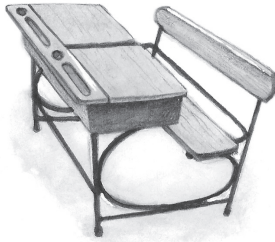


Havoc at School

‘WHAT am I going to do now, Reddy?’ Pearlie asked in despair as she looked down at the bunch of photographs in her hand. Every single one of them was black.

‘Buck up, Pearlie.’ Reddy snapped.

‘But now we still don’t have any proof that Beake’s a spy. My life is over . . .’ Pearlie’s arms dropped to her sides and she let the photographs scatter in the wind.

‘You’re not a goner yet,’ Reddy said. ‘We’ll break into his place again and find something

else to prove that he's the spy.'

'Break in? Again?' Pearlie shivered at the thought, remembering back to when she and Naoko had broken into Beake's house last time – how she'd had to hide in the cupboard when Beake had come home early. She'd smelt his horrible pipe-tobacco breath just inches away from her face. And then she'd dropped her bracelet, and so now he knew someone called Pearlie had been there.

They'd been looking for evidence to prove that Naoko's father, Mr Ito, wasn't the spy everyone had been talking about – that Beake was. But now they had no proof and no plan. And Beake was out to get her.

Reddy cocked his head to one side and raised his eyebrows. 'Hey, wait a minute . . . I've got a better idea.'

'That's a relief. What is it?'

'We'll ask Dulcie to come with us.'

'What! Are you crazy? We're arch enemies,

Reddy. I lopped off her precious ponytail, remember?’

‘But she’s perfect,’ Reddy said. ‘Her father’s a silvertail – you know, one of those guys who works for the government. And a top-level one at that. If Dulcie sees the spy stuff in Beake’s house, she’ll tell her dad, and bingo! Beake gets arrested and Pearlie Chan lives on to save the pets of the world.’

Pearlie let out a long growl. The thought of doing *anything* with that girl, even if it meant saving Pearlie’s own life or the animals she loved, made her feel as wild as a stormy sea. But Reddy was right. Dulcie would never pass up the chance to become the girl who caught the spy. It was a good plan and it might just work.

‘Fine,’ Pearlie said through clenched teeth. ‘But you ask her.’

Reddy grinned. ‘I’ll set it up for Saturday night then. Can you sneak out?’

‘I think so. But why Saturday?’

'I heard from Frank that Beake goes to the pub on Saturdays, so we'll have his whole house to ourselves.'



Pearlie lay in bed that night thinking about Naoko. The Japanese families who had been arrested were still at Adelaide River, not that far away. But in a few days' time the government was going to send them south. Pearlie had heard Mr Ito was going to Loveday Camp in South Australia.

That's like the end of world, she thought. Now Mr Ito has been interned, everyone's stopped talking about the spy. They think he's been caught when actually he's alive and well and still around! Oooh, I hate that man Beake.

An air-raid alert wailed. It was a frightening sound. Joey, Pearlie's brother, began to cry in his cot and Pearlie put her hand out to comfort him. The sirens were going off more and

more lately as the big searchlights scanned the night skies for Japanese warplanes. She held her breath listening, waiting for the drone of engines. She'd heard from Dad that the Japanese army was attacking Hong Kong and Penang, and advancing on the Philippines and the Malay Peninsula. The Japanese were winning against the British, Canadian and Indian forces! And now they were heading south towards Australia. They could be here any day, he'd said. He sounded frightened.

Mum came in and picked up Joey. 'It's all right,' she cooed, rocking him back and forth.

When the all-clear siren rang out, Mum put Joey back into his cot and bent over to kiss Pearlie's cheek. 'Go back to sleep, love.'

Pearlie was just drifting off ten minutes later when a small shadow, a little bigger than her fist, slipped into her room and jumped onto her bed. 'Tinto,' she whispered to the tiny monkey. 'How did you get out of your cage?'

Since Pearlle had rescued Tinto from Naoko's house, he'd been sleeping in a crate by the back door. But lately he'd become an expert at picking locks. The little pygmy marmoset jumped onto her chest, his sweet brown eyes glinting in the dim light of the kerosene lamp.

'I love you, Tinto,' she said, stroking his mane. And as if he understood, the monkey put his paw gently against Pearlle's cheek. She lifted the sheet and he snuggled down beside her. His warm body was soft against her nightdress and soon they both fell fast asleep.



It was the last day of school – not just for the year but for a very long while. Now that it seemed as if there really might be a war with Japan, the Australian War Cabinet had decided that all women and children should be evacuated from the city, and had put a

notice in the newspaper saying that everyone should be prepared for when their turn came. Most of the women didn't want to leave their homes or their husbands behind, but when the evacuation order came through, they had to obey. Not everyone could go at once, and there was no knowing who would be the next to leave – you just had to wait.

And so Pearlie's class was growing smaller and smaller. Peggy sat in Naoko's seat and Reddy had moved up to the front. Dulcie hadn't left Darwin yet. She boasted that they were waiting to leave on an American luxury liner. But Pearlie didn't believe it. Dulcie still wore a hat to hide the haircut she'd been given by Pearlie, who was still a bit of a hero for it. Dulcie's friends had all deserted her and Pearlie didn't feel a bit sorry. Dulcie's bullying days were well and truly over.

Mr Plumber, the school principal, came into the classroom.

The children stood up. 'Good morning, Mr Plumber,' they chanted.

'Good morning, children. I've come to wish you all the best for the future. School, as you know, will be closed from today. You will be evacuated to other cities so I'd like to remind you of The Three Rules. Can anyone tell me what they are?'

Billy Driscoll yelled from the back of the room, 'Listen for bombs. Run fast. Change your pants!'

Pearlie grinned at Reddy.

'No,' said Mr Plumber, looking around to see who had spoken.

When his head was turned away, Larry Lewis shouted out, 'Head south. Don't look back. Lift your knees!'

Pearlie had to cover her mouth to stop from laughing.

'No!' said Mr Plumber, jerking his head back to find the culprit. 'Who said that?'

‘Study hard. Be kind to one another and help our parents,’ Peggy said.

Pearlie rolled her eyes.

‘Thank you, Peggy. Now, children, bow your heads while we pray for the safety of our brave men and women who are defending Australia at home and across the sea.’

The whole class was giggling as they bowed their heads, and Pearlie was still grinning when a movement caught her eye. ‘Oh no,’ she breathed as a little head appeared at the window.

Tinto had picked the lock of his cage again!

She looked around to check if anyone else had seen him. Everyone’s head was bowed as Mr Plumber continued his prayer.

Using her hands, Pearlie tried to shoo Tinto away. The little monkey hopped through the window and scampered along the desks towards her. He reached Reddy and stopped, but not long enough for Reddy to grab him. Reddy shrugged and mouthed ‘sorry’.

Some of the children began to squeal when they saw Tinto. They'd all heard about him but had never met him.

As Mr Plumber and Miss Lyon looked up, Pearlle opened the lid of her desk and pushed Tinto inside. She closed the lid quickly and rested both arms on it, pretending nothing had happened.

'What is going on?' Mr Plumber said.

Silence filled the classroom except the scratching sounds coming from Pearlle's desk. Everyone sat up straight and tried to put on serious faces.

Pearlle didn't want to leave Tinto inside her desk for too long. She was scared he would suffocate so she lifted the lid a crack to let in some fresh air.

'Pearlle!' Miss Lyon said. 'What do you have there?'

'Nothing, Miss Lyon,' Pearlle said quickly.

But just then Tinto screeched and squeezed

through the crack. He climbed up onto Pearlie's shoulder and sat looking imperiously around the room.

'Aww . . . he's so cute,' said Peggy, putting her hand out to touch him.

'Pearlie Chan, get that monkey out of here immediately!' Mr Plumber demanded.

'Yes, Sir,' Pearlie replied. But as she stood up, Tinto did an unexpected thing. Instead of sitting happily on Pearlie's shoulder as he usually did, he jumped down onto the floor and ran towards Miss Lyon.

Miss Lyon screamed with fright, which made Tinto change direction and find the nearest pole to climb. Only it was not a pole at all. It was the inside of Mr Plumber's wide trouser leg.

Miss Lyon's hands flew up to her mouth as she stared helplessly at Mr Plumber, who was hopping around on one leg, trying to shake the monkey loose.

'Tinto, please come out,' Pearlie called as she ran up to the front of the class.

'Come out, come out! Tinto, please come out!' she heard Billy Driscoll shout behind her.

The whole class roared with laughter.

A minute later Tinto fell to the floor, did a neat somersault and scampered through the window.

'Pearlie Chan,' Mr Plumber said darkly, 'take that monkey home at once! Then, my office!'

'I'm sorry, Mr Plumber . . .' Pearlie said, hot with embarrassment.

She found Tinto in the rubbish bin sharing food scraps with the crows. The crows flew up to the branches and cawed in protest when Pearlie arrived.

'You're a naughty boy,' she said. 'And on the last day of school.'

Tinto looked up at her as if to say, *But I only wanted to be with you.*

Pearlie sighed. She could never be angry at the little monkey for long. She lifted him up and gave him a cuddle. 'I know it's boring in your cage while I'm at school, but after today, we can be together all the time.' She kissed the top of his head and walked quickly home.

After double-locking Tinto inside his cage with some chopped apple, Pearlie returned to school to see Mr Plumber. She was scared but the secretary winked at her and whispered, 'It's the last day of school. What can he do?'

Pearlie felt better after that. Mr Plumber yelled at her for a bit, then sent her back to class.

For the rest of the day, laughter echoed around the schoolyard. Nobody would ever forget that last day of school, when a monkey ran up Mr Plumber's trousers.