as 'balloony'. You might easily get a smack on the nose."

"Oooh, I'm sorry, Fatty, *reeeely* sorry," said Ern. "Maybe I'll pick up a few good manners now I'm with you again. I seem to lose them, like, at 'ome. Er - I mean HOME."

"It's good to see you, Ern," said Fatty. "We are planning to go on some interesting rambles - and you shall come with us, if you like - if your uncle will let you."

"Coo - I'd like that!" said Ern. "Well. Uncle says I've got to Turn To and Look Nippy, and Not Get Under His Feet, and Use my Loaf..."

"Your *loaf*?" said Bets, in surprise. "Do you have a loaf of bread of your own, then?"

"You don't know much, do you?" grinned Ern, so delighted to be with his old friend again that his eyes shone like stars. "Using your 'Loaf' means using your brains, see?"

"Ah yes," said Fatty, gravely. "Well if we all intend to go sightseeing and learning about Banshees and Old Musical Instruments, and Roman Remains, we must ALL use our - er - loaves. Are we allowed any butter with them, Ern?"

But dear old Ern didn't see the joke, though the others roared in delight. Ern didn't mind. It was sheer happiness to him to be with Fatty, Bets, and the rest. They could pull his leg, correct him, laugh at him - they were his friends and he was theirs. Let them do whatever they liked, as long as he could be with them!

3 - BINGO - AND BUSTER!

It was fun to have Ern again. He enjoyed the company of the five friends so much, and entered into everything with the greatest delight. He sat listening intently as they went on discussing their plans for the next two or three weeks.

"I suppose I couldn't come with you sometimes?" he said, at last. "I daresay Uncle would let me off now and again. So long as I do the jobs he sets me, of course."

"Yes, if he's kind enough to have you to stay, you must certainly help him in any way you can," said Fatty "His garden, for instance. I passed it the other day - shocking! Full of weeds!"

"That's what my uncle said," agreed Ern, mournfully. "Trouble is - I dunno weeds from flowers. Oh, and there's another thing - he's letting me have my dog with me while I'm here. What do you think of *that*?"

"_Dog_? I didn't even know you had one, Ern," said Pip surprised.

"Well, he's a bit new, like," said Ern. "I've had him for three weeks. I'm trying to train him good and proper - like you've trained old Buster there, Fatty."

"Good!" said Fatty. "Very good. An untrained dog is a nuisance - nobody likes him. Where is this dog of yours - and what's he called? What kind is he?"

"I don't rightly know what kind he is," said Ern. "He's a bit of a mixture really; he's not very big - but he's got a mighty long tail with a mighty big wag in it - and nice ears that prick up like Buster's here and rather short legs. Pity about his legs, really - he looks comic when he runs, you see, and all the other dogs laugh at him."

"They don't!" said Bets disbelievingly.

"Well they stand and stare at him, and sort of wink at one another when he comes scuttering by," said Ern. "His name is Bingo - good name, isn't it? It suits him too - you wait till you've seen him. I like him an awful lot - it's the first time I've had a dog of my own. He's potty on me you know - thinks I'm the world's wonder!"

"Just like old Buster then," said Bets. "He thinks Fatty's the world's wonder, don't you Buster?"

"Woof!" said Buster, agreeing heartily. He went to Fatty and licked his chin, and then put his head on Fatty's knee, looking up at him adoringly.

"Loving old thing," said Fatty, and patted him. "Well Ern, I'm awfully glad you've a dog of your own. Good for the dog - and good for you, too. You'll like having someone who looks up to you and thinks that everything you do is right! But look after him well, won't you?"

"Where is this Bingo?" asked Larry.

"I've locked him in the wood-shed at Uncle's," said Ern. "You see - well, I didn't know if you'd like

me to bring him along. Buster mightn't like him."

"Rubbish!" said Fatty, getting up. "Any dog is a friend of Buster's if he belongs to one of us. Let's go and visit this dog of yours and take him for a walk."

"You're a real sport, Fatty," said Ern, his face glowing. "Come on, then."

They all went out of the shed and made their way to Peterswood Village, Buster dancing round in joy sniffing along the hedges, barking at a sparrow, wagging his tail without a stop.

"Is your uncle in a good temper today?" enquired Larry.

"So-so," said Ern, with a grin. "He smiled when I cleaned his big boots for him - and he frowned when I upset the milk. He doesn't know I've come to see you.",

"Why didn't you tell him?" asked Bets. "You're not *scared* of him, are you?"

"Oh, I'm proper scared of Uncle all right," said Ern. "Bit too free with his hands, he is. I'd like to have sixpence for every slap he's given me - I'd be rich by now - *swimming* in sixpences! I don't think he'd be too pleased if I go about with you too much, so I shan't tell him anything."

They came to Goon's little house, which stood not far from the police station. As soon as they opened the gate a terrific volley of blood-curdling howls greeted them, and something hurled itself against the wood-shed door.

"That's him - that's Bingo," said Ern, in pride. "I hope Uncle's out. He wouldn't like that noise at all. Hey, Bingo! I've brought friends to see you."

Buster the Scottie was astonished and rather alarmed to hear the extraordinary noise from the shed. He put his head on one side and pricked up his ears to sharp points. He gave a little growl.

"It's all right. Buster," said Ern. "That's my dog in there. Hey, Bingo, come along out!" And he slipped the catch of the door and opened it.

Out shot something at sixty miles an hour, gave one horrified look at the crowd of children, and disappeared at top speed through the gate.

"That's him!" said Ern, proudly, as Bingo shot down the road. "What do you think of him, Fatty?"

"Well, I really only caught sight of his tail," said Fatty. "But that certainly looked fine. Look out, here comes old Goon - your uncle, Ern. He looks pretty bad-tempered too."

Mr Goon had opened his front door, and was standing there in his uniform, helmet and all, glaring in his best manner.

"ERN! What's the matter with that dog of yours, barking like that? Has he gone mad or something? Where is he?"

"I don't know, Uncle," said Ern, truthfully. "He shot off at top speed. I only hope he hasn't gone back

to my home. He might catch measles, and come out in nasty spots.”

“You and your measles!” snorted Mr Goon. “I said you could have that dog if he behaved himself - and if I could borrow him at nights when I go down into the rough part of the town; but I tell you this straight, Ern - if he’s going to act silly, and bark at nothing, and rush off like a mad thing, I won’t have him. And you might tell him to keep away from my feet. He’s tripped me up twice already.”

“Oh, I’m very sorry about that, Uncle,” said Ern. “Er - I just brought my friends to see him.”

“Well, you can take them away again,” said Goon, ungraciously. “They may be your friends, but they’re not *mine* - especially Master Frederick Algernon Trotteville - pah!”

“Who’s he talking about?” said Ern, in wonder, as Goon went indoors and slammed the door.

“Me, I’m afraid,” said Fatty. “Those are my real names, you know, Ern. I try to forget them, though I can’t say I like my nickname either. Now - what about your dog Bingo, Ern? Where do you suppose he’s gone?”

“I don’t know,” said Ern, suddenly looking desperate. “I can’t think why he went off like that. I suppose my uncle went and shouted at him in the shed and gave him a lamming or something. Let’s go and look for him.”

But before they had gone more than a few steps, Mr Goon was at his door again, shouting for Ern.

“Ern! You come back! What about those jobs I gave you to do? You come back, I tell you.”

“Better go, Ern,” said Fatty. “Cheer up. We’ll have a look for old Bingo. He won’t have come to any harm.”

Ern went slowly back through the gate, looking angry and troubled. His thoughts were full of Bingo, his beloved dog. He might get run over! He might get lost! He might even be stolen. “He’s so friendly and good-natured, he would go with anyone,” thought poor Ern, and began to run as he heard a stentorian shout from inside the house.

“ERN! You come on IN! I’ve got to go to the police station, and I want you to peel the potatoes for supper and get things tidy. ERN!”

Poor Ern disappeared into the house. He longed to slam the door, just as Goon had done, but he didn’t dare.

The others walked slowly through the village, talking about Ern, and keeping a lookout for Bingo. There was no sign of him. Fatty thought he must have gone to find his way back to Ern’s own home. They decided to go to the bun-shop and have tea there. Buster was pleased. He knew that this usually meant a few tit-bits for him!

Just as they reached the bun-shop they heard a little whine - a very small and pathetic one. It seemed to come from the hedge nearby. Buster went at once to investigate. He slipped through the hedge and then gave a sharp bark.

“Buster - what is it? Come back!” called Fatty. Buster appeared again - with something trotting behind him - Bingo!

“BINGO!” said everyone, in astonishment, and Bingo wagged his long tail, went flat on his tummy, and began to crawl anxiously towards them, in a most humble manner.

“Poor Bingo!” said Bets, in her gentle voice, and at once Bingo shot over to her, pressed himself against her and gave a funny little high whine. He wagged his long tail so hard that it slapped against Bets’ legs, but she didn’t mind. She patted him and stroked him, and he went nearly mad with joy. Buster stood nearby and watched gravely.

“Well - you’re a bit of a comic, Bingo, I must say,” said Fatty, looking at him from all angles. “What a tail! Pity you didn’t have legs to match, old boy! But my word, you’ve real doggy eyes!”

Yes, Bingo had good, bright, faithful eyes, and a tongue always ready to lick any friend. The children decided that Ern was lucky. “What do you think of him, Buster?” said Fatty, seeing Buster standing and watching everything, his eyes, bright, his tail wagging just a very little.

“Woof,” said Buster, and went straight over to Bingo. He stood nose to nose with him, each sniffing at the other. Then Buster danced round Bingo, and Bingo gave a joyful bark, and away they went together, tearing down the road like mad things!

“Buster approves,” said Larry. “_I_ rather approve of him too. A comical dog, but a real little sport. Well, if we’re going to have tea at the bun-shop, what about it? And please don’t eat more than six buns, Fatty - you want to be able to squeeze out of the door again!”

In they all went, made for their favourite table, and sat down. Fatty, as usual, had plenty of money, and that meant a good tuck-in for everyone. In the middle of the meal, the door was pushed open with a heave, and in trotted the two dogs, panting, their mouths open as if they were both laughing!

“Buster - go and shut the door after you,” said Fatty sternly. “Have you forgotten your manners? Bingo, please notice that doors must be pushed shut, not left open, when you come in and out of rooms.”

“Wuff,” said Bingo, head on one side, listening carefully. He trotted over to the door and helped Buster to shut it, using both paws and nose.

“He’s ‘One of Us’ already!” said Larry. “I’m beginning to like you, Bingo, old thing. Now sit! Buster teach him how to sit. Gosh, look at that, Fatty - both sitting down side by side, as good as gold! We’re going to have some fun with old Bingo!”

4 - MR GOON LOSES HIS TEMPER

Ern had been very busy indeed while the others had gone to the village. Mr Goon was in one of his worst tempers. He always was when he had met Fatty, whom he disliked very much.

“That fat boy!” he said to Ern. “I don’t trust him an inch. Never did. It’s a pity he’s not as stupid as he looks. Too clever by half, he is!”

“He *doesn’t* look stupid, Uncle,” said Ern, emptying some potatoes into a bowl of water to peel. “How could he when he’s got such marvellous brains! You should hear him talk - luvaduck, he knows pretty well everything!”

“I’ll luvaduck *you* if you don’t get on with those potatoes, Ern,” said Mr Goon. “That fat boy’s a menace - yes, that’s the word for him - a menace!”

“What’s a menace, Uncle?” asked Ern. “Anything to do with manners? Sounds a bit the same.”

“I don’t know if you’re being rude, or just plain stupid, Ern,” said Mr Goon majestically. “But this I do know - you’ll get a clip on the ear soon.”

“And one of these days my dog will bite you if you clip me!” cried Ern, almost at the end of his tether. “Now Uncle - don’t you come any nearer. I’ll throw this bowl of potatoes over you, if you do!”

Ern looked so fierce that Goon retreated hurriedly. “Now, now,” he said, “don’t take things so seriously, Ern. Can’t you see a joke?”

“Depends who makes it,” said Ern, feeling suddenly victorious, then his spirits fell again as he remembered his dog. Where was old Bingo? Had he run away for ever? He sniffed a little as he went on peeling the potatoes, and when he remembered how Bingo ran to meet him and licked him lovingly each time he came home from school, a tear fell plop into the potato bowl.

“I’m a fathead - that’s what Fatty would call me,” thought Ern. “But I dunno - there’s something about a dog that gets you - specially if it’s your own.”

Mr Goon went off to the police station, his boots well polished by Ern, and his helmet and uniform well brushed. Ern was glad to see him go. As soon as his uncle was out of sight he thought he would whistle for Bingo - just to see if by *any* chance he would come.

So he whistled. Ern had a most piercing whistle, shrill, long and alarming. It made everyone within hearing jump in surprise and annoyance. Ern stood at the front gate and whistled for at least five minutes. No Bingo arrived - but a good many windows and doors were opened, and people began looking out to see if anything was the matter. They thought that it must be Goon blowing his police-whistle for help!

A small boy arrived, panting, at the front gate, “Any help wanted?” he asked. “We heard the police-whistle being blown.”

“That was only me whistling for my dog,” said Ern, astonished. Then, seeing people looking out of

windows and doors, he shot inside Goon's house in a hurry. "They'll tell Uncle I was using his police whistle," he thought desperately. "Luvaduck, what a day! Wish I was at home, measles and all!"

About half-past five Mr Goon returned home to see if Ern had put on the kettle and had made him some toast, as he had commanded. Fortunately for Ern, he had everything ready. Ern was right down in the dumps: no Fatty had come back, no Buster, no Bets - and certainly no Bingo. Ern didn't want any tea at all, a most unusual thing.

"This toast is burnt," said Mr Goon grumpily.

"It's not," said Ern. "It's just right. That's how my Ma likes it, anyway."

"And you've put too much tea in the pot," said Mr Goon, peering in, holding the lid in his hand. It was hot and he had to drop it very suddenly. It fell to the floor and broke. He glared at Ern as if *he* had dropped it!

Ern gave a sudden giggle, and his uncle went red in the face. "Pick them pieces up," he commanded, "and take that grin off your face, Ern."

"I can't. It's stuck there," said Ern, suddenly feeling cheeky.

"ERN!" said Mr Goon, in a terrifying voice, and stood up. Ern promptly stood up too, and ran to the door. He opened it and Goon came after him. Ern went down the hall to the front door and opened the door and then shot down the front path with his uncle on his heels - at exactly the same moment as Fatty and the rest, with Buster and Bingo, came in at the gate.

Somehow or other Mr Goon became mixed up with the two excited dogs as they raced towards the front door - and down he went with a thud. Bingo leapt up at the astonished Ern, and tried his hardest to lick him in as many places as he could, barking madly all the time. Buster, finding his old enemy, Goon, on the ground, and at his mercy, sailed in gleefully to the attack! It really was a sight to be seen!

"BINGO! You've come back!" shouted Ern in joy, and lifted up the delighted dog, who at once plastered his face with loving licks.

"CLEAR ORF, ALL OF YOU!" roared poor Mr Goon, trying to push Buster away. "I'll tell your parents of this! WILL you order this dog away, Frederick Trotteville? One of these days I'll clap you in a cell, yes, and the dog too. Get away, you brute! Lemme get up! Ern help me up."

It was Fatty who pulled the heavy policeman to his feet and dusted him down, murmuring apologies in a polite voice that simply infuriated Mr Goon!

"Bad luck, sir! Did you trip over your feet? I say, you'll scare the girls, if you roar like that. Buster, behave yourself. BUSTER! Are you deaf? Stop dancing round poor Mr Goon. Here, let me help you up, sir - up we come - that's it - upsadaisy. You all right now, Mr Goon?"

Mr Goon glared. He saw that quite a crowd had gathered round his front gate - and some of them were daring to laugh! Laughing at the Law! What were things coming to? Most majestically Mr Goon went to the gate and scowled at everyone there. "What's all this? Clear orf, now! You're creating a

nuisance, you are. Move on, there. MOVE ON!”

Only a few people moved away, Fatty felt sorry for poor Mr Goon. “Perhaps if you told them to Move OFF instead of Move ON, they’d understand better,” he suggested. “Let me help you, Mr Goon.” And Fatty waved an imperious hand and shouted in a suddenly enormous voice, “MOVE OFF, WILL YOU MOVE OFF!”

And, rather astonished, the lookers-on moved off at once. Fatty was rather astonished too - he hadn’t thought it would be so easy! Mr Goon was more than astonished. He was exceedingly angry.

“Think you’re in the police force now, do you?” he said, fiercely. “Well, what about *you* Moving Off or on - I don’t care which. Funny how trouble always comes when you’re about, isn’t it. Master Trotteville? Now I’m going back to finish my tea in peace and quiet. Clear orf, all of you! I’m sick of the sight of you. You get indoors, Ern - and take that dog to the wood-shed. Tripping me up like that. You can consider him arrested and put into a cell, see? And there he’ll stay out in the wood-shed, night and day!”

“Oh *no*, Uncle - that would be cruel!” said Ern, upset. “Fatty, tell him. He might listen to you. You can’t lock up a dog, night and day.”

“All right then, you go home!” stormed Mr Goon. “I do a kindness and take you in - and that fatheaded dog too - and this is what happens. Go on home! Catch the measles!”

Ern didn’t know what to do - but Fatty did. He whispered something in Ern’s ear, and Ern’s face broke into a delighted smile. He took hold of Fatty’s hand and shook it hard. “You’re a friend, Fatty - yes, that’s what you are, a friend,” said Ern warmly. “I’ll go and get my things straightaway. Would you mind Bingo for me, till I come out? Uncle’s in such a temper, he might whip him. WHAT a pity he tripped over Bingo!”

Bets and Daisy had been very scared by all the upset, but the boys had rather enjoyed it. Fatty couldn’t help feeling a little sorry for Mr Goon. The policeman did not shine when things went wrong; but Fatty felt sure he would be sorry and feel guilty when he had had time to ponder over things. That was the worst of a hot temper - it led you into doing silly, rash things you were sorry for afterwards - and then it was probably too late.

Ern had disappeared into his uncle’s bouse. He was there about three minutes and then came out again carrying a canvas bag. Bingo trotted joyfully over to him. Ern was beaming all over his round face.

“Where are you going, Ern?” asked Bets, in surprise. “Home? But you can’t go there, with measles about!”

They all went out of the gate together, leaving Mr Goon staring after them. He was just beginning to wish that he hadn’t lost his temper.

“Ern, come back! You come and apologize and I’ll let you stay!” he shouted.

“Sorry, Uncle,” shouted back Ern. “I can’t stay where I’m not wanted - or where my dog will be locked up night and day. Sorry, Uncle!”

“Where’s Ern going?” asked Pip.

“He’s going to stay in my workroom till his family are clear of the measles,” said Fatty. “_And_ Bingo as well. Nice dog, Bingo. Be good for Buster to have company too. The workroom is nice and warm, and I can put a camp-bed there. But nobody is to know, see? You are all to Keep Your Mouths Shut. Ern is our friend, and we’ve got to stand by him.”

“Oh *good*, Fatty! You always think of some fine way out of things when they go wrong.” said Bets, squeezing Fatty’s arm. “Ern, are you pleased?”

“Pleased? I feel like a tail with two dogs,” said Ern, looking down at Buster and Bingo trotting amicably together. “No, I mean a dog with two tails. Coo luvaduck - wasn’t poor old Uncle in a temper - all because he fell over Bingo! To think I’m going to stay in your workroom. Fatty - I feel honoured, straight I do! You’re a friend - and I can’t say more than that, can I?”

“No, that’s about the best thing anyone can say about anyone else,” said Fatty, with one of his grins. He gave Ern a little punch in the back. “I bet I’ll say that about *you* someday, Ern!”

Ern glowed. He looked round gratefully at the little bunch of friends walking with him. Yes, that was about the best thing that could happen to anyone - to Have Friends, whether they were two-legged or four-legged.

“And to BE a friend to someone is just as good,” thought Ern. “Well - maybe it’s even better. I’ll have to ask Fatty about it sometime. He’s sure to know!”

5 - FATTY IS A REAL FRIEND!

The little company went in at the back gate of Fatty's garden, and trooped down to the shed - Fatty's cosy little workroom. The two dogs trotted along amicably together, Bingo occasionally giving Buste a friendly lick. Bingo's tail never stopped wagging or waving.

"You'll wear it out if you're not careful, Bingo." said Ern, as they went in close file down the path, Bingo's tail slapping against the nearest legs. Bets laughed. She didn't feel scared any longer - just pleased and excited. She was glad that Ern had got away from unkind Mr Goon. It would be nice to have him at their meetings.

The workroom felt warm when they opened the door, and was full of a golden light from the sinking sun.

"Well, here we are once more," said Fatty. "Get out the toffees, Bets - they're in that cupboard. I'll just go up to the house and see if I can find a camp-bed - or a spare mattress, if not."

He disappeared, and Bets went to find the toffees. Trust Fatty to have something to chew or suck or drink! Good old Fatty to think about rescuing poor Ern!

Fatty was in the middle of hunting about for a camp-bed when his mother appeared. She was astonished to see him in the lumber-room. "What in the world do you want, Fatty?" she said.

"Er - well, I just wondered if there was a camp-bed to spare," said Fatty.

"A *camp*-bed? Whatever for?" said his mother. "Fatty, I will NOT allow you to sleep out in the garden yet! You'd catch your death of cold!"

"Mother dear, I'm not *thinking* of such a thing!" said Fatty. "I like my own warm bed much too much to want to shiver outside, with beetles and frogs and ants all over me. I just wondered if we *had* a camp-bed to spare, that's all."

"Fatty, why are you so mysterious about it?" asked his mother. "Look at me! Why this sudden idea of a camp-bed?"

"Darling Mother, you are always so *curious*," said Fatty, taking her hand. "Can't you trust me? I don't want to sleep on it. I don't want to sell it. I don't even want to take it off the premises. I just want to *borrow* it. I'm afraid if I told you *why* I want it, someone might ask you questions and then you'd answer - and someone else might suffer. Please trust me. Mother, and believe that, like the Boy Scouts, I am about to do a Good Deed!"

"I never in my life knew anyone who could wheedle things out of me like you, Frederick," said his mother, beginning to laugh. "All right - I won't ask you any questions. I'll trust you - as I always do, dear! There's a spare camp-bed in the cupboard under the stairs."

"Bless you, Mother, you're a pet," said Fatty, and gave her a smacking kiss on the cheek. He went to the cupboard and found the camp-bed. In no time at all he had carried it down the garden, unseen, and Larry was helping him to take it through the door of the shed.

~~“Did you have any bother getting it?”~~ asked Larry. ~~“I always have to go into long, long explanations when I want to borrow anything like a camp-bed.”~~

“No. Fortunately my mother trusts me as much as I trust *her*,” said Fatty, putting up the camp-bed with Ern. “Nothing like trust in a family! I can recommend it thoroughly.”

Ern stared at Fatty. What queer things Fatty sometimes said - but they were worth remembering. Ern thought. “Nothing like trust in a family.” That meant trusting one another. There was quite a lot in the idea. Ern decided to think about it when he was in bed. He felt excited when he saw the camp-bed neatly made up in a corner of the workroom.

“Luvaduck!” he said. “It’s a miracle, this! Me sleeping here, all on my own, safe as houses, and my uncle not knowing a thing about it. I don’t know how to thank you enough, Fatty, that I don’t.”

“Well, don’t try,” said Fatty. “Bets, did you find the toffees - ah yes, I see a lump in your cheek, and one in Pip’s.”

“Fatty, can we do anything to help Ern?” asked Bets. “I mean - bring food, or something like that. Cook will always give us bits and pieces.”

“Well, I vote we all bring what we can, without arousing any *suspensions*,” said Fatty. “Ern had better send a postcard to his mother, saying ‘Getting on fine, quite happy’, or something like that - in case Goon tells her that he’s sent Ern off. But I don’t somehow think he will! He’ll imagine that Ern has rushed back home, with awful tales about him!”

“I’m going to enjoy myself,” said Ern, bouncing up and down on the camp-bed. “Wish *I* could do something for somebody - you, Bets, for instance. I’d do anything, reely I would!”

“I’ve no doubt your chance will come someday,” said Fatty. “Now, what about a game? Or shall we first of all decide what expeditions we are going to make this week?”

“It sounds as if we were explorers or something,” said Pip. “How nice to be able to say ‘What about exploring the Sahara, old man?’ Or ‘I think we should row down the Nile and count the number of crocodiles there, dear fellow’!”

The others chuckled. “Well, let’s take a vote on where we should go first,” said Fatty, taking two sheets of paper from a shelf. “Here are the lists made out by Pip’s father and Larry’s - together with a few notes of my own. I think we’ll take a vote as to which two places we would prefer to visit. We can always go and see the others afterwards, if we want to.”

He read out the list of places. “Well, there you are. Now just choose two of those, each of you, and scribble them down, fold your papers in half and give them to me. I’ll open them and see which place the majority of us want to visit.”

Soon they were all busy. Bets asked how to spell “Banshee” so everyone at once knew *one* of her choices! The notes were handed to Fatty and he opened them.

“Well, the two places that the majority of you want to see are: the old Water-Caves at Chillerbing -

and Banshee Towers on Banshee Hill. Bets, I'm surprised *you* put down Banshee Towers. I thought you'd be scared of any places connected with banshees wailing in the night!"

"Fatty, I only chose Banshee Towers because you said there were magnificent sea-pictures there," said Bets. "I won't go if there are *still* banshees, though - unkind fairies wailing and foretelling horrible things! I'd hate that."

"Dear Bets, banshees only belong to fairy tales," said Fatty, seeing that Bets looked rather scared. "We shan't see or hear a single banshee - but we *shall* see a magnificent set of sea-pictures. I believe some of them reach from floor to ceiling. We shall feel quite seasick if we gaze at them too long."

"I shall take some seasick medicine with me, then," said Bets solemnly. "I've some left - a few pills."

Everyone roared with laughter. "I'm only teasing you, Bets," said Fatty. "I say - *do* look at those two dogs!"

They all turned to look - and there were Buster and Bingo, *both* squeezed into Buster's basket, fast asleep, so entangled that, as Larry said, "T'other couldn't be told from which!" Pip glanced at Fatty and Ern. Both had such pleased, admiring looks on their faces that Pip laughed.

"Look at Fatty and Ern," he said. "Did you ever see such dippy looks on any faces except dog-lovers?"

"Yes, I did - on yours on your birthday when Granny gave you two white rabbits!" said Bets at once. "You looked at them just like Auntie Sue looks when she goes to see if her twins are asleep! *Quite* dippy!"

That made Pip go red, and everyone laughed. "You're getting quite smart, young Bets," said Fatty. "Well, to come back to Banshee Towers. I see that four out of five have voted for that, so we'll go there. And three out of five have voted for the Water-Caves. So those are our first two expeditions."

"I voted for Banshee Towers, too," said Ern, to Bets. "I'm mad on sea-pictures. You see, I want to go into the Navy when I'm old enough, so I *had* to vote for the sea-picture place. And don't you worry about banshees. Bets. The moment I see one, I'll whistle like this, see, and I'll make them so scared they'll fly out of the window and never come back!" And Ern suddenly put two fingers into his mouth, screwed up his face, and gave a very sudden, very long and extremely piercing whistle. It made everyone jump violently, and the two dogs in the basket leapt straight up into the air as if they had been shot.

Buster barked and Bingo howled, and both dogs tore round and round the room after imaginary enemies. Ern was quite overcome at the commotion he had caused.

Fatty glared at him. "ERN! Do you want to bring all the policemen in the neighbourhood here? That whistling of yours is EXACTLY like a police-whistle. You'll have my father and my mother down here if you don't lookout."

"Luvaduck!" muttered Ern, trying to catch Bingo as he tore past him for the third time, really scared.

Fatty heard a shout from somewhere outside, and groaned. "Somebody *is* coming!" he said. "Switch off the light, Bets, quick - the switch is just behind you. Shut up barking, Buster, you ass. Now - no

noise, anyone. We'll sit here in the dark and hope nobody comes to find out what on earth we are doing here. SHHHHHHHH!"

Not a sound was to be heard in the darkened room except some rather heavy breathing from a scared Ern. Suppose he was found here by his uncle or somebody and sent home? Ern wished and wished that he hadn't shown Bets how he proposed to frighten a banshee.

After five minutes had ticked by, Fatty judged it safe to put on the lights again. As he did so, there came the sound of a gong from his house, away up the garden. He groaned.

"That's my supper bell. Where *has* the evening gone to? I'll have to go. You and Pip ought to go too, Bets."

"Gosh, and so had we!" said Larry, pulling Daisy to her feet. "Good thing our father and mother are out tonight, and there's only Cookie to see to us. Goodnight everyone. Sleep well, Ern. So long, Bingo dog. Be good!"

"Wuff," said Bingo, pleased to hear his name. He accompanied everyone to the door, his tail wagging nineteen to the dozen. The two dogs gave each other a quick lick, and Buster trotted up the garden with Fatty.

Ern was left alone in the shed. He was astonished to hear Bingo growling softly twenty minutes later, and horrified to hear soft footsteps coming to the door. His heart sank. Was it his uncle, coming to fetch him? But how could he *possibly* know where he, Ern, was? The door opened and a torch shone in, lighting up the darkness in which Ern sat. Ern trembled and shook, feeling most alarmed.

"Ern! It's me, Fatty. I've come to bring you some supper - and to tell you there's a torch in the table drawer, if you want to see to eat or to read. I shan't be able to come down again to the shed tonight, so goodnight, and sleep well. I'll bring you some breakfast in the morning."

"Coo, thanks, you're a wonder, Fatty," said the grateful Ern, and took the tray that Fatty handed in.

"There's a bone for old Bingo, from Buster," said Fatty, giving him a paper bag. "So long, Ern. See you tomorrow!"

"So long," said Ern, gratefully, and sat down to eat a nice piece of fried fish, mashed potatoes and greens. He gave the bone to Bingo, who was thrilled. He made such a noise gnawing it that Ern felt sure it could be heard for miles around!

"Bingo, old dog - are you enjoying this?" said Ern when at last he had undressed and slipped under the rug that Fatty had left for the camp-bed. "Come on under the rug with me - we'll keep each other warm. That's right. Snuggle down. Goodnight!"

Goodnight, Ern and Bingo. You're quite safe, though Somebody has peeped in at the window, and knows you are there! Don't worry: it was only the black cat next door - and she fled as soon as she saw Bingo! Sleep tight!

6 - OFF TO BANSHEE HILL

Ern had a happy, but very restless night. Bingo kept imagining that he heard rats running round outside the shed, trying to get in, and leapt on and off the camp-bed every few minutes, rushing to sniff round the corners of the shed, his long tail waving in excitement.

“Bingo! I’d much rather have rats nibbling my toes than you jumping off and on my tummy all night long,” said Ern at last. “For goodness sake come and lie down.”

Tired out at last, Bingo cuddled under the rug and fell asleep. Era put an arm round him and went to sleep too, dead to the world until morning.

He awoke to hear a stealthy knocking on the door and flew out of bed to open it. Fatty was there - good old Fatty - his pockets bulging. Buster was with him, and immediately went to rub noses with Bingo.

“Hallo, Ern,” said Fatty, pushing his way in quickly to prevent the excited Bingo from rushing out. “Got to be a bit careful - Gardener’s here this morning, and he’d better not see you in the shed. He might tell Goon!”

“I’ll be very careful, then,” said Ern, as Fatty pulled a hastily-wrapped packet from one pocket, and some apples from another.

“Here you are, Ern,” he said. “Best I could do for the moment. I didn’t dare to take too much from the larder, but there were plenty of eggs, so that was something. How’s old Bingo? Was he good last night?”

“Well, he seemed to be hunting round for rats for *hours*,” said Ern, unwrapping the packet Fatty gave him. “Coo - hard-boiled egg sandwiches - smashing! And two buttered rolls - with honey inside! You’re a brick, Fatty, straight you are.”

“You’ll find some little bottles of lemonade in that cupboard,” said Fatty. “And an opener too. I daren’t bring you a pot of tea. Mother would start asking questions!”

Ern sat happily munching his egg sandwiches, a glass of lemonade beside him, with Bingo sitting expectantly at his feet. Buster went sniffing at the bottom of a second cupboard, and Fatty laughed.

“He knows a packet of his biscuits is kept there, and he wants to give old Bingo some,” said Fatty, getting up. “Am I right, Buster, old thing?”

“Woof!” said Buster, dancing round excitedly, his tail wagging, Bingo joined him, having heard the word biscuits! Soon he and Buster were amiably sharing a packet, crunching up the biscuits in delight.

Buster was overjoyed to have Bingo to play with. He suddenly went completely mad and began to run round and round the room at top speed, barking wildly. Bingo joined him, and the two boys hurriedly leapt out of the way.

“Shut up, Buster,” said Fatty. “Don’t do your racehorse gallop in here. Gosh, there goes the lemonade! BUSTER! Have you gone completely mad?”

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