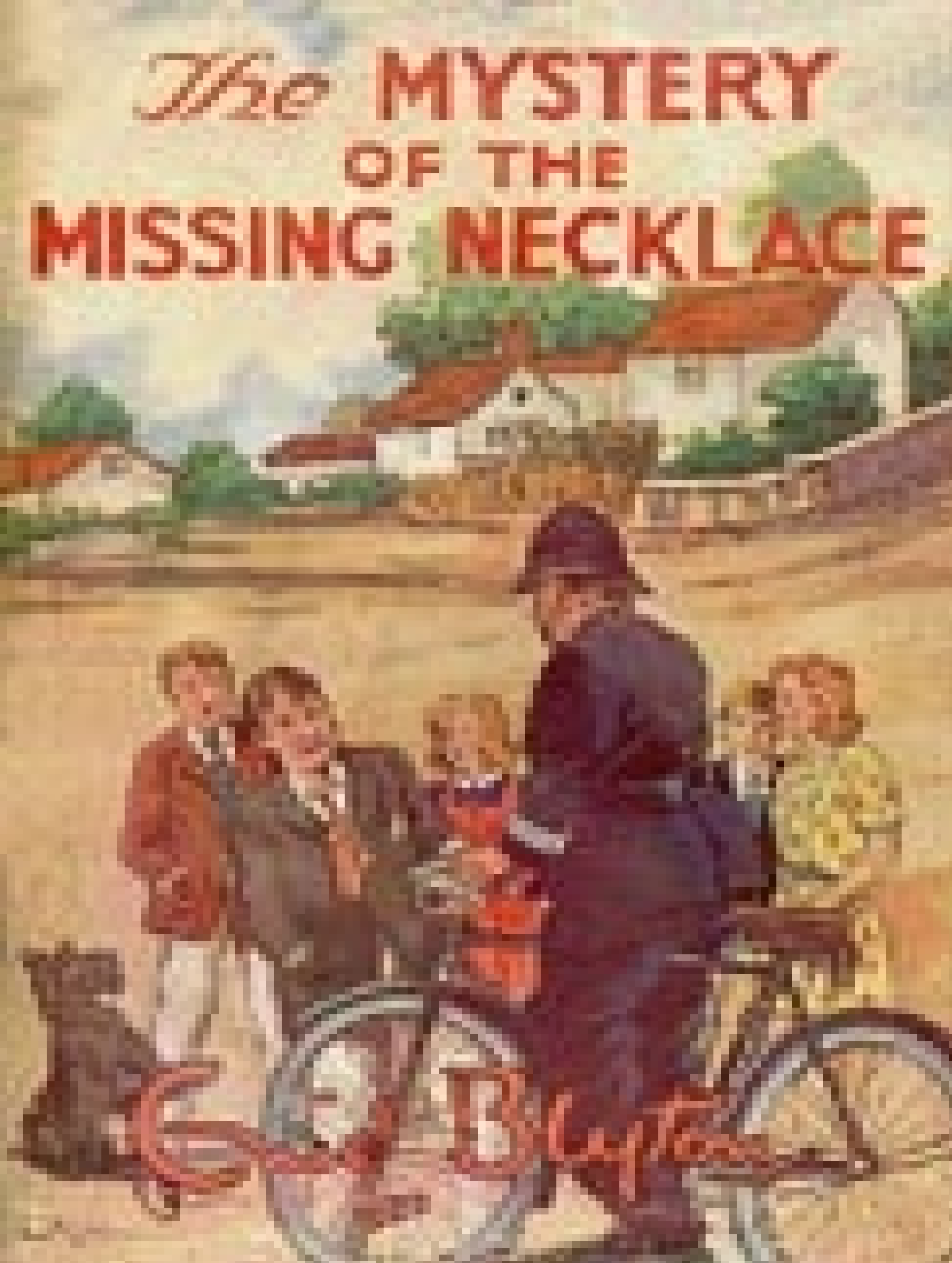


The MYSTERY
OF THE
MISSING NECKLACE



Mystery05—Mystery of the Missing Necklace, The—Blyton, Enid.

Oh, for a Mystery!

Pip and Bets sat in their garden, in the very coolest place they could find, They had on sun-suits and nothing else, for the August sun was blazing hot.

"A whole month of the summer hols gone already!" said Pip. "And except that we've been away to the seaside for two weeks, absolutely nothing else has happened. Most boring."

"The boringest hols we've ever had," said Bets. "Not even the smell of a mystery to solve I And not even Larry, Daisy, Fatty, or Buster to play with—they've been away at the sea for ages!"

Larry and Daisy were friends of Pip and Bets, and so was Frederick—or Fatty as everyone called him—Buster was his Scottie dog, loved by all the children.

The five children called themselves the Five Find-Outers and Dog, because for the last four holidays they had tackled curious mysteries and solved them all—much to the annoyance of the village policeman, Mr. Goon.

"But now it seems as if you and I, Pip, are the only Find-Outers left," said Bets. "I don't feel as if the others will ever come back! Soon the hols will be over, you'll all be back at boarding-school again, except me, and we shan't solve any mystery at all these hols."

"There are still four weeks left, so cheer up, baby!" said Pip. "And the others come back this week—and I bet old Fatty will have heaps of new disguises to try

out on us! We'll be on the look-out for him this time, though—and we jolly well won't be taken in!"

Bets laughed. She remembered how Fatty had disguised himself as a French boy, and deceived them all beautifully. And in the last holidays he had produced all kinds of disguises, which he wore with a red wig and eyebrows. There was no knowing what old Fatty would be up to next!

"But *this* time he won't deceive us," said Pip again. "I shall be very suspicious of any peculiar-looking stranger who tries to talk to me, or comes to call on us. I shall say to myself, 'It's you all right, Fatty, and I shan't listen to a word!'"

"Do you think there will be a mystery for us to solve these hols?" asked Bets. "I do so like looking for

clues, and making out lists of Suspects, and crossing people off the list when we've made enquiries—and finding the real Suspect at the end!"

"We've been jolly lucky so far," said Pip, sitting up and looking round for the bottle of lemonade he had brought out. "We've been able to solve every single mystery. We can't always be successful, though. I don't expect even real detectives are always successful. Bets, you pig, you've finished the lemonade. Go and ask Gladys for some iced water."

Bets was too lazy to move. She rolled over out of Pip's reach, and yawned loudly. "I'm bored! I want the others to come back so that we can have games with them. I want a mystery—a really good one. And I want to solve it before Old Clear-Orf does!"

Old Clear-Orf was Mr. Goon the policeman. He told children and dogs to "clear-orf" whenever he saw them. He disliked all the Find-Outers intensely, and never

had a good word to say for them. Pip and Bets hadn't seen much of him in the summer holidays, and were very glad, for he had often been to their parents to complain of the behaviour of the Five Find-Outers. Bets was afraid of him, because when he lost his temper he shouted, and was very unpleasant indeed.

"Bets, didn't you hear me tell you to go in and fetch some iced water?" said Pip crossly. "Go on!"

"I'm not going to be ordered about by you," said Bets, rolling a bit farther away. "I suppose you order all the little boys about in your school, and then when you come home you think you can order me about too. Well, I shall soon be ten, and you're not to!"

"Don't you cheek me, young Bets!" said Pip, sitting up. "You're much younger than I am, and you've got to do as you're told! Go and get that iced water—or I'll catch you and give you a jolly good smacking."

"I think you're a horrid brother to have," said Bets. "I'd much rather have Fatty. He's always kind to me!"

"He wouldn't be, if you were his sister," said Pip. "He hasn't got any sisters—if he had, he'd know what a nuisance they are. Now—are you going to go and ..."

"Yes, I'll get it!" said Bets, getting up, "but only because *I'm* thirsty, and *I* want some to drink, see? I don't mind bringing you out a little too, as I'm going to get some for myself, but I'm really going for myself, and..."

Pip pretended to be getting up, and Bets fled. If only the others would come back! She and Pip were getting tired of one another.

Bets hadn't long to wait before the others came back. In two days' time Larry, Daisy, Fatty, and Buster all turned up together, looking so brown that Pip and Bets

had to gaze earnestly at them to make sure they really were their friends. Buster wasn't brown, of course—he was still jet-black, and he flung himself on Pip and Bets in joy and delight, barking and licking and whining as if he had gone mad.

~~"Buster, darling! You're fatter! Oh, Larry, I'm glad you're back! Daisy, you're terribly brown. And oh, Fatty—you've grown!"~~

Fatty certainly had grown in the last four months. He was still plump, but he was taller, taller even than Larry now, and much taller than Pip, who didn't seem to have grown at all in the last year.

"Hallo, every one!" he said, and Bets gave a cry of surprise.

"Fatty! You've got a different voice! It's a grown-up voice! Are you putting it on—disguising it, I mean?"

"No," said Fatty, pulling Bets' hair teasingly. "It's just broken, that's all."

"Who broke it?" said Bets, in alarm, and the others roared at her till their sides ached.

"She'll never be anything but a baby!" said Pip. "Never."

Bets looked so upset and puzzled that Fatty put his arm round her and gave her a squeeze. "Bets, don't be silly. You know that when they grow up, boys get deep voices like men's, don't you? Well, when boys' voices change Eke that we say that their voices *break*—that's an. We don't mean broken in half, or smashed to pieces!"

"Oh, Fatty—I don't know you with such a deep voice," said Bets, half-alarmed. "You don't sound the same. You *look* like Fatty—but you don't sound like

him! I wish you had your old voice."

"Bets, you've no idea what a difference it makes to me, now I've got a proper grown-up voice," said Fatty earnestly. "It means that I can disguise myself as a grown-up instead of always like some kind of boy! It gives me much more scope—and I've got some fine grown-up disguises!"

Bets immediately changed her mind about not liking Fatty's new voice. More disguises! Now life would be exciting and thrilling and unexpected things would happen. Fatty would disguise himself as all kinds of grown-up people—the Find-Outers would have a simply gorgeous time. She stared at Fatty happily.

"Oh, Fatty! You've only been able to dress up as telegraph boys or butcher boys or messenger boys before! Now you can be all kinds of things—old men with beards—a postman—a dustman—a window-cleaner with a ladder—even a sweep! Oh, Fatty, do be all those things and let's see you!"

Every one laughed. "Give me a chance!" said Fatty. "I'm going to practise a bit these hols. I didn't have much chance whilst I was away, because Mother wouldn't let me take much luggage—but I don't mind telling you I'm going to collect a few things now! I've got taller too, so I can almost wear grown-ups' things. By the time our next mystery comes along I shall be able to tackle it in whatever disguise is necessary."

"You do sound grown-up," said Bets. "Doesn't he, everybody?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Fatty, swelling up a little with pride, "I'm the tallest boy in my form now, and you should just see the muscles in my arms. I'll show you!"

"Same old Fatty!" said Larry. "Best in everything, aren't you? Nobody to beat you!"

Fatty grinned and peeled off his shirt. He bent his arm and showed them how his muscles came up in a big lump. Bets looked on in awe, but Larry and Pip did not seem to be much impressed.

"Fair!" said Larry. "I've seen better ones on a boy of twelve!"

"Huh! You're jealous!" said Fatty, good-humouredly. "Now then—let's hear any Peterswood news, Pip and Bets. The village seemed pretty crowded when I came through it just now."

"Too jolly crowded for anything!" said Pip. "This hot weather is drawing the people to *the* river in their hundreds! We get motor-coaches all day long—and down by the river there are all sorts of shows to amuse the people when they get tired of the river, or it's raining."

"What sort of shows?" asked Fatty, lying down on the grass, and tickling Buster on his tummy. "Any good?"

"Not much," said Pip. "There's a Waxwork Show—pretty dull really—you know, figures made of wax, all dressed up—and there are those Bumping Motor-Cars—they're quite fun for the first two or three times you go in them...."

"And a Hoopla game," said Bets. "You buy three wooden rings for twopence, and you try to throw them over any of the things arranged on a big round table—and if the ring goes right over anything, you can have whatever you've ringed. I like that game."

"You would!" said Pip. "She spends a whole shilling on hiring the wooden rings—and then wins a mouldy

little brooch worth a penny, that Mother can't bear and won't let her wear!"

"Well, Pip, you spent tenpence once, and you didn't win a thing!" began Bets hotly. But Fatty interrupted.

"Sounds as if Peterswood is going quite gay!" he said. "Well have to make up a party and go down to see all these shows one wet afternoon. If it ever *is* wet again!"

"Fatty, will you go in one of your new grown-up disguises?" asked Bets excitedly. "Oh, do! It would be lovely to see you acting like a grown-up, and taking everybody in!"

"I'll see," said Fatty. "I'd like to take in Old Clear-Orf, I must say! He's up to all my boy-disguises now—he'd see through them at once—but I bet he wouldn't see through a grown-up disguise!"

"What will you go as?" asked Daisy.

"Don't know," said Fatty. "And listen, all of you—if you can get any old things of your fathers'—you know, old hats they don't want, or boots, or even old coats—they'd come in mighty useful for me. I'm

afraid if I take too many of my father's things, he'll be annoyed. Mother doesn't let him keep any of his old things, she gives them away—so he's only got rather newish clothes."

"We'll do what we can," promised Larry, and Pip nodded too. Anything to help old Fatty to disguise himself! Bets sighed with joy to think that Fatty was back again. Now life would really be exciting once more. And oh, if *only* a mystery turned up, how heavenly the rest of the hols would be!

Mr. Goon is Very Annoying.

It was lovely to be all together again, day after day. The Five bathed in the river, went for long bicycle rides, lazed in the garden, squabbled, drank pints of iced drinks, and ate hundreds of ices. Buster liked both lemonade and ices and had his full share. He got rather fat and Pip teased him.

"You're too fat to go after rabbits, Buster!" he said. "Why, even a mouse would escape you now. You don't walk any more, you waddle. You don't breathe, you wheeze! You..."

"Oh, don't tease him so," said Bets, who was always quite certain that Buster could understand every single word said to him. "He *doesn't* waddle. I bet if he saw Old Clear-Orf this very minute he'd be after him like a shot!"

"By the way, what's happened to Goon?" asked Fatty. "I saw him yesterday, in a great hurry and looking frightfully important."

"Probably solving some Mystery we don't know anything about," said Larry gloomily. "There have been a lot of burglaries lately, and perhaps Goon is getting at the bottom of them."

"Yes—but the burglaries haven't been in his district," said Fatty. "They've mostly been miles away. I've read about them in the paper. Lady Rexham's jewels were stolen only last week—and somebody else's famous diamonds the week before. It's a clever gang of thieves—but they're not working this district, as far as I know."

"I wish they were!" said Bets. "Then we could catch them. You could put on one of your new disguises, Fatty, and track them down."

"It's not as easy as all that, little Bets, and you know it!" said Fatty, with a laugh. "You just think of all the difficulties we had in our other mysteries."

"We haven't seen you in any grown-up disguise yet, Fatty," said Daisy. "Do put one on, so that we can spot you in it, if we can."

"I've been practising in my bedroom," said Fatty. "I don't want to try anything out on you till I'm perfect. I'll try it on you when I'm ready, I promise. And I'll give my second-best propelling-pencil to any one of you that spots me first, see?"

"Oooh, Fatty—the pencil that can write in lead, or in red, or in blue?" said Bets. "Can you really spare it?"

"I'll certainly give it to any of the Find-Outers if they're bright enough to spot me in my first grown-up

disguise," said Fatty. "It's a bargain!"

"I bet I'll spot you first," said Larry. "The girls won't, I'm sure. Pip might—but I'll be first!"

"We'll have to leave Buster behind when we try to-do the spotting," said Pip. "Or hell simply rush up to you and bark madly to tell every one it's you!"

"Yes. Buster's out of this," said Fatty, and Buster cocked up his ears at his name. "Sorry, Buster, old boy—but tomorrow you must stay at home with the cat." "Oh, Fatty—are you going to dress up tomorrow?" asked Bets, in delight. "Really tomorrow? Well, you won't deceive *me!* I shall look at every one with an eagle eye!"

"Right," said Fatty. "But all the same—I have a feeling that my propelling-pencil will still be safely in my pocket tomorrow night! You may be quite good Find-Outers—but I'm a bit cleverer than any of you!"

"You're certainly best at boasting!" said Larry. "That trumpet of yours must be quite worn out by now."

"What trumpet?" said Bets, in curiosity. "I've never seen Fatty with a trumpet."

"No, but surely you've heard him blowing his own trumpet?" said Larry. "It's deafening at times! It's..."

And then Fatty sat up and flung himself on Larry and there was a great deal of shouting and yelling and squealing, with Buster plunging into the middle of the brawl and getting wildly excited too.

Mrs. Hilton, Pip's mother, appeared. "Children! You do know I've visitors in the garden, surely? If you want to yell and squeal and fight, will you go somewhere else? What about a nice walk?"

"Oh *Mother*—it's too hot for a walk!" groaned Pip.

"Well, I should have thought it was much too hot to fight," said Mrs. Hilton disapprovingly. "Really, Larry and Frederick, you look very dirty and untidy!"

"Sorry, Mrs. Hilton," said Fatty meekly, and Larry tried to smooth his hair down. "Well go for a walk. I forgot you had people to tea in the garden. I really do apologize."

Fatty had marvellous manners with grown-up people, and Mrs. Hilton began to smile again. "Go down to the dairy and get yourselves an ice-cream each," she said. "That will get rid of you for a bit. Here's the money, Pip."

"Oh thanks, Mother," said Pip, and they all got up, pleased. It was the fourth ice-cream that day, but it

didn't seem worth while mentioning that to Mrs. Hilton. Fatty's mother had already provided ice-creams and so had Larry's, and Fatty had generously given them one each as well. Now this was the fourth lot. Goody!

They walked sedately down the garden and round the drive to the gates. They went to the dairy, which

made real cream-ices that were most delicious, and sat down at the little table in the window to eat them.

Mr. Goon passed by on his bicycle as they sat there. He pedalled furiously, his face hot and red.

"Spot of hard work for Goon," said Fatty, letting a cold spoonful of ice-cream slide as slowly down his throat as possible. "Looks busy, doesn't he?"

Before they had finished their ices, Goon came pedalling back again, as furiously as before. The police-station was just opposite the dairy, and the children watched the policeman go smartly up the steps. Then they saw his head behind the frosted window-pane of one of the rooms in the police-station, talking to somebody else. Goon was talking the most and was nodding vigorously.

"Never seen Goon so busy before!" said Fatty, in astonishment. "Do you think he's really got a case to work on—a mystery to solve that we don't know anything about?"

"Golly, here he comes again!" said Pip, as Goon scuttled out of the police-station, buttoning a big sheaf of papers into his breast-pocket. "He's simply bursting with importance."

"He's feeling jolly pleased about something," said Fatty. "I *should* be mad if something had cropped up in Peterswood whilst I've been away, and we don't know anything about it!"

Goon jumped on to his bicycle and pedalled away again. It was maddening to sit there and watch him so busy and important and not know why. Fatty felt as if he was bursting with curiosity.

"He's on to something!" he said. "He really is. I know that look on his face. We *must* find out what it is!"

"Well, you find out then," said Larry. "And if he tells you, you'll be lucky! It's what Goon has dreamed of for months—a mystery all to himself, that the Five Find-Outers don't know anything about!"

"I can't bear it!" said Fatty, and let the last spoonful of ice-cream go down his throat. Then he looked dismayed. "Oh I say—do you know, I was so puzzled about Old Clear-Orf and his mystery that I ate that ice-cream without tasting it. What a fearful waste. I'll have to have another."

The others looked at him. "There's no more money," said Pip. "We spent it all."

"I've got some," said Fatty, and dug his hand into his pocket. He always had plenty of money, much to the envy of the others, who had pocket-money each Saturday and had to make that do for the week, like most children. But Fatty had plenty of rich relations, who seemed to pour money into his pockets in a most lavish way.

"Mother says it's bad for you to have so much money," said Pip. "She's always saying that."

"It probably is bad for me," said Fatty, "but I'm not going round telling my relations to stop giving me tips. Now, who wants another ice-cream? Bets?"

"Oh, Fatty, I couldn't," sighed Bets sadly. "I'd love to, but I know I can't. I feel a bit sick already."

"Well, go outside," said Pip unfeelingly. "No thanks,

Fatty. I don't feel sick, but I shan't eat any supper if I have another, and then Mother will stop all ice-creams for a week, or something awful."

Larry and Daisy said they couldn't possibly eat another either, so Fatty had a second one all by himself, and this time he said he tasted every spoonful, so it wasn't wasted as the first one had been.

Mr. Goon came back on his bicycle, just as the children left the shop. "There he is again!" said Fatty admiringly. "I've never seen him move so quickly. Good evening, Mr. Goon!"

Mr. Goon was just getting off his bicycle to go into the police-station again. He glanced at Fatty, and took no notice of him. Fatty was annoyed.

"You seem extremely busy, Mr. Goon," he said. "Solving another mystery, I suppose? Nice to get the old brains to work, isn't it? I could do with a bit of that myself, after lazing away most of these holidays."

"Oh? You got some brains then?" said Mr. Goon sarcastically. "That's good hearing, that is. But I'm busy now, and can't stop to talk about your brains, Master Frederick. There's Big Things going on, see, and I've got plenty to do without wasting my time talking to you."

"Big Things?" said Fatty, suddenly interested. "What, another Mystery, Mr. Goon? I say—that's..."

"Yes, another Mystery," said Mr. Goon, almost bursting with importance. "And I'm IN CHARGE of it, see? I'm the one that's tackling it, not you interfering kids. And not a word do I tell you about it, not one word. It's Secret and Important, and it's a Matter for the police!"

"But Mr. Goon—you know how we ..." began Fatty anxiously; but the policeman, feeling for once that he

had got the better of Fatty, interrupted loftily.

"All I know about you is that you're a conceited, interfering kid what ought to be put in his place and kept there—you and your nasty barking dog! This here case is mine, and I'm already getting on with it, and what's more I'll get Promotion over this as sure as my name is Theophilus Goon," said the policeman, marching up the steps to the police-station. "You clear-orf now!"

"What a blow!" muttered poor, disappointed Fatty, as Goon disappeared through the door. He and the others walked home slowly, discussing all that Clear-Orf had said.

"To think of that fat policeman at work on a perfectly gorgeous new mystery that we don't know a thing about!" said Fatty, looking so miserable that Bets put her arm through his. "It's maddening. And the worst of it is that I simply don't see how we are going to find out a thing, if Goon won't tell us."

"Even Buster's upset about it," said Bets. "He's got his tail right down. So have you, poor Fatty. Never mind—you're going to try out your grown-up disguise tomorrow—that will be a bit of excitement for you, Fatty. And for us too!"

"Yes, it will," said Fatty, cheering up a little. "Well—I'll be getting back home now. Got to practise my disguise a bit before I try it out on you all tomorrow. Solong!"

Fatty Disguises Himself.

Next morning Larry had a note from Fatty.

"Go down to the side-shows by the river this afternoon. I'll meet you somewhere in disguise. Bet you won't know me!

"Fatty."

Larry showed the note to Pip and Bets when he went to see them that morning. Bets was thrilled. "What *will* Fatty be dressed in? I bet I'll know him! Oh, I can't wait for this afternoon to come!"

Larry's mother gave him some money to spend at the side-shows when she heard they were all going there that afternoon. They set off at two o'clock, ready to spot Fatty, no matter how well he was disguised.

As they walked down the village street an old bent man came shuffling up towards them. He stooped badly and dragged his feet, which were in old boots, the toes cracked and the heels worn down. He wore a straggly sandy-grey beard, and had shaggy grey eyebrows, and he looked extremely dirty. His coat sagged away from his bent shoulders, and his corduroy trousers were tied up with string at the knees.

His hat was too large for him and was crammed down over his head. He had a stick in his hand and used it to help himself along. He shuffled to a bench and sat down in the sun, sniffing loudly.

"That's Fatty! I know it is!" said Bets. "It's just the sort of disguise he'd put on. Isn't he clever? "

The old man took a pipe out of his pocket and began to stuff it with tobacco.

"Fancy Fatty even thinking of bringing a pipe!" said Pip. "I bet he's watched his father stuffing tobacco into his pipe. Golly—don't say he's even going to smoke it!"

Apparently he was! Great puffs of rather evil-smelling, strong smoke came wafting out from the old man. The children stared. "I shouldn't have thought Fatty *could* smoke," said Larry. "He oughtn't to. He's not old enough. But I suppose if he's in disguise..."

The old fellow sniffed loudly and then wiped his hand across his nose. Bets giggled. "Oh dear! Fatty really simply marvellous. I do think he is. He must have been practising that awful snuffle for ages."

Larry went over to the old man and sat down beside him. "Hallo, Fatty!" he said. "Jolly good, old boy! But we all recognized you at once!"

The old man took absolutely no notice at all. He went on puffing at his pipe and clouds of the smoke floated into Larry's face.

"Fatty! Stop it! You'll make yourself sick if you smoke like that!" said Larry. The others joined him and sat there, giggling. Pip gave the old man a punch in the ribs,

"Hey, Fatty! You can stop pretending now. We know it's you!"

The old man felt the punch and looked round indignantly, his eyes almost hidden under his shaggy eyebrows. He moved a little way away from Larry and Pip and went on smoking.

"Fatty! Shut up smoking and talk to us, idiot!" said Pip. The old man took his pipe out of his mouth, put his hand behind his ear, and said "Wassat?"

"He's pretending to be deaf now!" said Bets, and giggled again.

"Ah? " said the old man, looking puzzled. "Wassat? "

"What does 'Wassat' mean?" asked Bets.

"It means 'What's that' of course," said Larry. "Hey, Fatty, stop it now. Give up, and tell us we're right. We all spotted you at once."

"Wassat?" said the old man again and put his hand behind his ear once more. It was a very peculiar ear, large and flat and purple red. Bets gazed at it and then nudged Daisy.

"Daisy I We've made a frightful mistake! It's not Fatty. Look at his ears!"

Every one gazed at the old fellow's ears. No—not even Fatty could make his ears go like that. And they were not false ears either. They were quite real, not very clean, and remarkably hairy. In fact, they were most unpleasant ears.

"Golly! It *isn't* Fatty!" said Pip, gazing at the ears. "What *must* the old man think of us?"

"Wassat?" said the old man again, evidently extremely puzzled at the children's familiar behaviour towards him.

"Well, thank goodness the poor old thing is deaf," said Daisy, feeling ashamed of their mistake.

"Come on Larry, come on, Pip, We've made an idiotic mistake! How Fatty would laugh if he knew!"

"He's probably hiding somewhere around and grinning to himself like anything," said Pip. They left the

puzzled old man sitting on his bench and went off down the street again. They met the baker, and Bets gave him a long and piercing stare, wondering if he could by any chance be Fatty. But he wasn't. He was much too tall.

Then they met the window-cleaner, and as he was rather plump, and just about Fatty's height, they all went and pretended to examine his barrow of ladders and pails, taking cautious glances at him to find out whether or not *he* could be Fatty in disguise.

"Here! What's the matter with you kids?" said the window-cleaner. "Haven't you ever seen ladders and

pails before? And what are you giving me them looks for? Anything wrong with me today? "

"No," said Larry hurriedly, for the window-cleaner sounded rather annoyed. "It's just that—er—these sliding ladders—er—are rather interesting!"

"Oh, *are* they?" said the window-cleaner disbelievingly. "Well, let me tell you this..."

But the children didn't listen to what he had to tell them. They hurried off, rather red in the face.

"I say! We shall get into trouble if we go squinting at every one to find out if they really are Fatty," said Larry. "Well have to look at people a bit more carefully—I mean, without them knowing it."

"There he is—I'm sure of it!" said Bets suddenly, as they went over the level-crossing to the river-side, where the side-shows were. "Look—that porter with the moustache. That's Fatty, all right!"

The porter was wheeling a barrow up the platform, and the others stood and admired him. "He wheels it exactly like a *real* porter," said Bets. "Why do porters always wear waistcoats and no coats at railway stations?"

I'm sure that's Fatty. It's just the way he walks. And he's plump like Fatty too."

She raised her voice and hailed the porter. "Hey, Fatty I Fatty!"

The porter turned round. He set his barrow down on the ground and walked towards them, looking angry.

"Who are you calling Fatty?" he demanded, his face red under his porter's cap. "You hold your tongue you cheeky kids!"

The children stared at him. "It *is* Fatty," said Bets. "Look, that's just how his hair sticks out when he wears a hat. Fatty I We know it's you!"

"Now you look here!" said the porter, coming nearer, "if you wasn't a little girl I'd come over and shake you good and proper. Calling me names! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you did!"

"It *isn't* Fatty, you idiot," said Pip angrily to Bets. "Fatty isn't as short in the arms. *Now* you've got us into trouble!"

But very luckily for them, a train came thundering in at that moment and the porter had to run to open and shut doors and see to luggage. The children hastily left the level-crossing and ran down to the river.

"You *stupid*, Bets! You'll get us all into trouble if you keep on imagining every one is Fatty," said Pip. "Calling out 'Fatty' like that—especially as the porter was fat. He must have thought you were disgustingly rude."

"Oh dear—yes, I suppose it did sound awfully rude," said Bets, almost in tears. "But I did think it was Fatty. I'll be more careful next time, Pip."

They came to the side-shows, which made a kind of

Fair alongside the river road. There was a Roundabout, the Hoopla game, the Bumping Motor-Cars, and the Waxwork Show. The children looked at the people crowding in and out of the Fair, and tried to see anyone that might be Fatty.

Bets was scared now to recognize any one as Fatty. She kept seeing people she thought might be Fatty and followed them around till she knew they weren't. The others did the same. Some people saw that they were being followed and didn't like it. They turned and glared.

"What you doing, keeping on my heels like this?" one man snapped at Larry. "Think I'm going to give you money for the Roundabout?"

Larry went red and slipped away. He imagined Fatty somewhere near, tickled to death to see the Find-Outers trying in vain to spot him. Where *could* he be?

"I think I've found him!" whispered Bets to Pip, catching hold of his arm. "He's the man selling the Roundabout tickets! He's just like Fatty, only he's got a black beard and thick black hair, and gold ear-rings in his ears, and an almost black face."

"Well, he doesn't sound 'just like Fatty' to *me!*" said Pip scornfully. "I'm tired of your spotting the wrong people, Bets. Where's this fellow?"

"I told you. Selling Roundabout tickets," said Bets, and though Pip felt quite certain that not even Fatty would be allowed to sell Roundabout tickets, he went to see. The man flashed a grin at him and held up a bunch of tickets.

"A lovely ride!" he chanted. "A lovely ride on the Roundabout. Only sixpence for a lovely ride!"

Pip went and bought a ticket. He looked hard at the man, who gave him another cheeky grin. Pip grinned back.

"So it *is* you!" he said. "Jolly good, Fatty!"

"What you talking about?" said the Roundabout-man in surprise. "And who are you calling Fatty?"

Pip didn't like to say any more somehow, though he really was quite certain it was Fatty. He got on the Roundabout, chose a lion that went miraculously up and down as well as round and round, and enjoyed his ride.

He winked at the ticket-man as he got off and the man winked back. "Funny kid, aren't you?" said the man. Pip went to the others. "I've found Fatty," he said. "At least, I suppose it was Bets who did, really. It's the man who sells the tickets for the Roundabout."

"Oh no it isn't," said Larry. "Daisy and I have found Fatty too. It's the man who stands and shouts to people to come and have a go at the Hoopla. See—over there!"

"But it *can't* be!" said Pip. "He'd never be allowed to have a job like that. No, you're wrong. I don't think *that* can be Fatty."

"Well, and *I* don't think the Roundabout ticket-man is right, after all," said Bets unexpectedly. "I know I *did* think so. But I don't any more. His feet are much too small. He's got silly little feet. Fatty's got enormous feet. However much you disguise yourself you can't make big feet into small ones!"

"I bet Fatty could!" said Daisy. "He's a marvel."

"And I think he's the ticket-man at the Roundabout," said Pip, obstinately. "Well—we'll see. We'll have some fun, get tea over there, and wait for Fatty to show himself in his own good time!"

Fun at the Fair.

Having more or less decided the question of Fatty's disguise, though Bets was very doubtful indeed, the four children had some fun.

Bets bought some of the wooden Hoopla rings from the man that Larry and Daisy were certain was Fatty in disguise, and managed to ring a dear little clock. She was really delighted. She held out her hand for the clock, her eyes shining with joy. "It will do nicely for my bedroom mantelpiece," she said happily.

"Sorry," said the Hoopla-man. "The ring didn't go quite over the clock, Miss."

"But it *did*," said poor Bets. "It did. It didn't even touch the clock. It was the best throw I've ever done!"

"You didn't ring it properly, Miss," said the man. The other Hoopla-man, that Larry and Daisy thought was Fatty, looked on, and said nothing. Daisy, certain that it *was* Fatty, appealed to him, sorry to see little Bets being cheated out of the cheap little clock.

"She *did* win it, didn't she? Make this man let her have it!"

"Sorry, Miss. She didn't ring it properly," said that *L* too. And then Bets walked off, dragging the others with her. "*Now* do you think that man is Fatty?" she said fiercely. "*He* would have let me have the clock at once! Fatty is never unkind. He can't be Fatty!"

"Well—he might *have* to say a thing like that," argued Larry. "The other man might have got angry with him and given him a punch. I still think it's Fatty."

They went on the Roundabout, and in the Bumping Cars. Pip took Bets, and Larry went with Daisy, and with many squeals and yells they crashed into one another, and shook themselves and the little cars almost to pieces. It really was fun.

"Now let's go into the Waxwork Show," said Larry.

"Oh, it's too hot," said Daisy. "Really it is. Besides, I don't much like waxwork figures—they scare me a bit—they look so real, and yet they never even blink!"

"I want to see them," said Bets, who had never been inside a Waxwork Show in her life, and was longing to. "They've got Queen Elizabeth in there, all dressed up beautifully, and Napoleon, with his

hand tucked into his waistcoat, and Nelson with one arm and one eye, and..."

"Oh well, let's go in and see all these wonderful persons," said Daisy. "But it's a marvel to me they don't all melt in this weather. I feel as if I'm melting myself. We'd better have ice-creams after this."

They paid their money and went in. The show was in a small hall. A red-headed boy took their money scratching his head violently with one hand as he handed them tickets with the other. Bets stared at him. Could *he* be Fatty? Fatty had a red-headed wig and eyebrows, and he could put freckles all over his face, just like the ones this boy had. But Fatty had said he would be in a *grown-up* disguise—so he couldn't be this dirty-looking boy. Still—Bets couldn't help staring hard at him.

The boy put out his tongue at her.

"Stare away!" he said. "Never seen red hair before, I suppose!"

Bets went red and joined the others. All round the little hall, arranged on steps that raised each row of figures up behind the others, were the wax people. They stood there, still and silent, fixed looks on their pink faces, staring without blinking.

Pip and Larry liked them, but the two girls felt uncomfortable to have so many strange figures looking at them.

"There's Queen Elizabeth!" said Pip, pointing to a very grand-looking wax figure at the end of the little hall. "And there's Sir Walter Raleigh putting down his cloak for her to walk on. They're jolly good."

"What grand clothes she wears," said Bets, "and I like her big ruff. And look at all her beautiful jewellery. I'm surprised people don't steal it!"

"Pooh! All bought at Woolworth's!" said Pip. "I say—here's Nelson. I didn't know he was such a little chap."

"Oh—and here's Winston Churchill," said Bets in delight. She had a terrific admiration for this great statesman, and kept a photo of him on her mantelpiece. "With his cigar and all. He looks the best of the lot!"

"Look—there's a girl selling sweets," said Larry suddenly, winking at Pip. "Here, Bets, go and buy some chocolate for us." He gave the little girl some money and she went to the sweet-girl, who stood nearby with a tray of bags and boxes.

"I'll have some chocolate, please," said Bets, and held out her money. The girl didn't take it. She looked steadily over Bets' head and said nothing.

"SOME CHOCOLATE, PLEASE," said Bets loudly,

thinking that perhaps the girl was deaf. The girl took absolutely no notice at all, and Bets was puzzled.

Then she heard the others exploding behind her, and guessed in a flash the trick they had played. "Oh! This girl is a waxwork too! You beasts! I've been trying to buy chocolate from a waxwork figure."

"Oh, Bets! Anyone can take you in, simply anyone!" said Pip, almost crying with laughter. To think you're one of the Find-Outers, too! Why, you can't even spot when somebody is a waxwork!"—

Bets hardly knew whether to cry or to laugh, but fortunately she decided to laugh. "Oh dear! I really did think she was a proper person. Look at that horrid redheaded boy over there laughing at me!"

They examined all the wax figures closely. There were a good many of them. Among them was a policeman rather like Mr. Goon, but taller and not so fat.

"I'd like to stand Old dear-Orf in here!" said Pip, with a giggle. "He looks just about as stolid and stupid sometimes. And I say—look at this postman. He's quite good, except for his idiotic grin."

It was really very hot in the Waxwork Show and the children were glad to go out. The red-headed boy at the entrance put out his tongue at Bets again; and she tried not to look.

"What a horrid boy!" she said. "I can't think how I thought he could be Fatty. Fatty wouldn't behave like that, even in disguise."

"Let's go and have some tea," said Daisy. "Look, this place has got ices and home-make cakes."

"Cakes and an iced lemonade for me," said Pip. "I'll have an ice later if I can manage it. I wish old Fatty could join us. Wonder if he's looking on at us, in his

disguise. I'm sure he's the ticket-man at the Roundabout. That man's mop of curly black hair is too good to be true."

They had a very nice tea, and ate twenty-four cakes between them. They finished up with ices, washed down by a rather sweet lemonade, and then felt able to go out into the sun once more.

"Let's go and sit down by the river," said Bets. "It will be cooler there. There's always a breeze by the water!"

They made their way out of the Fair. Bets suddenly caught sight of a lovely patch of gay colour, and she stopped. "Pip! Look at those air-balloons! I do love a balloon. Have you got enough money to buy me one?"

"Don't be a baby," said Pip. "Fancy wanting a balloon like any three-year-old kid!"

"Well, I do," said Bets obstinately. They all went over to where the old woman sat, holding her bunch of gay balloons. She was a shapeless old dame, with a red shawl over her shoulders and head, though the day was hot. Untidy hair hung in wisps over her brown, wrinkled face, but she had surprisingly bright eyes.

"Balloon, young sir?" said she to Pip, in a cracked old voice.

"No thanks," said Pip. But Bets pulled his arm.

"Oh, do buy me one, Pip. Oh, I wish Fatty was here. *He'd* buy me one. They're so pretty!"

"Well, but they're sixpence each!" said Pip, looking at the price label hanging from the string of balloons. "Sixpence! It's robbery. No, I can't lend you sixpence for that. Mother would think I was mad."

"She can have one for half-price," croaked the old woman kindly. Bets looked at Pip.

"Oh, all right," he said, and pulled out three pennies. "But mind you give me the money back when you get home, Bets."

"Oh thank you, Pip," said Bets, and took the money. She looked at all the gay balloons, swaying gently in the breeze, and couldn't make up her mind which one to buy. The reds were so nice and bright, the greens were so pretty, the blues were like the sky, the yellows were like sunshine—oh, which should she have?

"Well, come on after us when you've made up your mind," said Pip impatiently. "We're not going to stand here all evening waiting for you, Bets."

The others went off to the river-bank. Bets stared at the lovely balloons.

"Pretty, aren't they, young miss?" said the old woman. "You take your time in choosing. I don't mind"

Bets thought what a kind old woman she was. "It was so nice of you to let me have one at half-price," she said. "Really it was. Do you make a lot of money, selling balloons?"

"Not much," said the old dame. "But enough for an old lady like me."

Bets chose a blue balloon and the old woman held out her hand for the money. It was a very dirty hand, and it closed over the money quickly. Bets wondered why all the Fair people had such dirty hands and faces.

Then she noticed something that made her stare. The old woman's hand was certainly extremely dirty—but the nails on it were remarkably clean! Much cleaner than Bets' own nails!

"How queer!" thought Bets, still staring at the clean, well-kept nails. "Why should this old woman keep her

nails so clean, and her hands so dirty?"

Bets then looked hard at the old woman's dirty brown face, all wrinkled up. She looked into the surprisingly bright, twinkling eyes—and she saw that they were Fatty's eyes! Yes, there wasn't an atom of doubt about it—they were Fatty's own bright, intelligent eyes!"

"Oh, Fatty!" whispered Bets. "Oh, it really is you, isn't it? Oh, do say it is?"

The old woman looked round quickly to make sure no one was listening.

"Yes. It's me all right," said Fatty, unwrinkling his face as if by magic, and straightening his bent back. "Jolly good disguise, isn't it? But HOW did you know it was me, Bets? You're too cute for anything!"

"Sh! There's somebody coming," whispered Bets. I'll go. Where will you meet us?"

"Go home at six and I'll meet you somewhere," said Fatty hurriedly, and screwed his face up into all kinds of wrinkles again. Bets saw that he had cleverly painted the places where the wrinkles came, so that no one could possibly see that they were not always there. Fatty was simply marvellous!

"Don't tell the others!" said Fatty. "Keep it dark for a bit." Then he raised his voice and, in a feeble croak, called "Balloons! Sixpence each! Fine strong balloons!"

Bets went off, her eyes shining. She had found Fatty—and oh, *wasn't* he clever! He really, really was!

The Old Balloon-Woman.

Bets went to join the others, very pleased with herself. Her blue balloon floated behind her, tugging at its string.

"Here she is at last!" said Pip. "We thought you were never coming, Bets. What's up with you? You look bursting with something." ,

"Do I?" said Bets. "Fancy that! By the way, I've a message from Fatty. We're to go home at six and he will meet us somewhere."

"Who gave you that message?" said Pip, at once.

"That's my secret," said Bets annoyingly.

"Did you speak to Fatty himself?" demanded Larry. "Is he the Hoopla-man?"

"I shan't tell you," said Bets. "I'm going to keep my secret for a bit!"

And she wouldn't say another word, which annoyed the others very much. Fancy young Bets knowing something *they* didn't know!

At six o'clock they made their way back through the Fair, across the level-crossing, and up the lane from the river. Sitting on a bench, with her balloons, was the old Balloon-woman, waiting for them. She got up as they came.

"Balloons!" said she. "Strong balloons!"

"No thanks," said Pip, and walked on. The old woman walked with him. "Buy a balloon!" she said, "Just to help me, young sir!"

"No thanks," said Pip again, and walked a little

faster. But the old dame could walk surprisingly fast too. She kept up quite easily with Pip!

"*Do* buy a balloon!" she said, her voice cracking queerly.

How long she would have pestered Pip nobody knew—but Bets suddenly exploded into a series of

helpless giggles that took the others by surprise. They stared at her.

"What *is* the matter?" said Pip, exasperated.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bets. "Oh dear—I'm sorry. But I can't help it. It's all so f-M-funny!"

"*What's* funny?" shouted Pip. And then he stared—for the old Balloon-woman, pulling her skirts above her knees, and showing sand-shoes and bare legs, was doing a lively jig in front of him and round him making peculiar noises all the time.

"Don't, Fatty, don't! I shall die of laughter!" said Bets, holding her aching sides.

The others stared as if their eyes were about to fall out. "What—it's *Fatty!*" said Pip. "*Fatty!* It isn't. I can't believe it!"

But it was, of course. As soon as Fatty "unscrewed" his face, as Bets called it, and got rid of his lines and wrinkles, every one could see quite well it was Fatty.

Larry and Daisy were speechless. So Fatty hadn't been the Hoopla-man, or the Roundabout-man either. He was the old Balloon-woman instead. Trust Fatty to think out a disguise that nobody would guess!

Or had little Bets guessed it? The others looked at her smiling face. Larry dragged the Balloon-woman to a wayside seat, and they all sat down.

"Is it really you, Fatty?" said Larry. The old woman nodded.

"Of course! Golly, this disguise must be super if I could take you all in as well as that!"

"Did Bets guess?" demanded Pip.

"She did," said Fatty. "She suddenly guessed when she was buying her balloon, and you had all gone off without her."

"But how did she guess?" said Pip, annoyed.

"Goodness knows!" said Fatty. "How *did* you guess, young Bets?"

"Oh, Fatty—it was such a silly thing—I don't really like to tell you," said Bets. "I'm sure you'll think it was a silly way to guess."

"Go on—tell me," said Fatty, with much interest.

"Well, Fatty—you see, you had very dirty hands, like all the rest of the Fair people," said Bets. "But I couldn't help seeing that you had nice, clean nails—and it did seem to me a bit funny that somebody with dirty hands should bother to keep their nails so clean."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Fatty, looking down at his dirty hands, and examining the well-kept nails. "Who would have thought of any one noticing that? Very very careless of me not to get some dirt into my nails when I made my hands filthy. I never thought of it. Bets, you are very clever. Most

intelligent."

"Oh, Fatty—not really," said Bets, glowing all over her face at such generous praise.

"Well, I must say I think it was jolly cute of young Bets to notice a thing like that," said Larry. "I really do. We all had a chance of noticing, because we all stood in front of you. But it was Bets who spotted it. Jolly good, Bets!"

"She wins my second-best propelling-pencil," said Fatty. "I'll give it to you when I get home, Bets. In fact

I'm not sure that I oughtn't to give you my best one. That was a really smart bit of work. Bright enough for a first-class detective!"

Daisy praised Bets too, but Pip was rather sulky. He was afraid his little sister would get swollen-headed. "If you say much more, Bets will want to be head of the Find-Outers," he said.

"Oh no, I shan't," said Bets happily. "I know it was only a bit of luck, really, Pip. You see, I actually put the pennies into Fatty's hands, and that's how I noticed the clean nails. Pip, I'll lend you the propelling-pencil *whenever* you want it. See?"

That was so like Bets. Not even a cross elder brother like Pip could sulk for long with Bets. He grinned at her.

"Thanks, Bets. You're a good Find-Outer, and a good little sport too!"

"I say—look out—here's Goon!" suddenly said Larry, in a low voice. "Better pretend we're not with Fatty, or Goon will wonder why we are hobnobbing with an old Fair woman!"

So they all got up, and left Fatty behind on the seat, with his string of balloons bobbing over his head. Mr. Goon was on his bicycle as usual. He pretended not to notice the children at all. He always seemed busy and important these days!

But he got off his bicycle when he saw the old woman. Fatty was drooping over, pretending to be asleep.

"Here, you!" said Goon. "Move on! And where's your licence to sell balloons?"

The others heard this, and looked alarmed. Did you have to have a licence to peddle balloons? They were sure Fatty hadn't got one.

Fatty took no notice, but gave a gentle snore. Mr. Goon shook the shoulder of the Balloon-woman, and Fatty pretended to awake with a jerk.

"Where's your licence?" said Goon. He was always rude and arrogant to people like the old Balloon-woman.

"What did you say, sir?" said Fatty, in a whining voice. "Want to buy a balloon, sir? What colour do you fancy?"

"I don't want a balloon," said Goon angrily. "I want to see your licence."

"Oh, ah, my licence?" said Fatty, and began to pat all over his extremely voluminous skirts, as if to find where a licence would possibly be hidden. "Somewhere about, sir, somewhere about. If you can just wait a few minutes, kind sir, I'll find it in the pocket of one of my petticoats. An old woman like me, sir, she wants plenty of petticoats. Sleeping out under hedges is cold, sir, even on a summer night."

"Gah!" said Goon rudely, mounted his bicycle and rode off, ringing his bell furiously at a small dog that dared to run across the road in front of him. Was he, the Great Goon, in charge of a First-Class Case, going to wait whilst an old pedlar-woman fished for ages in her petticoats for a licence he didn't really want to see? Gah!

When Goon was safely out of sight the others went back to Fatty, amused and half-alarmed. "Oh, Fatty! How *can* you act like that with Goon? If only he'd known it was really you!"

"I enjoyed that," said Fatty. "Good thing Goon didn't wait to see my licence though, because I haven't got one, of course. Come on—let's get back home. I'm

dying to take off these hot clothes! I've got layers of petticoats on to make me fat and shapeless!"

On the way up the village street they passed the bench where they had spoken to the old man on their way to the Fair that afternoon. Bets pointed him out to Fatty.

"Fatty. Do you see that old fellow, sleeping on that bench over there? Well, we thought he was *you*! And we went and called him Fatty, and Pip gave him a poke in the ribs!"

Fatty stood and looked at the old chap. "You know, it would be quite easy to disguise myself like him," he said. "I've a good mind to try it. Honestly, I believe I could."

"But you couldn't make your ears like his," said Bets. "He's got awful ears."

"No, I couldn't. But I could pull my cap down lower than he does, and hide my ears a bit," said Fatty. "Yes, that would be a very good and easy disguise indeed. I'll try it one day. Did Pip really poke him in the ribs?"

"Yes. And the old fellow kept on saying, 'Wassat? Wassat?'" said Pip, with a giggle. "He's deaf, poor old thing."

The old man suddenly opened his eyes and saw the children looking at him. He thought they must have spoken to him. He cupped one of his ears in his hand and croaked out his favourite word, "Wassat?"

The old Balloon-woman winked at the children and sat down beside the old fellow. "Fine evening," she said, in the cracked voice the children were beginning to know well.

"Wassat?" said the old man. Then he sniffed, and wiped his nose deftly with the back of his hand. Fatty did exactly the same, which made Bets giggle in delight.

"FINE EVENING," said Fatty. "AND A FINE MORNING TOO!"

"Don't know nothing about mornings," said the old man surprisingly. "Always sleep till midday, I do. Then I gets up, has my bit of dinner, and comes out into the sun. Mornings don't mean nothing to me."

He sniffed again, and then took out his pipe to fill it. Fatty watched all he did. Yes, it would be a marvellous thing to do, to disguise himself as this old fellow. Pipe, sniffs, deafness, and all—Fatty could do it!"

"Come on, Fatty!" said Pip, in a low voice. "We really will have to get back. It's getting late."

Fatty got up and joined them. They soon parted and went their different way—Pip and Bets down the lane, and Larry and Daisy up theirs. Fatty went in at his back gate, and his mother caught sight of the old Balloon-woman, as she stood in the garden, cutting sweet-peas for the table.

"A friend of Cook's, I suppose," she thought; "or is she trying to sell balloons here?"

She waited for the Balloon-woman to come back again, but she didn't. So, rather curious, Mrs. Trotteville went to the kitchen door and looked in. There was no Balloon-woman to be seen—only Cook, red in the face, cooking the dinner.

"Where did that old Balloon-woman go?" said Mrs. Trotteville, in wonder. But Cook didn't know. She hadn't seen any old woman at all. And no wonder—for at that moment the old Balloon-woman was stripping off layers of petticoats down in the shed at the bottom

of the garden—to come forth as a very hot and rather untidy Fatty.

"What a peculiar thing for a Balloon-woman to vanish into thin air!" thought Mrs. Trotteville. And so it was.

A Visit to Inspector Jenks.

Fatty had much enjoyed his fun as the old Balloon-woman, and so had the others. He gave Bets the silver propelling-pencil and she was really delighted.

"I've never had such a lovely pencil," she said. "It writes in red and blue, as well as in ordinary lead. Thank you awfully, Fatty."

"The holidays are going too fast," said Pip, rather gloomily. "And we still haven't got a mystery to solve, though we know that Goon has."

"Yes, I know," said Fatty, looking worried. "I can't bear to think of Goon getting busy on his mystery and we haven't the least idea what it is. Though it *may* be all those burglaries that are cropping up all over the place, you know—I expect most of the police are keeping their eyes skinned for the gang that is operating such big thefts."

"Can't we keep our eyes skinned too?" said Bets eagerly. "We might see the gang somewhere."

"Idiot! Do you suppose they go about in a crowd together, all looking like burglars?" said Pip scornfully. "They're too jolly clever. They have their own meeting-places their own way of passing on messages, their own

ways of disposing of the jewels they steal—haven't they, Fatty? And they are not ways we would be likely to find out, even if we did keep our eyes skinned!"

"Oh," said Bets, disappointed. "Well—can't we ask Inspector Jenks if there really *is* a mystery here, and ask him to let us help?"

"Yes—why can't we?" said Daisy. "I'm sure he'd tell us. We've helped him such a lot before."

Inspector Jenks was their very good friend. He was what Bets called "a very high-up policeman," and he belonged to the next big town. In the four mysteries the children had solved before, Inspector Jenks had come in at the end, and been very pleased indeed at all the children had found out. Mr. Goon, however, had not been so pleased, because it was most annoying to him to have those "interfering children messing about with the Law"—especially when they had actually found out things he hadn't.

"I think it's a very good idea of Bets," said Fatty. "Very good indeed. If he knows what the mystery is that Goon is working on—and he's sure to—I don't see why he can't tell us. He knows we'll keep our mouths shut and do all we can to help."

So the next day the Five Find-Outers, with Buster in Fatty's basket, rode on their bicycles to the next big town, where Inspector Jenks had his headquarters. They went to the police-station there, and asked if they might see him.

"What! See the Inspector himself!" said the policeman in charge. "Kids like you! I should *think* not. He's a Big Man, he is, too busy to bother with kids. Sauce, I call it!"

"Wait a bit," said another policeman, with a nice face, and very bright blue eyes. "Wait a bit—aren't you the kids that helped with one or two difficult cases over in Peterswood?"

"Yes, we are," said Fatty. "We wouldn't want to bother the Inspector if he's busy, of course—but we would like to ask him something rather important. Important to us, I mean."

"Shall I go in and tell the Inspector then?" said the first policeman to the other one. "Don't want my head bitten off, you know, for interrupting without due cause."

"I'll tell him!" said the blue-eyed policeman. "I've heard him talk about these kids." He got up and went out of the room. The children waited as patiently as they could. Surely their old friend would see them!

The policeman came back. "He'll see you," he said. "Come on in."

The children followed him down a long stone-floored passage, and then down another. Bets looked about her half-fearfully. Was she anywhere near prisoners in their cells? She hoped not.

The policeman opened a door with a glass top to it, and announced them. "The children from Peterswood, sir."

The Inspector was sitting at an enormous desk, piled with papers. He was in uniform and looked very big and grand. His eyes twinkled, and he smiled his nice smile.

"Well, well, well!" he said. "The whole lot of you at once—and Buster too, I see I Well, how are you? Come to tell me you've solved the mystery that's been worrying us for months, I suppose!"

He shook hands with them all, and put Bets on his

knee. She beamed at him. She was very fond of this big High-Up Policeman.

"No, sir, we haven't come to tell you we've solved any mystery, unfortunately," said Fatty. "These are the first hols for ages that we haven't had a mystery to solve. But sir, we know that Mr. Goon has got one he's working on, and we thought perhaps we could work on it too. But we don't know what it is."

"Yes, Goon's on it," said the Inspector. "In fact, most of the police force of the country seem to be on it too! But it's not one that you can be mixed up in. I don't think you could help at all, first-rate detectives though you are!"

"Oh!" said Fatty, disappointed. "Is it—is it all these big burglaries, sir?"

"Yes, that's right," said the Inspector. "Very clever, they are. The thieves know just what jewels to steal, when to get at them, and lay their plans very carefully. And we don't know one single one of the men! Not one. Though we have our suspicions, you know! We always have!"*

He twinkled at the listening children. Fatty felt desperate. Surely the Inspector could tell them more than that. Surely Goon knew more? Else why was he so busy and important these days?

"Mr. Goon looks as if he knew quite a lot, sir," said Fatty. "Is there anything going on in Peterswood all?"

The Inspector hesitated. "Well," he said at last, "as I said, this is not a thing for children to be mixed up in. Definitely not, and I am sure you would agree with me if you knew what I know. Peterswood is not exactly mixed up in it—but we suspect that some of the gang

go there—to meet perhaps—or to pass on messages—we don't know."

The children's eyes brightened immediately. "Sir!" said Fatty, at once, "can't we just keep our eyes open, then? Not snoop round too much, if you don't want us to—but watch and see if we hear or spot anything unusual. Children can often see and hear things that grown-ups can't, because people suspect other grown-ups, but they don't notice children much."

The Inspector tapped with his pencil on his desk. Fatty knew that he was weighing up whether or not to let them keep a watch on things in Peterswood, and his heart beat anxiously. How he hoped they would be allowed just to have a little hand in this Mystery! It seemed a pretty hopeless one, and Mr. Goon was sure to do better than they could, because he knew so much more—but Fatty simply couldn't *bear* to be left out of it altogether!

"All right," said the Inspector at last, and put his pencil down. "You can keep your eyes open for me—but don't plunge headlong into anything foolish or dangerous. Just keep your eyes open. It's

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