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opening extract from

Operation Gadgetman!

written by

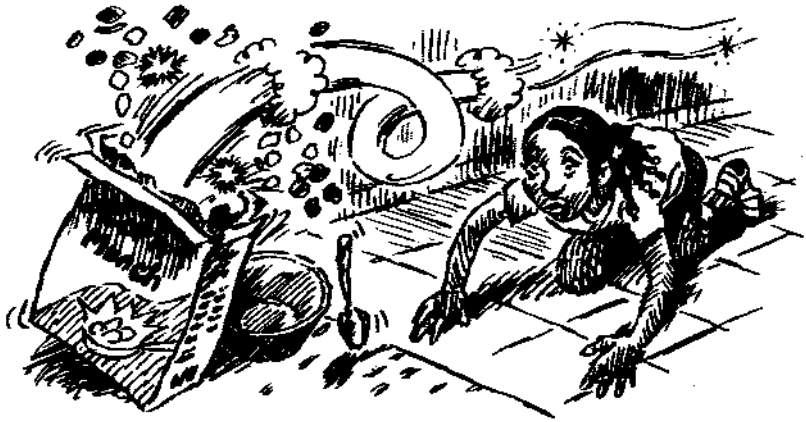
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Chapter One
A Little Experiment!

BOOM! WHIIIZZ! KER-BOOOM!

The whole house shook and the windows rattled violently. Gadgetman was at it again! Beans was still for only a moment. She ran out of the bathroom and dashed downstairs, her toothbrush in her hand.

'Dad! Dad, what's going on?' Beans yelled.

A high-pitched whistle shrieked through the house again. Beans ran into the kitchen.

BOOOOM! WHIZZZ!

'Eeek!' Beans threw herself down on to the kitchen floor.

Only just in time, too! A small red-and-yellow doobry-whatsit whizzed through the open kitchen window and shot over her head, before veering left to crash into a box of cornflakes.

BOOOOOOM!

Beans shook her head as she got to her feet. Dad could blow up his workroom if he wanted to – and he often did! – but did he have to blow up the kitchen as well? Dad's workroom was at the bottom of the garden, but there were times when the bottom of the garden wasn't far enough away. Beans didn't mind her dad being an inventor – much! – but did he have to make so much noise about it?

'Beans, are you OK?' Beans's dad called through the kitchen window.

'Yes, Dad.' Beans frowned. 'What on earth are you doing? You didn't tell me your animal crunchies were meant to explode like that!'

'They're not! I got the propellent mixture wrong. I'd better stop the rest of them from blowing up as well! Bye!' Beans's dad started across the garden. He stopped abruptly and turned back. 'Beans, er . . . you won't say a word to your friends about what happened on Wednesday night, will you?'

'No, Dad.'

'Our secret?'

'Our secret,' Beans agreed. As if she *would* tell anyone. No way!

Beans went out into the hall. Another explosion sounded behind her. She raised her eyes heavenwards, then walked faster.

I don't have time for all this. I have to get ready for school, Beans thought firmly.

She started up the stairs, vigorously brushing her teeth, when the doorbell rang. With a sigh, she turned to open the door. She'd never get to school at this rate!

It was her two best friends, Louisa and Ann. They always walked to school together. Beans grinned, the toothpaste frothy and bubbling in her mouth.

'Arrgh! Mad girl! Mad girl! Call the RSPCA!' Ann took a hasty step backwards.

Beans laughed, before choking on the toothpaste.

'Ugh! Beans, do you have to?' Louisa wrinkled up her nose. 'That is so gross!'

WHIZZZZ!

They all jumped.

'What on earth was that?' Ann asked, her green eyes round like saucers. 'Your dad?'

Beans nodded. Who else would be making that kind of racket at eight-fifteen in the morning? Mr McKee, their neighbour,

would be knocking on the front door for sure with all that din.

'It sounds like he's trying to give everyone in the street a heart attack.' Louisa frowned.

Beans shrugged, then pointed to her mouth and darted up the stairs. Toothpaste rinsed out, she ran back downstairs to the hall to join her friends. Dad was there ahead of her. His hair was sticking up in tufts all over his head, his glasses were practically off his nose, and the right-hand arm of his glasses was sticking in his ear rather than resting on top of it. He was wearing a blue T-shirt and the shorts Beans had bought him for Christmas – the ones with Bugs Bunny playing tennis all over them. And he only had one slipper on.

'Is everyone sure they're all right?' Bean's dad asked anxiously.

Louisa nodded. Ann bit her bottom lip and lowered her eyes, trying her best not to laugh. Beans couldn't blame her! Why did Dad have to be *so* embarrassing!

'I was doing a little experiment and it . . . er . . . went ever so slightly wrong,' he said.

'As always!' Beans muttered.

'Pardon, dear?'

'Nothing, Dad,' said Beans, hastily. 'Rats! I've forgotten my jacket. I'll be right back.' And she ran upstairs to her room.

When she came downstairs again, Dad said, 'I'm just telling your friends about my latest invention – animal crunchies! They're biscuits, shaped like various animals, which actually cook as you propel them through the air! Mind you, you have to lob them quite a few times before the ingredients cook properly, but it's worth it, 'cause then you get hot, fresh shortcake biscuits! Isn't

that terrific! I got the idea for them by accident, actually. It was . . .'

'Dad, you'll have to hold your horses until this afternoon or we'll be late for school.' Beans glanced down at her watch.

'But it won't take long . . .'

'We don't have the time, Dad – honest,' Beans said.

'Oh . . . OK then,' her dad said sadly.

Beans sighed. 'Louisa and Ann are coming round for dinner tonight so you can explain how your oojee-whatsits work later,' she said. Her dad's forlorn expression had got to her!

'All right then.' He brightened up. 'I'll make sure there's plenty of food ready for all of you when you get here.'

'Thank you, Mr Conran.' Louisa smiled.

'Yeah, thanks, Mr C.,' said Ann.

Beans turned to lead the way out of the house when her dad piped up from

behind her, 'Oh, just a minute, everyone.'

He trotted into the kitchen. Beans looked at her watch again, tapping her foot.

'Beans, if I have to stay behind after school to write another essay for being late, my arm will drop off,' Louisa whispered.

'And my mum will go into orbit,' Ann added.

'DAD . . . !'

'Here we are.' Beans's dad came out of the kitchen, a small black plastic briefcase in either hand. 'There you are, Ann. This one's for you,' he said, handing over one case to Louisa. 'And this one is for you, Louisa,' he continued, handing the second briefcase to Ann.

'Dad, you've got them round the wrong way – again,' Beans said patiently. She pointed to Louisa. 'That's Louisa.' She pointed to Ann. 'And that's Ann! I *have* told you before.'

'Oh yes, so you have,' her dad said vaguely. 'Sorry.'

Beans tutted. How could he get her friends mixed up? Louisa was black and Ann was white, for goodness sake!

'Thank you very much, Mr Conran. It's very kind of you.' Louisa looked down at the briefcase in her hand. 'Er . . . what is it?'

'They're Gadgetman spy kits!' Beans's dad announced proudly. 'They're going to be in the shops from the end of this month. Tell your friends! Tell your parents! Tell everyone! Buy now before the Christmas stampede.'

It was only June.

'Oh, Dad!' Beans shook her head.

If she shook it any more that morning it would drop off her neck! Some fathers shouldn't be allowed, they really shouldn't.

Especially hers!

PRINNNNNG! PRRINNNNNNGG!

Someone was pressing the doorbell and they obviously *weren't* going to take their finger off it until the front door opened.

Beans and her dad looked at each other.

'Mr McKee!' they said in unison.

Beans's dad turned round to scarper back to his workroom.

'Oh no you don't, Dad. Stay where you are!' Beans opened the door.

'Beans, I'd like to speak to your father about all those explosions going off in your garden, please,' Mr McKee said tersely. He looked past Beans and saw who he was looking for. His dark, bushy eyebrows fell so low over his narrowed eyes that they practically touched his kneecaps.

'Dad, we'll see you later.' Beans pulled Louisa and Ann out the front door with her.

'Er . . . Beans, couldn't you . . .' her dad began.

'Sorry! No can do! We'll be late for school if we hang around much longer,' Beans said.

'Mr Conran, I'm fed up! I'm warning you – one more bang, one more explosion, just one more teeny-tiny *pop* and I'm calling the police!' ranted Mr McKee.

Beans and her friends didn't wait to hear any more. They left her dad on the front doorstep, discussing his latest invention and the noise it made with his irate neighbour.

The three girls marched quickly down the hill.

'Why didn't you stay behind? Your dad obviously wanted you to,' Louisa said.

'Dad has to learn to get himself out of trouble,' Beans retorted. 'I can't keep doing it for him all the time.'

'Where did he get his animal crunchies idea from?' Ann laughed. 'I've never heard of anything like that before.'

'Is it any wonder!' Beans said dryly. 'Who else would come up with an idea like that?'

Louisa looked down at her watch. 'I hate to tell you two this, but . . .' She didn't need to say the rest.

Without any of them suggesting it, they all started running. They were going to be late for school.

Again.