Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Eating Things on Sticks

written by

Anne Fine

published by

Doubleday

Copyright © Anne Fine 2009, published by Doubleday, an imprint of Random House Children's Books

Illustrations Copyright © Kate Aldous 2009

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED!

'No, no, no, no, no, *no*!' I said. 'Not to Aunt Susan's! Not for a whole week! No, no, no, no!'

Mum wasn't backing down. 'Frankly,' she said, 'I don't believe I have to listen to any complaints from the person who burned our entire house to a crisp.'

I had to defend myself. 'I did not burn the entire house to a crisp.'

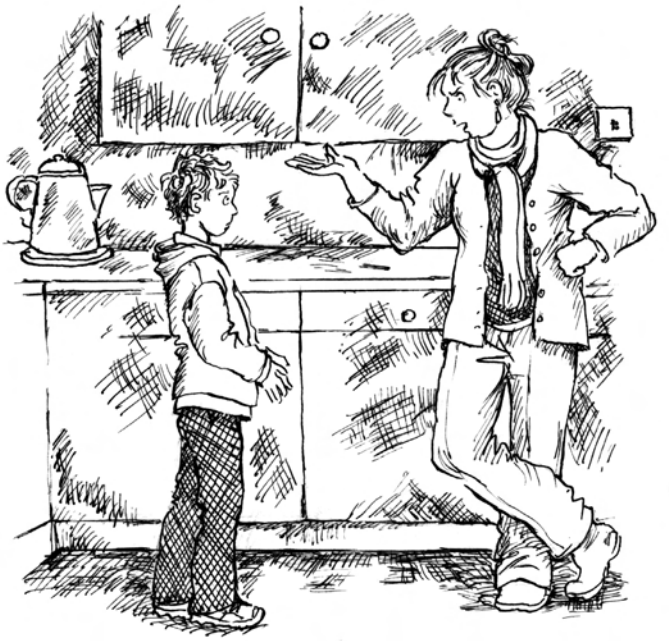
I should have kept my mouth shut. Mum waved an arm around what little was left of our kitchen. 'Excuse me? Are these walls the cheery colour that they used to be, or are they *black?* I don't recall choosing this nice "charred wood" theme for the cupboards. Is that clean water gushing out of the tap, or some dark dribble of sludge from melted pipes? And aren't we lucky

that the sun's still up, because it's not as if, when I flick on this light switch, anything actually *happens*.'

'Look,' I said for the millionth time, 'I'm really *sorry*. I didn't *mean* to forget that I was making that toast. I didn't *realize* that I'd left that tea towel lying across the grill. And I did not *deliberately* forget we had a fire blanket.'

'What's to forget? The thing was hanging on the wall in front of you with FIRE BLANKET printed across its case in big red letters. You can *read*, can't you?'

'Yes,' I said sullenly. 'I can read. I just didn't *see* it, did I?'



'Apparently not. So now, when we try to make arrangements to find you somewhere to stay while the house is full of workmen, perhaps you'll stop whining.'

'I was not whining,' I said huffily. 'I was just saying that I didn't want to stay with Aunt Susan.'

Mum ticked our other conversations off on her fingers. 'Or with Aunt Miriam and Uncle Geoffrey. Or with Great-Granny. Or with next door. Or with–'

I interrupted her. 'Because it's not fair. Ralph gets to go to scout camp.'

'Ralph was booked in to go to scout camp already. More to the point, Ralph is a scout, and you are not.'

I threw myself on her mercy. 'Mum, please! Don't send me to Aunt Susan. I couldn't bear a whole week of her ghastly nature walks, and prissy little Titania prancing about in one of her frilly-willy frocks pretending she's a fairy and singing me one of her' – I did my imitation of my cousin Titania's lisp – '"thweet little thongs". Oh, please don't send me. Please!'

'Harry, there's no one else.'

I had an inspiration. 'What about Uncle Tristram?'

Mum stared. 'Tristram? You must be mad. Your Uncle Tristram couldn't look after a cat.'

Mum only said it as a figure of speech. Still, it reminded her of poor old Pusskins and what happened to him, so her face fell. I stood there sensitively for a moment or two before I said,

'But Uncle Tristram could look after me. Because I can look after myself.'

'But he won't want you,' Mum explained. 'It's his week off. He'll have arranged to go away with one of his girlfriends.'

'I could go with them.'

'I don't think Tristram would agree to that!'

'He would,' I told her confidently, 'if I asked.'

Mum laughed. 'Feel free to give it a try. Because otherwise you'll be off to Aunt Susan's first thing in the morning.'

Challenge accepted!

BLACKMAIL

'Sorry,' said Uncle Tristram cheerfully. 'No can do. Off on my own hols tomorrow.'

'Where?'

'Not sure,' said Uncle Tristram. 'Some tiny island, I believe. Only one ferry a day, or some-

thing. I admit that I wasn't really listening.'

'Why not?'

'Because,' said Uncle Tristram loftily, 'my mind was set on other things.'

I bet I knew what other things his mind was set on. 'So who is she, then?'

'Never you mind.'

I ran through Uncle Tristram's last few girlfriends. Jean with the grating laugh. Moira the bank teller who was forever counting her change. The acrobat called Flip. None of the stories ended happily. 'Well, do I know her?'

'No. She's new.'

'Does she have any . . .' Pausing, I finished darkly, '– *cats?*'

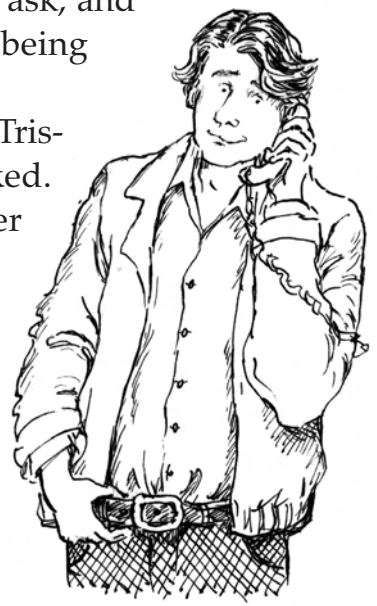
That shook him up. He started paying attention. 'Why do you ask?'

'Well,' I said, 'we wouldn't want any terrible accidents to happen, would we? And if any terrible accidents were to happen, just like to our poor little Pusskins, it might get harder and harder for me not to let drop to Mum – entirely by accident – that it was not the first time . . .'

'Harry,' said Uncle Tristram sternly, 'are you blackmailing me?'

'Yes,' I said. 'All I want is for you to offer me a roof over my head for one week. One tiny

week! It isn't much to ask, and it will save me from being sent to Aunt Susan's.'



'To Susan's?' Uncle Tristram sounded shocked. 'Your mother's never really threatening to make you spend a whole week in the same house as that ghastly little cream puff Titania?'

'She is,' I said.

I could tell Uncle Tristram felt for me. He started cracking.

'If I did let you come, you'd have to look after yourself,' he warned.

'No problems there.'

'No hanging about, cramping my style.'

'I wouldn't dream of it. I'll bring my holiday homework.'

'And no more talk of Pusskins.'

'No.'

'All right, then,' said Uncle Tristram. 'Just to save you from Aunt Susan and a week with Titania.'

'Yes,' I said. 'Nothing at all to do with what happened to Pusskins.'

'Absolutely not.'

'That's right,' I agreed. 'In fact, I've practically forgotten all that sad business again already. Who was poor Pusskins anyway? And what did happen to him?'

He'd hung up.