

1 At Kirrin Cottage again

Georgina was at the station to meet her three cousins. Timmy her dog was with her, his long tail wagging eagerly. He knew they'd come to meet Julian, Dick and Anne, and he was glad. It was much more fun when the Five were all together.

'Here comes the train, Timmy!' said George.

Nobody called her Georgina, because she wouldn't answer if they did. She looked like a boy with her short curly hair and her jeans and open-necked shirt. Her face was covered with freckles, and her legs and arms were tanned and healthy.

There was the far-off rumble of a train, and as it came nearer, a short warning hoot. Timmy whined and wagged his tail. He didn't like trains, but he wanted this one to come.

Nearer and nearer it came, slowing down as it reached Kirrin station. Long before it came to the little platform three heads appeared out of one of the windows, and three hands waved wildly.

George waved back, her face one big smile.

The door swung open almost before the train stopped. Out came a big boy, who helped down a small girl. Then came another boy, not quite as tall as the first one, with a bag in each hand. He dragged a third bag out, and then George and Timmy were on him.

‘Julian! Dick! Anne! Your train’s late; we thought you were never coming!’

‘Hello, George! Here we are at last. Get down, Timmy, don’t eat me.’

‘Hello, George! Oh, Timmy, you darling – you’re just as licky as ever!’

‘Woof,’ said Timmy joyfully, and bounded all around like a mad thing, getting in everybody’s way.

‘Any trunk or anything?’ asked George. ‘Only those three bags?’

‘Well, we haven’t come for long this time, worst luck,’ said Dick. ‘Only a fortnight! Still, it’s better than nothing.’

‘You shouldn’t have gone off to France all those six weeks,’ said George, half jealously. ‘I suppose you’ve gone all French now.’

Dick laughed, waved his hands in the air and

went off into a stream of quick French that sounded just like gibberish to George. French wasn't one of her strong subjects.

'Shut up,' she said, giving him a friendly shove. 'You're just the same old idiot. Oh, I'm so glad you've come. It's been lonely and boring at Kirrin without you.'

A station assistant came up with a trolley. Dick turned to him, waved his hands again, and addressed the astonished man in fluent French. But the station assistant knew Dick.

'Go on with you,' he said. 'Argy-bargying in double-Dutch like that. Do you want me to send these up to Kirrin Cottage for you?'

'Yes, please,' said Anne. 'Stop it, Dick. It isn't funny when you go on so long.'

'Oh, let him go on,' said George, and she linked her arms in Anne's and Dick's. 'It's lovely to have you again. Mum's looking forward to seeing you all.'

'I bet Uncle Quentin isn't,' said Julian, as they went along the little platform, Timmy capering around them.

'Dad's in quite a good mood,' said George. 'You know he's been to America with Mum,

lecturing and hearing other scientists lecturing too. Mum says everyone made a great fuss of him, and he liked it.'

George's father was a brilliant scientist, well known all over the world. But he was rather a difficult man at home, impatient, hot-tempered and forgetful. The children were fond of him, but held him in great respect. They all heaved a sigh of relief when he went away for a few days, for then they could make as much noise as they liked, run up and down the stairs, play silly jokes and generally be as mad as they liked.

'Will Uncle Quentin be at home all the time we're staying with you?' asked Anne. She was a bit scared of her hot-tempered uncle.

'No,' said George. 'Mum and Dad are going on a trip to Spain – so we'll be on our own.'

'Fantastic!' said Dick. 'We can wear our swimming costumes all day long then if we want to.'

'And Timmy can come in at mealtimes without being sent out whenever he moves,' said George. 'He's been sent out every single mealtime this week, just because he snapped at the flies that came near him. Dad goes absolutely mad if

Timmy suddenly snaps at a fly.'

'Shame!' said Anne, and patted Timmy's rough-haired back. 'You can snap at every single fly you like, Timmy, when we're on our own.'

'Woof,' said Timmy, gratefully.

'There won't be time for any adventure these holidays,' said Dick, regretfully, as they walked down the lane to Kirrin Cottage. Red poppies danced along the way, and in the distance the sea shone as blue as cornflowers. 'Only two weeks – and back we go to school! Well, let's hope the weather keeps nice. I want to swim six times a day!'

Soon they were all sitting around the table at Kirrin Cottage, and their Aunt Fanny was handing around plates of her nicest scones and teacakes. She was very pleased to see her nephews and niece again.

'Now George will be happy,' she said, smiling at the hungry four. 'She's been going around like a bear with a sore head the last week or two. Have another scone, Dick? Take two while you're about it.'

'Good idea,' said Dick, and helped himself. 'Nobody makes scones and cakes like you do,

Aunt Fanny. Where's Uncle Quentin?'

'In his study,' said his aunt. 'He knows it's tea-time, and he's heard the bell, but I expect he's buried in something or other. I'll have to fetch him in a minute. I honestly think he'd go without food all day long if I didn't go and drag him into the dining room!'

'Here he is,' said Julian, hearing the familiar impatient footsteps coming down the hall to the dining room.

The door was flung open. Uncle Quentin stood there, a newspaper in his hand, scowling. He didn't appear to see the children at all.

'Look at this, Fanny!' he shouted. 'See what they've put in this paper – the very thing I gave orders was NOT to be put in! The fools! The idiots! The . . .'

'Quentin! Whatever's the matter?' said his wife. 'Look – here are the children – they've just arrived.'

But Uncle Quentin didn't see any of the four children. He went on glaring at the paper. He rapped at it with his hand.

'*Now* we'll get the place full of reporters wanting to see me, and wanting to know all

about my new ideas!’ he said, beginning to shout. ‘See what they’ve said! “This eminent scientist conducts all his experiments and works out all his ideas at his home, Kirrin Cottage. Here are his stack of notebooks, to which are now added two more – fruits of his visit to America – and here at his cottage are his amazing diagrams,” and so on and so on. I tell you, Fanny, we’ll have hordes of reporters down.’

‘No, we won’t, dear,’ said his wife. ‘And, anyway, we’re off to Spain soon. Please sit down and have some tea. And look, can’t you say a word to welcome Julian, Dick and Anne?’

Uncle Quentin grunted and sat down.

‘I didn’t know they were coming,’ he said, and helped himself to a scone. ‘You might have told me, Fanny.’

‘I told you three times yesterday and twice today,’ said his wife.

Anne suddenly squeezed her uncle’s arm. She was sitting next to him.

‘You’re just the same as ever, Uncle Quentin,’ she said. ‘You never, never remember we’re coming! Shall we go away again?’

Her uncle looked down at her and smiled. His

temper never lasted very long. He grinned at Julian and Dick.

‘Well, here you are again!’ he said. ‘Do you think you can hold the fort for me while I’m away with your aunt?’

‘Definitely!’ said all three together.

‘We’ll keep everyone at bay!’ said Julian. ‘With Timmy’s help. I’ll put up a sign: “*Beware, very fierce dog*”.’

‘Woof,’ said Timmy, sounding delighted. He thumped his tail on the floor. A fly came by his nose and he snapped at it. Uncle Quentin frowned.

‘Have another scone, Dad?’ said George hurriedly. ‘When are you and Mum going to Spain?’

‘Tomorrow,’ said her mother firmly. ‘Now don’t look like that, Quentin. You know perfectly well it’s been arranged for weeks, and you *need* a holiday, and if we don’t go tomorrow all our arrangements will be upset.’

‘Well, you might have *warned* me it was tomorrow,’ said her husband, looking indignant. ‘I mean – I’ve got all my notebooks to check and put away, and . . .’

‘Quentin, I’ve told you lots of times that we

leave on September the third,' said his wife, still more firmly. 'I want a holiday, too. The four children will be all right here with Timmy – they'll love being on their own. Julian's almost grown-up now and he can cope with anything that turns up.'

Timmy snapped twice at a fly, and Uncle Quentin jumped.

'If that dog does that again,' he began, but his wife interrupted him at once.

'There, you see! You're as touchy and nervy as can be, Quentin, dear. It'll do you good to get away – and the children will have a lovely two weeks on their own. Nothing can possibly happen, so make up your mind to leave tomorrow with an easy mind!'

Nothing can possibly happen? Aunt Fanny was wrong of course. *Anything* could happen when the Five were left on their own!