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opening extract from

Batpants!

written by

Jeremy Strong

published by

Puffin Books

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This is Batpants the orang-utan . . .



She lives with Tilly and her brothers, Finn and Zak.



When they're together things can go a little bit ape!



Special thanks to stuntwoman extraordinaire Sarah Franzl, whose help and advice was both entertaining and indispensable

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

puffinbooks.com

First published 2010
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Illustrations copyright © Rowan Clifford, 2010
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Set in Baskerville
Made and printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–141–32796–9

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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This is for Rosa and Izzy, who have never ever
had a book dedicated to them before.
They aren't the least like orang-utans either, even though
their mother has suspiciously longer-than-average arms.



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1 Batpants and Other Family Members

I live in a tree house. You may wonder why. Could it be:

1. because my parents don't have a proper house?
2. because my parents didn't like to have us kids in their house because we're too noisy and messy?
3. because a gigantic strawberry cheesecake had fallen out of the sky, landed on our house and smashed it to bits and we had to live *somewhere*?
4. because Dad was very clever and thought that Finn and Zak

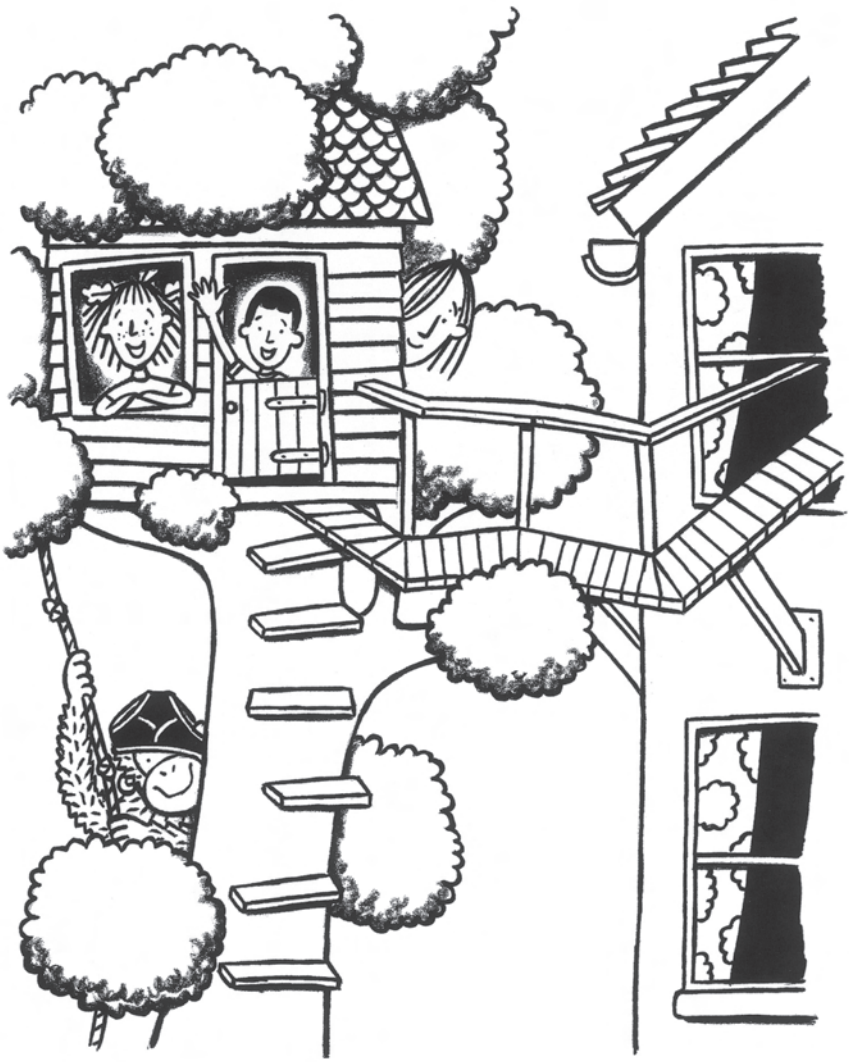
and I would really, really, really LIKE to live in a tree house, so he built one for us?

Guess what the answer is? Of course. It's 4.

The tree house is connected to the main home by a wooden walkway that wiggles across to the upstairs hallway. We have a dangly rope hanging down to the ground. (There are wooden stairs too, but the rope is a lot more fun.)

Finn is seven and a small pain. Zak is thirteen, and a big pain. Then there's me, Tilly – I'm ten. (And definitely no pain at all.) Oh, and I mustn't forget our orang-utan.

Dad trains animals for films and TV. You remember the advert where a tiger sits in a car and seems to drive it? Well, the tiger was trained to do that by our dad, and it was Dad who brought our orang-utan over from Borneo. He'd been filming there. She was just a baby then, and

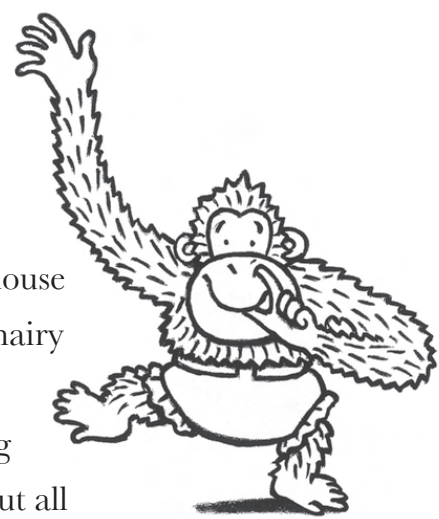




an orphan too.

Dad looked after her. He couldn't bear to leave her behind when filming finished so he got permission and brought her home to us. We fell in love with her at once. She was so *cute*! Even when she tiddled on your lap. It wasn't her fault – even human babies do that.

Mind you, it did help when Mum got some disposable nappies for her. She looked so funny, waddling about the house like some incredibly hairy little old man who'd been put in a washing machine and come out all



shrunken. And with very long arms. And wearing a nappy.

Do you know what the most difficult thing about having an orang-utan in the house is? I'll tell you – trying to think up a good name for her.

'Gingernut,' said Zak.

'Mabel,' I offered.

'Hairybum,' Finn suggested, and went into squeals of laughter. (He was only five at the time.)

'Floretta,' said Mum, which mystified us. She held up her hands and explained. 'I had a great-aunt called Floretta and she was rather similar to an orang-utan.'

'But Floretta makes her sound like a bit of broccoli,' I complained.

'Anyway, how did your great-aunt look like an orang-utan?' asked Zak.

'She was rather hairy,' Mum told us, stroking her chin, which sent Finn into more squeals.

Then Dad came up with his suggestion. 'Lady Henrietta Withering Gas-Trumpett,' he

announced. We looked at him in despair. And we still couldn't think of a good name.

One day Finn was playing at being Batman. He didn't have a proper costume, but I gave him a pair of my old tights.

Finn pulled on his grey school jumper and a pair of wellingtons for his bat-boots. His cloak was a black bin liner. Batman's pants were a problem, though. Finn didn't have any black pants, so we found a pair of Dad's Y-fronts.



Gross. Don't worry, they were clean, but totally uncool.

'Just don't poo in them,' I warned.

'I'm not TWO and Batman does not poo his pants!' shouted Finn.

The orang-utan came in to see what all the noise was about and my brain just about burst with the best idea ever.

'Why don't we dress *her* as Batman!'

Quick as a flash the tights came off Finn and went on the ape. So did the school jumper. We decided the boots wouldn't work. Instead, we draped her in Batman's cloak. That just left the pants.

I don't think orang-utans like wearing pants. Ours snatched the Y-fronts from me and stuck them on her head, pulling the sides right down over her face. Her nose and one eye peeped out from a leg hole. An ear poked through the other.

The ape stood there, gazing at us with the one bewildered eye. This was the superhero who was

supposed to SAVE THE WORLD! With pants on her head!

It was just too funny. Finn and I fell about. That was when the ape set off at high speed, zooming round the house. She whizzed upstairs, downstairs and through all the rooms, hooting like crazy. 'Hoo hoo whaaaa!'



She only came to a halt when she went hurtling straight into Zak, almost knocking him over.

Zak looked down at the sprawling animal, busily wrestling a pair of Y-fronts on her head. 'WHO or WHAT is THAT?' he asked.

'Batman,' I said. 'Obviously.'

'Bat-*MAN*?' snorted Zak. 'If you ask me, she looks more like Bat-*PANTS*!'

Finn and I looked at each other.

It was the perfect name.