

Big Ted's Reunion Party

By Marion McCune and Isobel Ellis



Introduction – Isobel Ellis – Whitehaven 1992

Last Saturday, I was just taking my cleaning things, Hoover, duster, brushes etc. upstairs to do the bathrooms when I thought I could hear giggling and chatter. I got a bit of a fright as I was in the house alone. However when I stopped to listen there was complete silence. Anyway I plugged in the Hoover and got on with the cleaning; after ten minutes or so I switched it off and in the sudden silence there was a definite scuffling in the attic.

My first thought was that a bird had somehow managed to get itself into the loft space. Then I thought it could be mice or even rats. So I got the ladder and with, I must admit, a thumping heart, nervously edged the hatch open a crack and peeped in. Total silence. I pushed at the hatch a few inches at a time until it was fully open, and summoning all my courage stepped into the attic. You can imagine my surprise when I found a very spick and span room where previously there had been total chaos after Marion and Neil had been rummaging around looking for "nothing."

Then a head appeared from behind a large box and a growly sort of voice said "We didn't mean any harm, honest." It was so long since I'd heard that voice I could have kissed him and so I did. So this is the full story of how "Big Ted had a Reunion Party." and the events leading up to it.

Big Ted's Reunion Party

Big Ted is a large brown and white Teddy Bear.



He lives with his friend Koala.



It all started in 1992 when Big Ted finally got fed up with his 'lot.' He'd fallen into a sort of lethargic sleep since Maz and Neil had grown up and forgotten him and all the "friends". They lived in the attic where despite their nice fur coats, they were cold and damp. After a while, all there was to do was sleep, so as toys do, the toys did, and they slept for years and years. But one day, Big Ted woke up and decided to give himself a shake. "Life is what you make it" he said to himself "Time we all had some fun again". The first thing he did was to go looking for Koala his very dear friend. He found her looking very sorry for herself. She was covered in cobwebs, cement dust and mildew. But once Big Ted had growled loudly in her ear for a while, she woke up, shook herself down, and at the sight of her old friend she was overjoyed and soon looking more like her old self. Her old self was rather bossy and self-opinionated. She originally came from Australia, and still had the twang in her accent and a blunt way of expressing her feelings.

Big Ted then started to explain his latest (and greatest) "plan". "Koala," he said, "we're going to have a grand reunion party."

Now Koala, being Koala was a bit dubious, but she thought she would give Big Ted a fair hearing for a change. So she asked him to tell her the details. Big Ted, being Big Ted, didn't have such a thing as a single detail in his big head. There is a saying 'Cold hands, warm heart, well with Big Ted it was more "Warm heart, empty head". "That's a nice idea in theory", Koala scolded "But try not to be so impetuous". Koala was very fond of big words.

"Don't worry Koala, I won't be impot. . . impit. . . im. . . What you just said. I'll organize everything and plan all the details. I promise it won't end up in a mess" Koala gave a huge sigh. In her mind she was running through some of the other things Big Ted had "organized". "Cast your mind back Big Ted" she said, and try to remember what happened the last time you had a party?"

Big Ted's first Party – Dalston 1974

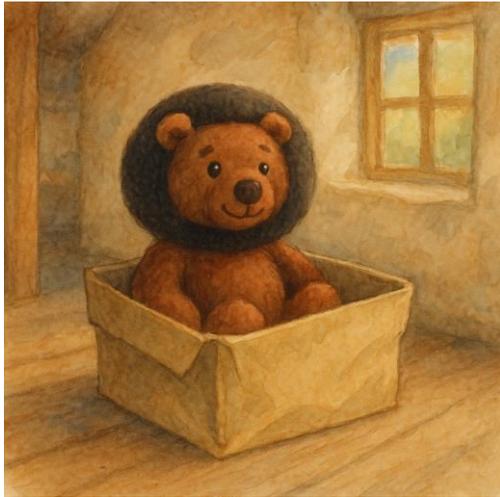
In 1974 Big Ted lived with Koala and many other toys in a village called Dalston, just one stop on the train from the local City, Carlisle. The human family which lived with him consisted of John who was an Excise Officer and spent most of his time riding around scenic parts of Cumbria on his bike, although he also had a pale blue Ford Cortina of which he was very fond; Isobel who did milk testing for the milk marketing board at very early hours of the morning and came back distinctly smelling of the farmyard, Maz who was at St Michael's village school and little Neil who was only four and attended a day nursery. They all lived in a bungalow which Isobel had once described as "looking like a public convenience" – it was quite nice really.

None of the humans are important characters in the story because Big Ted and his friends lived quite independent lives.

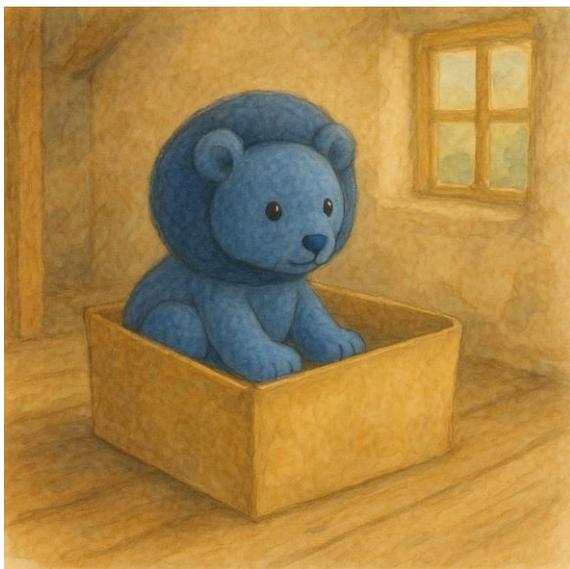


It was a warm day in April and spring had come to the Cumbrian hills and villages.

There were several other toys who were Big Ted's firm friends. One of them was Wallace, a fierce lion. He had always wanted to live out under a fierce desert sky, but as he lived in Cumbria and he didn't much like the damp, he had to content himself with a very small cardboard box in front of the living room fire.



Clarence was a member of Wallace's pride, but he harboured no such illusions because being made of felt, he knew he was fragile and couldn't be handled much, so he was quite happy with his own box



Mrs Bun and Mrs Ted lived in the village nearby (it was the "old" part of the village so they considered themselves highly superior).



They had brought their children Baby Bun and Baby Ted up quite strictly, but they had adopted two orphans called Pink Ear and Little Bear, and they were very naughty.



Dobbin was an old carthorse. He had once had wheels, but he didn't like them too much as they stopped him from going up and down stairs, so Maz had adjusted him so he could walk on his own

four hooves. He worked in the Market Garden in the village where he carried useful things like strawberries and melons from the field to the shop.

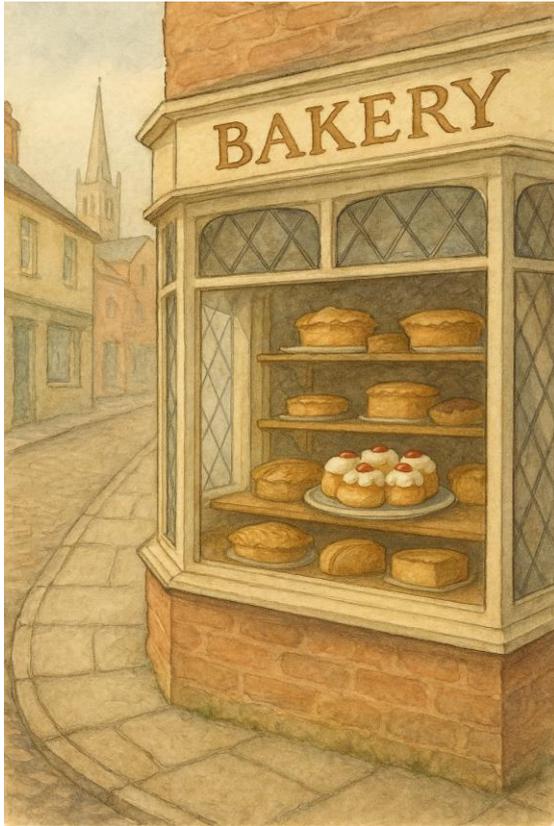


On this particular day, Big Ted was bored and was making his feelings very obvious by pacing up and down growling at the world in general. Maz was at school, and Neil had just started nursery, so there was nothing for him to do. Koala sat quietly sewing a new pinny for herself. Suddenly, Big Ted jumped straight up in the air, nearly bashing his head on the ceiling. "I know", he yelled "I'm going to have a party. I'm going to invite Maz and Neil and all the other toys. We'll have cream buns and lemonade and chocolate biscuits and pies, and a great big cake with my name on it!". Koala sighed. She had a great many things to say on the subject, but on balance she felt they would best remain unsaid, because with Big Ted in this kind of mood, it was generally better to let him get on with things rather than having him going on about them and getting in the way for days and days.

"All right" she said "That'll be bonza dinkum. When do you want to have it?".

"What's wrong with today?" asked Big Ted, flushed with enthusiasm. Koala thought for a moment. It was now 12:30pm. The Buns and Bears were coming over for tea anyway, and Wallace and Clarence were downstairs by the fire. It would be no trouble to fire up a quick note to the others and invite them over for 4pm, by which time the children would be home from school. As for refreshments, there was a tin of red salmon in the larder (this particular tin had been all the way to Spain and back), there was a box of chocolate biscuits Isobel had carefully hidden from Neil, and there was lemonade to drink. However, they were missing the cream buns, the pie, and the cake.

Koala pondered for a moment or two. Someone would have to go into Carlisle to get some provisions, and someone would have to sort out the invitations, laying the table and making the sandwiches. Somehow, she saw the probability of either of those things going wrong if left in the paws of Big Ted, but there was nothing to be done but to choose the lesser of two evils. "You are to go into town Big Ted. Here is my big basket" she said reluctantly. "There is a train at quarter to one. I am giving you ten shillings – sorry 50p" she corrected herself as she was not completely used to decimal currency "For your train fare, and £2 for the shopping. Buy a half return on the train – it is only one stop. Go to Armstrong's Bakery in Caldewgate and buy an apple pie, a big fruit cake and as many cream buns as you can get for the money.



Then come straight back home – there is a train at ten to three. Do not speak to any strange men, and Big Ted...” Koala paused ominously. “Stay away from the swings in Bitts Park, and in particular, stay away from the river. You remember what happened last time”. Big Ted nodded solemnly; he did recall his previous visit and how he had nearly fallen in the Eden trying to retrieve his sunhat. “I’ll come straight home Koala. There’s no need to lecture me, I mean”, he looked at her with a guileless expression, “How difficult can it be?”

Big Ted got ready to go, but as he washed behind his ears, a thought occurred to him. He had 50p for the train, and £2 for the buns. But if he didn’t go in the train, he would have... The sum was too difficult for him to do “I would have lots more money and we could have lots more buns”. Big Ted was very fond of buns. Shouting a cheerful farewell to Koala, he set off down the hall. On a small table next to the coat hooks was a set of car keys.

Big Ted had never driven a car before, but he had been in the car when other people had been driving it, and had even once been present on the only occasion where John had tried giving a driving lesson to Mrs Sethi from next door (that had not gone well). He jumped into the driving seat, spent a moment or two adjusting the pedals and seat height, and then turned the key in the ignition. With a cough, the engine sprung into action and the car took several kangaroo hops before stalling. On the third attempt, Big Ted achieved some degree of mastery over clutch and accelerator, and was on his rather unsteady way down the main road to Carlisle.



Actually, the road he took was not really the main road into the city, and there was not that much traffic on it, so after a while, Big Ted got the hang of things and really started to enjoy himself. He went past the brambling spot, thinking how much nicer it was in a car than pedalling slowly up the hill on a bike, and then shot down Brow Nelson with a “Wheeeee.....” Soon he was on the outskirts of the town, and got ready to turn right on the approach to the Castle. But at this point, things started to go wrong.

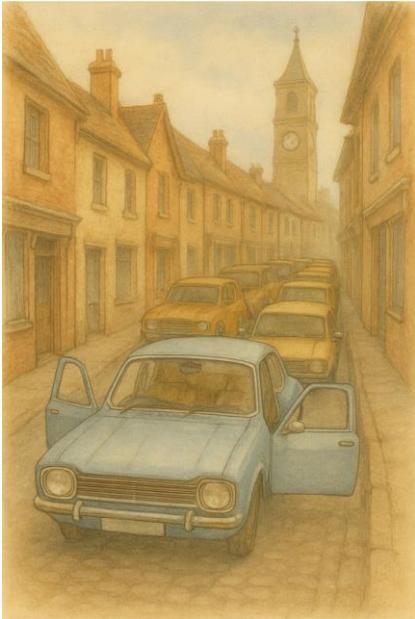
For some reason, although the traffic had been sparse earlier, the road suddenly became much more congested. It took him quite a long time and some injudicious use of his horn to manage to get onto the main road at all, then when he did so, the queue of cars slowed to a crawl. After ten minutes or so, he realized that along with the rest of the traffic, he was being diverted. No longer was he heading to the familiar baker’s shop, but right into the centre of town.



Then the car in front of him stopped dead. Big Ted turned the engine off, and in the distance, he thought he could hear very faint music, like a brass band.

The queue of traffic was going nowhere, and Big Ted was a bear of very little patience. “I’ll get out for just a minute and take a look” he said to himself. “I’ll just take the keys so that no one steals

John's car". Humming along with the distant music, he jumped out of the car leaving the door hanging open and trotted along to the end of the road.

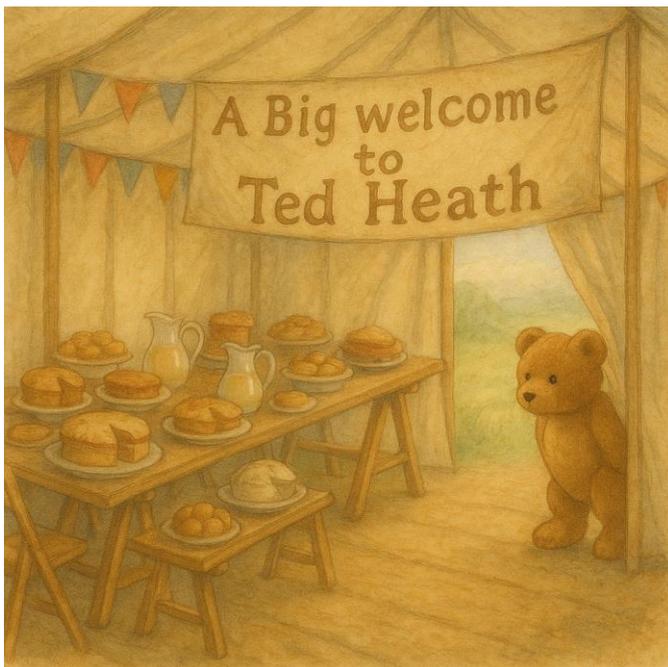


There he saw a most interesting sight; some of the side roads were cordoned off, and marching down the main thoroughfare (the very one Big Ted had been trying to reach, was a military band. Quite a few people were watching, and some of those were waving small Union Jacks. Behind the Royal Border Regiment came the Girl Guides, and then a group of men in splendid red and black velvet robes. Their leader had a splendid golden chain round his neck. This slow stately procession went round the corner, and Big Ted followed it for a while. "I'd like a chain like that", he thought "It would really go with my fur, and all my friends would be impressed and give me cream buns". At that thought he started back to the real world. He didn't have a watch, but he had an idea he might have been longer than just a couple of minutes. Feeling slightly guilty, he turned round and started to run back to where he had left John's precious Cortina. But as he approached, he rapidly slowed down. The barrier had been removed and the cars at the front of the queue had all gone. The only thing that was now stopping about fifty assorted vehicles from going on their lawful way, was a pale blue Cortina, parked right in the middle of the narrow street with its door open. Standing over the car were two large policeman and a sour faced woman in a black uniform with a yellow trim. She was writing something in a notebook. Forming around the officials was a growing crowd of angry motorists.

Big Ted pondered a moment. Much as he wanted to retrieve John's car, he had a feeling that any explanation to the police was going to have to involve a discussion of the ownership of the car, and further unpleasant investigations into his lack of a driving license or valid insurance. Surely the car would be returned to its proper owner in due course, and they would never suspect that he had been behind its abduction. Big Ted faded away through the crowd into a side street. By now he had quite lost his sense of direction, he didn't know what time it was and he was getting quite hungry. The houses around him were now rather grand, and up ahead he saw an imposing square surrounded by green painted railings. In the centre of the square was a large marquee, and in front of the wrought iron gates were two policemen. If they were supposed to be guarding, they didn't seem to be paying much attention to their job as they were chatting to each other and one was smoking a cigarette. But above the smoke, Big Ted, who had the keen nose of all bears, could smell something else. There was a faint aroma of baking coming from the tent.

Big Ted's rather ample stomach rumbled. He noticed that the railings had a substantial gap along the bottom, not high enough for a human, but just enough for even a portly teddy bear. Without giving his next move much thought, Big Ted wriggled under the railings and sneaked up to the canvas door of the marquee. He peered inside. Before him was a magnificent sight. Long tressel tables covered with snowy white clothes were laden with every type of thing that was good to eat. There were sandwiches of all varieties, there were sausage rolls and cheese straws, potted meat and shrimps and bowls of tomatoes. And the sweet things! There were scones and jars of jam and pots of thick cream, there were pies galore, there were fruit cakes and marzipan logs and chocolate cakes. But above all, there was a huge plate of the most magnificent cream buns Big Ted had ever seen. For some reason there was also a grand piano in the room, but Big Ted had no time for that.

It must be said in Big Ted's defence, that he had no intention of touching any of the food, or at least that he would have contented himself with a single bun. But then he saw a most amazing thing. Hanging above the head table was a banner, and the banner had writing on it. Big Ted was not a talented reader, and in fact to be honest he couldn't decipher much beyond his own name. But his own name was exactly what he saw. Big Ted. BIG TED!!! The party had all been put on for him as a surprise. He looked at the banner again. There were some other words he couldn't make out, but his own name was as clear as day.



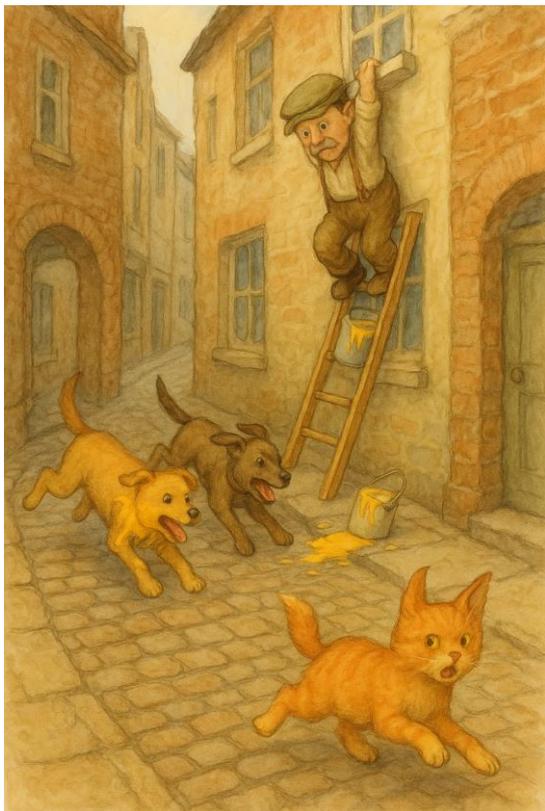
How kind and thoughtful Koala was, and how thoroughly she had meant to surprise her. Presumably she and all his other friends were waiting for him at the station. They would be wondering what had happened to him, but they would soon enough come back here, and there was no point in wandering off and running the risk of missing them again. He would wait here, and while he was waiting, he would just.... Big Ted rushed forwards and began to help himself liberally to the delicious tea.

Some considerable time passed. Big Ted moved from the sandwiches to the scones and back to eat three sausage rolls. He ate most of an apple pie and three slices from three different cakes. And then to the buns (he had made sure to leave plenty of space for them). They were as light as a feather yet packed with rich clotted cream and sweet luscious strawberry jam. Big Ted was on his

fourth bun, when he heard conversation behind him. That would be Koala and the others. He turned to face them, his fur covered in crumbs and his face smeared with a mixture of cream and jam. Outside the open flap stood a middle aged man with a big nose and a severe expression. Beside him was the man with the gold chain he had seen earlier, and behind them both was a group of well dressed women. They were all staring at the bear. Above his head fluttered the banner "A Big welcome to Ted Heath from Carlisle district WI".

One of the women screamed. "My cake! My special cake for the Prime Minister!". The man in the chain was becoming quite agitated and red in the face. "Arrest that bear" he yelled at the two policemen. "He's stolen the Mayor's cream buns!". Big Ted did not lose a moment. With deep regret, he flung the half-eaten bun at the long-nosed man, striking him full in the face, and fled as fast as his stubby legs would take him. He would not have stood a chance of evading his pursuers, but they wasted time trying to squeeze under the railings (one rather rotund lady became stuck) and by the time they had made it through the gate, Big Ted was a distance down the street.

Then all was chaos. The street was narrow and in heavy use. First Big Ted ran under the ladder of a man painting a windowsill. In his excitement, the man dropped his paint pot, spraying bright yellow paint over two of the policemen. Then the ladder fell over, hitting the roof of a car and leaving the poor workman dangling by his arms until the lady in the room above hauled him in. A woman walking two dogs had hysterics and the dogs got loose, spotted a large ginger cat across the street and charged it, causing a post van to swerve and run into a lamp post. A brief altercation with the cat convinced the dogs that discretion was the better part of valour and sped back across the road, where they joined a general tangle of paint, policemen, ladders and vehicles.



Back at the tent, the long nosed man wiped the remnants of the bun from his face, sat down at the piano and began to calmly to play, although his only audience was a little girl who had wandered in from the street. A brief smile flickered across his austere face.

But Big Ted sped on. Just as he thought he could run no more and he could hear his pursuers getting closer, he charged round a corner, to see two boys playing marbles on the pavement. Next to them, a red bicycle was propped up against the wall. In desperation, Big Ted jumped on to it and began to pedal feverishly. He had never ridden a bike before, and in fact he had positively avoided this form of transport as being overly taxing to the legs and rather undignified. But once on, he found that it was easier than he would have thought. He gained speed and careered on across the market square, knocking over a stall in the progress, and then suddenly found himself crossing a very busy main road with cars honking and drivers shaking their fists. And then suddenly he was out in the open, and realized where he was. The massive sandstone bulk of the castle loomed up to one side of him as he shot past the swing park Koala had warned him to avoid.



The policemen were still chasing him, and he could now hear the dull rumble of a helicopter overhead, but these were the least of his worries. He suddenly realized, that although, perforce, he had just taught himself to ride a bicycle, he had absolutely no idea of how to stop one. Rapidly approaching were the banks of the River Eden, where the previous year Big Ted had nearly fallen in. With more time to think things over, Big Ted could simply have stopped by falling off, because the grass was thick and would have provided a soft landing. But there was no time to think, and with a profound sense of inevitability, he went straight over the bank head over heels into the cold, fast flowing water. The bike jammed handlebars down in a mudbank, but Big Ted was swept away in the flood.



This story could have had a very sad ending, because the Eden is a very large river, and Big Ted could not really swim very well. However a few seconds later, he managed to grab hold of a log which was being carried along in the current, and pull himself far enough on to it to keep his head out of the water. But he did not have a pleasant time. It was very cold and the log bobbed about alarmingly so that he was constantly buffeted from side to side. Very frequently he thought his last moment had come, and he wished he had been a better bear all his life. If he survived this, he told himself, he would never eat a cream bun again, and would go to Africa to help the all the starving people he had seen on Blue Peter.

And then he felt a sharp pain in his “lower back”, and with a sudden jerk he was pulled backwards and downwards into the brown muddy water, losing his tenuous grip on the log. Something was dragging him along, through water, through weeds, his paws dragging on sand and then suddenly he was on dry land again. There was a sort of beach at the side of the river, and on it was a small girl with a large fishing rod. She shouted in delight “Dad, Dad! Look what I’ve caught. I’ve caught a bear!”. The man under the fishing umbrella didn’t look up from his newspaper. “No, you haven’t Lucy. You don’t catch bears in rivers, you catch fish – and neither of us will catch any of those if you don’t stop shouting and jumping around.” By way of answer, Lucy mutely presented the dripping Big Ted.

There were two reasons that Big Ted did not speak up at this point. Firstly, there was the long established tradition that toys do not speak or move in the presence of adult humans. Secondly, he was so full of water, river weed and sand that he couldn’t have said a word even if he had wanted to. “Can I keep her please Dad, as I found her in the river?” Lucy asked (she nearly said it was her birthday but as that didn’t happen until July it would not have been true). “I suppose so. But let’s get her cleaned up first”. “I’m going to call her Esmerelda, and Mummy and I will make her a lovely dress to wear”. Again, words could not have expressed Big Ted’s anguish at the idea of an enforced sex change.

The man and his daughter clambered up the steep steps to their back garden. They lived in a lovely cottage with “river views”. The river was in fact so very close that if you accidentally exited your back door too enthusiastically, you would end up as wet as Big Ted was. Lucy took her new bear into a

cosy kitchen, and hung him up to dry. Big Ted was not enthusiastic about this, but he realized that he had little choice but to comply. As he dangled limply, water started to well up from his eyes; not the contents of the Eden, but tears from his heart. He would never see his home again. He would never have fun with Koala and his other friends. But worse than any of that – he was to be put in a dress and called Esmerelda. At that moment he would rather have sunk to the bottom of the Eden and been eaten by little fishes.

In his misery, he hardly noticed that Lucy had re-entered the room, this time with a cheerful looking middle-aged woman. “So this is the famous Esmerelda I’m to make the dress for is it? She doesn’t look much like an Esmerelda at the moment – but I have some nice pink flowered chintz left over from my WI rag dolls, and with a nice flowery hat I’m sure she’ll look quite cute”. Big Ted felt quite faint. The woman grabbed him by the paw “She’s nearly dry, so I’ll just take some measurements.”. She paused. “Oh dear” she said. “Lucy love, don’t be too disappointed, but this Teddy belongs to someone else already. He’s got a tag sewed on to his back – he belongs to some one called...” she paused “This can’t be right but the name looks like “Koala”. The address is clear enough though – it is in Dalston not far from here. “

Big Ted’s spirits rose up like a moon rocket. He had despised Koala for insisting that he had a label on his back (she had done this after his third episode of losing himself on some made escapade) but thank goodness she had. Lucy started to cry, but was soon consoled when her Mum promised her that she would get a lovely doll called Esmerelda for her birthday.



The woman finished off his drying with a hairdryer and handed him to the burly fisherman. “Take him home” the woman said “You know what you have to do”.

Outside the house, Big Ted was rather surprised to see an ambulance parked in the driveway, but then noticed that the man was now wearing a smart uniform. “Thank heavens” he thought “I think he must be an ambulance driver. At least I hope he is – I don’t want to go to hospital and have my head reattached” (one of Big Ted’s friends, a black china doll had been to hospital and had recounted

in gruesome detail what had happened to her there). He was plumped down in the passenger seat, and off the ambulance trundled; much to Big Ted's disappointment, without flashing lights and siren.



Meanwhile, back at the bungalow, all was not well. Koala had been expecting Big Ted to come back on the 3:35 train and that she would therefore see him at about ten to four. When he did not appear then, she hoped he had caught the bus instead and would be home at 4:10pm. When Isobel came home at 4:15pm Big Ted had still not surfaced. At this point, Koala started to worry, particularly as there seemed to be some commotion going on in the hall. She caught a few words of Isobel's telephone conversation: "missing" "accident" "helicopter" and "Prime Minister" were some of them.



Mrs Bun and Mrs Ted had arrived by this point, and Koala related the story "Big Ted has had an accident and is missing – they have told the Prime Minister and now they are searching with helicopters". All the other toys burst into tears when they heard the bad news, but Koala was a true tough Australian and would have wrestled crocodiles if anyone had ever given her the chance; so all she did was sigh and going into the dining room, packed away all the biscuits and cakes.



At 5pm, a motley crew drew up at the bungalow. At the front, there was a police car with three policemen, one of whom had a peaked cap and a lot of silver braid, together with two other men in suits. For some reason they were wearing sunglasses and had mysterious bulges under their left arms. The second car was John's Cortina being driven by a WPC; it had a large dent in its bumper where an angry motorist had kicked it. The third car, also a police vehicle, contained a traffic warden, an young man clutching a dog which was covered in paint, a man in paint splattered overalls holding an empty pot, and two elderly women holding empty plates. Behind all of these was a man on a bicycle accompanied All of these people looked to be in various stages of irritation, and one of the plate women (who had blue rinsed hair) was plum in the face with anger.

Only one of the cars could get into the drive, so the others had to park in the street. As the toys watched, the small crowd of people assembled from their cars and began a heated conversation with Isobel. Koala could not hear this at all, although she thought she had managed to lipread the word "bear" appearing quite a lot.



By 5:30pm when John swung into the drive on his bicycle, the toys had finished the sandwiches, crisps and sausage rolls, and Wallace and Clarence had taken all the decorations down.



At this point, the scene outside seemed to be escalating. John was not a calming presence at the best of times and he was now focusing his ire on all concerned. Isobel was used to taking the blame for things that were not her fault, but the police inspector was not accustomed to this kind of thing and had produced a notebook and pencil. One of the special branch detectives was fiddling with his jacket buttons in a nervous fashion. A crowd of neighbours had formed, some of whom seemed to be supporting the police, and others who were on the Ellis side. In fact by 5:45, the whole street was taking on the characteristics of a small riot.



It was at this point that an ambulance pulled into the drive. The crowd fell silent, and even John paused his diatribe. One of the police constables took his helmet off. Koala stood in dumb despair; Big Ted had been found, but either he was severely injured, or the ambulance had come to return his body for burial. What would she do without him? He had often been irritating, he had caused more than his fair share of trouble over the years and a few times she had come close to strangling him, but she loved him, and so did all the other toys. Just when she had finished planning the hymns for his funeral, the driver got out of the ambulance carrying Big Ted, and handed him to Isobel. "I believe this is yours" he said. The police inspector licked his pencil and began to take notes (he wished he had brought a spare notepad as it looked as though this was all going to take a great deal of explaining).

Back in 1992 – the Reunion Party

"So that was what happened that time you wanted to have a party Big Ted", Koala said as she finished her story. "There was no party. You weren't allowed to have cakes or buns for a month and had to go to bed so early that you missed the last part of "The Water Margin". John got a bill for not just his car but a damaged bike and a dog shampoo. We were also just lucky that the police didn't press charges or you would just about have come out of prison by now. Apparently the Prime Minister was quite amused by the whole affair – and that was from someone who wasn't supposed to have a sense of humour."

But as Koala watched, she saw Big Ted's lip start to tremble. That had all been a long time ago, and he was right, there was no use in just sitting around getting dustier and dustier and more and more forgotten. Action had to be taken "Alright then" she said "If we must..."

This concession was all Big Ted needed!

"We'll write lists" he shouted "Lots of lists!"

- (1) List of things to do
- (2) Jobs to be allocated
- (3) Who to invite
- (4) Food
- (5) Drink – Lots to drink!

He dashed about for several minutes looking for pens and paper. Koala then quietly pointed out that he was sitting on the paper and had a pencil behind his ear.

Now in the attic there were lots of boxes which didn't belong to him or Neil or John or Isobel (or anybody living for that matter) but that made no difference to Big Ted. He started diving into boxes scattering their contents to left and right, growling with delight at each new find. Koala did her best to restrain him but his excitement was too much and she had to give in in the end. He found lots more pens and pencils in the process. Koala told him they belonged to someone called Roddy and he might not be too pleased at Big Ted for using them.

"Don't be ridiculous of course he won't mind. He must like us because he's got lots of 'friends' too. He has a whole zoo! We'll invite them all to the party. "

Just at that Big Ted gave a shriek (Yes – bears can really shriek) "Whatever's wrong now?" demanded Koala.

"Oh Koala, we can't invite all Roddy's friends because they're horrible. He's got some photograph albums of them here and there are pictures of really awful monsters, dragons, trolls. Oh dear, oh dear."



He was so upset that he would have turned pale if he could – but as he was furry he couldn't.

Koala rushed over to see what the emergency was.

"You big wowser" she said "these are D&D books not photograph albums. They are only silly games people play". But Big Ted was not wholly convinced and didn't venture near that particular box again.

They found some pretty coloured paper and sat about writing invitations to all their friends. If this had been a few years later, they would have been using Publisher for this. As usual Big Ted started with great gusto but Koala got most of them actually written which is just as well because there were more blots, mistakes, misspellings than anything else in Big Ted's invitations. This was the invitation list: Mrs Bun & Baby Bun, Dobbin, all the zoo, Mrs Ted & Baby Ted, Wallace, Clarence, and last but not least a small but fierce looking Cthulhu. No one knew who had decided to invite him, so Koala guessed she must have read about him in a book somewhere.



With Invitations duly sent, operation clean up was put into motion with Koala doing most of the work as usual. Big Ted rather fancied himself as the foreman and stood around giving orders till an old shoe somehow “landed by accident” on his head and he took the hint and stopped issuing his orders. That's not to say that he did much more in the way of work. He and Koala did put some decorations up though.



At 4pm the guests started to arrive. Dobbin brought some cream buns.



Mrs Ted brought sandwiches (salmon of course), and Mrs Bun brought sausage rolls.



Koala baked a magnificent cake with “Big Ted” iced on the top.



The zoo brought lots of fruits and nuts.



And Chthulu brought the seafood course in a string bag.



The table was laid with a magnificent tea.



And the animals all sat down to enjoy it. After all, they had waited eighteen years for it, but in the end it was a very good reunion party.



The End

Epilogue (for adults only).

A very incomplete version of this story was found in an old school exercise book. It was written by my mother Isobel Ellis in the early 1990s. These photographs were tucked into the book. They show Big Ted, Koala and Wallace as they were in mid 1970s.





So the original story was actually set in 1974 – largely so that the joke about “Big Ted” would work while Ted Heath was prime minister. The house in the 1970s part of the story is 13 Yetlands where we actually lived then.



The house in 1990s referenced is Albert Square (yes really) where my parents lived (I had moved out by then).

As my Mum is now 86, and has shown no inclination to finish it off, I have done it for her and finished it off in 2025. The illustrations were done by AI based on my descriptions and some other photos taken of the toys by me. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that none of the technology used to create the story (the personal computer, the iPhone camera and of course the AI) existed, or indeed was even contemplated in 1974, so I have seen the entire world change. But...

Most of the toys mentioned are all still going strong and are living with me in considerable comfort. As you will see, I have done considerable restoration work to bring them back from the rather sad state they were in. Neil and Isobel are still here, as is Roddy who is mentioned in the story. John died a couple of years ago. I suspect the toys will still be here when the last of us are gone and forgotten.



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