

DRIPPING FRITZ



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FRITZ WAS a streamlined meat machine with a powerful dislike for water.

Fritz belonged to Mrs. Munchem. Mrs. Munchem loved her pet and he was pretty fond of her. But he hated, just hated, being wet. On hot summer days when the sprinkler spun and splashed him unexpectedly, he'd go berserk. He hated rain too. He'd bark at it boldly from safe inside his kennel.

When Fridays came around, Fritz would do everything possible to make himself invisible — because Friday was when curly-haired Emily Agnes turned up, towing her little *Dog Washing* van behind her.

Fritz not only knew when it was Friday. He was quite good at detecting Thursday nights as well. That was when Mrs. Munchem began to act strangely.

“Come on, Fritzzy boy,” she'd coo. “Please be a good doggy for me tomorrow. The bubbles don't hurt. See?” And she'd pull a bubble pipe from her pocket and blow swirling spheres into the air.

Fritz wasn't going to fall for that one. He knew that bubbles meant water. He'd snap at them in the air until they disappeared.

Other times, Mrs Munchem would wave a treat in front of him so his nose twitched with excitement. But then she would swing it quickly behind her back. "You can have it tomorrow, Fritz, if you're a good boy for Emily Agnes."

"Humph," Fritz would mumble and wander back to his kennel. That would be the end of the treat, for Fritz had no intention of letting Emily Agnes wash him.

And that's how it was every Thursday night. But every Friday, like it or not, Fritz went into Emily Agnes's bath. Until one Thursday, when Mrs Munchem had tempted him with a particularly nice, chewy treat — the kind that was shaped like a bone and smelled as if it had been buried for a week — he decided it was time to put his paw down.

The following morning dawned fresh and sunny — just the kind of day when Fritz would love to go and smell all the tyres in the car park at the oval. But no. It was Friday, so Fritz pressed himself so hard into the back of his kennel there was no room for his tail — it had to curl over like a furry frond.

"Fritz!" sang Mrs Munchem from the back door. "Oh, Fritz!"

Fritz knew that tone of voice. It was that time. It was Emily-Agnes-will-be-here-any-minute time and I-want-you-to-be-a-good-dog-for-her-today time. Well, he wouldn't!

Fritz pushed himself even further back in his kennel. Now he was so scrunched he felt as if he were on a spring and would launch himself right out of the kennel and over the fence if he released the catch. If only! That would get him out of having a wash.

Suddenly, Fritz's ears began to tingle. Wait a minute! he thought. There was an idea in there somewhere! Something about springs? Fences?

Then it hit him.

Why should he put up with it any longer? Why should he cringe like a furtive alley cat every Friday morning? Why should he torture himself trying to squeeze out of sight behind the piano or the woodshed?

The answer was simple. So simple it was a wonder it hadn't occurred to him before.

Slip, slop, slip, slop. Mrs Munchem's slippers were coming down the pathway. She wore them instead of shoes on Friday mornings, hoping every week to creep up on Fritz. But slippers were no way to fool ears as sensitive as Fritz's.

"Oh, Fritz," crooned Mrs Munchem, with a plea in her voice. "Here, boy." The old lady bent towards the kennel, her hand outstretched. For a moment, Fritz felt a twinge of pity for his owner. "There'll be a nice treat for you once you've had your bath," she went on.

Then Fritz did it.

He uncurled himself from the kennel, gave one good doggy-like stretch and pattered docilely down the garden path towards the front gate.

Mrs Munchem gasped. "Oh, Fritz!" she cried, slip-slopping speedily behind him. "Good dog! Good dog!"

With a grin as wide as a slice of watermelon, Mrs Munchem opened the gate. Fritz did a quick trot forward. For a split second, Mrs Munchem's brows creased in a frown. Then they relaxed. Mrs Munchem patted the dog's head. "I can't believe it," she said to Emily Agnes, who stood steadfast in the van, ready for the usual tussle.

"Up you go then, boy," said Mrs Munchem, in a voice silky with pride and relief.



But as she stood back, Fritz saw his chance, the moment he'd been waiting for. With a neat side-step, he lifted his front paws and the next time they hit the pavement he was several metres away from the two women, whose mouths were round in surprise like tiny full moons.

Fritz bounded. He streaked, head low, wind slicing above him. He reached the end of the street. Muffled shouts followed. He had a good head start. He could afford to turn and look back.

There was Mrs Munchem, puffing and rocking, her green slippers flip-flopping along the footpath. Emily Agnes was speedier. Her arms were pumping back and forth.

Fritz took off again. This was it. This was the life: no more washes; no stinky, smelly bubbles that popped about him; no towel rubs; and especially not the indignity of having a hairdryer aimed at him.

Fritz ran. The whole world full of trees and street posts and parked cars was waiting for him. Oh, bliss!

On and on he ran, till he reached the oval. The two women were tiny specks behind him, bobbing up and down like small boats on a paved horizon.

But what was this? The oval was empty. The car park was empty. Fritz was taken aback. Oh, well, he decided, plenty else to see.

He took a turn towards the beach. The mildest breeze brought the whiff of salt and the stronger scent of lovely, rotting seaweed. He dashed between cars, his coat swaying like wavelets in the gleam of an autumn sun.

"Fritz!" That was Emily Agnes's voice. She was at the crossing. Mrs Munchem was catching her breath some distance back.

Fritz ignored them, and trotted happily along the road that led straight to the beach. He sniffed good morning to a couple of small terriers who weren't terribly friendly. He raised his leg on a telegraph post and felt very satisfied. He thought about seagulls — how they'd be strutting along the shore, like real-estate agents surveying their property. He'd give them a good run for their money!

Suddenly Fritz pricked up his ears. Music. Hmm! That sounded interesting. He turned and trotted towards the music.



Oh, he liked this. Lots of shops with lots of smells. Then he saw what was making the music. It looked like fun.

He jumped on, next to the horses that were galloping up and down in time with the music. He was having a wonderful time, when a rough voice cried, "Someone get that dorg orf the merry-go-round!"

Fritz enjoyed the chase. Round and round he went, dodging the man in overalls and darting in and out of the horses with the shiny gold poles.

"Fritz!" Fritz hardly recognised Mrs Munchem. Her grey, wiry hair was spiked out all over her head, her face was glowing like a boiled beetroot and her chest was heaving up and down.

"That your dorg?" cried the man. "Get 'im orf right now!"

"I'll get him," said Emily Agnes to Mrs Munchem, her dark eyes bright with determination. But when the curly-haired woman leapt onto the merry-go-round, Fritz decided it was time to get going again.

He ran off and into a small park, just as a little boy threw a red ball high up in the air.

Fritz couldn't believe his luck. There was hardly anything he enjoyed more than a game of ball.

With his eyes on the ball and his mouth wide open, he dashed forward. And took a mighty leap. Then he stumbled against something. He toppled, and suddenly there was water splashing up to his tummy. Fritz had landed in the park fountain pool!

So had the ball.

“Waa!” cried the little boy, running to his mother. Every few steps, he turned round, blubbering and pointing.

Fritz looked up, stunned. He tried to fetch the ball, but it kept bobbing out of reach. Then he hit on an idea. By crouching under the water, he could spring up and grab the ball from below. That worked! Ah! Fritz stood up in the fountain pool, ball in mouth, proud as anything.

But Fritz was wet. Dripping. Soaking.

And it didn't bother him one bit. In fact, after he'd dropped the ball back at the little boy's feet, he jumped back in the pool and frolicked around, splashing the stunned Mrs Munchem and Emily Agnes.

So that was how Fritz Munchem, that streamlined meat machine, overcame his dislike for water. Fridays come and go now without so much as a murmur. Emily Agnes smiles a lot more and Mrs Munchem often buys special dog-treats . . .

. . . Now that she's paid off the fine for having a dog in a park fountain, that is.

