

## CHAPTER 2

### Liquorice and the Steaming Turd



For several days after the arrival of Liquorice, my sister answered the phone every time it rang, just in case it was someone about the cat. She could make herself sound exactly like Mother when she wanted to. In fact, sometimes, she sounded even more like Mother than Mother did.

The precaution proved unnecessary as no-one called about the cat. The days passed and Liquorice remained with us. Mother acted as if he were invisible and never mentioned him. It would be several months before we caught her stroking him when she thought no one was watching.

We children wouldn't have minded a bit of advice on kitten rearing but thought it prudent to steer well clear of

## LIQUORICE AND THE STEAMING TURD

any discussion that might bring up the whole cat adoption question.

Liquorice could fit into the palm of one hand. I liked to think of him as my cat. After all it was my mistake that delivered him to our house. But my sister thought all good things belonged to her and made her own claims on Liquorice.

‘If you don’t let him sleep in my room, I’ll tell Mother he peed on her Persian carpet,’ she announced with her hands on her hips. She wouldn’t have but that didn’t make it any easier to stand up to her.

In the end I didn’t have to. Every night Liquorice made his way at some point into my room. Perhaps he too thought he was my cat but far more probably my sister simply petted him too relentlessly and he came to me for the peace and quiet of uninterrupted sleep. A tiny, breathing, purring, ball of softness against my body (or on my face as was often the case!). Anyway, my sister already had her pet budgie, Charlie, and fair’s fair.

In the event, Muffin and Liquorice did have a little tussle for supremacy. It ended in Liquorice holding Muffin round her muzzle in a five-clawed grasp. Like a bull pulled by its ring, Liquorice thereby exerted complete control.

## THE LIQUORICE STORIES

After that, Muffin took a totally pacifist approach and never did anything other than wag her tail amiably at Liquorice.

We had the food angle covered but there were more than a few things we didn't know about keeping a cat and it hadn't dawned on us that what goes in must come out.

One day, late for school, my sister tore into the downstairs loo in a hurry to pee. My brother, realising her momentary vulnerability, seized the chance to flick the light switch outside the bathroom on and off and her shouts of rebuke only served to egg him on until suddenly, there was a blood curdling scream.

I nearly tripped over myself in my anxiety not to miss out on the action. Mother came rushing through fearing the worst.

'Mother of Christ! Help!' my sister shrieked.

'Mind your language, please! And open the door! Open the door this instant,' said Mother with authority.

I was nearly wetting myself with excitement and my brother's cheeks were pink with guilt. He wasn't sure quite how bad his actions had really turned out to be. Even Liquorice waited outside the loo to see what all the fuss was about.

## LIQUORICE AND THE STEAMING TURD

A sort of hyperventilating kind of heavy breathing was coming from behind the bathroom door, then the sound of the bolt sliding back. My sister backed out apparently transfixed by some horror inside. I craned my neck and my brother poked his head round the door. But it was Mother who saw it first.

‘Stay back,’ she ordered. ‘How vile!’

Then in one swift movement she grabbed Liquorice by the scruff of his neck. We, all of us, gasped. We held our breath as Mother stood with Liquorice, a flip of a little thing, dangling awkwardly from her grasp. The worst was coming to pass. This was surely going to be the end of Liquorice.

Then, to our immeasurable relief, Mother stormed, not to the front door, but into the loo and stuffed Liquorice’s nose into the turd in the wash basin. Liquorice squirmed out of her grasp and caterwauling, streaked away.

Afterwards I teased my sister mercilessly. I mean what a wuss!

‘It was just a common or garden poo, for goodness sake,’ I said. ‘And you nearly cost us Liquorice.’

But she wasn’t having any of it.

THE LIQUORICE STORIES

‘You would have been the same had it been *you* going to use the wash basin,’ she said darkly, ‘a poo, larger than



*The steaming turd*

## LIQUORICE AND THE STEAMING TURD

life, appearing then disappearing as the lights flashed on and off ...’

It did sound rather terrifying the way she put it.



The nights became frosty, the windows were tightly battened down and doors kept firmly shut to keep out the draught. There was central heating but it was so expensive to run that we did without it and I used to keep my hands in my pockets to stop them from seizing up with cold.

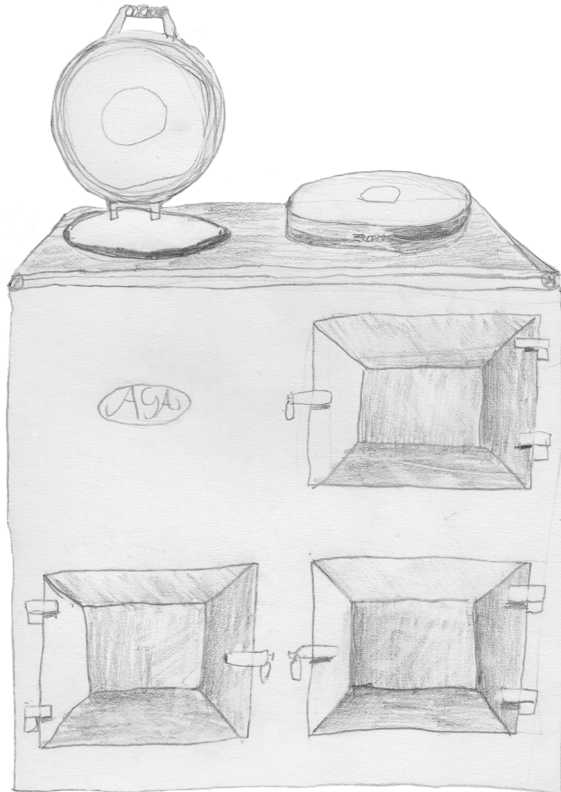
I could see my breath misting up the air in the music room when I practiced the violin and that was even after turning on the three-bar heater. My brother stood too close to it once and singed his trousers.

I don't know what we'd have done in those days if the AGA hadn't been invented. It was more than a cooker, more than a place to dry clothes, it was like the source and centre of all life. Not many people know this but AGA is short for Aktiebolaget Svenska Gasaccumulator. This English beyond English utility was invented by a Swedish physicist you see.

I was the one who found the second offensive deposit. Looking back on it I can see Liquorice's problem. He couldn't get out but he was a fastidious and clean animal.

## THE LIQUORICE STORIES

He had had his nose rubbed in it, quite literally, when he'd elected to use the basin. His options were clearly limited. And there in the bathtub, I found a perfectly formed ice-cream shaped contribution.



*Tristan Birst*

*Aktiebolaget Svenska Gasaccumulator*

## LIQUORICE AND THE STEAMING TURD

‘Miaow,’ Liquorice said rubbing his head against my calves.

‘Oh, no, no, no Liquorice,’ I said. ‘This won’t do at all. Mother will really chuck you out of the house if this goes on.’ I lifted him up and showed him.

‘No, no, no,’ I repeated sternly.

‘Can you help me clear it up before Mother sees?’ I asked as my sister appeared.

‘I think not,’ she replied tartly. ‘He’s your cat, is he not?’

My stomach churned as I pictured myself using toilet paper to scoop up the squelchy excrement in my hands and I was nearly sick.

I fetched my brother and offered him a pound of my pocket money to do it. I still consider this to be one of the best pounds I’ve ever spent.

‘Look on the bright side,’ he said, ‘at least Liquorice hasn’t figured out how to turn the taps on; the whole water system would be clogged up with cat shit.’

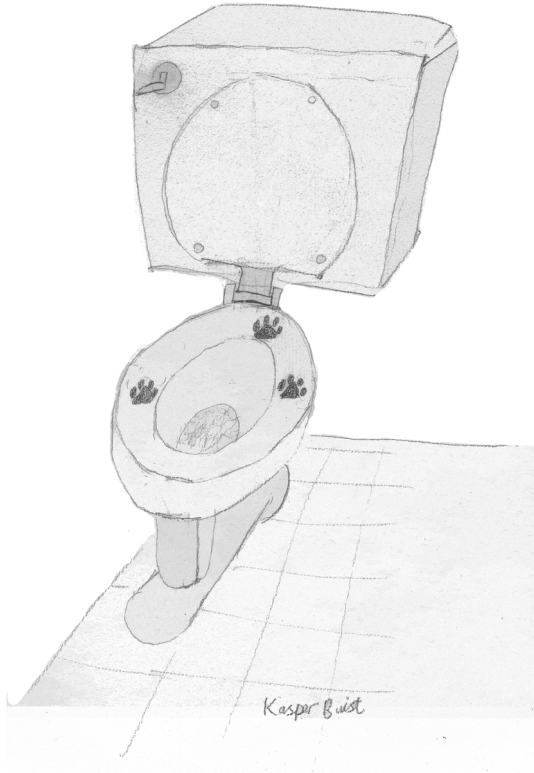
‘He can’t get out. He needs a cat flap,’ my sister said knowingly. ‘They’ve got one at Harmony Cottage and their cat can just go in and out when she likes.’

‘You know about their cat?’ I asked.



THE LIQUORICE STORIES

‘Of course! They’re friends of Mother’s, you know. They’ve got that lovely Tabby cat,’ she said.



*Clever Liquorice*

‘Oh! That must have been the one that followed me to school!’ I laughed. ‘Well, we don’t have any money to buy

## LIQUORICE AND THE STEAMING TURD

a cat flap,' I went on 'and we can't ask Mother can we? She doesn't even want Liquorice.'

'I'll ask her,' my sister volunteered. 'We can hardly cut a hole through the door without her noticing and it's not as if she actually wants turds all over the place either...'

Before we had a chance to do anything, however, we were astonished to find paw prints on the loo seat downstairs. These small marks were to herald an end to the whole cat poo issue and we thought Liquorice was the cleverest cat in the world.

## CHAPTER 3

### Liquorice and the Christmas Turkey



We had barely got over the drama of the steaming turd when Jenner's, the department store, started playing Christmas carols. Known as the Harrods of the North, what a landmark establishment Jenner's has been for the past two hundred years (almost)!

At Christmas it was illuminated on the outside with a multitude of lights and bedecked with festive decorations within. It was (and still is) a glorious place with an amazing toy department. Any toy you could dream of and some that had only just been invented, were enticingly displayed; drum kits, model train tracks, blaster guns, games of battleships and board games of all kinds...

## LIQUORICE AND THE CHRISTMAS TURKEY

It was outside Jenner's, on Princes Street where we had been doing a spot of pre-Christmas shopping (not in the toy department, alas) that I had one of my nasty accidents. I was already on first name terms with the staff in A&E at The Western General Hospital – what with the sofa incident and the wash room blood bath, to name but two.



*Edinburgh New Town*

Mother had parked in St Andrew's Square but I had to get home early and was going to take the bus. As I came to the pedestrian crossing I saw the exact bus I needed on the opposite side of the road. Two big buses on this side were stationary and the sun reflected off the green man just