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--AND STAYS THERE

'I say,' said Baker of Jephson's excitedly some days later, reeling into the study which he shared with Norris, 'have you seen the team the M.C.C.'s bringing down?'

At nearly every school there is a type of youth who asks this question on the morning of the M.C.C. match. Norris was engaged in putting the finishing touches to a snow-white pair of cricket boots.

'No. Hullo, where did you raise that Sporter? Let's have a look.'

But Baker proposed to conduct this business in person. It is ten times more pleasant to administer a series of shocks to a friend than to sit by and watch him administering them to himself. He retained The Sportsman, and began to read out the team.

'Thought Middlesex had a match,' said Norris, as Baker paused dramatically to let the name of a world-famed professional sink in.

'No. They don't play Surrey till Monday.'

'Well, if they've got an important match like Surrey on on Monday,'

said Norris disgustedly, 'what on earth do they let their best man come down here today for, and fag himself out?'

Baker suggested gently that if anybody was going to be fagged out at the end of the day, it would in all probability be the Beckford bowlers, and not a man who, as he was careful to point out, had run up a century a mere three days ago against Yorkshire, and who was apparently at that moment at the very top of his form.

'Well,' said Norris, 'he might crock himself or anything. Rank bad policy, I call it. Anybody else?'

Baker resumed his reading. A string of unknowns ended in another celebrity.

'Blackwell?' said Norris. 'Not O. T. Blackwell?'

'It says A. T. But,' went on Baker, brightening up again, 'they always get the initials wrong in the papers. Certain to be O. T. By the way, I suppose you saw that he made eighty-three against Notts the other day?'

Norris tried to comfort himself by observing that Notts couldn't bowl for toffee.

'Last week, too,' said Baker, 'he made a hundred and forty-six not out against Malvern for the Gentlemen of Warwickshire. They couldn't get

him out,' he concluded with unction. In spite of the fact that he himself was playing in the match today, and might under the circumstances reasonably look forward to a considerable dose of leather-hunting, the task of announcing the bad news to Norris appeared to have a most elevating effect on his spirits:

'That's nothing extra special,' said Norris, in answer to the last item of information, 'the Malvern wicket's like a billiard-table.'

'Our wickets aren't bad either at this time of year,' said Baker, 'and I heard rumours that they had got a record one ready for this match.'

'It seems to me,' said Norris, 'that what I'd better do if we want to bat at all today is to win the toss. Though Sammy and the Bishop and Baynes ought to be able to get any ordinary side out all right.'

'Only this isn't an ordinary side. It's a sort of improved county team.'

'They've got about four men who might come off, but the M.C.C. sometimes have a bit of a tail. We ought to have a look in if we win the toss.'

'Hope so,' said Baker. 'I doubt it, though.'

At a quarter to eleven the School always went out in a body to inspect

the pitch. After the wicket had been described by experts in hushed whispers as looking pretty good, the bell rang, and all who were not playing for the team, with the exception of the lucky individual who had obtained for himself the post of scorer, strolled back towards the blocks. Monk had come out with Waterford, but seeing Farnie ahead and walking alone he quitted Waterford, and attached himself to the genial Reginald. He wanted to talk business. He had not found the speculation of the two pounds a very profitable one. He had advanced the money under the impression that Farnie, by accepting it, was practically selling his independence. And there were certain matters in which Monk was largely interested, connected with the breaking of bounds and the purchase of contraband goods, which he would have been exceedingly glad to have performed by deputy. He had fancied that Farnie would have taken over these jobs as part of his debt. But he had mistaken his man. On the very first occasion when he had attempted to put on the screw, Farnie had flatly refused to have anything to do with what he proposed. He said that he was not Monk's fag--a remark which had the merit of being absolutely true.

All this, combined with a slight sinking of his own funds, induced Monk to take steps towards recovering the loan.

'I say, Farnie, old chap.'

'Hullo!'

'I say, do you remember my lending you two quid some time ago?'

'You don't give me much chance of forgetting it,' said Farnie.

Monk smiled. He could afford to be generous towards such witticisms.

'I want it back,' he said.

'All right. You'll get it at the end of term.'

'I want it now.'

'Why?'

'Awfully hard up, old chap.'

'You aren't,' said Farnie. 'You've got three pounds twelve and sixpence half-penny. If you will keep counting your money in public, you can't blame a chap for knowing how much you've got.'

Monk, slightly disconcerted, changed his plan of action. He abandoned skirmishing tactics.

'Never mind that,' he said, 'the point is that I want that four pounds. I'm going to have it, too.'

'I know. At the end of term.'

'I'm going to have it now.'

'You can have a pound of it now.'

'Not enough.'

'I don't see how you expect me to raise any more. If I could, do you think I should have borrowed it? You might chuck rotting for a change.'

'Now, look here, old chap,' said Monk, 'I should think you'd rather raise that tin somehow than have it get about that you'd been playing pills at some pub out of bounds. What?'

Farnie, for one of the few occasions on record, was shaken out of his usual sang-froid. Even in his easy code of morality there had always been one crime which was an anathema, the sort of thing no fellow could think of doing. But it was obviously at this that Monk was hinting.

'Good Lord, man,' he cried, 'you don't mean to say you're thinking of sneaking? Why, the fellows would boot you round the field. You couldn't stay in the place a week.'

'There are heaps of ways,' said Monk, 'in which a thing can get about

without anyone actually telling the beaks. At present I've not told a soul. But, you know, if I let it out to anyone they might tell someone else, and so on. And if everybody knows a thing, the beaks generally get hold of it sooner or later. You'd much better let me have that four quid, old chap.'

Farnie capitulated.

'All right,' he said, 'I'll get it somehow.'

'Thanks awfully, old chap,' said Monk, 'so long!'

In all Beckford there was only one person who was in the least degree likely to combine the two qualities necessary for the extraction of Farnie from his difficulties. These qualities were--in the first place ability, in the second place willingness to advance him, free of security, the four pounds he required. The person whom he had in his mind was Gethryn. He had reasoned the matter out step by step during the second half of morning school. Gethryn, though he had, as Farnie knew, no overwhelming amount of affection for his uncle, might in a case of great need prove blood to be thicker (as per advertisement) than water. But, he reflected, he must represent himself as in danger of expulsion rather than flogging. He had an uneasy idea that if the Bishop were to discover that all he stood to get was a flogging, he would remark with enthusiasm that, as far as he was concerned, the good work might go on. Expulsion was different. To save a member of his

family from expulsion, he might think it worth while to pass round the hat amongst his wealthy acquaintances. If four plutocrats with four sovereigns were to combine, Farnie, by their united efforts, would be saved. And he rather liked the notion of being turned into a sort of limited liability company, like the Duke of Plaza Toro, at a pound a share. It seemed to add a certain dignity to his position.

To Gethryn's study, therefore, he went directly school was over. If he had reflected, he might have known that he would not have been there while the match was going on. But his brain, fatigued with his recent calculations, had not noted this point.

The study was empty.

Most people, on finding themselves in a strange and empty room, are seized with a desire to explore the same, and observe from internal evidence what manner of man is the owner. Nowhere does character come out so clearly as in the decoration of one's private den. Many a man, at present respected by his associates, would stand forth unmasked at his true worth, could the world but look into his room. For there they would see that he was so lost to every sense of shame as to cover his books with brown paper, or deck his walls with oleographs presented with the Christmas numbers, both of which habits argue a frame of mind fit for murderers, stratagems, and spoils. Let no such man be trusted.

The Bishop's study, which Farnie now proceeded to inspect, was not of



this kind. It was a neat study, arranged with not a little taste. There were photographs of teams with the College arms on their plain oak frames, and photographs of relations in frames which tried to look, and for the most part succeeded in looking, as if they had not cost fourpence three farthings at a Christmas bargain sale. There were snap-shots of various moving incidents in the careers of the Bishop and his friends: Marriott, for example, as he appeared when carried to the Pavilion after that sensational century against the Authentics: Robertson of Blaker's winning the quarter mile: John Brown, Norris's predecessor in the captaincy, and one of the four best batsmen Beckford had ever had, batting at the nets: Norris taking a skier on the boundary in last year's M.C.C. match: the Bishop himself going out to bat in the Charchester match, and many more of the same sort.

All these Farnie observed with considerable interest, but as he moved towards the book-shelf his eye was caught by an object more interesting still. It was a cash-box, simple and unornamental, but undoubtedly a cash-box, and as he took it up it rattled.

The key was in the lock. In a boarding House at a public school it is not, as a general rule, absolutely necessary to keep one's valuables always hermetically sealed. The difference between meum and tuum is so very rarely confused by the occupants of such an establishment, that one is apt to grow careless, and every now and then accidents happen. An accident was about to happen now.

It was at first without any motive except curiosity that Farnie opened the cash-box. He merely wished to see how much there was inside, with a view to ascertaining what his prospects of negotiating a loan with his relative were likely to be. When, however, he did see, other feelings began to take the place of curiosity. He counted the money. There were ten sovereigns, one half-sovereign, and a good deal of silver. One of the institutions at Beckford was a mission. The School by (more or less) voluntary contributions supported a species of home somewhere in the wilds of Kennington. No one knew exactly what or where this home was, but all paid their subscriptions as soon as possible in the term, and tried to forget about it. Gethryn collected not only for Leicester's House, but also for the Sixth Form, and was consequently, if only by proxy, a man of large means. Too large, Farnie thought. Surely four pounds, to be paid back (probably) almost at once, would not be missed. Why shouldn't he--

'Hullo!'

Farnie spun round. Wilson was standing in the doorway.

'Hullo, Farnie,' said he, 'what are you playing at in here?'

'What are you?' retorted Farnie politely.

'Come to fetch a book. Marriott said I might. What are you up to?'

'Oh, shut up!' said Farnie. 'Why shouldn't I come here if I like? Matter of fact, I came to see Gethryn.'

'He isn't here,' said Wilson luminously.

'You don't mean to say you've noticed that already? You've got an eye like a hawk, Wilson. I was just taking a look round, if you really want to know.'

'Well, I shouldn't advise you to let Marriott catch you mucking his study up. Seen a book called Round the Red Lamp? Oh, here it is. Coming over to the field?'

'Not just yet. I want to have another look round. Don't you wait, though.'

'Oh, all right.' And Wilson retired with his book.

Now, though Wilson at present suspected nothing, not knowing of the existence of the cash-box, Farnie felt that when the money came to be missed, and inquiries were made as to who had been in the study, and when, he would recall the interview. Two courses, therefore, remained open to him. He could leave the money altogether, or he could take it and leave himself. In other words, run away.

In the first case there would, of course, remain the chance that he

might induce Gethryn to lend him the four pounds, but this had never been more than a forlorn hope; and in the light of the possibilities opened out by the cash-box, he thought no more of it. The real problem was, should he or should he not take the money from the cash-box?

As he hesitated, the recollection of Monk's veiled threats came back to him, and he wavered no longer. He opened the box again, took out the contents, and dropped them into his pocket. While he was about it, he thought he might as well take all as only a part.

Then he wrote two notes. One--to the Bishop--he placed on top of the cash-box; the other he placed with four sovereigns on the table in Monk's study. Finally he left the room, shut the door carefully behind him, and went to the yard at the back of the House, where he kept his bicycle.

The workings of the human mind, and especially of the young human mind, are peculiar. It never occurred to Farnie that a result equally profitable to himself, and decidedly more convenient for all concerned--with the possible exception of Monk--might have been arrived at if he had simply left the money in the box, and run away without it.

However, as the poet says, you can't think of everything.