

Judy B L U E

tales of a
fourth grade
nothing



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*For Larry,
who is a combination of Peter and Fudge,
and for Willie Mae,
who told me about Dribble*

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1 The Big Winner

I won Dribble at Jimmy Fargo's birthday party. All the other guys got to take home goldfish in little plastic bags. I won him because I guessed there were three hundred and forty-eight jelly beans in Mrs. Fargo's jar. Really, there were four hundred and twenty-three, she told us later. Still, my guess was closest. "Peter Warren Hatcher is the big winner!" Mrs. Fargo announced.

At first I felt bad that I didn't get a goldfish too. Then Jimmy handed me a glass bowl. Inside there was some water and three rocks. A tiny green turtle was sleeping on the biggest rock. All the other guys looked at their goldfish. I knew what they were

thinking. They wished they could have tiny green turtles too.

I named my turtle Dribble while I was walking home from Jimmy's party. I live at 25 West 68th Street. It's an old apartment building. But it's got one of the best elevators in New York City. There are mirrors all around. You can see yourself from every angle. There's a soft, cushioned bench to sit on if you're too tired to stand. The elevator operator's name is Henry Bevelheimer. He lets us call him Henry because Bevelheimer's very hard to say.

Our apartment's on the twelfth floor. But I don't have to tell Henry. He already knows. He knows everybody in the building. He's that smart! He even knows I'm nine and in fourth grade.

I showed him Dribble right away. "I won him at a birthday party," I said.

Henry smiled. "Your mother's going to be surprised."

Henry was right. My mother was really surprised. Her mouth opened when I said, "Just look at what I won at Jimmy Fargo's birthday party." I held up my tiny green turtle. "I've already named him . . . Dribble! Isn't that a great name for a turtle?"

My mother made a face. "I don't like the way he smells," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked. I put my nose right down close to him. I didn't smell anything but turtle. So *Dribble smells like turtle*, I thought. *Well, he's supposed to. That's what he is!*

"And I'm not going to take care of him either," my mother added.

"Of course you're not," I told her. "He's my turtle. And I'm the one who's going to take care of him."

"You're going to change his water and clean out his bowl and feed him and all of that?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "And even more. I'm going to see to it that he's happy!"

This time my mother made a funny noise. Like a groan.

I went into my bedroom. I put Dribble on top of my dresser. I tried to pet him and tell him he would be happy living with me. But it isn't easy to pet a turtle. They aren't soft and furry and they don't lick you or anything. Still, I had my very own pet at last.

Later, when I sat down at the dinner table, my mother said, "I smell turtle. Peter, go and scrub your hands!"

Some people might think that my mother is my biggest problem. She doesn't like turtles and she's always telling me to scrub my hands. That doesn't mean just run them under the water. *Scrub* means I'm

supposed to use soap and rub my hands together. Then I've got to rinse and dry them. I ought to know by now. I've heard it enough!

But my mother isn't my biggest problem. Neither is my father. He spends a lot of time watching commercials on TV. That's because he's in the advertising business. These days his favorite commercial is the one about Juicy-O. He wrote it himself. And the president of the Juicy-O company liked it so much he sent my father a whole crate of Juicy-O for our family to drink. It tastes like a combination of oranges, pineapples, grapefruits, pears, and bananas. (And if you want to know the truth, I'm getting pretty sick of drinking it.) But Juicy-O isn't my biggest problem either.

My biggest problem is my brother, Farley Drexel Hatcher. He's two-and-a-half years old. Everybody calls him Fudge. I feel sorry for him if he's going to grow up with a name like Fudge, but I don't say a word. It's none of my business.

Fudge is always in my way. He messes up everything he sees. And when he gets mad he throws himself flat on the floor and he screams. *And* he kicks. *And* he bangs his fists. The only time I really like him is when he's sleeping. He sucks four fingers on his left hand and makes a slurping noise.

When Fudge saw Dribble he said, "Ohhhh . . . see!"

And I said, "That's *my* turtle, get it? *Mine!* You don't touch him."

Fudge said, "No touch." Then he laughed like crazy.

2 Mr. and Mrs. Juicy-O

One night my father came home from the office all excited. He told us Mr. and Mrs. Yarby were coming to New York. He's the president of the Juicy-O company. He lives in Chicago. I wondered if he'd bring my father another crate of Juicy-O. If he did I'd probably be drinking it for the rest of my life. Just thinking about it was enough to make my stomach hurt.

My father said he invited Mr. and Mrs. Yarby to stay with us. My mother wanted to know why they couldn't stay at a hotel like most people who come to New York. My father said they could. But he didn't want them to. He thought they'd be more comfortable staying with us. My mother said that was about the silliest thing she'd ever heard.

But she fixed up Fudge's bedroom for our guests. She put fancy sheets and a brand-new blanket on the hide-a-bed. That's a sofa that opens up into a bed at night. It's in Fudge's room because that used to be our den. Before he was born we watched TV in there. And lots of times Grandma slept over on the hide-a-bed. Now we watch TV right in the living room. And Grandma doesn't sleep over very often.

My mother moved Fudge's crib into my room. He's going to get a regular bed when he's three, my mother says. There are a lot of reasons I don't like to sleep in the same room as Fudge. I found that out two months ago when my bedroom was being painted. I had to sleep in Fudge's room for three nights because the paint smell made me cough. For one thing, he talks in his sleep. And if a person didn't know better, a person could get scared. Another thing is that slurring noise he makes. It's true that I like to hear it when I'm awake, but when I'm trying to fall asleep I like things very quiet.

When I complained about having to sleep with Fudge my mother said, "It's just for two nights, Peter."

"I'll sleep in the living room," I suggested. "On the sofa . . . or even a chair."

"No," my mother said. "You will sleep in your bedroom. In your own bed!"

There was no point in arguing. Mom wasn't going to change her mind.

She spent the day in the kitchen. She really cooked up a storm. She used so many pots and pans Fudge didn't have any left to bang together. And that's one of his favorite pastimes—banging pots and pans together. A person can get an awful headache listening to that racket.

Right after lunch my mother opened up the dinner table. We don't have a separate dining room. When we have company for dinner we eat in one end of the living room. When Mom finished setting the table she put a silver bowl filled with flowers right in the middle. I said, "Hey, Mom . . . it looks like you're expecting the President or something."

"Very funny, Peter!" my mother answered.

Sometimes my mother laughs like crazy at my jokes. Other times she pretends not to get them. And then, there are times when I know she gets them but she doesn't seem to like them. This was one of those times. So I decided no more jokes until after dinner.

I went to Jimmy Fargo's for the afternoon. I came home at four o'clock. I found my mother standing over the dinner table mumbling. Fudge was on the floor playing with my father's socks. I'm not sure why he likes socks so much, but if you give him a few pairs he'll play quietly for an hour.

I said, "Hi, Mom. I'm home."

"I'm missing two flowers," my mother said.

I don't know how she noticed that two flowers were missing from her silver bowl. Because there were at least a dozen of them left. But sure enough, when I checked, I saw two stems with nothing on them.

"Don't look at me, Mom," I said. "What would I do with two measly flowers?"

So we both looked at Fudge. "Did you take Mommy's pretty flowers?" my mother asked him.

"No take," Fudge said. He was chewing on something.

"What's in your mouth?" my mother asked.

Fudge didn't answer.

"Show Mommy!"

"No show," Fudge said.

"Oh yes!" My mother picked him up and forced his mouth open. She fished out a rose petal.

"What did you do with Mommy's flowers?" She raised her voice. She was really getting upset.

Fudge laughed.

"Tell Mommy!"

"Yum!" Fudge said. "Yummy yummy yummy!"

"Oh no!" my mother cried, rushing to the telephone.

She called Dr. Cone. She told him that Fudge ate

two flowers. Dr. Cone must have asked what kind, because my mother said, "Roses, I think. But I can't be sure. One might have been a daisy."

There was a long pause while my mother listened to whatever Dr. Cone had to say. Then Mom said, "Thank you, Dr. Cone." She hung up.

"No more flowers!" she told Fudge. "You understand?"

"No more," Fudge repeated. "No more . . . no more . . . no more."

My mother gave him a spoonful of peppermint-flavored medicine. The kind I take when I have stomach pains. Then she carried Fudge off to have his bath.

Leave it to my brother to eat flowers! I wondered how they tasted. *Maybe they're delicious and I don't know it because I've never tasted one*, I thought. I decided to find out. I picked off one petal from a pink rose. I put it in my mouth and tried to chew it up. But I couldn't do it. It tasted awful. I spit it out in the garbage. Well, at least now I knew I wasn't missing anything great!

Fudge ate his supper in the kitchen before our company arrived. While he was eating I heard my mother remind him, "Fudge's going to be a good boy tonight. Very good for Daddy's friends."

"Good," Fudge said. "Good boy."

"That's right!" my mother told him.

I changed and scrubbed up while Fudge finished his supper. I was going to eat with the company. Being nine has its advantages!

My mother was all dressed up by the time my father got home with the Yarbys. You'd never have guessed that Mom spent most of the day in the kitchen. You'd also never have guessed that Fudge ate two flowers. He was feeling fine. He even smelled nice—like baby powder.

Mrs. Yarby picked him up right away. I knew she would. She looked like a grandmother. That type always makes a big deal out of Fudge. She walked into the living room cuddling him. Then she sat down on the sofa and bounced Fudge around on her lap.

"Isn't he the cutest little boy!" Mrs. Yarby said. "I just love babies." She gave him a big kiss on the top of his head. I kept waiting for somebody to tell her Fudge was no baby. But no one did.

My father carried the Yarbys' suitcase into Fudge's room. When he came back he introduced me to our company.

"This is our older son, Peter," he said to the Yarbys.

"I'm nine and in fourth grade," I told them.

"How do, Peter," Mr. Yarby said.

Mrs. Yarby just gave me a nod. She was still busy with Fudge. "I have a surprise for this dear little boy!" she said. "It's in my suitcase. Should I go get it?"

"Yes," Fudge shouted. "Go get . . . go get!"

Mrs. Yarby laughed, as if that was the best joke she ever heard. "I'll be right back," she told Fudge. She put him down and ran off to find her suitcase.

She came back carrying a present tied up with a red ribbon.

"Ohhhh!" Fudge cried, opening his eyes wide.

"Goody!" He clapped his hands.

Mrs. Yarby helped him unwrap his surprise. It was a windup train that made a lot of noise. Every time it bumped into something it turned around and went the other way. Fudge liked it a lot. He likes anything that's noisy.

I said, "That's a nice train."

Mrs. Yarby turned to me. "Oh, I have something for you too uh . . . uh. . . ."

"Peter," I reminded her. "My name is Peter."

"Yes. Well, I'll go get it."

Mrs. Yarby left the room again. This time she came back with a flat package. It was wrapped up too—red ribbon and all. She handed it to me. Fudge stopped playing with his train long enough to come over and see what I got. I took off the paper very carefully in case my mother wanted to save it. And

also to show Mrs. Yarby that I'm a lot more careful about things than my brother. I'm not sure she noticed. My present turned out to be a big picture dictionary. The kind I liked when I was about four years old. My old one is in Fudge's bookcase now.

"I don't know much about big boys," Mrs. Yarby said. "So the lady in the store said a nice book would be a good idea."

A nice book would have been a good idea, I thought. But a picture dictionary! That's for babies! I've had my own regular dictionary since I was eight. But I knew I had to be polite so I said, "Thank you very much. It's just what I've always wanted."

"I'm so glad!" Mrs. Yarby said. She let out a long sigh and sat back on the sofa.

My father offered the Yarbys a drink.

"Good idea . . . good idea," Mr. Yarby said.

"What'll it be?" my father asked.

"What'll it be?" Mr. Yarby repeated, laughing.

"What do you think, Hatcher? It'll be Juicy-O! That's all we ever drink. Good for your health!" Mr. Yarby pounded his chest.

"Of course!" my father said, like he knew it all along. "Juicy-O for everyone!" my father told my mother. She went into the kitchen to get it.

While my father and Mr. Yarby were discussing Juicy-O, Fudge disappeared. Just as my mother served

everyone a glass of Mr. Yarby's favorite drink he came back. He was carrying a book—my old, worn-out picture dictionary. The same as the one the Yarbys just gave me.

"See," Fudge said, climbing up on Mrs. Yarby's lap. "See book."

I wanted to vanish. I think my mother and father did too.

"See book!" Now Fudge held it up over his head.

"I can use another one," I explained. "I really can. That old one is falling apart." I tried to laugh.

"It's returnable," Mrs. Yarby said. "It's silly to keep it if you already have one." She sounded insulted. Like it was my fault she brought me something I already had.

"MINE!" Fudge said. He closed the book and held it tight against his chest. "MINE . . . MINE . . . MINE . . ."

"It's the thought that counts," my mother said. "It was so nice of you to think of our boys." Then she turned to Fudge. "Put the book away now, Fudge."

"Isn't it Fudge's bedtime?" my father hinted.

"Oh yes. I think it is," my mother said, scooping him up. "Say goodnight, Fudge."

"Goodnight Fudge!" my brother said, waving at us.

Fudge was supposed to fall asleep before we sat

down to dinner. But just in case, my mother put a million little toys in his crib to keep him busy. I don't know who my mother thought she was fooling. Because we all know that Fudge can climb out of his crib any old time he wants to.

He stayed away until we were in the middle of our roast beef. Then he came in carrying Dribble's bowl. He walked right up to Mrs. Yarby. He thought she was his new friend. "See," he said, holding Dribble under her nose. "See Dribble."

Mrs. Yarby shrieked. "Ohhhh! I can't stand reptiles. Get that thing away from me!"

Fudge looked disappointed. So he showed Dribble to Mr. Yarby. "See," he said.

"HATCHER!" Mr. Yarby boomed. "Make him get that thing out of here!"

I wondered why Mr. Yarby called my father "Hatcher." Didn't he know his first name was Warren? And I didn't like the way Mr. and Mrs. Yarby both called Dribble a "thing."

I jumped up. "Give him to me!" I told Fudge. I took Dribble and his bowl and marched into my room. I inspected my turtle all over. He seemed all right. I didn't want to make a big scene in front of our company but I was mad! I mean *really* mad! That kid knows he's not allowed to touch my turtle!

"Peter," my father called, "come and finish your dinner."

When I got back to the table I heard Mrs. Yarby say, "It must be interesting to have children. We never had any ourselves."

"But if we did," Mr. Yarby told my father, "we'd teach them some manners. I'm a firm believer in old-fashioned good manners!"

"So are we, Howard," my father said in a weak voice.

I thought Mr. Yarby had a lot of nerve to hint that we had no manners. Didn't I pretend to like their dumb old picture dictionary? If that isn't good manners, then I don't know what is!

My mother excused herself and carried Fudge back to my room. I guess she put him into his crib again. I hoped she told him to keep his hands off my things.

We didn't hear from him again until dessert. Just as my mother was pouring the coffee he ran in wearing my rubber gorilla mask from last Hallowe'en. It's a very real-looking mask. I guess that's why Mrs. Yarby screamed so loud. If she hadn't made so much noise my mother probably wouldn't have spilled the coffee all over the floor.

My father grabbed Fudge and pulled the gorilla mask off him. "That's not funny, Fudge!" he said.

"Funny," Fudge laughed. "Funny, funny, funny Fudge!"

"Yes sir, Hatcher!" Mr. Yarby said. "Old-fashioned manners!"

By that time I'm sure my father was sorry the Yarbys weren't staying at a hotel.

I finally got to bed at ten. Fudge was in his crib slurring away. I thought I'd never fall asleep! But I guess I did. I woke up once, when Fudge started babbling. He said, "Boo-ba-mum-mum-ha-ba-shi." Whatever that means. I didn't even get scared. I whispered, "Shut up!" And he did.

Early the next morning I felt something funny on my arm. At first I didn't wake up. I just felt this little tickle. I thought it was part of my dream. But then I had the feeling somebody was staring at me. So I opened my eyes.

Fudge was standing over me and Dribble was crawling around on my arm. I guess Fudge could tell I was about ready to kill him because he bent down and kissed me. That's what he does when my mother's angry at him. He thinks nobody can resist him when he makes himself so lovable. And a lot of times it works with my mother. But not with me! I jumped up, put Dribble back into his bowl, and smacked Fudge on his backside. *Hard*. He hollered.

My father came running into my room. He was still in his pajamas.

He whispered, "What's going on in here?"

I pointed at Fudge and he pointed at me.

My father picked up my brother and carried him off. "Go back to sleep, Peter," he said. "It's only six o'clock in the morning."

I fell asleep for another hour, then woke up to an awful noise. It was Fudge playing with his new train. It woke up everybody, including the Yarbys. But this time there was nobody they could blame. They were the ones who gave Fudge the train in the first place.

Breakfast was a very quiet affair. Nobody had much to say. Mr. Yarby drank two glasses of Juicy-O. Then he told my father that he and Mrs. Yarby had their suitcase packed. They were leaving for a hotel as soon as breakfast was over.

My father said he understood. That the apartment was too small for so many people. My mother didn't say anything.

When Mr. Yarby went into Fudge's bedroom to pick up his suitcase his voice boomed. "HATCHER!"

My father ran toward the bedroom. My mother and Mrs. Yarby followed him. I followed them. When we got there we saw Fudge sitting on the Yarbys' suitcase. He had decorated it with about one hundred

green stamps. The kind my mother gets at the supermarket.

"See," Fudge said. "See . . . pretty." He laughed. Nobody else did. Then he licked the last green stamp and stuck it right in the middle of the suitcase. "All gone!" Fudge sang, holding up his hands.

It took my mother half an hour to peel off her trading stamps and clean up the Yarbys' suitcase.

The next week my father came home from the office and collected all the cans of Juicy-O in our house. He dumped them into the garbage. My mother felt bad that my father had lost such an important account. But my father told her not to worry. Juicy-O wasn't selling very well at the stores. Nobody seemed to like the combination of oranges, grapefruits, pineapples, pears, and bananas.

"You know, Dad," I said. "I only drank Juicy-O to be polite. I really hated it!"

"You know something funny, Peter?" my father said. "I thought it was pretty bad myself!"

3 The Family Dog

Nobody ever came right out and said that Fudge was the reason my father lost the Juicy-O account. But I thought about it. My father said he was glad to be rid of Mr. Yarby. Now he could spend more time on his other clients—like the Toddle-Bike company. My father is in charge of their new TV commercial.

I thought maybe he could use me in it since I know how to stand on my head. But he said he wasn't planning on having any head-standers in the commercial.

My grandma taught me to stand on my head when I spent the night at her house. I can stay up for as long as three minutes. I showed my mother, my father, and Fudge how I can do it right in the living room. They

were all impressed. Especially Fudge. He wanted to do it too. So I turned him upside down and tried to teach him. But he always tumbled over backwards.

Right after I learned to stand on my head Fudge stopped eating. He did it suddenly. One day he ate fine and the next day nothing. "No eat!" he told my mother.

She didn't pay too much attention to him until the third day. When he still refused to eat she got upset. "You've got to eat, Fudge," she said. "You want to grow up to be big and strong, don't you?"

"No grow!" Fudge said.

That night my mother told my father how worried she was about Fudge. So my father did tricks for him while my mother stood over his chair trying to get some food into his mouth. But nothing worked. Not even juggling oranges.

Finally my mother got the brilliant idea of me standing on my head while she fed Fudge. I wasn't very excited about standing on my head in the kitchen. The floor is awfully hard in there. But my mother begged me. She said, "It's very important for Fudge to eat. Please help us, Peter."

So I stood on my head. When Fudge saw me upside down he clapped his hands and laughed. When he laughs he opens his mouth. That's when my mother stuffed some baked potato into it.

But the next morning I put my foot down. "No!

I don't want to stand on my head in the kitchen. Or anywhere else!" I added, "And if I don't hurry I'll be late for school."

"Don't you care if your brother starves?"

"No!" I told her.

"Peter! What an awful thing to say."

"Oh . . . he'll eat when he gets hungry. Why don't you just leave him alone!"

That afternoon when I came home from school I found my brother on the kitchen floor playing with boxes of cereals and raisins and dried apricots. My mother was begging him to eat.

"No, no, no!" Fudge shouted. He made a terrible mess, dumping everything on the floor.

"Please stand on your head, Peter," my mother said. "It's the only way he'll eat."

"No!" I told her. "I'm not going to stand on my head anymore." I went into my room and slammed the door. I played with Dribble until suppertime. Nobody ever worries about me the way they worry about Fudge. If I decided not to eat they'd probably never even notice!

That night during dinner Fudge hid under the kitchen table. He said, "I'm a doggie. Woof . . . woof . . . woof!"

It was hard to eat with him under the table pulling

on my legs. I waited for my father to say something. But he didn't.

Finally my mother jumped up. "I know," she said.

"If Fudge's a doggie he wants to eat on the floor! Right?"

If you ask me Fudge never even thought about that. But he liked the idea a lot. He barked and nodded his head. So my mother fixed his plate and put it under the table. Then she reached down and petted him, like he was a real dog.

My father said, "Aren't we carrying this a little too far?"

My mother didn't answer.

Fudge ate two bites of his dinner.

My mother was satisfied.

After a week of having him eat under the table I felt like we really did have a family dog. I thought how great it would be if we could trade in Fudge for a nice cocker spaniel. That would solve all my problems. I'd walk him and feed him and play with him. He could even sleep on the edge of my bed at night. But of course that was wishful thinking. My brother is here to stay. And there's nothing much I can do about it.

Grandma came over with a million ideas about getting Fudge to eat. She tricked him by making milk shakes in the blender. When Fudge wasn't looking she

threw in an egg. Then she told him if he drank it all up there would be a surprise in the bottom of the glass. The first time he believed her. He finished his milk shake. But all he saw was an empty glass. There wasn't any surprise! Fudge got so mad he threw the glass down. It smashed into little pieces. After that Grandma left.

The next day my mother dragged Fudge to Dr. Cone's office. He told her to leave him alone. That Fudge would eat when he got hungry.

I reminded my mother that I'd told her the same thing—and for free! But I guess my mother didn't believe either one of us because she took Fudge to see three more doctors. None of them could find a thing wrong with my brother. One doctor even suggested that my mother cook Fudge his favorite foods.

So that night my mother broiled lamb chops just for Fudge. The rest of us ate stew. She served him the two little lamb chops on his plate under the table. Just the smell of them was enough to make my stomach growl. I thought it was mean of my mother to make them for Fudge and not me.

Fudge looked at his lamb chops for a few minutes. Then he pushed his plate away. "No!" he said. "No chops!"

"Fudgie . . . you'll starve!" my mother cried. "You must eat!"

"No chops! Corn Flakes," Fudge said. "Want Corn Flakes!"

My mother ran to get the cereal for Fudge. "You can eat the chops if you want them, Peter," she told me.

I reached down and helped myself to the lamb chops. My mother handed Fudge his bowl of cereal. But he didn't eat it. He sat at my feet and looked up at me. He watched me eat his chops.

"*Eat your cereal!*" my father said.

"NO! NO EAT CEREAL!" Fudge yelled.

My father was really mad. His face turned bright red. He said, "Fudge, you will eat that cereal or you will wear it!"

This was turning out to be fun after all, I thought. And the lamb chops were really tasty. I dipped the bone in some Ketchup and chewed away.

Fudge messed around with his cereal for a minute. Then he looked at my father and said, "NO EAT . . . NO EAT . . . NO EAT!"

My father wiped his mouth with his napkin, pushed back his chair, and got up from the table. He picked up the bowl of cereal in one hand, and Fudge in the other. He carried them both into the bathroom. I went along, nibbling on a bone, to see what was going to happen.

My father stood Fudge in the tub and dumped the

whole bowl of cereal right over his head. Fudge screamed. He sure can scream loud.

My father motioned for me to go back to the kitchen. He joined us in a minute. We sat down and finished our dinner. Fudge kept on screaming. My mother wanted to go to him but my father told her to stay where she was. He'd had enough of Fudge's monkey business at meal times.

I think my mother really was relieved that my father had taken over. For once my brother got what he deserved. And I was glad!

The next day Fudge sat at the table again. In his little red booster chair, where he belongs. He ate everything my mother put in front of him. "No more doggie," he told us.

And for a long time after that his favorite expression was "eat it or wear it!"

4 My Brother the Bird

We live near Central Park. On nice days I like to play there after school. I'm allowed to walk over by myself as long as I'm going to be with friends. My mother doesn't want me hanging around the park alone.

For one thing, Jimmy Fargo has been mugged three times—twice for his bicycle and once for his money. Only he didn't have any to give the muggers.

I've never been mugged. But sooner or later I probably will be. My father's told me what to do. Give the muggers whatever they want and try not to get hit on the head.

Sometimes, after you're mugged, you get to go to police headquarters. You look at a bunch of pictures