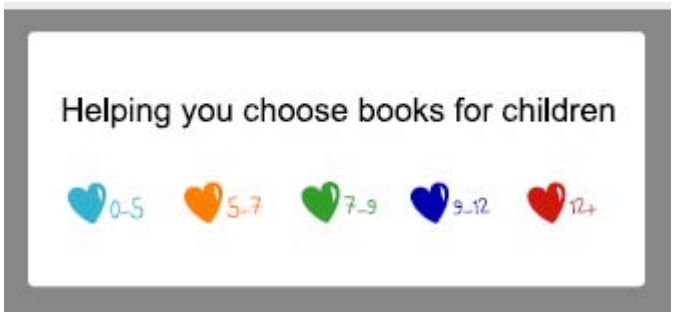
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opening extract from

Toby Tucker
Mucking about with Monkeys

written by

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TOBY TUCKER



VAL WILDING

Illustrated by Michael Broad

EGMONT

The Allen house, present day

Toby Tucker was so excited he could hardly eat. 'Did you say dog?' he asked. 'We're having a dog?'

'For a while,' said Evie, his foster mother. 'Only if Don agrees.'

'He will! He always agrees with you.'

That was almost true. Toby's foster father, Don, was one of the easiest people in the world to get along with, but when he felt strongly about something, he always spoke his mind.

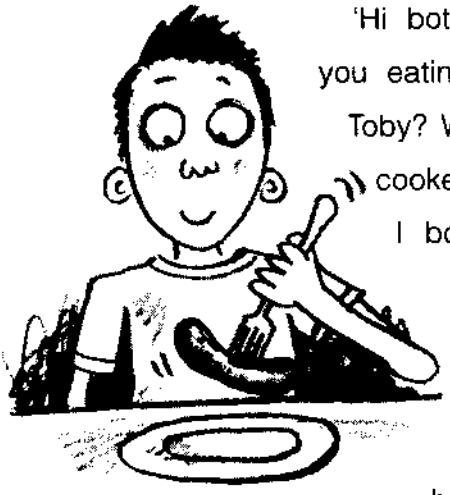
'Anyway,' said Toby. 'It's your mum's dog, and she's going into hospital, so we have to have it. What's it like?'

It was only a couple of months since Toby had left the children's home to live with the Allens. He hadn't yet met the rest of the family. Don and Evie had moved into their house just before Toby arrived, and all their spare time was taken up with



decorating and repairs.

Before Evie could reply, Don came in carrying a bag of nails.



'Hi both,' he said. 'Aren't you eating those sausages, Toby? Why not? Evie overcooked them again? Can I borrow one to bang these nails in?' He took a sausage, bit into it and grinned at Evie. She stuck her tongue out.

Toby pinned his last sausage with a fork. Evie never overcooked anything!

'We're having a dog!' he said.

'We're not,' said Don. 'Flipping nuisances, they are. Always needing walks, shedding hairs everywhere, biting postmen, forever after food . . .'

'Apart from the postmen,' said Evie, 'that sounds just like you.' She put sausages, onions,

green beans and mash in front of Don. 'Toby's right – we're having a dog, but not for long.'

'It's one of her mum's dogs,' Toby explained. 'What's it called, Evie?'

'Snowball.'

Toby thought Snowball was a fun name. 'While Evie's mum's having her hip done,' he continued, 'her neighbour's looking after one dog, and we're looking after Snowball.'

'Are we indeed?' said Don.

'If you agree,' Toby and Evie chorused.

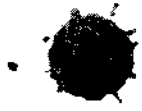
Don frowned. 'I've never seen Snowball. It must be new. I suppose it won't be as much bother as the other one, that mad Barney.'

Toby jumped up. 'Hooray! We're getting a dog! Can I go and tell Jake and Amber?'

'Of course,' said Evie. 'Don't be late back.'

Toby didn't intend being late. He had something special to do.

Jake and Amber were thrilled about Snowball. 'It'll be nice for you,' said Jake. 'You





haven't got much of your own, so having a dog will give you something to do.'

'Jake!' said Amber crossly.

'Ignore him,' said Toby. 'Jake, I keep telling you, I've got loads of stuff.'

'But you only had clothes and a wooden chest when you came to live with the Allens,' said Jake. 'You said the chest has nothing in it except –'

'For goodness' sake,' said Amber. 'The Allens have bought Jake everything he needs.'

'Except a bike, and I'm saving up for that,' said

Toby. 'Anyway, I won't need a bike while Snowball's with us.' He grinned. 'I'll be walking my dog!'



'I'm back!' Toby yelled. 'Jake and Amber are coming round to see Snowball tomorrow.'

From the kitchen he heard Don's shocked, 'Tomorrow!' and Evie saying, 'Didn't I say? I'm fetching Snowball tomorrow. Coffee, dear?'

Toby giggled and went up to his room at the top of the house. He looked round. He certainly did have loads of stuff now – CD player, a TV that only played DVDs, because it didn't have a proper aerial, posters, clothes, great trainers, books, football fanzines – all sorts. Jake hadn't seen any of it for one good reason. The Allens were taking a long time getting round to decorating his room, and there was no way Toby was letting his mates see that he slept surrounded by pink fairy wallpaper.

The most important thing in the room stood beneath the window – his wooden chest. It held an incredible secret.



Toby opened it, felt beneath heaps of paper scraps and pulled out a framed photo. He believed it held a clue to the question that no one knew the answer to.

Who's Toby Tucker?

He got the same warm feeling he always did when he looked at the elderly man in the photo – that gentle face. 'Who are you?' Toby wondered. He read again the pencilled note on the back of the frame.

> 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.

Anyone reading that would think, as Toby once thought, that 'Gee', whoever he was, had made a mistake, writing 'when you come from' instead of 'where'. But now Toby knew differently.

He looked up at his pinboard on the wall. There were three names there already. With luck,



Toby would add a fourth tonight. All I need do to start the magic, he thought, is piece together a name from my family tree. He knew that was easier said than done. It was a fortnight since he'd last managed it. Tonight he felt lucky!

Suddenly, there was a yell.

'Tobeeee! Quick! Don's trying to paper the bedroom ceiling and all he's papered is himself!'



Toby sighed, put the photo back, and went downstairs to the Allens' bedroom. He couldn't help laughing. Don stood on a step ladder, with a sheet of wallpaper draped over his head. Paste dripped from it.

Evie handed Toby a broom. 'Once Don's stuck one end up, use that to hold it in place as he does the other end.' She turned to Don. 'If that doesn't work, I'm sticking it up with drawing pins!'

As Toby hoisted his broom, he thought of the wooden chest. Maybe tomorrow.



Toby raced home after school next day, dying to see Snowball! Jake and Amber were coming later, so they could all take the dog for a walk.

'Evie?' he called.

'In here!'

Toby threw his bag down and went to the kitchen. He stared.

'Hi,' said Evie. 'Meet Snowball.'

Toby couldn't believe his eyes. 'What's *that*?'

