

THE SATURDAYS

Elizabeth Enright



Puffin Book



PUFFIN BOOKS

Editor: Kaye Webb

THE SATURDAYS

It was Randy Melendy who first had the idea of the Saturday Afternoon Adventure Club. She and Mona, her elder sister, and Rush and Oliver, her two brothers, were tired of wasting good Saturday afternoons because they hadn't enough pocket money to do anything interesting, so they decided that they'd pool their money and take it in turns so that each of them spent one Saturday afternoon in four doing what they particularly wanted.

The result is a series of gay, funny, exciting, and often unexpectedly rewarding adventures, each as different as the child who has them.

This is a book for people who enjoy reading about real families of children doing real things and getting the best out of every instant of their lives.

Elizabeth Enright has created a family as attractive, heart-warming, and durable as E. Nesbit's Bastables. It will be enjoyed by boys and girls of nine and ten upwards.

Other Puffin books about the same family are: *The Four-Storey Mistake*, *Then There Were Five* and *Spiderweb for Two*.

Cover design by Shirley Hughes

THE SATURDAYS

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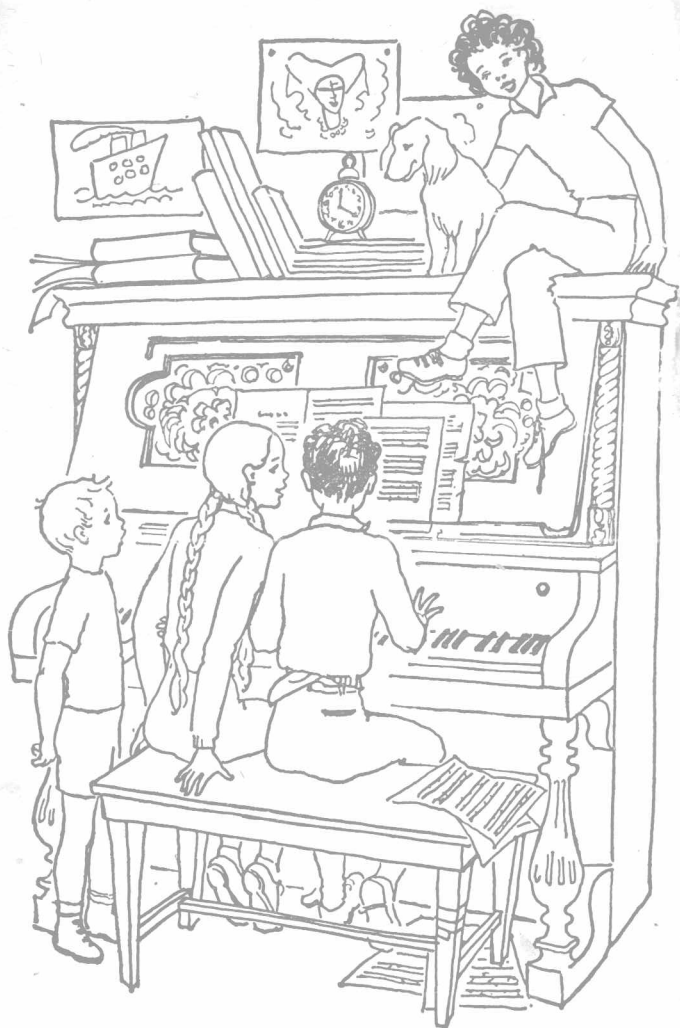
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SATURDAY ONE

‘**I**T would have to rain today,’ said Rush, lying flat on his back in front of the fire. ‘On a Saturday. Certainly. Naturally. Of course. What else would you expect? Good weather is for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday; and rain’s for Saturday and Sunday, and Christmas vacation and Easter.’

‘Oh, Rush, do stop grouching,’ said Mona, turning a page peacefully. She wasn’t even listening to what he said; all she heard was the grumble in his voice.

‘But it isn’t enough just to have it plain rain,’ continued Rush in the same tone. ‘Oh, no. Today it has to go and be a sousing, slopping pouring wet kind of rain that you can’t do anything about; not even if you put on a lot of truck like rubbers.’

He was quite right. It was a very wet rain. It plinked and splashed and ran in long curly streams down the skylight. The windows were speckled and running, and occasional drops even fell down the chimney and hissed into the fire. All the city sounds that could be heard above the rain itself were wet sounds; the long whish of passing automobiles, damp clopping of horses’ hooves, and the many voices, deep, or high, or husky, that came hooting and whistling out of the murky rivers at either side of the city.

‘It is disgusting,’ agreed Randy wholeheartedly from the trapeze where she was sitting. ‘There’s nothing to do!’

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But Oliver took no part in the discussion for he was perfectly happy. He was drawing pictures at his own little table which had been Mona's little table first, and then Rush's and then Randy's, all depending on who was small enough to fit at the time. He was drawing with his whole being – red in the face, tongue between his teeth, feet wrapped around chair legs. It was intensely hard work. The pictures were of battleships, only they all looked exactly like teapots because they had such big spout-shaped bows and great steamy plumes of smoke coming out of the tops of them. But Oliver was very pleased with them, and whenever he made an especially good one he stuck it into the wall beside him with a thumb-tack; there were about seven pinned up already.

There were four Melendy children. Mona was the eldest. She was thirteen, and had two long thick butter coloured braids that she was always threatening to cut off. Rush came next, he was twelve; dark, with mussy hair and a look of mischievous wickedness. Miranda (always called Randy) was ten and a half, with dark untidy hair like Rush's. And Oliver was the youngest, six years old; a calm and thoughtful person.

The room in which they were sitting might have been called a playroom, schoolroom or nursery by most people. But to the Melendys it was known as the Office. It was at the very top of the house so that they could make almost all the noise they wanted to and it had everything such a room should have: a skylight and four windows facing east and north, and a fireplace with a basket-shaped grate. The floor was covered with scarred red linoleum that didn't matter, and the yellow walls

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were encrusted with hundreds of indispensable objects: bookcases bursting with books, pictures both by the Melendy children and less important grown-up artists, dusty Indian war bonnets, a string of Mexican devil masks, a shelf of dolls in varying degrees of decay, coats and hats hanging on pegs, the left-over decorations from Mona's birthday party, and other articles too numerous to mention. In one corner of the room stood an old upright piano that always looked offended, for some reason, and whose rack was littered with sheets of music all patched and held together with Scotch tape.

In addition to various chairs, tables and toy cupboards, there was a big dingy sofa with busted springs, a blackboard, a trapeze and a pair of rings. That was all but I think you will agree that it was enough. The Melendys seemed to go on and on collecting precious articles that they could never bear to throw away. The Office was their pride and joy, and what it lacked in tidiness it more than made up for in colour and comfort and broken-down luxuries such as the couch and the piano. Also it was full of landmarks. Any Melendy child could have told you that the long scars on the linoleum had been made by Rush trying out a pair of new skates one Christmas afternoon; or that the spider-shaped hole in the east window had been accomplished by Oliver throwing the Milk of Magnesia bottle; or that the spark holes in the hearthrug had occurred when Mona tossed a bunch of Chinese firecrackers into the fire just for fun. Melendy history was written everywhere.

'There's that leak again,' said Rush in a tone of lugubrious satisfaction. 'It's getting bigger than it was last



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time even. Boy, will Cuffy be burned up!' He lay staring at the ceiling. 'It's a funny shape,' he remarked. 'Like some kind of a big fat fish. And there're lots of other old dried-out leaks that have funny shapes. I can see a thing like a heart and a thing like a baseball mitt and a kind of a lop-sided Greyhound bus.'

'You've missed Adolf Hitler, though,' said Randy, thumping down off the trapeze and lying on the rug beside him. 'See up there? That long fady line is his nose, and those two little chips are his eyes, and that dark place where you threw the plasticine is his moustache.'

'I'm going to throw some more plasticine and make it into George Bernard Shaw,' said Rush.

'Who's he?' inquired Randy.

'Oh, a man with a beard,' said Rush. 'I'd rather look at him than Hitler.'

Mona put down her book.

'George Bernard Shaw is a playwright,' she said. 'My heavens, don't you even know *that*? He wrote a play called *Saint Joan*, all about Joan of Arc, that I'm going to act in someday.'

'I bet that's why you were walking around your room, holding the curtain rod out in front of you, yesterday. You had kind of a moony expression and you kept talking to yourself. I thought to myself, she's gone goofy at last.' Rush shook his head and laughed appreciatively.

But Mona didn't get mad. She just flapped her braids and said, 'I wish you'd stop spying around. It's getting so there's no place I can practise my acting except in the bathroom.'

All the Melendys knew what they were going to be



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when they grew up. Some of them were going to follow several professions. Mona, of course, had decided to be an actress. She could (and did) recite yards of poetry and Shakespeare at the drop of a hat. Randy was going to paint pictures and be a dancer. Rush was going to be the best pianist in the world, and a great engineer as well: the kind that builds suspension bridges, and dams, and railroads. Oliver was going to be an engineer too, but he was going to be the kind that drives trains. It was nice to have it all settled.

Meanwhile, they got along very pleasantly just being children. It was sad that they had no mother, but they *did* have Father and he could not have been improved upon as a parent. And there was Cuffy; dear Cuffy, who was housekeeper, nurse, cook, and substitute mother, grandmother, and aunt. One couldn't even imagine the house without her in it. She had always been there and it seemed as though she always would be. Her real name was Mrs Evangeline Cuthbert-Stanley, but ever since Mona at eighteen months had solved the problem with 'Cuffy', she had been called nothing else. She was fat in a nice comfortable way: fat enough to creak and puff when she went up and down the stairs, but not so fat that she had no lap to sit on. She had a nice comfortable face too: wrinkles and round cheeks, and teeth as regular and gleaming as the white keys on a piano. Late at night if you had a stomach-ache or a bad dream and woke Cuffy up to tell her about it she looked different (though still nice). Her front hair was all curled up in little snails on the top of her head, while her back hair hung down in a big grey mare's-tail. Her face looked rather fallen in, and

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she spoke distantly as though inside a cave, because there on the floor beside her bed you could see all her beautiful white teeth grinning in a glass of water. Cuffy ruled the house. And it was an extensive domain.

Besides the Office on the top floor, there was the storeroom. Between the Office and the storeroom, as on every floor, there was a bathroom. This one served as a sort of laboratory. In it were bowls of tropical fish, Oliver's turtle, a bathtub full of damp clay and a medicine cabinet stacked with jars of finger-paint. A great swoosh of raffia hung over the towel rack. On the next floor below were Father and Rush's two rooms and below that Mona and Randy shared a room as did Cuffy and Oliver. The living-room was on the first floor and so was Father's study, where through the closed door you could almost always hear the pecking and chiming of his typewriter. The kitchen and dining-room were in the semi-basement, and still below them was the real basement where the furnace lived, precious as the heart in a human body. It had to be watched tenderly, fed at regular intervals, cranked, shaken, and relieved of its coal gas. This was all taken care of by Willy Sloper who came in by the day and who always referred to the furnace as 'She'. 'I got her wide open,' he'd tell you on a cold night, or 'Say, Cuffy, she'll be needing a couple tons stove coal tomorra, next day, tella Boss.' Or oftener still with a knock on Father's study door. 'Say, Mr Melendy, the furnace, she's on the fritz again.' This would be followed by an exasperated sound from Father. Once he said, 'Okay, Willy. Call in Mr Yellen. But the next time she acts up I'm going to replace her with a good

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dependable oil furnace; maybe gas. This way it's like being married to an Italian opera singer. Tell her I said so.'

All the Melendy children had their own jobs. They each had not one but several. For instance, they made their own beds and took weekly turns at cleaning the Office (all except Oliver, of course). And the cleaning had to be thorough. Under Cuffy's eagle eye there could be no nonsense such as sweeping things under things, or shaking the mop out the window, or dusting only where it showed. It had to be well done. In addition to these there were the special jobs. Rush shined all the shoes, took care of the fuse-box, repaired the radio when necessary, and was sort of plumber's assistant to Willy Sloper. Mona helped Cuffy with the mending and ironing, and had the entire responsibility of keeping the living-room tidy. Randy always set the dinner table and dried the dishes, as well as sorting the laundry and making out the lists. Even Oliver had his chores. He had to water all the plants, and feed the fish and his turtle, and see that the clay in the tub was kept moist.

So between jobs and school and amusing themselves life for the Melendys rarely contained a dull moment.

This, however was one of them.

'I'm so b-o-o-o-o-red!' groaned Randy, (lifting one foot in the air and letting it drop heavily as though simply unable to sustain the weight of her boredom.)

'You and me, both,' agreed Rush.

'And I'm bored listening to you complain,' complained Mona, slapping her book together.

Oliver paid no attention to any of them. 'Why don't

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we play something? Parcheesi or something?' suggested Mona.

'Oh, *parcheesi*!' scoffed Randy.

'Well, you used to like it. Then how about making something out of clay, or drawing, or we might do a play.'

'Clay's dreary on a wet day, and I'm tired of drawing, and it's no fun being in plays with you, Mona, because you take all the leading parts, and Rush and I are only the fathers and mothers or the maids or the policemen or something.'

'Oh, all right, you're impossible!' Mona retired to her book. 'Why don't you read?'

'I've read everything,' said Randy, which wasn't true, but she was enjoying being difficult. It was a novelty.

'The radio's busted again, I suppose. I could fix that,' said Rush, and got up. But instead he went to the piano and stood there, one hand in his pocket, and his other hand skipping over the keys, jiggling out a neat precise little tune that they all knew.

'And for heaven's sake don't play Bach,' ordered Randy. 'It's so *jumpy* for today.'

Rush slung his leg over the piano stool and sat down. With both hands he began to play slow deep chords that fitted together into a wonderful dark mysterious music.

'Yes, that's better for today,' approved Randy. 'What is it anyway?'

'Bach,' said Rush without turning his head. 'Just shows how much you know about music.'

'Not an awful lot,' admitted Randy humbly.

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‘Not any,’ said Rush.

He played another bar.

‘Not many people your age do, though,’ he added kindly. ‘Gee! I wish I had enough money to go to Carnegie Hall and hear something good. Schnabel or somebody.’

‘You got your allowance today,’ said Mona. She could read and listen at the same time.

‘Fifty cents isn’t enough,’ said Rush. ‘And besides I need some shoe-laces and a new writing-pad and I owe a dime to a guy at school.’

Randy sat up on the hearth-rug and stared into the fire. There was one little fitful pale-blue flame among all the golden ones in the grate.

‘I have an idea,’ she said slowly.

Mona went on reading. Rush went on playing. Oliver went on drawing his fourteenth battleship.

‘I think I have a good idea,’ repeated Randy patiently, and they looked at her.

‘Well?’ said Mona, her finger in her book.

‘Let’s start a club!’ suggested Randy.

‘Oh, look at all the clubs we’ve had already,’ said Rush. ‘The Mystery-Solving Club. The Tropical Fish Collectors Club. The Helping-Cut-Down-the-Electric-Light-Bill Club. What ever happened to any of them? They were all the same. Mona was always president and we never had more than two meetings.’

‘But this one will be different,’ persisted Randy. ‘Listen, Rush. Each of us (except Oliver, of course) gets fifty cents allowance every Saturday. Now. You want to go to Carnegie Hall and hear some music. Mona wants