



THE PUFFIN BOOK OF

# FUNNY STORIES





THE PUFFIN BOOK OF  
**FUNNY**  
**STORIES**

A PUFFIN BOOK



# Contents

Arabel's Birthday *Joan Aiken*

In Sheep's Clothing *Catherine Storr*

Little Badman/ Big Trouble *Humza Arshad and Henry White*

The Watch *Michael Rosen*

*from* Charlie Changes Into a Chicken *Sam Copeland*

Noble Warrior *Clare Balding*

Dragons at Crumbling Castle *Terry Pratchett*

The Geek Squad *Rebecca Elliott*

Max Crosses the Road *Dick King-Smith*

Meet the Bolds *Julian Clary*

*Acknowledgements*

*Other Puffin collections*

*Compiled by Wendy Cooling*

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR SIX-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR SEVEN-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF CHRISTMAS STORIES

*Compiled by Gene Kemp*

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF GHOSTS AND GHOULS



# Arabel's Birthday

from *More Arabel and Mortimer*

by Joan Aiken

*Illustrated by Quentin Blake*

*Arabel Jones has a mischievous raven called Mortimer who causes havoc wherever he goes. But he is also Arabel's best friend and she wouldn't swap him for the world.*

THERE WERE visitors at Number Six, Rainwater Crescent. Mr Jones's cousin Gladys Line had come up to London to have a lot of special work done on her teeth at Rumbury Dental Hospital. This was going to take several days, so she was staying in Rainwater Crescent for a week. Her husband, Ray Line, who owned his own removal firm, had driven her down from Benwick-on-Tavey, where the Lines lived, along with two huge suitcases full of clothes, and their daughter Annie, who was just Arabel's age. Ray left his wife and daughter with the Joneses, and then drove up north again with a load of brass fire-tongs, two mahogany tables, and a love seat.

Just because somebody is the same age as you does not always mean that you are fond of them, and Arabel was not very fond of her cousin Annie, who had platinum blonde curls, and eyes the colour of curried beans, and a little squeaking whiny breathless voice in which she was always saying things that had better not have been said.

'Mummy, I saw Uncle Ben dip his finger in his soup to see if it was hot – that's not very nice, is it? Ooh, Mummy, Arabel put a HUGE spoonful of jam

on her bread. Mummy, Aunt Martha's porridge isn't as good as yours, she doesn't put treacle and raisins in it. Mummy, Uncle Ben gave Arabel a much longer push on the swing than he did me, it's not *fair*. Mummy, Arabel's got slippers like rabbits and I haven't, it's not *fair*.'

Many things happened to Annie that were not fair; or she thought they were not; other people had different opinions.

'Ask me, that child ought to have been parcelled up at birth and posted off to Pernambuco,' said Mr Jones. He said this quietly to his wife in the garden, where he thought no one else could hear, but little Annie was sitting under the wheelbarrow, and she scrambled out and ran indoors to her mother, asking, 'Mummy, Mummy, why does Uncle Ben say I ought to have been posted to Pernambuco, where is Pernambuco, Mummy?'

'Ooo werp oh oo arhing ee ey hing ush ow,' said Annie's mother, who had just come back after a day spent at the dental hospital.

Annie had brought a great many of her own toys with her in the removal van, to prevent her becoming bored at Number Six, Rainwater Crescent while Cousin Gladys was at the hospital having her teeth fixed. The things that Annie had brought were much more expensive and complicated than Arabel's toys: there was computer golf, and an electronic exercise bicycle, and some radio-controlled tiddlywinks, a centrally-heated doll's house, a small infra-red oven that really roasted, magnetic dominoes, a computer guitar that would make up its own music and play without your needing to do anything, a book that would read aloud when you opened it (but it always read the same story, which was rather boring), a skateboard that ran on solar energy, a chess set that played games against itself, and lots of other things besides.

A lot of these toys didn't seem to need humans at all.

Arabel thought they seemed as if they would prefer to play by themselves, without being bothered to include Annie and Arabel in what they were doing. And many of them were so complicated – with their plugs and cables and switches and instrument panels and control-boxes – that they needed Mr Jones, first to start them up, and then to stay around and keep an eye to make sure they didn't go wrong, heat up red-hot, run out of fuel, chop somebody's arm off, or roll away, tossing out sparks, through the front door and into Rainwater Crescent. Mr Jones soon became fed up with this. He became tired of Annie's voice squeaking, 'Uncle Ben! Come *quick*! The doll's house is overheating again. The infra-red oven's letting off its warning whistle. Uncle *Ben*!'

Mr Jones said he had better things to do – such as driving his taxi – than sit all day keeping an eye on radio-controlled tiddlywinks. And, when the

computer guitar had given Arabel quite a bad electric shock, Mr Jones carted a whole lot of Annie's toys up to the attic, and locked them away, despite her grumbles.

'They can't do any harm there,' he said. 'Besides, *I'm* not going to replace them, if they get broken while the kid's here. Those things probably cost a fortune. Let her play with them when she's back at home, and shock herself to death. Besides, if they're locked up, Mortimer can't get at them.'

This was true, even Annie could see. Mortimer, the Jones family raven, had, from the start, taken a huge amount of interest in Annie's toys; his black eyes sparkled bright as jet beads when first one glittering complicated object and then another was carried into the house by Cousin Ray Line.

Mortimer would dearly have liked to swallow the radioactive building bricks and squeeze inside the centrally-heated doll's house and have a ride on the electronic bicycle, and look at his own bones through the X-ray box, and roast something in the infra-red oven; he looked very downcast and sulky when Mr Jones packed all these things in the attic, and locked the door, and slipped the key on to the ring that he always carried in his pocket.

'*Nevermore ...*' muttered Mortimer to himself.

But he did not give up hope of getting into the attic. One day – when all the family were out ...

One thing that Mr Jones did not lock away, for she would not let him, was little Annie Line's Winky Doll, Mabel. Annie insisted on keeping Mabel by her wherever she went. This creature was larger than Annie and Arabel – *much* larger than Mortimer; it could walk, and nod its head, and wink its eye, and dance, and shake hands, and skate (that is, if you put it on ice, and strapped skates on to its feet); and it could give a horrible smile, and put its finger to its lips, and whisper, '*Listen! I'll tell you a secret!*'





Then, if you leaned your ear close beside its mouth, it would whisper something into your ear.

Annie was always putting her ear beside the Winky Doll's mouth and listening to what it whispered. Then she would burst into loud giggles and say, 'Ooooooh! Winky Doll's just told me EVER such an exciting secret, and I'm not going to tell it to YOO-OO!'

After a day or two of this, Arabel waited for a chance when her Cousin Annie was out in the garden, asking Mr Jones for the twentieth time to stop his digging and give her a push in the swing.

'Ooh, Uncle Ben, please push me, please, Uncle Ben, please, Uncle Ben!'

While this was happening, Arabel put her ear close to the Winky Doll's mouth, and pressed its whisper button. The Winky Doll winked like mad, and nodded its head ever so many times, but all that Arabel actually managed to hear was 'Gabble-gabble-gabble-gabble, rhubarb-rhubarb-rhubarb'.

This was quite disappointing.

Perhaps the Winky Doll won't whisper for me because I'm not its proper owner, Arabel thought.

Or perhaps it never does whisper a real secret.

Mortimer the raven had taken a strong dislike to the Winky Doll from the very start. He hated the knowing smile on its fat face, and he hated the way it winked its eye and nodded its head. He hated its clothes, which were checked cotton with a great many patches sewn on all over. He hated its blue rolling eyes and its fat pudgy hands, and worst of all he hated the way it whispered secrets to little Annie Line.

Mortimer could not stand being left out of anything. If secrets were being whispered, he wanted them whispered to *him*.

‘*Kaaaark*,’ he grumbled furiously, each time Annie said, ‘Winky Doll’s told me a secret and I’m not going to tell yoo-oo ...’

‘Never mind, Mortimer,’ said Arabel, who quite sympathised with what Mortimer was feeling, ‘*I’ll tell you a secret*,’ and she whispered to him, ‘Pa’s making me a see-saw for my birthday.’

But Mortimer was not appeased by this news. For one thing, he already knew about the seesaw, because he had watched Mr Jones dig a deep hole, down at the far end of the garden, and sink a post in the hole, and set it in cement; and he had also spent some time in Mr Jones’s garden shed workshop, while the hinge was being fitted on the seat part of the see-saw; until Mr Jones noticed that Mortimer had swallowed half a jarful of brass upholstery tacks, and requested him to leave.

The fifth day of Cousin Gladys’s visit was Arabel’s birthday. The see-saw had been finished, ready for use. As well as the see-saw, Arabel had been given, by her mother, a little marble pastryboard and rolling pin, also a small pudding basin, flour-sifter, wooden spoon and cheese-grater, so that she could make pastry or cheese straws if she wanted to. Mortimer the raven was very fond of cheese straws. From her father Arabel had a set of gardening tools, spade, fork, rake, hoe, watering can and wheelbarrow. Mortimer at once wanted a ride in the wheelbarrow, which was exactly the right size for him.

‘I’ve bought you some tulip and daffodil bulbs too,’ said Mr Jones. ‘Otherwise, as it’s October, there wouldn’t be much you could plant. But you can put the bulbs in now, and then you’ll see them come up in the spring.’

Arabel was very happy with her presents. She had also a toy dentist’s set from Annie, a red handbag from Cousin Gladys, and, from Great-Uncle Arthur, a packet of six Mortimer bars.

Mortimer bars were a new kind of chocolate bar that had just been invented. They had layers of butterscotch, nuts, marzipan and crumbly biscuit, wrapped in a thick chocolate rind.

Arabel liked them because of the butterscotch, nuts and biscuit; Mortimer liked them because of the name. The name had nothing to do with Mortimer

really; Fun-Folks Foods Ltd, the chocolate company who made the bars, had never heard of Mortimer. They chose the name because it began with an M, for they already had several other chocolate bars with M names, Monarch and Macho and Monster and Magpie (which was black and white chocolate). Now there were big posters all over London, especially in Underground stations, showing a frantic mother and her little boy who was howling with hunger. The caption underneath the picture said:

She should have  
bought him a  
MORTIMER!

Mortimer was delighted with these posters, and let out a loud '*Kaaark*' of satisfaction whenever he saw his own name written up so large. (Mortimer was not able to read many words. But Arabel had taught him to recognise his own name when it was printed.)

Little Annie did not think highly of Arabel's presents.

'Who wants a crummy old *cooking set*?' she said. 'That's only for *babies*. And who wants to work in the *garden*? I'd sooner ride on my exercise bicycle. And as for those mingy chocolate bars ...! When it's *my* birthday, *my* Dad gives me a *huge* box of chocolates, five layers deep, that costs pounds and pounds and pounds; and I'm allowed to eat the chocolates till I'm sick.'

'Fine goings on, I must say,' said Mrs Jones.

'But with the Mortimer bars,' pointed out Arabel, 'you can win half a million pounds.'

Arabel was right about this. Fun-Folks Foods Ltd had launched their new chocolate bar with an advertising campaign that told the public: 'Save the wrappers from twenty different Mortimer bars, fit them together, and make yourself a map which will lead you to the exciting spot where a solid block of gold is buried worth £500,000! Five hundred thousand pounds!'

Every Mortimer bar had part of a map printed on the inside of its wrapper. When you had managed to collect the twenty different bits that made up the whole map, and stuck them all together in the right order, you had to solve the secret clues printed on the map, which told you where the gold was buried. It might be anywhere in the whole country. The map was dotted all over with little pictures of people and animals doing different things, and clues about these activities. 'Emus bury wart,' said one clue. 'Subway, Mr True?' said another. 'We may rub rust,' said another, and another said 'A rum ruby stew'.

Arabel and Mortimer had already collected more than twenty Mortimer bar wrappers. They had not actually eaten all that number of chocolate bars; but Mortimer was extremely sharp at spotting the gold, purple and brown wrappers on the pavement, or in litter bins, or on Rumbury Waste where he and Arabel sometimes went roller-skating.

Mrs Jones did not approve of Mortimer picking up the wrappers.

‘They’re sure to be covered in germs,’ she said.

But Mortimer was very quick and clever at flipping them up with his beak and whipping them under his wing, and not bringing them out until he was back at home. He and Arabel had a wooden cigar box where they kept their collection of wrappers.

Some of the twenty wrappers that Arabel and Mortimer had saved were duplicates; they did not yet have a complete set of all that were needed. However, with Great-Uncle Arthur’s six, there seemed a good chance that they might have the whole set.

‘But you’re not to go unwrapping and eating them all at once!’ warned Mrs Jones. ‘One a day – after dinner. You can cut each bar into three bits, one for each of you.’



Mortimer's eyes sparkled at this, but Annie said, 'That's not *fair!* That's *mean!* *My* Mum lets me eat a whole bar whenever I want to, *and* as many chocolates as I like.'

'Yes, and look at your spotty face,' said Mrs Jones, but she said this to herself, not aloud, for she did not want to be unkind to a guest. Not that Annie took any pains to be kind to the Jones family. She pinched Arabel to make her get off the swing, poked Mortimer with her doll's parasol, told Mr Jones that his face was too red, and grumbled because Mrs Jones did not have ice cream at every meal.

Arabel's birthday, a Saturday, was fine and sunny, so she went into the garden directly after breakfast to plant her new bulbs with her new gardening tools. Annie didn't want to be left out of this, although she despised gardening, so Arabel let her have half the bulbs, and take turns with the spade, trowel and rake, which were red, with yellow handles.

Mortimer preferred to dig holes with his beak.

'Perhaps we'll find the gold Mortimer bar, if we dig enough holes,' said Annie. 'It might be in this garden as well as anywhere,' and she began digging holes all over Mr Jones's garden beds, until he came out of his workshed and stopped her.

When they had planted all the bulbs (Annie planted hers upside down, because she said that way they would grow downwards and come up in Australia; Arabel was not very happy about this), they played on the new see-saw.

Annie and Arabel were just about the same height and weight; they found they could use the see-saw very well together.

Mortimer did not like being left out. He jumped up and down with annoyance, and shouted '*Nevermore!*' so many times that neighbours in gardens on each side began to complain.

'That bird is a pest,' they said. 'There's never any peace while he's around.'

'He wants a turn on the see-saw,' said Arabel.

'Well, give him one, for mercy's sake!' said Mr Cross next door.

'He can't have *my* place,' said Annie.

'Come on, Mortimer, you can sit on my end,' said Arabel, and she got off and lifted Mortimer on to her seat. Mr Jones had set in crossbars for a handhold; Mortimer clutched the crossbar with his claw.

Unfortunately he was far too heavy for Annie on the see-saw; Mortimer had recently swallowed an iron wedge, a claw hammer and an old metal doorstep, in Mr Jones's workroom; and when he sat on the see-saw, the other end, with Annie on it, shot up into the air and stayed there.

‘Ooooooh! I’m slipping! Let me down!’ shrieked Annie, high up on her end of the see-saw.

Mortimer flopped off his end, and Annie came down with a bump.

‘What a shame,’ said Arabel. ‘Let’s try with both of us on one seat and Mortimer on the other.’

But even so, he was too heavy for them.

‘You’ve been eating too much, you fat old pig of a rook!’ said Annie rudely. ‘Come on, Arabel, let’s play dressing-up.’

Mortimer was offended, and also disappointed, because he had been looking forward to a turn on the see-saw. He ruffled out all his feathers, went into a sulk, and walked away to watch Mr Jones, who was burning up dead cabbage stalks and thorn twigs in the garden incinerator, along with the chips of wood left over from the see-saw.

Mortimer watched Mr Jones with great attention. Then he began bringing things to be burned; first he fetched some sticks, but Mr Jones said they were his pea-sticks and were being saved for next year; next Mortimer found the cardboard box that had had the bulbs in it, which Mr Jones let him burn; then he brought the paper wrappings from Arabel’s tool set, and a whole tangle of garden raffia that had gone rotten, so Mr Jones let him burn those things too.



‘Now that’s enough, Mortimer,’ said Mr Jones at this point. ‘I’ve got other things to do than watch a raven burning rubbish. You run along and play with the girls.’

Mr Jones went off to drive his taxi.

Mortimer never ran anywhere. He walked away slowly, with his head sunk in his neck-feathers.

The girls were in Arabel’s room, dressing up in each other’s clothes. Little Annie had brought from home an enormous suitcase full of dresses and pinafores and skirts and sweaters and jeans and shirts, all clean and new; she could have changed everything she had on, from the skin up, five times a day and still have had some things left over by the end of the visit. So Arabel was having quite an exciting time trying on her cousin’s wardrobe. Unluckily Arabel herself did not have nearly so many clothes, and also she was thinner and a little shorter than Annie; Mrs Jones had made her a new blue dress for her birthday but when Annie tried it on, she tore it at the neck.

‘Your clothes are boring,’ said Annie. ‘Let’s dress up in Auntie Martha’s clothes and play Kings and Queens.’

Without asking permission, Annie got Mrs Jones’s fur coat out of the black plastic mothproof satchel where it lived, and put it on; then she made herself

a crown from an empty ice-cream container cut into spikes.

When Mortimer discovered what the girls were doing, he was not interested. He had not the least wish to play Kings and Queens. He tried to get into the black plastic satchel where Mrs Jones's fur coat had been kept, which he had always wanted to do, but Arabel would not let him. So, while Arabel was making herself a crown out of three egg-boxes stuck together, Mortimer went grumpily downstairs again. On the way up he had noticed the Winky Doll arranged in an armchair in the lounge, staring at the blank television screen. (Annie had left the TV switched on for the Winky Doll, but Mrs Jones had switched it off, muttering 'Dolls watching telly, what next?' before going back to her kitchen work.)

Mrs Jones was busy making Arabel's birthday cake.

Mortimer went into the lounge and tried to pick up the Winky Doll. But, although he was very strong, the doll was too floppy and bulky and awkward for him to carry.

'*Nevermore!*' he croaked to himself.

The Winky Doll's hands and feet were too fat and shiny for Mortimer's beak or claws to grasp them. At length he managed to drag the doll off the chair and on to the floor by its skirt; then he began hauling it across the floor by its hair. Some hair came out. And Mortimer knocked over a small table and a standard lamp.

At the sound of the table falling, Mrs Jones called, 'Arabel and Annie, what are you doing?'

'We aren't doing *anything*, Auntie Martha,' called Annie from upstairs. Mrs Jones went to see what this meant. She was very annoyed at finding Annie in her fur coat.

'*That goes straight* back in its satchel, and don't let me see you touch it again,' she said. 'And you'd better tidy up all this mess. What Cousin Gladys will say when she sees all Annie's nice new things crumpled up like that, I *do* not know.'

'Oo werp oh oo arhing ee ey hing ush ow,' was all that Gladys Line actually said when she came back from the dental hospital, but by that time, of course, the clothes had been folded up and put back in Annie's drawer.

Mrs Jones was even more annoyed when she found that Arabel's new blue dress had been torn at the neck.

'You girls go and play *outside*,' said Mrs Jones, and she went back, with her lips pressed tight together, to the kitchen, to see how Arabel's birthday cake was getting on. The girls played radio-controlled tiddlywinks on the back doorstep.



While Mrs Jones was upstairs, Mortimer had managed to drag the Winky Doll through the kitchen, out of the back door, and down the sloping cement path to the garden incinerator behind the laurel bush. He propped the doll against the side of the incinerator and rested for a moment or two; all that dragging had been hard work. Then he flapped himself up and perched on the rim of the incinerator. Then he leaned down and took a good hold of the doll's hair with his beak.

Then, with one terrific jerk, twitch, flap, hoist and scramble, he wrenched up the Winky Doll, hauled it over the rim of the incinerator, and dropped it down inside.

There were still some glowing ends of twigs and slivers of wood smouldering away under the ashes at the bottom of the pile of burnt garden rubbish. When the Winky Doll had stood on its head in the ashes for a few minutes, the dry blonde hair began to burn; then, with a little spurt of flame, the frilly collar caught fire.



'Kaaark!' said Mortimer, delighted; and he flopped off the rim of the incinerator (which was rather too close to the flames for comfort) and

watched from the handle of Mr Jones's wheelbarrow, as, with a fluttering roaring sound, the Winky Doll burned up completely. A thick black column of smoke rose up from the foam rubber with which the doll was stuffed. Quite soon there was nothing left in the bottom of the incinerator but a squirmy coil of shiny greasy black brittle stuff.

'Nevermore!' said Mortimer with deep satisfaction, and he went away to sit on the bottom end of the see-saw, and think about Mortimer bars, and milk chocolate, and mince pies, and mushrooms, and all the other things he liked to eat.

'Girls,' said Mrs Jones presently, seeing them on the back step, 'it'll be teatime soon, why don't you take a bit of exercise before tea, instead of just sitting there?'

Arabel and Annie stood up. If Arabel had been on her own, she would have found plenty to do in the garden: sweeping up leaves, picking bunches of Michaelmas daisies to put in meat-paste jars, collecting empty snail shells, and looking for nuts in the hazel hedge behind Mr Jones's work-shed. But Annie did not want to do any of those things; she said they were boring.

'Let's get out the garden hose and water your bulbs that we planted,' Annie said.

'Pa doesn't like me to get out the hose,' Arabel said doubtfully.

'Well he's not here,' said Annie, and she dragged out the hose, which was long and green and shiny, and lived in the shed, wound up on a kind of wheel.

Annie unwound a whole lot of the hose. Then she fitted the end of it over the garden tap and turned the tap on.

Annie had left the nozzle of the hose pointing towards Arabel, who was walking slowly towards Mortimer, still sitting on the see-saw; when Annie turned the tap full on, a sharp jet of water burst out of the hose nozzle and drenched Arabel from head to foot.

'Eeeech!' cried Arabel, in surprise; and Mortimer, who had climbed off the see-saw and started walking towards her, stopped short and gazed in astonishment. Next minute he got soused as well, for Annie, almost doubled up with laughter, grabbed the nozzle and turned it in Mortimer's direction.

Mortimer did not in the least mind being sprayed with water; his coat of black feathers was so thick and waterproof that most of the spray just ran off on to the grass. But he was very anxious to get a closer look at the hose; this was because, whenever Mr Jones used it for watering the garden, he forbade Mortimer to come anywhere near, and, indeed, generally shut the raven inside the house while watering was being done. 'For you know what would happen,' he said. 'That black monster would eat up the hose like spaghetti before you could say Columbus!'

So Mortimer had never been able to get a close look at the hose, and now he was not going to waste his chance. He thought the hose looked as if it might be made of liquorice.

Just then Mrs Jones came out with a couple of tea cloths to hang on the line.

‘Girls!’ she called. ‘It’s just going to be teatime. Birthday cake! Where are you?’

Then she saw Arabel, soaked from head to foot, with her fair hair hanging plastered all round her like a yellow shawl, and the water streaming off her wet dress.

‘*Arabel Jones!* Whatever have you been *doing?*’

‘Look out, Auntie Martha!’ squeaked Annie in fits of giggles. ‘Or I’ll turn the hose on you too!’

But at that moment Mortimer, who had been observing the length of shiny green hosepipe very attentively, walked along it towards Annie, giving it, as he went, a series of brisk sharp stabs with his beak – just the way a cook cuts with a knife round the rim of a pastry tart – peck, peck, peck, peck, peck! At each peck along the pipe, out shot a jet of water. And the last one hit little Annie Line, and drenched her as thoroughly as her cousin.

Mrs Jones, lips jammed together to stop her saying something she might later regret, went and turned off the garden tap. Then she jerked the lever that coiled the hosepipe, and rewound it on to its wheel. Then she locked up the hose in the garden shed and pocketed the key.

‘Just you wait till your father hears about this!’ she said to Arabel. ‘Go along – indoors, the pair of you, and get out of those wet things.’

‘Shan’t you let us have Arabel’s birthday cake now?’ pertly asked Annie Line, turning to stare at Mrs Jones with her curried-bean eyes, as she slowly dripped her way upstairs, all over Mrs Jones’s pale green stair carpet.

Annie was used to being in disgrace, which was a daily event with her at home; disgrace never lasted long in her family.

‘We’ll see,’ said Mrs Jones grimly, following Arabel into the bathroom with a towel.

However when Mr Jones came home, which he soon did, for he had promised to be back in time for Arabel’s birthday tea, he said, after hearing the story, ‘Well, Martha, it wasn’t Arabel’s fault – for it was Annie’s idea to play with the hose. So I don’t see why Arabel shouldn’t have her birthday cake. And as for Mortimer, it’s no more than you’d expect of *him.*’

‘It’s all that perishing little Annie – I could wring her neck,’ muttered Mrs Jones. ‘Nothing but trouble since she’s been in the house. Normally our

Arabel's good as gold – and Mortimer at least is just himself, that's all you can say of him.'

'Well, Annie's a visitor, you can't punish the child,' said Ben, 'and thank goodness she and Gladys are going on Monday; nothing too bad can happen between now and then,' he added hopefully. 'Let's go on and have the birthday tea, Martha.'

So they had the birthday tea, in the kitchen, with a pink tablecloth over the big kitchen table, and candles on the pink cake, and Annie and Arabel rather clean and quiet, and Mortimer decidedly overexcited, swallowing the crackers as fast as they were pulled, sometimes even before they were pulled, as well as all the things that came out of them, riddles and whistles and rings and paper caps and plastic flowers.

Cousin Gladys returned from her day's treatment at the hospital and swallowed a cup of tea, but was unable to eat anything because of her teeth.

'Ooo werp oh oo arhing ee ey hing ush ow,' she said. 'Ahhy irhy, Arel eerie.'

Later it was bedtime for the girls, and Annie began looking for her Winky Doll.

'That's funny. I thought I left her in the lounge,' she said. 'I thought I left her in the armchair watching *Racing at Windsor*.'

'So you did, but I came in and switched off the programme. Wasting television on dolls, indeed!' said Mrs Jones.

'Did you put my Winky Doll away somewhere, Aunt Martha?'

'Didn't touch the object,' said Mrs Jones.

'Somebody knocked over the table and the light, and broke the bulb,' said Mr Jones, taking the broken bulb out of the standard lamp. 'Was that you girls?'

They shook their heads.

Then Arabel noticed a button from the Winky Doll's dress lying on the carpet near the door. Just one button. And a tuft of hair.

A sudden awful thought came into her head.

'Mortimer,' she said. 'Did you take Annie's Winky Doll anywhere?'

'*Kaaark*,' said Mortimer dreamily.

'Mortimer. Where did you take the Winky Doll?'

Without the least hesitation, Mortimer proudly led the way to the garden incinerator. By now it was dark, they had to switch on the light outside the back door, and carry torches with them to shine on what Mortimer had to show them – which was a pile of ash. There was one brass button left among the ashes, and a blue eye.

'MORTIMER!!!'