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FARNIE GETS INTO TROUBLE--

It was perhaps only natural that Farnie, having been warned so strongly of the inadvisability of having anything to do with Monk, should for that very reason be attracted to him. Nobody ever wants to do anything except what they are not allowed to do. Otherwise there is no explaining the friendship that arose between them. Jack Monk was not an attractive individual. He had a slack mouth and a shifty eye, and his complexion was the sort which friends would have described as olive, enemies (with more truth) as dirty green. These defects would have mattered little, of course, in themselves. There's many a bilious countenance, so to speak, covers a warm heart. With Monk, however, appearances were not deceptive. He looked a bad lot, and he was one.

It was on the second morning of term that the acquaintanceship began. Monk was coming downstairs from his study with Danvers, and Farnie was leaving the fags' day-room.

'See that kid?' said Danvers. 'That's the chap I was telling you about. Gethryn's uncle, you know.'

'Not really? Let's cultivate him. I say, old chap, don't walk so fast.'

Farnie, rightly concluding that the remark was addressed to him, turned

and waited, and the three strolled over to the School buildings together.

They would have made an interesting study for the observer of human nature, the two seniors fancying that they had to deal with a small boy just arrived at his first school, and in the grip of that strange, lost feeling which attacks the best of new boys for a day or so after their arrival; and Farnie, on the other hand, watching every move, as perfectly composed and at home as a youth should be with the experience of three public schools to back him up.

When they arrived at the School gates, Monk and Danvers turned to go in the direction of their form-room, the Remove, leaving Farnie at the door of the Upper Fourth. At this point a small comedy took place.

Monk, after feeling hastily in his pockets, requested Danvers to lend him five shillings until next Saturday. Danvers knew this request of old, and he knew the answer that was expected of him. By replying that he was sorry, but he had not got the money, he gave Farnie, who was still standing at the door, his cue to offer to supply the deficiency.

Most new boys--they had grasped this fact from experience--would have felt it an honour to oblige a senior with a small loan. As Farnie made no signs of doing what was expected of him, Monk was obliged to resort to the somewhat cruder course of applying for the loan in person. He applied. Farnie with the utmost willingness brought to light a handful of money, mostly gold. Monk's eye gleamed approval, and he stretched forth an itching palm. Danvers began to think that it would be rash to

let a chance like this slip. Ordinarily the tacit agreement between the pair was that only one should borrow at a time, lest confidence should be destroyed in the victim. But here was surely an exception, a special case. With a young gentleman so obviously a man of coin as Farnie, the rule might well be broken for once.

'While you're about it, Farnie, old man,' he said carelessly, 'you might let me have a bob or two if you don't mind. Five bob'll see me through to Saturday all right.'

'Do you mean tomorrow?' enquired Farnie, looking up from his heap of gold.

'No, Saturday week. Let you have it back by then at the latest. Make a point of it.'

'How would a quid do?'

'Ripping,' said Danvers ecstatically.

'Same here,' assented Monk.

'Then that's all right,' said Farnie briskly; 'I thought perhaps you mightn't have had enough. You've got a quid, I know, Monk, because I saw you haul one out at breakfast. And Danvers has got one too, because he offered to toss you for it in the study afterwards. And besides, I

couldn't lend you anything in any case, because I've only got about fourteen quid myself.'

With which parting shot he retired, wrapped in gentle thought, into his form-room; and from the noise which ensued immediately upon his arrival, the shrewd listener would have deduced, quite correctly, that he had organized and taken the leading part in a general rag.

Monk and Danvers proceeded upon their way.

'You got rather left there, old chap,' said Monk at length.

'I like that,' replied the outraged Danvers. 'How about you, then? It seemed to me you got rather left, too.'

Monk compromised.

'Well, anyhow,' he said, 'we shan't get much out of that kid.'

'Little beast,' said Danvers complainingly. And they went on into their form-room in silence.

'I saw your young--er--relative in earnest conversation with friend Monk this morning,' said Marriott, later on in the day, to Gethryn; 'I thought you were going to give him the tip in that direction?'

'So I did,' said the Bishop wearily; 'but I can't always be looking after the little brute. He only does it out of sheer cussedness, because I've told him not to. It stands to reason that he can't like Monk.'

'You remind me of the psalmist and the wicked man, surname unknown,' said Marriott. 'You can't see the good side of Monk.'

'There isn't one.'

'No. He's only got two sides, a bad side and a worse side, which he sticks on on the strength of being fairly good at games. I wonder if he's going to get his First this season. He's not a bad bat.'

'I don't think he will. He is a good bat, but there are heaps better in the place. I say, I think I shall give young Farnie the tip once more, and let him take it or leave it. What do you think?'

'He'll leave it,' said Marriott, with conviction.

Nor was he mistaken. Farnie listened with enthusiasm to his nephew's second excursus on the Monk topic, and, though he said nothing, was apparently convinced. On the following afternoon Monk, Danvers, Waterford, and he hired a boat and went up the river together. Gethryn and Marriott, steered by Wilson, who was rapidly developing into a useful coxswain, got an excellent view of them moored under the shade

of a willow, drinking ginger-beer, and apparently on the best of terms with one another and the world in general. In a brief but moving speech the Bishop finally excommunicated his erring relative. 'For all I care,' he concluded, 'he can do what he likes in future. I shan't stop him.'

'No,' said Marriott, 'I don't think you will.'

For the first month of his school life Farnie behaved, except in his choice of companions, much like an ordinary junior. He played cricket moderately well, did his share of compulsory fielding at the First Eleven net, and went for frequent river excursions with Monk, Danvers, and the rest of the Mob.

At first the other juniors of the House were inclined to resent this extending of the right hand of fellowship to owners of studies and Second Eleven men, and attempted to make Farnie see the sin and folly of his ways. But Nature had endowed that youth with a fund of vitriolic repartee. When Millett, one of Leicester's juniors, evolved some laborious sarcasm on the subject of Farnie's swell friends, Farnie, in a series of three remarks, reduced him, figuratively speaking, to a small and palpitating spot of grease. After that his actions came in for no further, or at any rate no outspoken comment.

Given sixpence a week and no more, Farnie might have survived an entire term without breaking any serious School rule. But when, after buying a

bicycle from Smith of Markham's, he found himself with eight pounds to his name in solid cash, and the means of getting far enough away from the neighbourhood of the School to be able to spend it much as he liked, he began to do strange and risky things in his spare time.

The great obstacle to illicit enjoyment at Beckford was the four o'clock roll-call on half-holidays. There were other obstacles, such as half-holiday games and so forth, but these could be avoided by the exercise of a little judgement. The penalty for non-appearance at a half-holiday game was a fine of sixpence. Constant absence was likely in time to lead to a more or less thrilling interview with the captain of cricket, but a very occasional attendance was enough to stave off this disaster; and as for the sixpence, to a man of means like Farnie it was a mere nothing. It was a bad system, and it was a wonder, under the circumstances, how Beckford produced the elevens it did. But it was the system, and Farnie availed himself of it to the full.

The obstacle of roll-call he managed also to surmount. Some reckless and penniless friend was generally willing, for a consideration, to answer his name for him. And so most Saturday afternoons would find Farnie leaving behind him the flannelled fools at their various wickets, and speeding out into the country on his bicycle in the direction of the village of Biddlehampton, where mine host of the 'Cow and Cornflower', in addition to other refreshment for man and beast, advertised that ping-pong and billiards might be played on the premises. It was not the former of these games that attracted Farnie.

He was no pinger. Nor was he a pongster. But for billiards he had a decided taste, a genuine taste, not the pumped-up affectation sometimes displayed by boys of his age. Considering his age he was a remarkable player. Later on in life it appeared likely that he would have the choice of three professions open to him, namely, professional billiard player, billiard marker, and billiard sharp. At each of the three he showed distinct promise. He was not 'lured to the green cloth' by Monk or Danvers. Indeed, if there had been any luring to be done, it is probable that he would have done it, and not they. Neither Monk nor Danvers was in his confidence in the matter. Billiards is not a cheap amusement. By the end of his sixth week Farnie was reduced to a single pound, a sum which, for one of his tastes, was practically poverty. And just at the moment when he was least able to bear up against it, Fate dealt him one of its nastiest blows. He was playing a fifty up against a friendly but unskilful farmer at the 'Cow and Cornflower'. 'Better look out,' he said, as his opponent effected a somewhat rustic stroke, 'you'll be cutting the cloth in a second.' The farmer grunted, missed by inches, and retired, leaving the red ball in the jaws of the pocket, and Farnie with three to make to win.

It was an absurdly easy stroke, and the Bishop's uncle took it with an absurd amount of conceit and carelessness. Hardly troubling to aim, he struck his ball. The cue slid off in one direction, the ball rolled sluggishly in another. And when the cue had finished its run, the smooth green surface of the table was marred by a jagged and unsightly cut. There was another young man gone wrong!

To say that the farmer laughed would be to express the matter feebly. That his young opponent, who had been irritating him unspeakably since the beginning of the game with advice and criticism, should have done exactly what he had cautioned him, the farmer, against a moment before, struck him as being the finest example of poetic justice he had ever heard of, and he signalized his appreciation of the same by nearly dying of apoplexy.

The marker expressed an opinion that Farnie had been and gone and done it.

"Ere," he said, inserting a finger in the cut to display its dimensions. "Look 'ere. This'll mean a noo cloth, young feller me lad. That's wot this'll mean. That'll be three pound we will trouble you for, if you please."

Farnie produced his sole remaining sovereign.

"All I've got," he said. "I'll leave my name and address."

"Don't you trouble, young feller me lad," said the marker, who appeared to be a very aggressive and unpleasant sort of character altogether, with meaning, "I know yer name and I knows yer address. Today fortnight at the very latest, if you please. You don't want me to 'ave to go to your master about it, now, do yer? What say? No. Ve' well then."

Today fortnight is the time, and you remember it.'

What was left of Farnie then rode slowly back to Beckford. Why he went to Monk on his return probably he could not have explained himself. But he did go, and, having told his story in full, wound up by asking for a loan of two pounds. Monk's first impulse was to refer him back to a previous interview, when matters had been the other way about, that small affair of the pound on the second morning of the term. Then there flashed across his mind certain reasons against this move. At present Farnie's attitude towards him was unpleasantly independent. He made him understand that he went about with him from choice, and that there was to be nothing of the patron and dependant about their alliance. If he were to lend him the two pounds now, things would alter. And to have got a complete hold over Master Reginald Farnie, Monk would have paid more than two pounds. Farnie had the intelligence to carry through anything, however risky, and there were many things which Monk would have liked to do, but, owing to the risks involved, shirked doing for himself. Besides, he happened to be in funds just now.

'Well, look here, old chap,' he said, 'let's have strict business between friends. If you'll pay me back four quid at the end of term, you shall have the two pounds. How does that strike you?'

It struck Farnie, as it would have struck most people, that if this was Monk's idea of strict business, there were the makings of no ordinary financier in him. But to get his two pounds he would have agreed to

anything. And the end of term seemed a long way off.

The awkward part of the billiard-playing episode was that the punishment for it, if detected, was not expulsion, but flogging. And Farnie resembled the lady in *The Ingoldsby Legends* who 'didn't mind death, but who couldn't stand pinching'. He didn't mind expulsion--he was used to it, but he could not stand flogging.

'That'll be all right,' he said. And the money changed hands.