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opening extract from

Toby Tucker Keeping Sneaky Secrets

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TOBY TUCKER



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EGMONT

The Allen house, present day

Toby Tucker couldn't believe his eyes. Such a huge room! And it was just for him! The pink fairy wallpaper was a bit of a no-no, but otherwise, it was great.



THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! Toby stepped on to the landing and leaned over the banister to see what the racket was. 'Can I help?'



Don rested a heavy wooden chest against his knees. He took a deep breath and blew out. 'You can give me a hand with this, lad,' he said. 'What have you got in it? Dinosaur bones?'

Toby grinned. 'There's not much, really. It's the box that's heavy, not what's in it.'

They dragged the chest upstairs and across Toby's room, making tracks in the deep red carpet. Don pulled a face. 'Evie won't like that,' he said. 'It's new.'

Toby looked up. 'New? Did you buy the carpet for me?'

'Sort of,' said Don. 'We've only just moved in ourselves, so we had to buy a few bits. This house is almost as new for us as it is for you.' He wiped his hand across his sweaty brow. 'And we wanted you to have a nice room, seeing as how it's your first proper home. Like it?'

'It's brilliant,' said Toby. 'But, er . . .'

Don grinned. 'I know – the fairies. Don't worry, we'll get that sorted before you have any mates



up here.'

Toby knew that would be a while. New room plus new home plus new school plus new town. That all added up to no mates. Yet.

Light footsteps pattered up the stairs, and Evie appeared with a tray of tea, hot buttered toast and strawberry jam. 'Like your room?' she asked. 'Jeepers creepers, Don!' she said, before Toby had a chance to reply. 'What have you been doing to the carpet? Sledging on it?'

'Sorry,' said Toby, worried that he'd done wrong on the first day of his new life with Don and Evie Allen. 'It's my chest that did it. The people at the children's home gave it to me when I left. They said there's only a load of torn paper in it, but it belongs to me, so I have to have it.'

Don grinned. 'You're a bit of a mystery, you are, Toby Tucker,' he said, handing mugs round. 'No past – no record of you at all at the home.'

'That's right.' Evie sprayed toast crumbs as she spoke. 'And you could tell the staff think it's



weird, too. Where did you come from, Toby Tucker?'

Toby didn't know what to say, but Don jumped up and said, 'Doesn't matter where he comes from – he can be the boy from nowhere as far as I'm concerned. The important thing is that he's here now, we're his foster parents, and we're going to get on like . . . like . . .'

'A house on fire?' suggested Evie.

'Birds in a nest?' suggested Toby.

'Pigs in a pigpen!' said Don.

Toby Tucker sat back on his heels and looked round the room. His clothes were in the white-painted wardrobe. Everything else was in a tall built-in cupboard, which had far too many shelves for his few possessions. Good-luck cards from the kids and staff at the home stood on the windowsill, and all that was left was the heavy wooden chest. It stood on the floor beneath the window. Evie said it would make a handy extra seat.



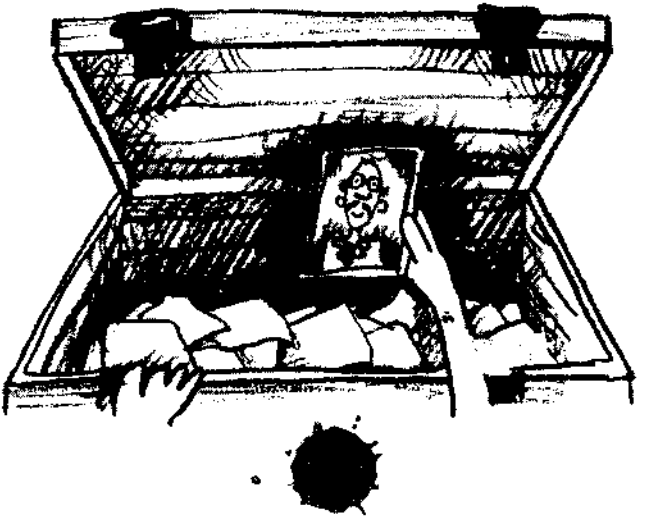
Toby lifted the lid and stared at the mass of torn paper. He plunged his hands into it and tossed the pieces into the air.

'What am I supposed to do with this?' he wondered.

Again, he plunged his hands deep into the chest, but this time he caught his little finger on something.

'Yowch!' He sucked his nail, then burrowed through the paper to see what he'd stubbed his finger on. It was an old wooden photo frame.

Toby gazed at the photo. The face meant nothing to him, yet it was a gentle face, with a smile that made Toby feel warm inside.



He turned the photo over. There was some writing on the back, in pencil. Toby looked closely. His eyes widened when he caught sight of his own name. He tilted it so the light fell on it, then read, his lips moving as he made out the faded words.

> The paper in the chest is your family tree. I wonder which little baby tore it up, eh, Toby Tucker? Piece it together and you'll find out who you are and when you come from.
>
> Gee.

He got it wrong, thought Toby. He meant 'where you come from', not 'when'.

Just then, Don yelled, 'Dinner, Toby! Your first chance to suffer Evie's cooking – ouch!' Laughter echoed up the stairs.

I'm going to like it here, Toby thought. He took one more look at the photo as he put it back in the box.

'Perhaps you're my great-grandfather, or



something,' he said to the gentle face. 'I hope you are. Were.'

After dinner, which Toby thought was ace, he showed Evie and Don his family tree. They were fascinated.

'If you can piece it together,' said Evie, 'you'll find out who you are.'

That's what the note said, Toby remembered. He didn't mention it though. Having a secret made him feel special.

Don pulled open a drawer. 'Here,' he said. 'No time like the present.' He handed Toby a roll of sticky tape. 'Want some help?'

'No!' Toby said quickly. 'Sorry, I'm not being rude, but I'd like to do this myself.'

'Of course you would,' Evie said with a smile. 'Hey! Maybe if you finish it, you'll be able to use it to track down some real family.'

'Yeah!' said Don. 'Like a second cousin three times removed, or something.'



'You might be a prince!' Evie bobbed a curtsy.

'Or a gypsy boy!' said Don. 'Cool!'

Toby grinned. 'Don't be daft. I just want to find out who I am!'

'Then you'd better get started,' said Evie. 'You have a quest. Who's Toby Tucker?'

Toby took a heap of paper scraps from the chest and dumped them in the middle of the carpet.

