

## Four

You've guessed it. Charlie Smugg is Sergeant Smugg's son, and he's a real pain. I was always bumping into him, and his dad's three Alsations – at least, Charlie was always bumping into me, deliberately. He's thirteen and enormous. He's got great gangly arms like King Kong, a face full of pimples and little piggy eyes. You know those pictures you see in books about Prehistoric Man? Well, he looks like that. Charlie likes pushing people around, as long as they're smaller than he is. Tina and I both come into the small category as far as Charlie is concerned.



'Well, if it isn't a pair of love-birds,' he began.

'You're right, it isn't,' Tina snapped back.

'Come out here for a smooch?' leered Charlie.

'Get lost!' she said. (I wouldn't have dared speak to Charlie like that!)

'What are you doing here, then?' he demanded.

Streaker made one of her rare guest appearances, flying past at Mach three, before doing a bombing run on a distant rabbit-hole. 'If you must know,' I said, desperate to prove that there was nothing going on between me and Tina, 'we're out here to train my dog.'

Did I tell you that when Charlie Smugg laughs he sounds like an asthmatic donkey? I thought he'd never stop. 'Train that dog?' he sniggered. 'You can't train a dog like that!'

'Yes we can,' insisted Tina. 'No problem.'

A sneering grin appeared on Charlie's face. He reminded me strongly of

Quasimodo, though I didn't tell him. And then he said the words that caused us so much trouble for the rest of the holiday.

'I bet you can't.'

'Bet you we can!' shouted Tina.

There was a strange sinking sensation in my stomach, as if I could sense trouble ahead, but it was too late to do anything about it.

'Right – you're on.' Charlie looked very satisfied.

'So, what's the bet?' demanded Tina recklessly.

Charlie took Tina's stick and trailed it through the sludge at the bottom of the old tin bath. It came out trailing great globs of green-black, slimy weed. Several more bubbles floated up, burst and filled the air with their putrid stink. Charlie smiled. He towered over us with a murderous look in his eye and dangled the dribbling stick in



front of our faces. 'If you haven't got Streaker trained by the end of the holiday, you have to take a bath – right here!'

Tina and I were too stunned, too horrified, too appalled to answer. We simply gawked at Charlie in dismay. He was really enjoying himself of course, and he hadn't finished either.

'You've got to wash your hair in it too, *both* of you.'

I stared in disbelief at the yellow scum floating in the bath. I felt like being sick, but Tina snatched back her stick and waved it at Charlie. 'Don't forget bets work both ways,' she shouted. 'If we *do* train Streaker, you have to wash here yourself.'

Charlie shrugged. 'That's OK. You'll never train her. I can't wait!' He turned on his heel. 'You can have your smooch now,' he added and strode off, laughing noisily. In the far distance I could see a neat black

head with flapping ears appear occasionally. Streaker was homing in on Charlie like a cruise missile.

I nudged Tina and pointed. 'Five, four, three, two, one . . .'

There was a very satisfying yell and Charlie suddenly disappeared from view. A few seconds later he struggled to his feet waving a fist. We were too far away to hear what he was saying. I shall leave it to your imagination.

Charlie went on his way and I breathed a long, long sigh. 'Come on, we'd better find Streaker and start training her immediately. You've got us into a real mess now.'

'Me! I like that! I offer to help and end up getting blamed for everything. We're in this together.' Tina suddenly gave a giggle and stirred the murky water. 'Thank goodness we're not in *this* together,' she pointed out.

'Ha ha.' How could she joke about it?

'It's not bath-time yet,' said Tina cheerfully. 'You give up so easily. We are going to train that dog, Trevor, get the thirty pounds *and* watch Charlie Smugg sit in this bath and wash his greasy hair. Come on.'

What could I do but follow?