

Black Cats

The Ramsbottom Rumble • Georgia Byng
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THE RAMSBOTTOM RUMBLE

GEORGIA BYNG

**ILLUSTRATED BY
HELEN FLOOK**



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A small, blue car drove at thirty miles an hour along the winding avenues of Bouring-on-Sea. Behind the wheel was Mrs Bugsby, a woman of thirty-five with flaming red hair, in an outfit that was halfway between army combat gear and frills – if you can imagine that.

In the car were her two sons. Tom, the elder (the brown-eyed one in the front), had hair which was brown and short, like a Doberman's. Like a fighting dog, he had scars on his face – one below his left eye and the other on his chin – and his two front teeth were chipped. He wore baggy trousers two sizes too big for him, with pockets all down the front and back, a huge tee shirt, and trainers that flapped open with their laces undone. By his feet were two footballs, a skateboard and a frisbee. Tom looked sulkily out of the window.

Dan, his younger brother, was sitting in the back seat looking fairly grumpy too. Dan had thick, shaggy hair that hung like a hairy curtain over his blue eyes. Protruding from beneath this fringe was a very large nose. He wore a tight, long-sleeved tee shirt with a butterfly on the front of it, a brown belt, and boots with a one-inch heel. On his lap was his denim jacket, onto which he was sewing a flower.

Suddenly, putting down his needlework Dan started to turn the window handle frantically.

'Are we nearly there? I think I'm going to be sick again, Mum,' he spluttered.

'Oh, Dan,' said his mother, hitting the kerb, 'just not in my handbag again, okay? I know it looks like a bucket but that's the design. Take some gulps of fresh air.'

'I feel sick at the idea of going to Granny's,' said Tom, sourly, from the front, ignoring his brother. 'For how long anyway, Mum? You never told us for how long.'

'For however long it takes for Aunt Saz to recover. One week? I don't know. She's going to be very sick after her plastic surgery.'

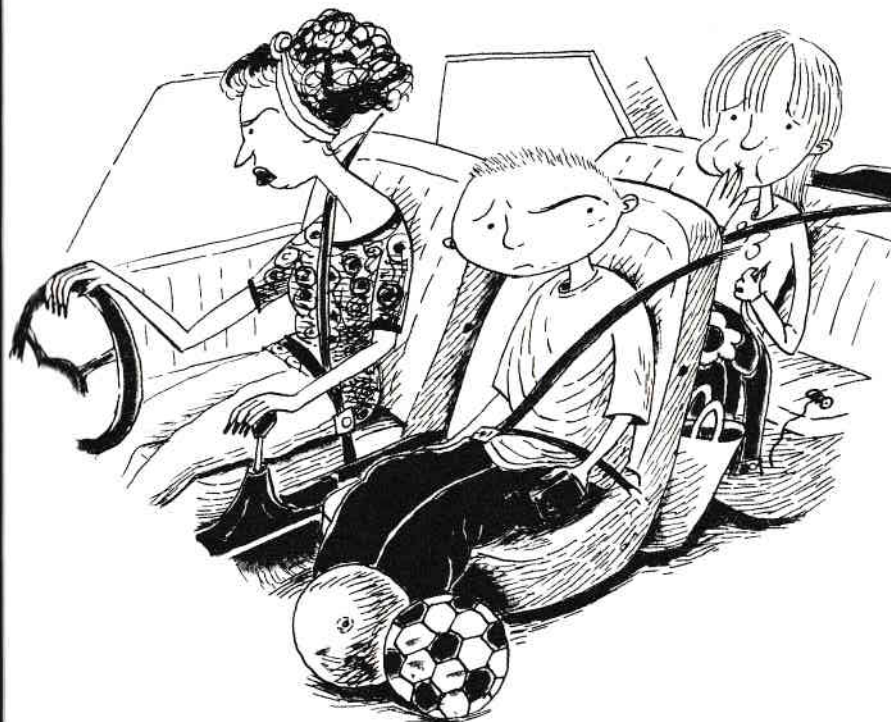
'Please stop talking about sick, or I really am going to throw up,' groaned Dan. For a moment, as the car rattled along, there was silence. Everyone was keen for the journey to end. Mrs Bugsby was late, Dan felt ill and Tom was restless. Since there was nothing to do, he started to play with words. 'Throw up, vomit, chunder, puke...'

'Tom, stop it. You're revolting,' said his mother, not really listening.

Tom continued. 'The best words are the onomatopoeic ones... like "puke", "puuuuuuke", it really sounds like it, doesn't it? Chunder's quite good too... "Chunnnnnnder". That really sounds like someone being sick. Whereas "vomit" is a

useless word, doesn't sound like being sick at all.'

'Oh, stop it,' Dan managed to say. 'Or I'll be sick all over you. Mum – this is really bad. This road is



so bendy. Oh no! Ouuurgh!' Dan desperately poked his head out of the window, opened his mouth and stuck his tongue out.

'Lovely! Flies! Yum!' shouted Tom. Dan shut his mouth and swallowed hard; he was getting a grip on this sick feeling now and he wasn't going to let Tom distract him. His cheeks wobbled and his eyes watered as the wind hit his face. He'd been sick twice already and he felt green. What a way to start the holidays. It was bad enough as it

was; because of his aunt going to hospital for her plastic surgery, Dan and Tom were missing summer club at The Polchester Theatre School. The school had at last realised how good Dan was at acting and this summer he'd been given one of the lead parts – a villain with a hooked nose. Like his aunt and his mother, Dan had the huge family nose. He liked his, but his aunt didn't like hers so she was going to have it made smaller by a plastic surgeon. In America. And so their mother was going to America, to keep their aunt company, and to see their dad too, who was there on business. Dan suspected that their aunt was going to have all sorts of other things fixed. Things made bigger and things made smaller. He wondered if they'd recognise her when she returned. Anyway, because of their aunt's nose, Dan was missing his big part in the play. As his eyes watered in the wind, he added a few real tears to the flow, and felt very sorry for himself. Then his mum slammed on the brakes and his head hit the window of the car. Tom, in the front seat, got a karate chop in the stomach as Mrs Bugsby protected him with her arm.

'Oooof!' said Tom, his eyes watering. 'That hurt, man. I've got nails in my tee shirt pocket.'

'I am not a man,' said Mrs Bugsby, 'and I've told you before, Tom, not to carry loose tools in your pockets. It's dangerous.' Mrs Bugsby shot through a red light.

Like his brother, Tom also took the opportunity of his eyes watering to shed a few tears. His tool kit... He'd been really looking forward to using that backstage at the summer theatre school. This year, he had been going to design, as well as build, the set. But now he was going to miss all that and stay at his gran's, in boring Bouring-on-Sea. How long for, was anyone's guess. The car came to another sudden halt and another karate chop in the stomach brought Tom to his senses.

They'd arrived. Tom and Dan peered out of the car. There was the pink façade that was the front of their gran's beauty parlour. There were the familiar pink letters above the shop, that read, 'Hannah's Heaven'.

'Phweeeh!' Dan breathed noisily. 'I'm so glad we're here.' Meanwhile Tom undid his safety belt and groaned morosely – he'd noticed that the shop next door had a newly-painted sign saying 'Pensioners' Paradise', but otherwise, the street looked exactly the same as last year; a quiet, Victorian street, full of dull shops for old people. Old people. Tom had never been to a place with more old people. This was good for trick or treating since the old people of Bouring-on-Sea usually had lots of sweets to give away, but it was not good for the summer holidays. Tom glanced at the winding street of shops and sighed self-pityingly once more. Then he caught his breath as

he saw a woman, all in white, who looked like a character from a pantomime, stepping out of the beauty parlour.

'Haaalloooo,' she shrieked.

'Oh my giddy aunt,' said Tom, 'she's dyed her hair purple.'

'Looks stylish,' said Dan from the back, regarding her with his trained eye.

'Stylish if you like "Fluffy Poodle Style",' said Tom cynically.

'Well I do,' said Dan, just to annoy his brother.

'Hi, Mum,' said their mum, as she wound down the window. 'Look, I'm in a real rush. Dan was sick twice. I'm late for the plane. So I'll just drop them, if that's okay?'



'Fine, darling,' came their grandmother's sing-song reply, 'but drive safely won't you?' Their gran kissed her daughter, leaving a fat, purple lipstick mark on her forehead. 'And have a good trip. Give Saz and Dave my love.'

Dan and Tom climbed out of the car with their bags and belongings. There wasn't time for a long goodbye. So Mrs Bugsby kissed them both and scrunched their cheeks.

'Love you both, but I must fly. Really. Ha! Must fly.'

In a cloud of exhaust, Mrs Bugsby was gone. And the stay in Bouring had begun.

Gran waved as the blue car disappeared down the street, and then she descended upon her grandsons like a massive, six-foot paper doily. 'Ooooooh la la!' she said, patting them both on their heads. 'Well haven't you grown! Golly gosh I can't tell which is the oldest any more.'

'I am,' said Tom sternly, wiping Gran's lipstick from his cheek.

'Of course you are, my daaaring, by a year. You must have been growing your clothes – gosh they're baggy – Tom, while Dan has been growing his bones and his hair! Goodness, Dan, your hair is so long, it's past your shoulders. I'll cut it for you, if you like.'

'No thanks, Gran,' said Dan, flicking his long hair out of his eyes. 'I like the look.'

Chapter Two

‘Of course you do, and so do I. It’s just that you must find it difficult seeing anything. Now, what do you think of mine?’

At that moment, a lady with thick glasses tripped out of their gran’s salon, only just saving herself from falling. ‘Oh, Lady Horsehock! Mind yourself,’ said their gran, hurrying to help her.

‘Thank you so much, Hannah. That massage was wonderful, it’s made me go all giddy,’ said the tweedy Lady Horsehock in a grand accent. ‘Pity I haven’t got time for more, but I’ll see you on Saturday, and I’ll leave you to have fun with your lovely grandsons.’ Lady Horsehock peered at Dan so that her powdered nose almost touched his. ‘Oh, so one is a little granddaughter... I thought...’

‘No, he’s a boy. He’s just got long hair, that’s all.’

‘Ah,’ said Lady Horsehock, obviously disapproving. ‘Well, see you on Saturday.’

At that point, a uniformed chauffeur put his arm under Lady Horsehock’s elbow, and led her away.

‘Poor Lady Horsehock. Blind as a bat,’ said Gran as she turned to go inside. She didn’t seem to notice the boys’ long faces. ‘Ooohh,’ she said, bubbling with excitement. ‘You are going to love my new decorations and we’ll have so much fun.’

Tom’s and Dan’s hearts heaved as she pushed open the beauty parlour door and strange fragrances filled their nostrils. For them, ‘Hannah’s Heaven’ was more like ‘Hannah’s Hell.’

And so began the boys’ holiday. Gran was delighted to be having her two grandsons to stay.

She led the boys through the beauty parlour reception room, with its clinical white and chrome chairs. On the walls were pictures of models with green sludge all over their faces, with captions like ‘Find the New You,’ and women in swimming costumes jumping up to the sky in a most unnatural way, as if they were trying to take off.

Gran removed her white overall to reveal a very frilly purple dress underneath.

‘Gran, isn’t that a kind of teenager’s dress?’ asked Tom, disapprovingly.

‘Yes Tom, some people might say I’m mutton dressed as lamb, but I’m mutton having fun, that’s all, if that’s okay with you,’ replied Gran with a twinkle in her eye. ‘Because, recently, things have changed in my life. I’ll tell you about it later.’ With that, she stepped past the till desk to her apartment door, and pushed it open. Then she started up the stairs. Once or twice she nearly twisted her ankle in the very high shoes she was wearing.

‘I like your shoes, Gran,’ Dan commented. ‘I’ve always liked platforms, but are you sure they’re safe?’

‘Not really,’ said Gran, ‘but you know what they say, “you’ve got to risk it for a biscuit.”’