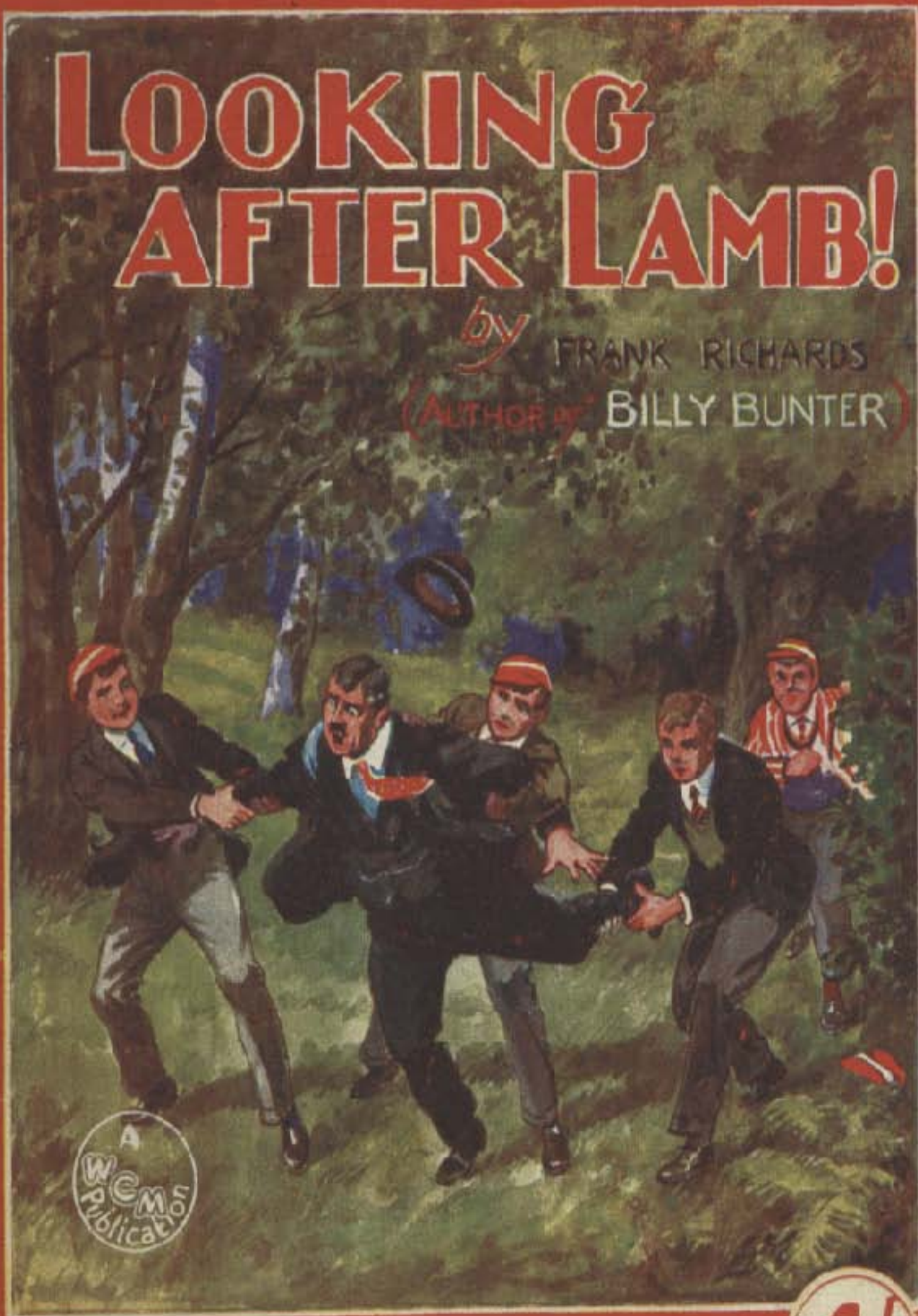


SPARSHOTT SERIES N°4

# LOOKING AFTER LAMB!

by FRANK RICHARDS  
(AUTHOR OF BILLY BUNTER)



"GOT HIM!"

# Looking after Lamb!

By FRANK RICHARDS

PAINFUL FOR PLUM!

"LOOK out for squalls!" murmured Barnes-Paget.  
"Looks as if we're for it this morning!" sighed Tom Rake.  
"Outlook stormy!" remarked Harry Vernon.

Those remarks were exchanged in whispers in the Fourth-form room at Sparshott. Nobody wanted to catch Mr. Lamb's eye just then, Plum Tumpton had already caught it—much to his dismay.

The minute they were in the form-room that morning, the juniors could see that their form-master, Mr. Lamb, was not his usual sunny self.

Generally he was good-tempered. Often he had a benevolent smile. Often and often he was very patient with Plum, who just couldn't help dropping books, or treading on other fellows' feet, or knocking things over. But on this particular morning, the Little Lamb had no patience to waste on Plum or anybody else.

He was frowning, to begin with. And when Plum dropped his Virgil with a loud thump on the form-room floor, Lamb gave tongue. In a happier mood he might have passed the incident unnoticed, or merely requested Eustace Percival Tumpton not to be so clumsy. Now he gave poor Plum the sharpest edge of his tongue, and kept it up for a full minute—Plum blinking at him like a startled owl.

"I—I—I only dropped a book, sir!" stammered Plum, quite surprised and dismayed by Mr. Lamb's flow of eloquence.

"You are always dropping things, Tumpton!" barked Mr. Lamb. "You are the clumsiest boy in my form. And the most stupid. I shall cane you if you drop a book again."

"Oh jiminy-whiskers!" breathed Plum.

"What did you say, Tumpton?"

"Oh! N-n-nothing, sir."

Lamb glared at him over his glasses.

"You said something, Tumpton! I have no doubt it was some impertinence. I order you to repeat at once what you said."

"I—I—I only said jiminy-whiskers, sir!" gasped Plum.

"Take a hundred lines, Tumpton."

"I—I was only going to say——"

"Take two hundred lines, Tumpton."

Harry Vernon grasped Plum by the arm, and dragged him down into his seat. The Little Lamb looked like making it five hundred if Plum went on talking. Silence was golden just then.

Plum suppressed his indignation, which was deep and intense. Obviously, Lamb was out of temper that morning. At such times, a judicious fellow walked warily, and gave a beak his head, as it were. But Plum was seldom judicious. However, he contrived to suppress his indignation and said no more.

"What's up with Lamb this morning?" Carboy whispered to Barnes-Paget. "The little beast is more like a wolf than a lamb to-day."

"Carboy!" rapped Mr. Lamb. Lamb's ears seemed unusually keen that morning.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Carboy.

"You are speaking in class."

"I—I only——"

"Take a hundred lines, Carboy."

Carboy did not speak in class again. He sat looking rather like a demon in a pantomime.

By that time all the Fourth were very wary. It was evident

that their form-master had to be treated with care and tact, in his present mood. Some fellows, who had been careful with their prep the evening before, were glad of it. Others, who hadn't, were sorry for it. Among the latter was Plum, who hoped from the bottom of his heart that he would not be called on to construe.

Plum hadn't even looked at his prep. On the subject of the section of the *Æneid* with which the Sparshott Fourth were then dealing, his mind was a happy blank. He had trusted to luck and to Lamb's good temper! He needed all his luck now, for clearly there was no good temper to be expected from Lamb.

Barnes-Paget was first to be called for "con." Sometimes the Buccaneer of Sparshott amused himself, and the form, by handing out a very bad con, and causing Lamb to snort and snap. But Barney knew when to be judicious: and on this occasion his con was very, very good. Lamb had a rather baleful eye on him, ready to spring, as it were, at the first sign of a "rag." But Barney gave him no excuse for springing.

"You will go on, Vernon!" rapped Mr. Lamb.

Harry Vernon was as careful as Barnes-Paget. He was captain of the form, and generally rather in Mr. Lamb's good graces. But it was plain that at the first mistake, the thunder would roll, on this stormy morning. Vernon got through without a mistake: and Tom Rake came next.

Rake was not quite so good at his books as his pal. At his first stumble, Lamb rapped out:

"Have you prepared this lesson, Rake?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"The result does not do you credit!" said Mr. Lamb, "You will write out the lesson after class, Rake."

"Yes, sir!" groaned Tom.

"You will go on, Tumpton!"

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" murmured Plum. He was "for it": there was no mistake about that. He gazed at the page of Virgil. Had Plum done his "prep" in No. 3 Study, as Plum ought to have done, he could have stumbled through. But Plum hadn't done his prep: and a page of unprepared Latin was a deep and impenetrable mystery to Plum.

"Tumpton!" boomed Mr. Lamb.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Plum.

"I told you to go on."

"Yes, sir! I—I'm just going to begin!" stammered Plum.

"I—I—I've lost the place for a minute, sir."

"Go on from *equo ne credite, Teucri*," snapped Mr. Lamb.

"Oh! Yes, sir. *Equo ne credite, Teucri*!" mumbled Plum.

"Construe!" hooted Mr. Lamb.

"Yes, sir! I—I'm going to!" Plum tried to penetrate the mystery before him! "*Equo*" evidently had something to do with a horse—and "*Teucri*" obviously were Trojans. But for the rest, poor Plum was quite at a loss.

"I am waiting, Tumpton," said Mr. Lamb, in a deep rumbling voice.

"Yes, sir! The—the horse—"

"What?"

"The—the horse was no credit to the Trojans!" got out Plum.

"Ha! ha, ha!" came in a yell from all the Fourth. Even Mr. Lamb's frowning brow could not check that howl of merriment.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Lamb, "Tumpton! Can I believe my ears?"

"I—I hope so, sir!" stammered Plum.

"This," said Mr. Lamb, "is not mere stupidity! It is impertinence. In all my experience as a schoolmaster, I have never heard the like. Tumpton, you are pleased to make the

form-room, a place of jesting. Plum, certainly, was in no  
"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Plum. Plum, certainly, was in no  
jeeling mood! "You are very well aware, Tumpton, that the meaning is  
But not your trust in the horse, Trojans!"  
"Oh! Is—is—is it, sir!"

Tumpton! stand out before the class." Mr. Lamb picked up the cane from his desk.

"Bend over that form, Tumpton!"  
Whop! whop!

"Oh! Yaroooh!" roared Plum. He wriggled convulsively.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Lamb. "Go back to your place,  
Tumpton! Another sound, and I shall cane you again! Carboy,  
you will go on."

Carboy went on "con," and never had Carboy been so  
careful. Plum sat and wriggled—and he was still wriggling,

when the hour came to an end. Lines fell thickly in the Fourth-  
form room that morning; but Plum's was the only licking—if

that was any comfort! Never had the Sparshott Fourth been so  
glad to get out of their form room, when at length Mr. Lamb

dismissed them—French with Mossos was quite a nerve-rest  
after Latin with Lamb.

"What on earth's the matter with Lamb to-day?" asked Tom  
Rake, as they went down the passage. "Has the Head been

combing his hair, or what?"  
"Savage little beast!" said Barnes-Paget.

"Can't make him out," said Harry Vernon. "How do you  
feel now, Plum, old man?"

"Ow! wow! wow!" answered Plum.  
Plum's feelings were still deep.

### A MYSTERIOUS MEETING!

"SHAN'T!"  
It was not elegant. It was not polite. But it was emphatic.

Eustace Percival Tumpton was in an emphatic frame of mind.

"Now, look here, you old clown—" said Harry Vernon and  
Tom Rake together.

"Shan't!" repeated Plum. "It's a half-holiday, ain't it?  
We've fixed up to go down to the cave under the headland, ain't  
we! Well, were going. Why not?"

"You've got two hundred lines—"  
"For nothing!" said Plum.

"For nothing or not, you've got them, and you've got to  
write them out!" hooted Tom Rake, "Lamb's on the war-path  
anyway. He's as mad as a hatter to-day. Do you want to make  
him madder?"

"He can be as mad as he likes," said Plum, "I'll do the  
lines for him—later. I'm not going to waste a lovely afternoon  
like this on lines. 'Tain't my fault Lamb was in a rotten temper  
this morning, is it?"

"You shouldn't chuck Virgil about the form-room, when  
Lamb's got the danger signals hoisted," said Vernon.

"I happened to drop a book! Two hundred lines for  
dropping a book!" said Plum, breathing indignation, "Licked  
for my con, and lined for dropping a book! I'm not standing  
much more from Lamb, I can tell you fellows. And I'm going out  
this afternoon. The lines can wait. So can Lamb."

"If he spots you going out—"  
"Let him, and be blowed."

"Better get the lines done first—"  
"Shan't!" roared Plum. "That's that! See! You fellows  
coming or not?"

Plum marched out of the House. Vernon and Rake followed  
on. Evidently, there was no arguing with Plum.

Plum was a placable fellow, as a rule. But he could get his back up. And it was up now, most emphatically. He was still feeling twinges from the whops in the form-room. And as for sticking indoors on a fine afternoon, to do his lines, Plum would not even hear of it. Plum had arranged to go down to the headland cave that afternoon—and Plum was going. Moreover, it was not only exploring the cave that attracted Plum. There was a sporting chance of falling in with Meg Ridd, if the chums went by way of Headland House School. Plum was not losing a chance like that. Not if Plum could help it.

But as it happened, Plum couldn't help it. For, as the Sparshott Com went down to the gates, a dapper figure in coat and hat came out of the House: and a sharp voice called to Plum:

"Tumpton!"

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" Plum glanced round in dismay, at the voice of his form-master.

One glance showed that Mr. Lamb's temper had not improved since the morning. His brows were knitted, his lips were set, and his eyes had a quite unpleasant gleam in them. What was the matter with Lamb was a mystery to his form—but it was very plain that he was not in a good temper.

"Have you done your lines, Tumpton?"

"Oh! No, sir! Not yet, sir."

"Go back to the House, and write your lines immediately, Tumpton."

"I—I'm going out, sir—"

"Your imposition is doubled, Tumpton. Now go back to the House."

Plum gave Mr. Lamb one look—and went. The master of the Fourth, frowning, went on his way, and disappeared out of the gates. Vernon and Rake exchanged glances.

"Poor old Plum!" murmured Tom, "Always asking for it—and always getting it. Look here, we're not going to the cave without Plum. Make it Saturday instead."

"Let's!" agreed Vernon.

Plum Tumpton marched into the House. Plum was in a rebellious mood, more than ready to kick over the traces. But he went in, as bidden, and went up to No. 3 Study in the Fourth. There he sorted out impot paper, breathing hard and deep the while. His lines had increased to four hundred, which was a heavy impot: and seemed likely to keep Plum busy till tea-time. He wrote a dozen lines of Virgil. Then, with a snort, he hurled down his pen.

It wasn't just. Plum felt that it wasn't just. Lamb had been in a rotten temper, and Plum had had the benefit of it. Plum wasn't going to stand it. Lamb was safely off the scene by this time: and Plum was going to leave those lines unwritten and go after his friends. If there was a row with Lamb afterwards, let there be a row, and be blowed! That, in Plum's present wild and reckless mood, was how he looked at it.

Plum slipped quietly out of the House, and strolled down to the gates. Lamb was gone: and nobody else had a right to stop him. He was not in detention—he had simply been sent back to do his lines. He passed Wilmot and several other prefects in the quad, who took no notice of him: but he felt easier when he was outside the school gates.

Then he started at a trot. It did not occur to Plum's powerful brain that his chums had not gone to the sea-cave after all, not caring to go without him. Having no doubt that they were ahead of him on the way, he was thinking only of overtaking them. He went down the road at a run, and turned into the footpath through Oke Wood.

On the footpath, shady under the thick old trees, he trotted.

His footsteps made no sound on the grass and fallen leaves—which was fortunate, for all of a sudden at a turn in the path, Plum spotted a dapper figure ahead—walking in the same direction, its back to Plum.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Plum, staring at Mr. Lamb's back. Lamb might have looked round, had he heard Plum behind him. Luckily, he had not heard Plum. Plum stared at his back in concentrated wrath and dismay for a moment, and then backed off the path under the trees, in case the Little Lamb should look round.

"Blow!" hissed Plum. But it was all right—Lamb hadn't seen him, and he only had to wait for the master of the Fourth to get clear. It just meant a little waste of time. Plum decided to wait five minutes, to make assurance doubly sure.

But only two or three minutes had elapsed, when there was a sound of someone passing the tree behind which Plum had blotted himself out.

Peering forth, he glimpsed Mr. Lamb again, and stared at his back once more. Plum's heart beat rather fast.

Had Lamb, after all, spotted him somehow? If not, why was he walking back, instead of going on his way? If Lamb was looking for him, he might look off the footpath among the trees. That thought was enough for Plum. He scrambled up the trunk of the tree behind which he had taken cover, and disappeared into thick foliage. That was safer cover in which to wait.

"Rascal!" Plum jumped at the sound of Lamb's voice, just below him. He peered down through the foliage in great trepidation, expecting to see Lamb looking up.

There was Lamb—Plum had a view of the top of his hat, as he passed under the branches that extended over the footpath. He was not looking up. He was not, as Plum had feared, addressing Plum. He was, evidently, quite unconscious of Plum. He was retracing his steps once more, and apparently talking to himself as he did so. He was calling somebody a rascal—not Plum, clearly, but some person who was in his thoughts, but not present.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured the puzzled Plum. Lamb disappeared once more. But Plum did not think of descending from cover. He realised, by this time, that Mr. Lamb was pacing up and down that solitary woodland path, and might reappear at any moment.

"Rogue!" It was Lamb's voice again. Once more he was passing under the branches. "Rascal! Unscrupulous knave!"

To whom Lamb was applying those pretty expressions, was a mystery to Plum. But the clown of Sparshott was beginning to understand how matters stood. Plum's brain did not work quickly—but it did work. Given time, Plum could understand anything that any other fellow would have understood in half a minute. It dawned on him that Mr. Lamb was waiting for somebody on the footpath, and walking up and down the path while he waited. He could hardly have walked a mile from the school, just to pace up and down that path for nothing! It was an appointment—and the other party was late in keeping it. Why that other party didn't come to the school, if he had to meet Mr. Lamb, Plum did not try to guess—that was too much for him. But there it was—Lamb was waiting for somebody who hadn't come, and it began to look as if Eustace Percival Tumpton was booked to make his home in that tree for some time to come.

Mr. Lamb had come to a halt. He seemed tired of pacing up and down while he waited for the man who did not come.

He leaned on the trunk of the big oak whose branches sheltered Plum: and the Sparshott junior peered down through thick oak leaves at the crown of his hat.

"This," breathed Plum, "is the giddy limit!" It was not easy for Plum Tumpton to keep quiet. It was not easy for him to keep still. But he managed both—with Mr. Lamb fairly under him. If Lamb had been fierce in the morning, he was positively ferocious in the afternoon: and the thought of being discovered by him, almost made Plum's blood run cold.

There was a long, long wait. Ten minutes passed—fifteen—twenty. Then Mr. Lamb left the oak trunk, and paced again. But he tired of pacing once more, and came home to roost, as it were, leaning on the trunk, and ejaculating:

"Rogue! Dastard! Knave!" Plum listened-in, wondering whether those fancy names were applied to the man for whom Lamb was waiting. But why Lamb should walk all that distance, to wait in the wood for a rogue, dastard, and knave, beat Plum hollow.

Then there was a sound on the path, and another exclamation from Lamb.

"That must be he!"

Plum peered through foliage. He saw a man coming down the footpath, from the direction of Oke. Plum did not like the man's looks. He was a squat man, with a greasy, shiny face, a black moustache, and eyes that were narrow and sharp and watchful as a fox's.

"Mr. Lamb?" he asked, in a guttural voice:

"That is my name!" snapped Mr. Lamb, "and you, I presume, are the man who dared to write to me, signing himself James Quail."

"Exactly."

"The man who dared to ring me up on a school telephone!" added Mr. Lamb, his voice trembling with anger.

"The same!" assented Mr. Quail.

"And now—now you have kept me waiting over half an hour—kept me waiting, sir, after I had agreed to see you and hear what you had to say!"

"Not my fault, Mr. Lamb. I am a stranger in this locality, and had to find my way. I should have preferred to call at the school to see you."

"If you dared step into the gates of Sparshott—" began Mr. Lamb.

The other interrupted him, unceremoniously.

"Cut all that out, please! I am here to oblige you—as for daring to step into the school. I should have no hesitation whatever in doing so. And you, sir, would have received me courteously there—unless you wanted to be kicked out of Sparshott yourself by the head-master."

Plum Tumpton almost fell out of the oak branches as he heard that. Luckily he held on—wondering, dizzily, whether he had gone to sleep in the oak tree and was dreaming this.

**BLACKMAIL!**

**MR. LAMB** stood staring at the oily man, gasping for breath. His face was flushed, his eyes gleamed with anger, but he was, as even Plum could see, feeling more alarm than anger.

His manner had, for the moment, been bullying. Now it was merely sardonic again. Plum, peering down through foliage at an oily face and mocking eyes, thought he had never seen so thoroughly unpleasant a man as James Quail. But why his form-master stood the man's cheek was a mystery to Plum. He would have expected Lamb to knock the fellow down for his insolence, or at the very least to turn his back on him and walk away. But the master of the Sparshott Fourth did neither of

these things. He stood where he was, eyeing the oily-faced man, and gasping for breath. But he spoke at last.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Quail."

"I think you do," said Quail, coolly. "I told you enough over the telephone to acquaint you with your position, Mr. Lamb. I am not myself a public-school man—". This was said with a grinning sneer. "But I have some acquaintance with the manners and customs of those antiquated establishments. A master, I believe, may be very stupid, but he must be of impeccable character."

"Do you dare to breathe the slightest hint against my character, sir?" asked Mr. Lamb, his voice trembling with anger.

"Not at all!" smiled Mr. Quail. "But appearances must be considered. And a form-master of Sparshott School who was mixed up with racing and gambling on the Turf, would not I think, be allowed to remain long in charge of boys at the school."

"I—mixed up with racing and gambling!" gasped Mr. Lamb. "Are you mad?"

"Let us be plain, Mr. Lamb. I have come a long way to see you, you are keeping me standing in the open air, and I have a return train to catch. I have no time to waste, even if you have. I will briefly state the facts as they may come to the knowledge of Dr. Oliphant, head-master of Sparshott, if I choose to place them before him."

"You!" snapped Mr. Lamb. "If you dared enter the school the porter at the gate would turn you out. If you succeeded in gaining the presence of the head-master, he would order you to go without a word. Do you think, for one moment, that Dr. Oliphant would listen to a blackguard of your description?"

"Probably not," agreed Mr. Quail, unmoved, "but it would not be necessary for me to call at the school, and give your porter the trouble of throwing me out at the gate, Mr. Lamb. There is such an institution as the General Post Office. You could scarcely prevent a letter from reaching Dr. Oliphant, acquainting him with what you have done."

"What I have done?" repeated Mr. Lamb. "What have I done? What do you dare to insinuate that I have done?"

"I insinuate nothing!" drawled Mr. Quail. "I state facts. You, a form-master of Sparshott, have had dealings with a firm of Turf accountants—in plainer words, bookmakers, called Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker."

"It is false!"

"You have paid them a sum of money—"

"That is true, but it was not on my own account, as you must be aware, as you seem to know so much of the matter."

Mr. Quail shrugged his shoulders. "I am not interested in irrelevant details," he said. "You paid Messrs. Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker, the sum of forty pounds, on account of a loss on a race at Newmarket. You were cautious enough to pay it by money-order, doubtless not desiring your bankers to see such a name entered in your pass-book. But the money order sent to Messrs. Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker, was accompanied by a letter in your own hand."

"What of it?"

"That letter is now in my possession," said Mr. Quail.

"You can have no right to its possession!" said Mr. Lamb.

"I am not concerned with that."

"But the police may be concerned with it," said Mr. Lamb, warmly. "Even a letter may not be stolen, Mr. Quail. If this letter is indeed in your possession—"

"I am willing to show it to you."

"Then you must have purloined it, in the offices of Messrs.



"I do not make a secret of it," yawned Mr. Quail. "I must conclude," said Mr. Lamb, "that you are employed in the offices of Messrs. Tonge and Co., as otherwise you could never even have seen the letter." "Correct!"

"And suppose, sir," exclaimed Mr. Lamb, "suppose I inform your employers of the use you are making of a letter addressed to them, and with which you have no concern? How long, sir, do you think you would remain in their service?"

James Quail laughed. "If I were still in their service, Mr. Lamb, you would never have heard of my existence. We had a little trouble, and I left."

"I can guess the kind of trouble, from your present conduct," said Mr. Lamb, contemptuously. "You may as well admit that you were dismissed for dishonesty."

"That is neither here nor there," snarled Quail. "Understand this, Mr. Lamb—I was a clerk in Messrs. Tonge's office, when I had to handle your letter and money order. The letter, in the ordinary course, would have been destroyed after the transaction was completed. I did not destroy it—I kept it, as it might be of further use to me. When I left the service of Tonge, Isaac, and Tucker, it was time to put it to use. That is why I communicated with you."

"And to what use, sir, do you fancy you can put a letter, written months ago, and addressed to the firm who have discharged you?"

"It is for sale," said Mr. Quail.

"For sale!" exclaimed Mr. Lamb.

"Exactly. The price is twenty-five pounds."

"Are you mad?"

"Hardly! I am here for business. If that letter is worth twenty-five pounds to you, I will hand it over for that sum."

"It is worth nothing to me."

"Very good!" said Mr. Quail. "In that case, it is worth nothing to me either. I will send it on to Dr. Oliphant."

"It does not concern Dr. Oliphant in any way."

"That is for him to decide. He may be interested to know that a master on his staff paid forty pounds because Blue-Chip lost in the three-thirty!" remarked Mr. Quail, sarcastically.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Lamb. "This—this is blackmail!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quail.

"No news to you, perhaps?" said Mr. Lamb, breathing hard.

"This is not your first essay in blackmail, I daresay. (But there are prisons, sir, for such as you.)"

"Quite!" agreed Quail. "You have only to prove your charge, sir, and I should have to retire from activity for a couple of years or so. I am well aware of it. But I do not think that you would find it easy to prove."

"You rascal!" breathed Mr. Lamb.

"Go on!"

"You knave!"

Mr. Quail yawned.

"Need we waste time in passing compliments?" he asked.

"I have said that I have a return train to catch. In a word, Mr. Lamb, do you or do you not want your racing transactions to come to the knowledge of the head-master of Sparshott?"

"Knave!" hissed Mr. Lamb. "From what you tell me, you must be fully aware that I have never had any racing transactions of any kind. You must be aware that that account was paid for another person. As you dealt with the correspondence

of Messrs. Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker, you must know that that racing debt was incurred by a young man named Armitage, who is a relative of mine, and that I paid the debt for him, taking pity on him in his distress."

"Is that so?" yawned Mr. Quail.  
"You know that it is so!" almost shouted Mr. Lamb. "The foolish young man appealed to me for assistance. Shocked as I was, distressed as I was, I could not refuse to help my sister's son. I told him that I would pay the debt as soon as I could get the ready money—and I paid it. In return he promised me to keep clear of racing—clear of men of your sort, you rascal—and I believe he will keep his word. I do not regret my action. But to represent this as a racing transaction of my own—oh, you knave!" Mr. Lamb choked.

Mr. Quail blew out a cloud of smoke, and threw away the stump of his cigarette. He seemed rather amused.

"Is that really how it was?" he drawled.

"As you know so much, you must know also that that was how it was," said Mr. Lamb. "I have nothing on my conscience, as you very well know."

"Let us hope that the headmaster of Sparshott will take the same view!—when he sees the letter!" jeered Mr. Quail.

"Villain!" panted Mr. Lamb. "It is quite possible that I might be misjudged on that letter alone."

"Quite!" grinned Quail. "Is it worth a pony to you, to avoid being so cruelly misjudged, Mr. Lamb?"

"I—I will give you a pound for that letter."

"I am not here for nothing, Mr. Lamb."

"How do I know you have the letter at all?" demanded Mr. Lamb. "You are a crook and a thief, on your own showing. I do not believe that you have the letter."

Mr. Quail laughed.

"That is easily settled," he said. "I will show it to you! No snatching."

The Sparshott form-master made a gesture of contempt. But Mr. Quail was evidently wary, for he stepped back a couple of paces, as he drew from his pocket a leather wallet. Opening the wallet, he drew out a folded letter. Mr. Lamb watched him, as he unfolded the letter, and held it up for inspection.

It was out of Mr. Lamb's reach, but it was plain for him to see—and for Plum, peering down through the oak leaves. The form-master breathed very hard, as he read the letter he had written months ago and since forgotten. It ran:

Dear Sir,  
I thank you for having given me time to meet this account, and I now enclose money-order for the sum of £40 0. 0. in settlement.

Yours truly,  
J. Lamb.

Messrs. Tonge, Isaac, and Tucker,  
Shaftesbury Avenue,  
London.

The letter was written on the school notepaper, headed "Sparshott School." Mr. Lamb gazed at it.

Never, in sending that letter with the money due, had he dreamed that there was any risk attached. Neither would there have been, had not Messrs. Tonge, Isaac, and Tucker happened to have a dishonest rascal in their employ. But the unfortunate little gentleman realised very clearly the effect that such a letter must have, if it became publicly known.

A form-master at a school like Sparshott had to be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. No breath of scandal could be allowed to touch him. Any fellow at Sparshott who had had

dealings with Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker, would have been expelled by the head-master. In the case of a master, Dr. Oliphant's judgment would have been more severe than in the case of a boy—instant resignation would be demanded at the very least: instant dismissal was more likely. And that letter, written on the school notepaper in Mr. Lamb's own well-known hand, was more than enough.

There was nothing in it to indicate that the money was paid on account of another person—even if Mr. Lamb could have ventured to reveal that he had paid a racing debt for a reckless relative.

Mr. Quail, holding up the letter, watched the form-master's harassed face. He was sure of his victim.

"If you desire this letter to go to the head-master of Sparshott——!" he drawled.

"Oh, you knave!" breathed Mr. Lamb. "The transaction was not mine—I could, after all prove that it was not mine——!"

"Your nephew could be called on as a witness!" suggested Mr. Quail. "He is, I understand, employed in a bank. His employers would doubtless be extremely interested to know what his amusements are in his leisure time."

"Oh, you rascal!" gasped Mr. Lamb.

Mr. Quail looked at his watch.

"I have no further time to waste," he said, incisively. "That letter is for sale. The price is twenty-five pounds. Do you want it?"

There was a long, long pause.

"Yes!" said Mr. Lamb, at last.

"Money talks!" said Mr. Quail.

"I have no such sum on me," muttered Mr. Lamb. "I must obtain it from the bank. I must see you again——"

"I cannot wait long."

"Come here again on Saturday afternoon, at the same time. Bring the letter with you, and I will bring the money."

"Very well: but do not fail me, Mr. Lamb. I am not to be played with."

"I shall not fail you, you rascal!"

Mr. Quail replaced the letter in the wallet, and the wallet in his pocket. Then, slightly raising his hat in mocking salute to Mr. Lamb, he turned and walked away up the footpath, and disappeared.

Mr. Lamb remained under the oak tree for a few minutes. He seemed overcome by his interview with the blackmailing rascal, and at a helpless loss. But he moved off, at last, walking away in the direction of the school.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" breathed Plum.

## KEEPING IT DARK

"**V**ERNON! Rake!"

"Yes, sir!" said the two juniors, together.

"Where is Tumpton?"

Harry Vernon and Tom Rake had no immediate reply to make. They stood before the Little Lamb in his study, in dismay. So far, they had supposed that Eustace Percival Tumpton was in No. 3 Study, writing lines for Mr. Lamb. But the form-master's question indicated otherwise.

And matters looked serious. Mr. Lamb, obviously, was in a very bad temper.

"Answer me!" Lamb's voice came in a sharp rap. "I have no doubt you know where Tumpton is. Speak."

"Isn't he in the study, sir?" stammered Harry.

"He is not! He does not appear to be in the House at all. I sent him back to do his lines. Where is he?"

"He went back when you sent him in, sir!" said Tom Rake. "We went down to games practice instead of going out, and did not see him again."

Mr. Lamb compressed his lips harder.

"You cannot tell me where he is now?"

"No, sir!"

"Find him, if he is in the school, and send him to me," said Mr. Lamb. "If you cannot find him, come back and report to me in half an hour."

"Very well, sir!" said Harry, quietly.

The two juniors left their form-master's study. In the corridor, they exchanged eloquent glances.

"What on earth's biting the old bean?" murmured Tom.

The captain of the Fourth shrugged his shoulders.

"Goodness knows! He's got it bad, anyhow! Let's look for Plum, the fathead—the clown! We'll boot him as far as Lamb's study if we find him! Isn't he just the man to beg for trouble with Lamb in this state?"

"Just!" agreed Tom.

And they went to look for Plum. Where Plum was, what had become of him, what he fancied he was up to, they had no idea. It was unusual, and unpleasant, for fellows to be called upon for a task like this, on a half-holiday. Only too plainly, the Little Lamb was in a tantrum, and less considerate than was his wont.

However, there was no help for it: and Vernon and Rake marched up and down and round about Sparshott inquiring for Plum.

"Seen Plum?" they asked, as they came on Barnes-Paget.

"Too often," answered the Buccaneer.

"Fathead! Seen him lately?"

"Glad to say I haven't."

The chums of the Fourth nobly refrained from banging the Buccaneer's head on the wall, and went further afield.

"Seen Plum, Banks?"

"No: and don't want to."

"Seen Plum, Cook?"

"Thank goodness, no."

"Seen Plum, Hansom?"

"I saw him at dinner," answered Hansom.

"You howling ass, so did we. Seen him since?"

"No! You'll find him in the tuck-shop if you want him, that is, if he's got any money. Mrs. Charne's got jam puffs——"

It seemed a likely theory: and Vernon and Rake headed for the school shop. But Plum was not there. Carboy and Root were there, disposing of some of Mrs. Charne's new stock of jam puffs, and Vernon called to them.

"Seen Plum, Carboy?"

"Looking for him?" asked Carboy. "Yes, I saw him going across to the Keep."

"Oh, thanks. Come on, Tom."

Glad to have picked up a clue at last to the missing Plum, Vernon and Rake hurried away. Root gave his pal a curious look.

"Tumpton ain't in the Keep, Carboy," he remarked.

"Not?" yawned Carboy.

"I believe he's gone out of gates."

"So do I!" agreed Carboy. "I saw him go."

"You told those fellows he was in the Keep!" said Root, with a stare.

"Nothing of the kind. I said I saw him going there," explained Carboy. "I forgot to mention that it was yesterday I saw him going there. A fellow can't think of everything in a minute."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Root. Unaware that the playful Carboy was leg-pulling, Vernon and Rake hurried off to the old Keep. Why Plum had gone there, they did not know: but fellows often did ramble over the old ruins on a half-holiday, and they had no doubt, after what Carboy had said, that he was there.

They pushed into the old Keep through one of the gaps in the ancient walls, and looked round for Plum Tumpton. But there was no Plum to be seen, nor anyone else.

"Plum!" shouted Vernon. "Are you here, fathead?"

"Plum! Plummy! Plum!" roared Tom Rake.

The old ruins echoed to their voices. But there came no answer, and they had to realise that the elusive Plum was not there.

With deep feelings, they went back to the quad. Carboy and Root were coming out of Mrs. Charne's shop, and they smiled at the sight of two flushed and wrathful faces.

"Haven't you found him?" called out Carboy.

"No!" grunted Vernon. "When was it you saw him going to the Keep?"

"Yesterday afternoon," answered Carboy, blandly. "I hardly think he'd be there still, come to think of it. What?"

"Why, you—you—you——!" gasped Vernon.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Root.

The chums of the Fourth glared at Carboy. They were getting tired of hunting Plum, and Carboy had sent them off on a wild-goose chase. Carboy and Root seemed to think it funny. Vernon and Rake did not.

"So it was a joke, was it?" said Vernon, breathing hard.

"Sort of!" agreed Carboy.

"Well, we're rather jokers, too!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Bag him, Tom, and bump the silly ass!"

"Good egg!" said Rake.

"Here, I say—leggo!" roared Carboy, as the two juniors colored him. "I say—look here—you leave a fellow alone—I was only joking—yaroooh."

"Bump!"

"Whoop!" roared Carboy, as he sat down in the quad, "yooohoop! leggo! If you bump me again, I'll—yaroooh!"

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! Ooooooh!"

"One good turn deserves another," remarked Tom Rake.

"Same applies to jokes. Are you tired of jokes, old bean, or shall we carry on?"

"Leggo!" howled Carboy.

And the chums of the Fourth left him sitting in the quad, feeling a little solaced as they left him. Root was laughing—more than ever—but Carboy seemed to have finished laughing.

"Must have gone out, I think," said Harry. "It would be like Plum! Let's see if we can see anything of him—the half-hour's nearly up."

They went down to the gates. A good many Sparshott fellows could be seen on the road, but Plum Tumpton was not among them. But a few minutes later, a plump form and a pink face came into view.

"There he is!" said Vernon and Rake, together.

They glared at Plum, as he came up.

"Where have you been, you ass?" demanded Vernon.

"Eh?" Plum blinked at him. "Oh! Out."

"You haven't done your lines for Lamb?" hooted Rake.

"Eh! Oh! No."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Oh! Nothing! I—I was just thinking——"

"Gammon! Where have you been?"

"Eh! Oh! Round about," said Plum, vaguely. "You

fellows have got back early from the sea-cave, haven't you?"  
"We never went there, ass, after you were sent in."  
"Oh! I thought you had, and I followed on," said Plum.  
"Still, I never went as far as the cave, after all, after what happened."

"What happened, then?"  
"Oh! Nothing."  
"You never went as far as the cave after what happened, and nothing happened?"

"Yes! No! I mean—oh! nothing! I'm not keeping a secret from you fellows," said Plum, hastily, "I'd tell you like a shot! Only—"

"Only what?"  
"Oh! Nothing."  
"I wish I hadn't gone out now," went on Plum, with a rather worried look. "It's a bit sickening hearing things that a fellow wasn't meant to hear. Too much like that weed Carboy to suit me. But I couldn't help it, could I?"  
"You've been eavesdropping like Carboy?" asked Tom, staring.

"No!" hooted Plum, indignantly, "It was very awkward—but I couldn't help hearing, when I was in the tree, and they were just underneath it."

"What on earth were you doing in a tree?"  
"Holding on to a branch."  
"You unlimited idiot. I mean why did you climb a tree?"  
"Oh! So that Lamb wouldn't spot me, of course. Think I wanted Lamb to spot me out of gates? No fear. I never knew they were going to talk under the tree, did I?"

"Who talked under a tree?" shrieked Rake.  
"Oh! Nobody! That is, I mean—that's telling! Sorry I can't tell you fellows, but I think I ought to keep it dark," explained Plum, "I mean to say, Lamb would be frightfully sick if he knew a fellow knew."

"If a fellow knew what?"  
"Oh! Nothing in particular. I mean, I can't tell you fellows. Nobody but me knows that Lamb met that oily beast at all, and I'm not going to mention it to anyone."

"What oily beast?" gasped Vernon.  
"Oh! Nobody! I say, has Lamb come in?"  
"Yes, and he wants you in his study. The sooner you go, the sooner you'll get it over. Four up at least."

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" said Plum. "I say, Lamb oughtn't to take it out of a fellow, because that oily beast got his rag out. It ain't just, you know. Tain't my fault that what's-his-name got him on the phone, and made him go out and meet him for a jaw in Oke Wood."

"Made him go out and meet him!" gurgled Rake.  
"Well, you can bet Lamb didn't want to go," said Plum. "He was calling him all sorts of names. Loathed him. Nasty piece of work, too—I saw that, from the tree. I'd have liked to have dropped down on his nut and floored him. Poor old Lamb!"

"Poor old Lamb!" repeated Vernon. "Well, poor old Lamb is waiting for you, poor old Plum, in his study, and he's getting fiercer and fiercer. Better get in before he gets absolutely bloodthirsty. If he leaves anything of you, what's left had better come up to the study, and we'll have tea ready."

"Oh, crikey!" said Plum. "Pretty thick, if he pitches into me, when I'm keeping his queer secrets for him, and sympathising with him, and all that. Not that I'm going to say anything to him about it, of course. I wouldn't let him know I knew, for anything—not for a ton of tarts—not for five hundred dough-nuts. Still, it's pretty thick, all the same."

Plum marched into the House, leaving his perplexed chums staring at one another.

"Has anything happened while Plum was out of gates, or is he wandering in his mind?" asked Vernon.

"Has he one to wonder in?" asked Tom.

Greatly puzzled, the chums of the Fourth went up to No. 3 Study, to wait for Plum there. They proceeded to get tea ready—and the best of the study cupboard could produce was placed on the table. There was no doubt that Eustace Percival Tump-ton would require comforting, after Lamb had done with him—no doubt at all—and refreshment liquid and solid was the kind of comfort that the plump Plum could best appreciate.

Tea was ready, by the time Plum was heard coming. His voice preceded him, on a note of anguish, as he came:

"Ow! ow! ow! Wow! Oooogh! Ow! Ow!"

**RUM!**

**PLUM** tottered into No. 3 Study. He seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife as he came. His plump face registered woe.

"Ow!" he said. "Oh! Ah! Ooooooh!"

"Had it bad?" asked Vernon, sympathetically.

"Yow-ow-ow!" replied Plum, which seemed to indicate that he had had it bad.

"Did it hurt?" asked Tom.

Plum looked at him.

"Did it hurt?" he asked. "Did six up hurt? Oh! No! Not at all! Wow! I rather enjoyed it! Yow-ow! I'm making all this fuss because it was so nice—yow-ow! You blithering idiot! Wow!"

"Six up!" said Harry. "The Lamb is fierce! But you've got his rag out, Plum."

"Ow! Blow him!" groaned Plum. He leaned on the table, and moaned. "Six up—and every one a swipe! Wow! I jolly well wish that What's-his-name had come to the school after all, and got him hooped out, I jolly well do, ow!"

"Lamb hooped out!" said Tom, blankly. "Mad?"

"Yow-ow-ow! If you know what I knew—I mean, if you knewed what I know—that is, if you knewed what I knewed—ow—!"

"You're getting mixed, old chap! Take it calmly till the first effects wear off!" said Harry, soothingly. "It doesn't last for ever, you know."

"I know—wow! All the same in a hundred years, I dare say," said Plum, sarcastically. "That doesn't help much now, though! Ow!"

"We've got eggs for tea—"

"Blow the eggs! Wow!"

"And a plum cake—"

"Bother the plum cake! Woooooh!" moaned Plum.

His chums looked quite serious. If matters came to such a pass that Plum Tump-ton "blowed" eggs for tea, and "bothered" plum cake, it was evident that matters were very bad with Plum. Only too clearly, the Little Lamb had laid it on not wisely but too well.

"Ow! Oooogh!" continued Plum, in anguished tones. "He said it was deliberate disobedience! That's the sort of thing beaks say when you don't do as they tell you! That's what they call it—ow!"

"What else could they call it, old chap?" inquired Tom.

"Oh, don't be an ass! I shan't be able to sit down to tea! I shan't be able to sit down to prep! I shan't be able to—wow! wow!"

"Like me to turn the radio on, old fellow, and help you to

forget it? asked Tom. Turning on the radio was Tom Rake's cure for all mortal ills.

"You turn it on!" said Plum, savagely. "I'll buzz a chair at it if you do! Ow!"

"Well, what can a fellow do?" asked Tom. "Ow!"

"Well, you might shut up!" said Plum. "Ow!"

Barnes-Paget glanced into the study from the passage. "Killing a pig here?" he asked. "Sounds like it. Hallo! Is that Plum, or a corkscrew? Practising as a contortionist, Plum?"

Plum looked round at him. He did not answer, but he grabbed up a cushion from a chair, and hurled it. The Buccaneer grinned, and stepped aside in time, and the cushion flew across the passage.

There was a wild yell the next moment. "Lazy!" Lovelace was coming up the passage—just in time to catch the cushion. It landed under his left ear, and he went headlong.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Buccaneer. "Good old Plum! Man down!"

"Oh, gad! Oh, holy smoke!" Lovelace staggered up. "What was that? Who chucked that cushion? Somebody in that study—well, here it comes back."

The cushion came back with a whiz. Which member of No. 3 Study had hurled it, Lovelace did not know—he hurled it back into the midst of them, and Tom Rake got it, and sat down suddenly. Lovelace chuckled, and went on up the passage, rubbing his ear.

"Gimme that cushion," said Plum, as Tom scrambled up. "I want to get that grinning idiot Barney with it!"

"I'll give it to you, you clown!" gasped Tom: and he gave it—hard! Plum roared, and sat down in his turn.

He bounded up again with a frantic yell. Sitting on the study floor was not comfortable at any time—and much less so after "six up" from the Little Lamb.

"Carry on!" chuckled Barnes-Paget, at the door. "This is as good as a circus!"

Harry Vernon slammed the door, and Barney jumped away just in time to save his nose. Plum glared at Rake—and then leaned on the table again, and moaned.

"Ow! Ow! wow! Blow him! Taking it out of a chap because that oily beast is sticking him for a pony! Ow!"

"Sticking Lamb for a pony!" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes, he jolly well is! 'Tain't my fault, is it?" bawled Plum, indignantly. "I never asked Lamb to write that letter, did I?"

"What letter?" howled Harry Vernon.

"Oh!" Plum remembered—that he was keeping it dark. Nothing! Did I say a letter? "I mean—well, nothing! Ow!"

"That whopping's gone to his head," said Tom. "Quite potty."

"Ow! Serve him right if I told every chap at Sparscott!" said Plum, wriggling in anguish. "Some fellows would!"

"If you told every chap at Sparscott, what?" shrieked Rake.

"Oh! Nothing!"

"Mad as a hatter," said Tom. "Perhaps feeding will pull him round. Don't talk any more, Plum, till your brain begins to work again."

"Yah!" snorted Plum. "If you jolly well knew what I jolly well know, you'd jolly well say—ow! wow! ow! wow!"

Vernon and Rake exchanged a grin, and Vernon lifted the dish of eggs from the fender, and Rake followed it up with a plate of toast. Plum glanced at these comestibles, and his sufferings seemed to abate. He was, after all, interested in eggs and toast.

"Like me to turn the radio on, old fellow."



"Sit down, old chap, and have some," said Harry.  
"I won't sit down," mumbled Plum. "But I'll have some."  
Ow! Awful rotter, making a fellow feed standing up like a horse! Ow! I say, though, this is jolly good. "Ow!"

Three or four rounds of toast, and a couple of eggs seemed to solace Plum. He was plainly feeling better. And when the plum cake followed, Eustace Percival Tumpton almost smiled. His sufferings seemed to abate more and more, as he gulped plum cake.

"Feeling better, old chap?" asked Harry.  
"Well, yes," admitted Plum. "Mind, it was tough—awfully tough! But I'm not the man to make a fuss about a licking."

"Not!" ejaculated Tom Rake. "What have you been doing for the last quarter of an hour, Plum?"

"If a fellow can't talk sense, a fellow ought to shut up," said Plum. "I can take a licking, I hope. I say, this is jolly good cake. Still, it was jolly thick. If Lamb knew I knew—"

"If he knew you knew what?"

"Oh! Nothing, I'm not spilling anything," said Plum, cautiously. "If a fellow hears what he's not intended to hear, he's bound to keep it dark—point of honour, you know. Besides, suppose it got out—Lamb could hardly stay afterwards. He's a frightful beast, but I don't want to see him turfed out of the school. We might get a worse beak than Lamb, all things considered."

"How could he be turfed out, you ass?"

"Well, suppose the Head knew!" said Plum.

"Suppose the Head knew what?" shrieked Tom.

"Did Lamb do a burglary or a murder while he was out for a walk this afternoon?" asked Tom.

"Eh! No! Not that I know of."

"Glad to hear that, at all events," said Tom, sarcastically.

"Now, if your burbling means anything at all, which I doubt, it means that you heard Lamb talking to some other man about his private affairs, and you ought to be jolly well kicked for listening—"

"How could I help it, when I was in the oak tree over their nuts?" hooted Plum. "Think I wanted to stick in the tree like a dashed monkey hanging on a branch? Couldn't help hearing them, any more than I could help seeing the letter."

"What letter?"

"The one that oily beast showed Lamb, of course. The one Lamb's got to give him a pony for. Blackmailing rascal—that's what Lamb called him, and so he is. I'd jolly well like to punch him—even after Lamb's licked me for nothing—practically nothing. Mind I can't tell you fellows," added Plum. "I'd like to—I hate keeping secrets from my pals. But it wouldn't be playing the game to give Lamb away. You see that."

"You're not going to tell us?" gasped Tom.

"No!" said Plum, firmly. "It would serve Lamb right if I told all Sparshott, after licking me, and making out that I'm disobedient—me, you know! But a fellow must play the game. I'm not going to mention it to a soul—nobody at Sparshott is going to know, from me, that Lamb met the man in Oke Wood at all, or that his name's Quail, or—or anything! I'm determined on that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Vernon and Rake.

"Well, where does the cackle come in?" demanded Plum, staring at them. "I mean it, every word! Think what the fellows would say, if they knew that Lamb had met a rotter who was sacked by a firm of bookmakers for dishonesty, and who pinched a letter to blackmail a schoolmaster! Why, Lamb could never stay on after it got about! Don't you fellows ask

me any more questions! I'm sorry, as I've said, but I can't tell you anything—anything at all—it's a point of honour, and I'm rump as an oyster."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, cut the cackle," snapped Plum. "I say, I'll finish this cake, if you fellows don't want any. You needn't get your backs up because I won't tell you—I just can't, as I've explained. And shut up that cackling!" roared Plum. "It's a pretty serious matter, I can tell you, a schoolmaster being blackmailed by an oily rascal like that man Quail. If you're too dense to understand that, take my word for it. It's serious."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled his chums.

Plum gave a snort. He could see nothing whatever to cackle at. Happily unaware that he had already told his chums the whole story, Plum munched cake and frowned. It was, as he had said, a serious matter—nothing to cackle about. But his friends did not take it so seriously as Plum.

When, a little later, they left the study—leaving Plum searching the cupboard for something to follow the plum cake—they compared notes in the passage.

"Can't be anything in it," said Harry.

"Can't be!" agreed Tom.

"How did he get it into his silly head?"

"Went to sleep in the tree, perhaps, and dreamed it."

"It's rum," said Vernon, slowly.

"Plum is always rum," answered Rake. "Never was a fellow so rum as Plum. Rummiest man at Sparshott."

Vernon nodded, and they went down to the Lair. There couldn't be anything in the strange story Plum had inadvertently let out—there just couldn't. But it was "rum"—very rum indeed and Vernon and Rake could not quite dismiss it from their minds.

### BARNEY CHANGES HIS MIND

"OH, gum!" breathed Barnes-Paget.

The Buccaneer's heart gave a sudden jump.

It was after class the following day. Barnes-Paget, of the Fourth, was in his form-master's study, where Barney had no business or right to be. So it was rather alarming to Barney to hear a hand on the door-handle outside. Carboy, who was with him, turned quite pale.

They had not had a happy day in the Sparshott Fourth. What was the matter with Lamb, nobody knew—excepting Plum Tumpton! But that something was the matter with him, was only too clear.

He was nervy, jumpy, worried, and tart—very tart—in fact, tartaric! Plum knew what was on the unhappy little man's mind—and could make allowances, though his patience was tried. Lamb had asked him whether he had done his lines—four hundred—and the reply being in the negative, had ordered him to remain in the form-room after class, and write them out before he left it—which made Eustace Percival Tumpton breathe hard and deep. But Plum knew what was worrying poor Mr. Lamb, and he nobly tried to bear with him.

Nobody else knew—and it seemed to the rest of the form sheer unreasonable ill-temper. It was unlike Lamb and it was very unpleasant. Lines fell like autumn leaves on the form-room that day, and there were glum faces—one or two sullen faces. Barnes-Paget had two swipes for scowling when he was given lines. It was true that he scowled, and that a fellow was not supposed to scowl like a demon in pantomime when his form-master gave him lines. Still, it was severe—and it roused all the rebellious pugnacity of the Buccaneer of Sparshott.

After class, Plum was in the form-room, writing weary lines. Other fellows were in the quad, or the Lair, or the studies, all discussing Lamb's extraordinary tantrums, and telling one another what they thought of the Little Lamb. Barnes-Paget was made of sterner stuff: he was not content with slanging Lamb: he was on the war-path.

Having seen Mr. Lamb go into master's Common-Room, Barnes-Paget, accompanied by Carboy, headed for Mr. Lamb's study. Barney had lines and a licking—Carboy had lines—and both were vengeful. The Sparshott Fourth were feeling sorry for themselves that day: and perhaps Lamb might feel sorry for himself, too, when gum was introduced into his inkpot, and tin-tacks into his armchair. Barney hoped so.

Unluckily, Mr. Lamb did not linger in masters' Common-Room—in his present state of worry, he found no solace in the company of other beaks. Instead of remaining there to read the evening paper, he put an evening paper under his arm and walked away to his study.

Two juniors in that study were taken by surprise. At the sound of Mr. Lamb coming, even the iron-nerved Barney felt his heart beat faster, and Carboy stood rooted to the floor with terror. There were already tin-tacks in Lamb's armchair, and to be caught in Lamb's study—especially in Lamb's present ferocious state—was a terrifying prospect.

But the Buccaneer was quick on the uptake. He had only seconds—but he made the most of them. He grasped the terrified Carboy by the arm, and dragged him into the corner of the study, across which stood a screen. It was a chance—a slim chance—of escaping discovery—only a slim chance, but better than nothing. Carboy, quite dizzy with terror, was dragged along like a sack, and he staggered in the angle of the wall, leaning there and panting. Barnes-Paget grasped the screen, which rocked as they pushed behind it, and held it firm. His heart was beating unpleasantly: but he was cool—the Buccaneer of Sparshott never lost his head.

A moment later the door opened.

Mr. Lamb came in, and closed the door after him. The Buccaneer hardly breathed: and Carboy, with an effort, stilled his panting breath.

They were out of sight, at least. If Lamb remained in the study, they could hardly hope to escape detection. But he might not remain—they fervently hoped that he wouldn't.

They listened, with beating hearts, for the howl that was likely to follow when Mr. Lamb sat down in his armchair. The tin-tacks could not fail to produce an effect. Lamb would know that someone had been there—would he guess that someone was there still?

But there was no howl—Mr. Lamb did not sit down in the armchair. He paced up and down the study.

He had brought in an evening paper under his arm. But he threw it on the table, and apparently forgot it.

Up and down, up and down the study, Mr. Lamb paced. The hidden juniors heard him muttering to himself.

Carboy, squeezed in the angle of the wall, perspired in terrified silence. Barnes-Paget, cool and self-possessed, peered through a little rent in the screen, which gave him a narrow view of the pacing form-master.

His look became very curious.

Lamb did not look bad-tempered now. He looked intensely worried and depressed. The Buccaneer had come to that study on the war-path, breathing vengeance. But his bitter feelings faded out now that he watched Mr. Lamb's troubled, harassed face.

In the form-room, Lamb had seemed simply nervy, and ill-

tempered. But Barney was no fool, and he could see, now, that some trouble—some deep trouble—was on the little gentleman's mind. He was curious, but no longer inimical. If Lamb was in some trouble—and he certainly looked it—that explained his unusual tantrums—it was only too likely that a form-master with a heavy trouble on his mind, would find a form like the Sparshott Fourth a little too much for his patience. The Buccaneer of Sparshott was a hard nut to crack, and he had rather less than more than the normal allowance of the milk of human kindness. But he was conscious of feeling sorry for poor old Lamb at that moment, and he wished sincerely that he had not come there to rag his study.

"Scoundrel!"

The two juniors started, as that word rapped out from Mr. Lamb. It was not addressed to them: Lamb would hardly have used such an expression to a Sparshott boy, if he had known the two young rascals were there. And plainly he did not know—he had not the remotest idea that anyone but himself was in the room.

"Knave! Rascal! Cur!" went on Mr. Lamb.

He paced and paced, muttering. Once he came quite close to the screen in the corner, and Carboy trembled, and Barney's heart beat. But he turned again, and paced, and paced, and muttered. Most of his mutterings were only half-audible, and conveyed little meaning. But every now and then words came sharply.

"The knave! The money is nothing—I can manage that! But—what if he plays me false? How can I trust such a man? If he takes the money, and does not hand over the letter—what then?"

Carboy blinked in dizzy amazement as he heard that. It seemed to him that Lamb was wandering in his mind. The Buccaneer was perplexed, but his face grew graver. Only too clearly poor old Lamb was in deep waters.

Mutter, mutter—tramp, tramp! The hapless little gentleman moved restlessly about the room. Once he stopped at the arm-chair—but, luckily, he did not sit down—he went on pacing. Words came clearly again.

"Knave! Dastard! How am I to deal with him, if he plays me false? What am I to do? I must see Quail again on Saturday—I must! But—mutter—mutter—mumble—mumble!"

Carboy wondered dismally how long this was going on. It had lasted half an hour already. Carboy was getting cramped—but he dared not stir. Pins and needles in one leg gave him agonies. But a movement meant discovery.

Suddenly Mr. Lamb crossed to the door, and went out of the study, slamming the door after him. Carboy fairly gasped with relief. The Buccaneer drew a deep, deep breath.

"Oh, crickey!" breathed Carboy. "Thank goodness, he's gone! I couldn't have stood it much longer." He rubbed his cramped leg.

Barnes-Paget stepped from behind the screen. Lamb's footsteps had died away down the corridor, but the Buccaneer was on his guard, ready to dodge back into cover at a sound of returning steps. But a minute later, glancing from a corner of the study window, Barney sighted Mr. Lamb in the quadrangle—walking under the old beeches by the school wall. Apparently he was still thinking over his mysterious trouble, whatever it was, in the fresh air.

"All clear!" muttered the Buccaneer.

"Sure he's gone?" whispered Carboy.

"He's trotting in the quad."

"Oh, good." In the form-room, Lamb had seemed simply

Carboy emerged in his turn, wriggling with pins and needles. His face was relieved, but angry and malicious. "He gave me a precious turn!" he muttered. "What's up with him, Barney? Who's that Quail he was mumbling about?" "Goodness knows." "Seems to be worried about something, blow him. Well, we'll give him a bit more to worry about," said Carboy, viciously. "We haven't put the gum in his inkpot yet. What the thump are you doing?" added Carboy, in angry astonishment, as he stared at the Buccaneer.

Barnes-Paget was groping over the seat of the armchair, gathering up tin-tacks. Carboy watched him blankly.

"Mad?" he asked. "Leave them for him, you ass. I'll get on with the gum—we've got bags of time, as he's out in the quad."

"Leave that inkpot alone." "What do you mean?" snarled Carboy.

"What I say! We're not ragging here," snapped Barnes-Paget.

"You blithering idiot, we came here to rag, didn't we—and now it's all safe, and—"

"Put that gum bottle back in your pocket, or I'll jam it down the back of your neck. I've got all the tin-tacks—let's get out."

Carboy looked at him—amazed, enraged, bewildered. But the Buccaneer's face was set hard, his eyes glinting, and the cad of Sparshott dared not carry on in defiance of him. Breathing hard, Carboy put the gum bottle back into his pocket, and tramped to the door.

Barnes-Paget followed him out. They hurried down the passage. At the corner, safe out of the masters' quarters, Barney gave his companion a very significant look.

"Keep clear of that study, old scout," he said. "I can do as I choose, I suppose," said Carboy, sullenly.

"Oh, quite! You can rag Lamb if you choose, and I can punch your face through the back of your head if I choose. And if you rag Lamb, old bean, look round for a new set of features—you'll want them."

"If you've not gone off your rocker, what do you mean, Barnes-Paget?" hissed Carboy.

"I mean that Lamb looks as if he's got trouble enough, and we're going to leave him alone."

"Going soft?" sneered Carboy. "Nice little boy that loves his kind teachers, what?"

Barnes-Paget flushed. "Soft or not, I mean what I say," he snapped. "Leave the man alone. And take that sneer off your face, if you don't want me to smack it off."

Carboy shrugged his shoulders, and walked away—still sneering. Barnes-Paget stood frowning, stung and irritated by the imputation of "softness" which was very disagreeable to a fellow who prided himself upon being as hard as steel all through. Finally he shook himself impatiently, and walked away, and threw his handful of tin-tacks from a window. Mr. Lamb, when he did sit down in that armchair later in the evening, never dreamed how near he had been to finding it extremely uncomfortable.

### MUM'S THE WORD

"**B**LOW!" breathed Plum Tumpton.

Plum was writing lines. Lines, and lines, and lines, and lines! Plum was fed up with lines. He was sick and tired of lines. And he was hungry. It was a serious matter when Plum was hungry. He got hungrier than other fellows, and oftener. He felt it severely.

True, it was not yet tea-time. But Plum did not wait for meal-time to get hungry—he got hungry much sooner than that, and counted the minutes to a meal. A snack at the school they would have seen Plum comfortably through—but there was no snack for poor Plum. Occasionally he chewed the handle of his pen—but there was nothing more palatable for him to chew. He wrote lines, thought of the jam puffs in Mrs. Charne's shop, and wrote lines—and lines—and lines. And his indignation was deep.

Here he was, keeping queer secrets for Lamb—not even telling his own pals!—and Lamb had not only whopped him, but was keeping him in to write lines! True, Lamb didn't know what Plum was doing for him—never dreaming for an instant that the plumpest member of his form knew anything at all about Mr. Quail. Still, there it was—he was keeping secrets for Lamb—and this was how Lamb rewarded him. It got Plum's goat sorely.

"Hullo, fathead!" said a sudden voice.

Plum looked up, startled, from weary lines. The form-room door had opened without a sound, Barnes-Paget had stepped in, and closed it after him. Plum stared at the Buccaneer, and the Buccaneer grinned back at Plum.

"Well, what?" grunted Plum, not particularly pleased to see the scapegrace of Sparshott in the form-room. "You'll get scalped if Lamb spots you here, Barney."

"Lamb won't spot me," answered Barnes-Paget. "Lamb's walking up and down under the beeches across the quad, and he's got enough on his mind without bothering about little me, from his looks."

"Oh! I bet he has!" agreed Plum. "What do you want, Barney?"

"Nothing! Do you remember when I was in detention a week or two ago, you got my bike out for me when I cut?"

"What about it?" asked Plum, staring.

"One good turn deserves another," said the Buccaneer. "You're in detention now, so I've dropped in to cheer you up."

Plum grunted. He did not consider Barney's company particularly cheering—and he had his lines to write.

Barnes-Paget chuckled and produced a paper bag from under his arm. He laid it on Plum's desk.

"Oh!" said Plum. He sniffed, as a delicate aroma from the bag struck him. "I say, Barney, what's that?"

"One of Mrs. Charne's home-made plum cakes, just new and fresh. That will cheer you up, old man, even if my genial conversation won't do it," grinned the Buccaneer.

"Barney, you're a Briton!" said Plum, with deep feeling.

He left it at that: a moment later his jaws were too busy for speech. He was hungry—the cake was scrumptious—and for happy minutes Plum munched and munched, the Buccaneer sitting on the end of the desk, and watching him, with a grin on his face.

"I say, that's awfully decent of you, Barney," said Plum, at last.

Having taken the keenest edge off his appetite, he talked with his mouth full, in a rather muffled tone. "Topping nice! You were a goat to cut that time, and I was an ass to see you, but I'm jolly glad you remembered it to-day. I was finished! I've had nothing since dinner except a doughnut and some bulls-eyes and a spot of toffee. By gum, I feel better now." Plum took a fresh bite of cake. "I say, Barney, now you're here, like to do some of my lines for me?"

"Not the least little bit in the world!" answered Barnes-Paget, coolly. Barney was the man to repay an obligation: but not the man to over-do it.

"Well, I've still got nearly two hundred," said poor Plum.

"And it's frightfully unjust! Lamb's tantrums, you know." "Poor old Lamb's up against it, I think," said Barnes-Paget. "I'm not going to rag him any more while he's down. Looks as if he's collected most of the troubles in the giddy old universe."

"I know that! But that ain't any reason for sticking a chap into a form-room to write lines. I never buzzed that man Quail at him, did I?" growled Plum. "Bit thick to take it out of me because of Quail."

Barnes-Paget started a little, and gazed at Plum curiously. He remembered the name of Quail, uttered by Mr. Lamb in his mutterings in the study.

"What the dickens do you know about the man Quail, Plum?" he asked.

"Oh! Nothing!" said Plum hastily. "I mean it's rather a secret! I haven't told even my own pals, so I can't tell you, Barney. I'm not going to say a word to anybody about Quail. Oily little beast!" added Plum, "I'd like to punch his greasy head!" Plum munched what remained of the cake.

The Buccaneer sat silent on the desk looking at him. How on earth Plum Tumpton, the clown of Sparshott, knew anything about the mysterious trouble that afflicted Mr. Lamb, Barnes-Paget could not guess. But it was clear that Plum did know something.

"So Quail's an oily little beast, is he?" said the Buccaneer, at last.

"Oozing!" said Plum. "Nasty piece of work!"

"So you've seen him?"

"Oh! No! Yes! I mean, I can't tell you whether I've seen him or not," said Plum, cautiously, "I'm keeping the whole thing dark. Lamb's pretty rough on me, but I'm not giving him away."

"What is there to give away?"

"Oh! Nothing! I say, that was a jolly good cake." Plum had not been losing time, and the cake was already in the past tense. "Got any bulls-eyes?"

"Nix! Where did you see Quail?"

"Oh, somewhere," said Plum. "I'd better get on with my lines. Lamb will be here for them presently, and I don't want to get his rag out again—he ain't safe, so long as that man Quail is worrying him. I wonder he didn't hit the brute in the eye, and grab the letter. I would have."

"The letter!" repeated Barnes-Paget. Evidently, Plum knew something: Barney remembered Mr. Lamb's mumblings about a "letter," which apparently he feared that "the man" might not hand over, after "taking the money."

Barney Paget was extremely interested now. The matter was beginning to take shape in his mind—though it seemed incredible in connection with a man like Mr. Lamb, and in Mr. Lamb's position.

Had Barney heard this, as Vernon and Rake had heard it, only from Plum, he might have given it no more heed than it had received in No. 3 Study. But Barney had something, as it were, to "go on." The dispirited, disjointed mutterings of the Little Lamb in the study had already put him wise to some extent.

"Don't you ask me any questions," said Plum, shaking his head. "I'm sorry that I was in that tree yesterday afternoon at all, and I wish I'd never heard a word of what they said. I couldn't help it, of course, but it's a rotten position for a fellow to be placed in. I wish I knew nothing at all about it, and the least a fellow can do is to say nothing. If some cads like Carboy got hold of it, it would be all over the school before you could say 'knife.' Of course I can't let Lamb know. I know

anything about it, but if he asked my advice, I'd jolly well advise him to take a big stick with him on Saturday and give that oily rat the thrashing of his life. That's what I'd do."

"So he's seeing him again on Saturday?" said Barney.

Plum shook his head.

"I'd rather not tell you," he answered. "It was topping of you to stand me that cake, Barney, and I can tell you I was fearfully hungry; but I can't tell you about Lamb's affairs—it wouldn't be cricket. Lamb may be going to see him in Oke Wood again on Saturday, or he may not. I'd rather not say. What are you grinning at, Barney?"

"Oh, nothing, old chap!" said Barney. "You're the fellow to keep a secret, I must say that. Wild horses wouldn't drag it from you, Plum."

"Well, you see, it's up to me," explained Plum. "It's a point of honour. I heard it all by sheer accident, as I shinned up that big oak on the footpath to get out of Lamb's way, and then they stood under the tree talking. Of course I never dreamed that they'd stop just there to talk. How could I? But in the circumstances I'm bound to keep it dark."

"Bound to," agreed Barney, suppressing a chuckle. "It wouldn't do Lamb any good if it got about, would it?"

"Good Lord, no," said Plum. "It would be the finish for him here. All very well for him to explain that he only paid racing debt for his nephew, who's in a bank, and would land in trouble if they knew he backed horses. That wouldn't alter the fact that he did write a letter to a book-making firm, sending the money, and that that oily little beast can produce the letter and show him up." Plum shook his head solemnly. "It would finish Lamb here. Beaks can't get mixed up in such things—the Head would go right off at the deep end, if he knew."

"Poor old Lamb!" said Barnes-Paget, with real feeling. "He's a good little ass, with all his funny ways: and just the man to land himself in Queer Street on another man's account."

"Oh, he's all right," agreed Plum. "Bit thick to come down on me as he does, but you have to take the rough with the smooth at school. I don't expect a lot of sense from a schoolmaster, either. I expect he will be all right again when he's got that letter back—and he can afford a pony, I suppose. I'd jolly well knock the brute down and grab it, but I suppose Lamb can't very well."

"Nunno—that doesn't quite sound in the Little Lamb's line," grinned Barnes-Paget. "But from what you say, it's really Lamb's own letter, and he has a right to it—it's his, not Quail's, from what you say."

"I'm not saying anything!" contradicted Plum. "I suppose it's his letter really, as he wrote it, and the oily beast admitted that he pinched it from his employer's office when he was sacked, but I'd rather not tell you anything about it, Barney, if you don't mind. I'm awfully obliged for the cake: but I really can't tell you about Lamb's personal affairs that I heard by accident, can I?"

"Hardly!" grinned the Buccaneer. He slipped from the desk. "Keep it dark, Plum—mum's the word, old man! You're a big success at keeping a secret—rack and thumb-screw wouldn't get anything out of you, what?"

"No fear!" agreed Plum. "I fancy I know how to keep my mouth shut! Not always babbling and gabbling like some fellows. I say, Barney, like to do a hundred lines for me, before you go?"

"Not quite!" grinned Barney.

"What about fifty?"

"Nothing about fifty, old scout."



And the Buccaneer slipped out of the form-room as quietly as he had entered it, and Plum was left alone once more—with Virgil. Plum sighed, scraped the last remaining crumbs from the paper bag that had contained the cake, and disposed of them; and then, with a sorrowful countenance, devoted himself once more to transcribing the deathless lines of P. Vergilius Maro.

### CARBOY IS TOO CLEVER!

CARBOY was grinning. His pal Root was grinning too. Some of the other fellows noticed it, and wondered what the joke was. Barnes-Paget eyed his two pals suspiciously. The three were generally birds of a feather; but on this occasion, Barney did not know what was on any more than other fellows in the Fourth. It was morning, and the Sparshott Fourth were at their form-room door, ready to go in when Lamb came. Lamb was a little late. Generally the master of the Fourth was as punctually on time as the big ancient clock in the Sparshott clock-tower. But the worry on his mind seemed to be making him unpunctual, as well as tartaric.

"What's the giddy joke, you fellows?" asked Tom Rake, with a glance of disfavour at Carboy and Root. "Some rotten trick, what?"

"Not at all," answered Carboy, blandly. "Do I ever play rotten tricks?"

"Do you ever play anything else?" asked Harry Vernon.

"Well, I'm playing up this morning," said Carboy. "Lamb's going to find me keen on Latin. That ought to please him."

"Sure to!" chuckled Root.

"Yes, I can see you keen on Latin, or on anything else except smoking fags in the box-room," said Plum Tumpton.

"Honest Injun!" said Carboy. "I've come across a Latin word that rather puzzles me, and I'm going to ask Lamb what it means."

"No joke in that, that I can see!" said Harry Vernon, staring.

"Lots of things you can't see!" remarked Carboy, airily.

"What's the word?" asked Banks.

"Oh, you wouldn't know it, Banker. I'm keeping it for Lamb," Carboy chuckled. "I'm sure Lamb will be pleased to see me so keen on acquiring knowledge."

"First time he's seen you like it, anyway!" remarked Ridd.

"Why can't you tell us what the word is?"

"You'll hear it when I ask Lamb. Here he comes!" added Carboy, as the Fourth-form master appeared in sight. And Carboy ceased to grin, as Mr. Lamb rustled up the passage.

Lamb unlocked the form-room door, and the Fourth went in to their places. All eyes turned on Carboy. Every fellow in the Fourth realised that this was, somehow, a joke up against Lamb; though how, no one could guess. Barnes-Paget knitted his brows. He was left out of the confidence of his pals this time—no doubt in remembrance of the way he had changed his mind about ragging the Little Lamb the day before. He could guess no more than the others how asking the meaning of a Latin word could possibly be a joke up against Lamb. But he did not need telling that something malicious was coming, and his glance at Carboy was very grim. Carboy was his pal, more or less—they had many tastes in common. But there was a big difference between the two. The Buccaneer would not have hit his worst enemy when he was down, but would have been more likely to give him a helping hand up. Carboy, in such circumstances, would have hit all the harder.

Mr. Lamb did not seem in a bad temper this morning. His face was clouded, his brow overcast; but he seemed more depressed than wrathful or irritable. That made no difference to Carboy.

"If you please, sir—" began Carboy, as Mr. Lamb looked over papers at his desk. The form-master glanced round at him.

"What is it, Carboy?"

"May I ask you the meaning of a Latin word, sir? It's a new one to me."

"Certainly you may, Carboy, though I really do not see why you could not look it out in the dictionary. What is the word?"

"Coturnix, sir."

Mr. Lamb stared at him, and gave a little start.

"Coturnix!" he repeated. "Did you say coturnix, Carboy?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Carboy, meekly.

Mr. Lamb's hand trembled on the papers on his desk, and the colour wavered in his face. Every eye in the form-room could see his emotion.

Most of the fellows knew the English for the Latin word "coturnix"—as no doubt Carboy did, as well as anyone. But why Mr. Lamb should be disturbed and perturbed, by a fellow asking him to translate the Latin word for "quail," was quite a mystery to most of the Fourth.

But not to all. Barnes-Paget gave Carboy a furious look. He knew what the Sparshott cad's game was. "Quail" was the name Mr. Lamb had muttered aloud in the study the day before—a name connected with the mysterious trouble that was on his mind. Carboy had only the vaguest idea of what it might all mean—but he knew that the name of "Quail" was distressing to Mr. Lamb. That was enough for Carboy to know!

Harry Vernon and Tom Rake exchanged a quick look. They remembered that Plum had babbled the name of "Quail" in No. 3 Study.

Plum, however, gave no heed. "Quail" would have made Plum sit up and take notice; but Plum did not happen to know that "coturnix" meant "quail" in Latin. That was only one of the immense number of things Plum didn't know.

Mr. Lamb stood by his desk, gazing at Carboy.

For a moment or two, he was feeling quite sick.

The word "quail" struck him like a blow, recalling the oily, sardonic face of the blackmailing rascal he had met a few days ago in Oke Wood. It seemed to him, for that moment or two, that a boy of his form knew—had somehow found out—and under cover of asking for a translation, was taunting him with what he knew.

It was a full minute before he pulled himself together.

There was a dead silence in the form-room. Root, who knew what Carboy had told him, was grinning—but the grin froze on his face. And Carboy, as he watched his form-master, rather wished that he had not made the venture. He had intended to give Lamb a "knock." He realised now that it was a very hard knock he had given, and that the consequences might be painful.

Mr. Lamb found his voice at last.

"It is—er—absurd to ask me such a question in the form-room, Carboy," he said as evenly as he could, "You should look the word out in the dictionary. However, I will tell you. The word means 'quail.'"

Plum gave a jump at that.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" he ejaculated.

Lamb's eyes shot round at Plum.

"Did you speak, Tumpton?"

"Oh! No! Yes! No—yes, sir!" stammered Plum.

"Take fifty lines, Tumpton,"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Carboy!" Mr. Lamb was cool again now. He told himself that the boy could not know anything of James Quail—how could he? It was merely by chance that he had asked the meaning of the Latin word "coturnix." "The word means quail—nominative, coturnix, genitive, coturnicis."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Carboy.

"On another occasion, look out a word in the dictionary for yourself, and do not waste my time in the form-room," said Mr. Lamb.

"Oh, certainly, sir."

With that the incident closed. But it was easy to see that Mr. Lamb was still more worried and depressed after that little incident. Carboy, when he was sure that Mr. Lamb's eye was not on him, winked at Root. He knew that he had given Lamb a "knock": and as there had been no consequences, he was greatly pleased and gratified thereby. Instead of giving due attention to Mr. Lamb's valuable instructions in first hour, that morning, Carboy was thinking out how he could develop that little joke, and give the Little Lamb another knock on the subject of the mysterious Quail.

But at the end of the hour, Carboy made the unpleasant discovery that there were going to be consequences, though not from Mr. Lamb.

There was a five minutes' interval after that lesson, before the juniors went to the French master's class-room. In the passage, Harry Vernon and Tom Rake collared Plum Tumpton, and backed him up against the wall, much to his wrath and astonishment.

"You burbling clown," said the captain of the Fourth. "Have you been babbling that rot to Carboy that you babbled in the study the other day?"

"Doesn't he babble everything to everybody?" growled Tom. "Bang his nut."

"Leggo!" howled the indignant Plum. "I haven't—I tell you, I haven't spoken to Carboy this week at all. Leggo, you fatheads. As if I would!"

"Then how does he know about Quail?" demanded Harry.

"How should I know! I never told him. Leggo!"

"Yaroooop!" came a sudden yell along the passage, and the chums of No. 3 Study released Plum, and they all stared round.

Bang! bang! bang!

"Barney!" gasped Vernon.

Barnes-Paget had a grip of iron fastened on the back of Carboy's collar. Carboy was struggling frantically: but he was not of much use in the grip of the muscular Buccaneer. Barney was banging his head on the corridor wall—and putting plenty of beef into it.

Bang! bang! bang!

"Here, you let Carboy alone, will you!" blustered Root.

With his left hand, Barnes-Paget smacked, and Root went staggering across the passage. Then he resumed with Carboy.

Bang! bang! bang!

"Oh! Ow! Yaroooh!" roared the suffering Carboy. "Will you let go, Barney, you mad fool? What are you up to! Gone mad? Ow! wow! Leggo, you lunatic. Are you as mad as a hatter?"

"Not at all. You shouldn't be lazy, Carboy."

"Lazy!" yelled Carboy. "Wharrer you mean, you idiot?"

"Bothering Lamb to translate for you in the form-room! Horrid lazy," said Barnes-Paget. "Don't do it again, Carboy!"

"I'll do as I dashed well like, and—yaroooooh!"  
Bang! bang! bang!  
"Don't brain him, Barney!" grinned Tom Rake.  
Bang! bang!  
"Still going to do as you dashed well like, Carboy?" asked Barnes-Paget.

"Yes, you rotten bully—"  
Bang! bang!  
"I mean, no!" shrieked Carboy. "Anything you like! Oh, my head!—Wow! Leggo, you rotter! I'll do anything you like! Ow!"

"Good man," said Barnes-Paget, genially, releasing Carboy's collar. "Stick to that, old scout. You're an awfully clever chap, Carboy—picking out Latin words for Lamb's benefit, and all that—frightfully clever. But it's possible to be a bit too clever. Don't be so clever any more, Carboy."

"Go and eat coke!" snarled Carboy, and he tottered away, rubbing his head.

In the French set, Carboy was rubbing his head most of the time, and mumbling. And it was very probable that Carboy was not going to be so clever again at the Little Lamb's expense. Barnes-Paget had altogether too muscular an arm to be argued with, by a fellow like Carboy at all events.

There was a lingering ache in Carboy's head for the rest of the day: and, gratifying as it was to give his form-master a "knock," Carboy wished from the bottom of his heart that he had never asked Mr. Lamb to translate the Latin word "coturnix" in the form-room.

### BARNEY TAKES THE LEAD!

"LOOKING after Lamb?" said Harry Vernon, blankly.

"Just that!" assented the Buccaneer.

"Does Lamb need looking after?" asked Tom Rake.

"Ask Plum!" replied Barney.

Vernon and Rake looked at Barnes-Paget, and then looked at Plum. It was after dinner on Saturday, and the chums of No. 3 Study were preparing for their postponed visit to the sea-cave under the headland, when Barnes-Paget blew into the study, and astounded them by the remarkable proposition that they should put in that afternoon "looking after Lamb."

Plum blinked at Barnes-Paget, and coloured uncomfortably under the inquiring gaze of his chums. Lamb, as Plum knew, was in troubled waters: but it certainly had not occurred to Plum to "look after" Lamb.

"Look here! wharrer you mean, Barney?" he asked, uneasily.

"Exactly what I say," answered the Buccaneer. "Lamb's been a Tartar lately. He's been making the whole form sit up, I was going to pay him out—but since I've learned what the trouble was, I'd rather give him a leg up. And if a bad character like me feels like that," added the Buccaneer, sarcastically, "such model characters as you chaps ought to jump at it."

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Harry. "Tell us what you mean, if you mean anything. We're willing enough to back up Lamb—he's a good sort, though he has been on the war-path the last few days. What's up?"

"Plum knows!"

"I've said that I can't tell you fellows!" said Plum, shaking his head. "It's not my secret—it's Lamb's—and I just can't."

The Buccaneer chuckled.

"Plum has his own way of keeping things dark," he said. "I daresay he's let out as much to you fellows as he has to me."

"Oh! That?" said Harry. "Plum went to sleep in a tree and dreamed it."

"I didn't!" roared Plum.

"It's straight goods," said the Buccaneer, quietly. "I've heard something myself, and I know. Carboy's rather on the trail, too—you remember his little joke about 'coturnix' in the form-room yesterday. But he doesn't know much, as he hasn't been talking to Plum——"

"I shouldn't have let out anything, if he had!" snapped Plum.

"Putting it in a nutshell," said the Buccaneer, "Here it is: Lamb was soft enough to pay a racing debt for a relation, and softer enough to write a letter to a firm of bookmakers when he sent the money. A man named Quail, who was then in that firm's employment, pinched the letter, and he's blackmailing Lamb—offering him the letter for twenty-five pounds."

Plum fairly jumped.

"How on earth do you know all that, Barney?" he gasped.

Barnes-Paget laughed, and did not reply.

"But is it true?" exclaimed Tom Rake, very doubtfully. "Plum was babbling something like that, but he's such a clown——"

"Look here——!" bawled Plum.

"It's true!" said Barnes-Paget. "Lamb's going to meet the man again, on the footpath in Oke Wood, this afternoon, and take him the money. He's afraid that the rascal may take the money, and then refuse to give up the letter."

"How do you know that?" asked Harry blankly.

"Well, I do know! It fits in with what Plum knows. Lamb's not the man to deal with a blackmailer!" said Barnes-Paget, his lip curling. "I'd deal with him fast enough, and make him sorry he'd taken up that line of business. But Lamb is just a pet lamb in his claws. Look here, you men—I'm going to chip in—will you back me up to see Lamb through?"

"Lamb would be frightfully sick if he knew we knew anything about it," said Tom, uneasily.

"He's not going to know that we know anything about it. We're not going to set it to music and sing it in the quad under his window."

"But what can we do?" asked Harry. "I'd be jolly glad to barge in, if matters are as you think. But what——?"

"Lamb will be waiting for the man on the footpath, as before, near the big old oak in Oke Wood. Quail will come along that footpath from Oke, where he gets out of his train. The wood's pretty thick there, and four fellows could find plenty of cover by the path."

Plum's eyes gleamed.

"Good for you, Barney!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of that! But it's a ripping stunt. Lay for him, collar him, and rag him bald-headed, what?"

"And duck him in the pond in the wood," said Barnes-Paget. "There's more mud than water in it—it will be quite nice for Quail."

Plum chuckled.

"Let's!" he exclaimed.

"Hold on a minute," said Harry Vernon. "If the man's what you describe, I'd like to rag him to a frazzle. But how is that going to do Lamb any good? If he's got a letter that belongs to Lamb, and is holding it over his head, ragging and ducking him won't help. More likely to make him vicious, and tougher on poor old Lamb."

"Oh!" said Plum. His face fell. "I didn't think of that! You're rather an ass, Barney! No good at all."

"Let a fellow finish speaking?" suggested the Buccaneer. "This is how it stands. Lamb has agreed to pay a pony for the letter. That's the only way he thinks he can get hold of it. Actually, it's his letter, and Quail is a thief to keep it, just as if he had pinched Lamb's watch. If you saw a thief making off with Lamb's watch, what would you do?"

"Grab him," said Tom, "and get it back from him, of course."

"Exactly. Well, he's got Lamb's letter, and he's using it to commit a crime and break the law. He's liable to imprisonment for stealing the letter in the first place, and to penal servitude for using it for purposes of blackmail. He's safe enough, so long as he's got the letter—he banks, like all blackmailers, on his victim not daring to face a scandal. But if he lost that letter, his teeth would be drawn—he couldn't hurt Lamb."

"Catch him losing it!" said Plum. "He's a cunning rascal—sly as a fox! He won't lose that letter in a hurry."

"With four fellows pushing his face into the grass, and stamping on him if he gives trouble, he mayn't have much choice about losing it," answered Barnes-Paget.

"Oh!" ejaculated Plum.

Harry Vernon looked very grave.

"Look here, Barney," he said, "If matters are as you think, we're more than willing to look after Lamb, as you call it. If a blackmailing villain has got hold of a letter that doesn't belong to him, the police would make him give it up, if they had the dealing with him. That's all right. But—"

"But what?" asked Barnes-Paget, impatiently.

"But you're such a wild ass," said the captain of the Fourth, dubiously, "If it was proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the man had a letter belonging to Lamb, we'd get it off him, same as we'd get Lamb's watch or umbrella if a thief bagged them. But—we've got to be sure."

"You bet on that!" said Tom Rake, with emphasis.

"Plum's seen the letter!" said Barnes-Paget. "Was it in Lamb's fist, Plum?"

"Yes, it was," answered Plum.

"Was it signed with Lamb's name?"

"Yes, it was."

"Was it addressed to that man Quail?"

"No, it wasn't! I heard him admit that he'd pinched it."

"How's that, umpire?" asked Barnes-Paget, looking at the captain of the Fourth.

Harry Vernon nodded.

"Sounds straight enough," he said. "But—we've got to see the letter, as well as Plum, Barney. This is a serious matter, and we've got to be sure."

"I know that as well as you do. We'll all give the letter the once-over, and make assurance doubly sure."

"Quail won't let us see it, if he can help it."

"He won't be able to help it! I've got it all cut and dried!" said the Buccaneer. "Look here, the sooner we're on the ground the better—we don't know just when Lamb will start, and we don't want to run into him in the wood. A walk won't hurt you, on a nice afternoon—hike along with me now, and I'll give you the tip how I've planned it as we go."

Harry Vernon and Tom Rake looked at one another, and nodded. Plum Tumpton gave a still more emphatic nod.

"It's a go!" said Harry.

And the four juniors left the House together—that trip to the sea-cave being once more postponed by the Co. They were not feeling, like Barnes-Paget, a keen anticipation of a reckless

adventure. "But they were more than willing to put in the afternoon "looking after Lamb": although what that gentleman would have thought, and said, and done, had he learned that four juniors of his form were "looking after" him, was hardly to be imagined.

"There's the Little Lamb," whispered Barnes-Paget, as they sauntered down to the school gates.

The juniors glanced at Mr. Lamb. He was walking on the path under the old Sparshott beeches, his eyes on the ground, and a pucker of troubled thought in his brow. For the moment he had forgotten that eyes might be upon him, and the deep care and trouble in his mind were plainly visible in his face.

Mr. Lamb was, in truth, in very deep waters. It was no light matter to be robbed of such a sum as twenty-five pounds by a rapacious rogue: but he had made up his mind to that. But what if the rogue, after getting the money, kept his grip on the letter? It was impossible to trust such a man an inch. And if he played Lamb false, what was the hapless gentleman to do? He shuddered at the thought of more and more blackmailing demands, one after another—yet so far as he could see, there was no help.

Harry Vernon and Co. glanced at him, and then quickly averted their glances, and walked on. That harassed look on poor Mr. Lamb's face went straight to their hearts. If they had had any doubt before of following Barney's lead, that doubt was gone now.

They walked down the road, the Buccaneer explaining as they went, the details of the plan that had formed in his active mind. From the road they turned into the footpath in Oke Wood.

"That's where I saw him," said Plum, as they passed under the branches of the great oak by the footpath, where Plum had taken cover on the previous Wednesday afternoon. "Me stuck up in that tree, you know—and that oily little beast insulting poor old Lamb just underneath me. I can tell you I'd jolly well have dropped on his rüt, if Lamb hadn't been there. Never saw such a twister as that man Quail."

"The rotter!" muttered Tom, "But—"

"Come on!" said the Buccaneer.

They tramped on by the leafy footpath. Vernon and Rake were grave, and very thoughtful. Plum was grinning, with the happy anticipation of ducking the "oily beast" in the muddy pond in the wood: Barnes-Paget's eyes were gleaming. It was true that the Buccaneer was sorry for poor old Lamb, and that he had a generous impulse to help a man who was wronged and in sore trouble. But it was true also that Barney liked taking matters into his own hands, and taking the lead in a rather wild and reckless adventure. Whatever the other fellows were thinking or feeling, there was no doubt that the Buccaneer of Sparshott was going to enjoy that afternoon.

"Here you are!" said Barnes-Paget. They were about a quarter of a mile past the big oak, in a spot where the footpath was deeply shaded by thick branches, and closed in by tangled underwoods on either side. "Halt!"

"Jolly good place!" agreed Plum.

"Lots of cover," said Barnes-Paget. "Get out of sight."

And the juniors got out of sight. A minute later, the footpath looked quite deserted: nobody, passing along it, would have dreamed that four fellows were in cover in the thickets, watching the path. Three of them were silent, as all needed to be: but the voice of Eustace Percival Tumpton was suddenly heard in the land.

"Ooogh! Ow! Blow!"

"You potty chump," breathed Barnes-Paget. "Quiet! Do you want the blighter to hear you when he comes along?"

"That's a fool question, Barney. Of course I don't! Fat lot of good getting out of sight, if we let him hear us!"

"Shut up, then."

"A blessed thorn ran into my leg—"

"My knuckles will run into your silly nose, if you don't shut up."

"Look here—!" hooted Plum.

"Quiet, old chap!" said Harry.

"Pack it up, old fat face," said Tom.

And Plum, with an indignant snort, packed it up, and was silent.

**THE BUCCANEER'S WAY!**

**JAMES QUAIL** walked along the footpath through the wood from Oke, with a cheery step, and an unpleasant smile on his shiny face. Mr. Quail was feeling quite merry; and bright that sunny afternoon.

In following his peculiar trade, the oily Mr. Quail sometimes had his downs as well as his ups. He had seen the inside of a prison once. He had been thrashed more than once. But this time, Mr. Quail thought, he was on to a good thing—a soft thing—it was money for jam. That worried, perturbed schoolmaster was as wax in his hands. That afternoon he was going to collect a "pony"—and he had a happy anticipation of collecting a series of "ponies" later. For he had no intention whatever of handing over the letter to Mr. Lamb; the Little Lamb's doubts on that point were more than justified. He was prepared to show the letter, in order to extract payment from Mr. Lamb—but once his greedy fingers had closed on the notes, that letter was going back into his pocket. What could the poor little gentleman do? A mere threat to post that wretched letter to Dr. Oliphant would silence him. James Quail grinned as he walked through the leafy wood, happily anticipating a regular income from Mr. Lamb, for quite a long time to come, on the strength of the letter he had "pinched" in the office of Messrs. Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker.

But all of a sudden, the grin died off the unpleasant oily face, and Mr. Quail uttered a sharp, startled yell.

For suddenly, without warning, there was a rustle and a swaying in the thickets by the footpath, and four fellows leaped into sight.

They leaped at Mr. Quail. Three of them reached him, in a single leap. Harry Vernon grasped one arm—Tom Rake grasped the other—and as he staggered forward, Barnes-Paget grasped a leg, and dragged it back; and Mr. Quail pitched forward on his face. Plum, who had fully intended to be foremost in the fray, caught his foot in a trailing root—which was exactly what Plum would do!—and sprawled over with a howl.

But three sturdy fellows were quite enough to deal with Mr. Quail. He crashed.

His unpleasant features were buried in grass-roots. He gasped and panted for breath, dizzy with amazement and rage. For the moment, in the sudden surprise, he hardly knew what was happening to him.

"Got him!" gasped Tom Rake.

"Ow!" came from Plum. "Blow! I've banged my knee!"

"Ow!"

"Got him!" grinned Barnes-Paget. "Hook him into the wood."

"Urrrgh" gurgled Mr. Quail. "Wurrgh! Release me!"



Urrgh! Who are you—what does this—gurrgh—outrage mean? Wurrghh!"

Unheeding Mr. Quail's frantic gurgles, the three juniors "hooked" him into the wood. Plum scrambled up, and joined them. Four pair of hands grasped James Quail, and he was bundled headlong through thickets and bushes, to the edge of the pond deep in the wood.

There he was dumped down, on the muddy margin of the pond. He struggled—his face red with breathless fury.

"Stop wriggling, you rotter!" snapped Barnes-Paget: and as Mr. Quail did not stop wriggling, he was tipped over, and his greasy head dipped into the muddy water. His bowler hat floated away on the pond.

"Urrrrrrrrghh!" gasped Mr. Quail, as he sat up, streaming with mud and water. "You—you—you—gurrgh! Who are you?"

He blinked muddily at the juniors. Who they were, why they were handling him, he had not the faintest idea. He had never seen any of them before: and had no knowledge of the fact that one of them had seen him, and had whispered "That's him!" as he came along the footpath. He was absolutely astounded by this strange and unlooked-for happening.

"Who are you?" he hissed.

"We're us!" explained Barnes-Paget. "That's enough for you, Mr. Quail. Get out your wallet."

"If you think you're going to rob me——!"

"Why, you cheeky swob!" gasped Plum, indignantly. "Here, dip his head in again—a bit deeper this time."

Splash!  
"Urrrrrrrrghh!"

Mr. Quail sat up again, spluttering. His oily hair was caked with mud, and water ran down his neck in streams. He gave a terrific wrench, in an effort to release himself. But it was in vain.

"What do you want with me?" he hissed.

"Get out your wallet," rapped Barnes-Paget.

This time Mr. Quail obeyed.

"Take the letter out of it."

Quail jumped in amazement.

"What letter?" he panted.

"That will do! Take out the letter, or your head goes in again."

With deep feelings, Mr. Quail opened the wallet, and took the letter out from inside it. He had no choice in the matter, and he did as he was told.

"Good!" said Barnes-Paget. "Put the wallet back in your pocket."

Mr. Quail was glad enough to do that, at least. There was money in his wallet, and he dreaded that his mysterious assailants had designs on it. What else they could possibly want, he couldn't begin to imagine: but at all events, it was clear that his money was safe.

"Look at that letter, you men," said the Buccaneer.

The juniors looked at the letter in the rascal's greasy hand. They knew their form-master's "fist" well enough, and his signature. That letter was exactly as Plum had described it: written by Mr. Lamb, signed by Mr. Lamb, and the property of Mr. Lamb, and obviously dishonestly obtained by the man who now held it in his greasy shaking fingers.

"That settles it!" said Harry Vernon.

"You shall not take this letter from me!" breathed Quail.

"This letter is mine—written to me——"

"That letter was written to your employers, and you pinched

it, and could be run in for pinching it!" said Barnes-Paget.

Quail stared at him blankly. It was true: but how this unknown schoolboy knew it, was a deep mystery to Mr. Quail.

"We're not going to take it from you," added Barnes-Paget, "Nobody here is going to touch that letter, Mr. Quail."

"Oh!" gasped Quail. "Then what—?"

"You're going to send it back to the owner."

"Wha-a-t?"

"You're going to address an envelope to the owner, write a short note to go with it, and send it to Mr. Lamb."

Quail simply blinked.

"Got that?" snapped Barnes-Paget.

"I—I—I—yes!" gasped Quail. "I—I will do as you ask! Release me now, and as soon as I get back to the village, I will do as you ask."

"Think we could trust him as far, you fellows?" asked Barnes-Paget.

"I don't think!" chuckled Tom.

"Keep hold of him. If he gives any trouble; tip him back into the pond again, and put his head under next time."

"You bet!"

Barnes-Paget took a pocket-book, and a fountain-pen, from his pocket. While Vernon, Rake, and Plum held Mr. Quail in their grasp, sitting on the muddy edge of the pond, his trousers squelching in damp mud, Barney opened the pocket-book, rested it on his knee, and presented the pen to Mr. Quail.

"Now write!"

"What do you want me to write?" snarled Quail.

"Just this: 'Sir, I regret having taken the enclosed letter, which is your property, and which I now return to you. Signed, James Quail.'"

"I—I will—not—I never—" panted Quail.

"Tip him over!"

"Stop! I—I—I will do it."

"You'd better, and without arguing so much," said Barnes-Paget. "Get it done, you reptile, and let's have done with you."

With a face of fury, Quail wrote as instructed, and signed the note. Barnes-Paget glanced at it, and nodded.

"Right!" he said.

He took a stamped envelope out of his pocket, and laid it on the pocket-book on his knee.

"Address that to Mr. Lamb at Sparshott School!" he said.

"I—I—I—"

"Tip him over!"

"Stop!" howled Quail. "I will address it."

And he did so.

"Good egg!" said Barnes-Paget. "We're getting on. Fold Lamb's letter up in your note, put both in the envelope, and stick it down."

For a second, Quail hesitated. To part with the stolen letter, meant to part with his power over the Sparshott form-master. It meant a long farewell to his schemes for extracting money from the Little Lamb. It meant that he had risked imprisonment for nothing, and would go back no better off than he came. But it was only for a second that he hesitated. He was in the hands of the Philistines, and had to do as he was told. The flap of the envelope was stuck down on the contents.

"That's that!" said Barnes-Paget. "Now, my pippin, if you ask one of us to post that letter for you, we'll oblige. We're awfully obliging chaps, when you know us. Like me to post it?"

Mr. Quail's only reply to that question was a glare of hate and rage.

"You'll have to put it civilly, or I shan't oblige you, mind!" said Barnes-Paget. "Say 'Please, sir, post this letter for me.'"

Still Mr. Quail did not speak.

"Tip him over——!" began Barney.

"No! No! Stop! Please, sir, post that letter for me!" spluttered Quail.

"Well, as you put it so civilly, I'll oblige you!" said Barnes-Paget, with a nod, and he took the envelope and slipped it into his pocket. "We're through, you fellows. Nice afternoon we've had, haven't we, Mr. Quail?"

A muttered curse was the answer to that.

"There's one more thing," added the Buccaneer, thoughtfully. "We don't like your sort around these parts, Mr. Quail. You may be quite popular, where you belong—in Dartmoor, or Pentonville, or wherever it is—but you don't attract us at all. We'd rather you kept clear altogether. I think very likely you'll be tired of this part of the country, after going through that pond. What do you think?"

"I—I—I——"

"Tip him in."

"Oh! Help! Stop—urrrggh!"

Splash!

Mr. Quail wallowed in shallow water and mud. He sprawled at full length, wallowing. The Sparshott juniors regarded him with smiling faces. Dripping with mud, hatless, streaming, Mr. Quail crawled out.

"Chuck him in again!" suggested Plum.

"We'll give him one minute to clear!" said Barnes-Paget. "If he's not out of sight in one minute, in he goes—and we'll keep him in for ten minutes."

"Good egg!" chuckled Tom Rake.

That was enough for Mr. Quail. He had had enough of that pond—too much. He bounded to his feet, and ran. His hat was in the pond, but Mr. Quail did not stop for his hat. He did not even remember it. He flew. Mud splattered in all directions as he fled: and he was out of sight under the minute.

"Can he run?" grinned the Buccaneer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time for some games-practice, when we get back," said Barnes-Paget, looking at his watch. "We'll post the letter as we go. I fancy that blighter won't be trying to carry on his business in these parts any more—I've got a strong impression that he didn't like that pond——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And buck up," added Barnes-Paget. "If we catch the early collection, Lamb will get this letter to-night—what a surprise packet for him, what?"

And the Sparshott juniors left the spot—quickly, though far from as quickly as Mr. Quail.

### ALL SERENE!

**T**RAMP! tramp! tramp!

Mr. Lamb was pacing his study.

It was evening. Other beaks were in the Common-Room. But Mr. Lamb was in no mood for the company of the other beaks in Common-Room. He was deeply disturbed and perturbed.

James Quail had not kept his appointment that afternoon.

Mr. Lamb had waited for a good hour, under the old oak, before he gave him up, and returned to the school. Why the man had

not come, Mr. Lamb could not guess—certainly he never dreamed that some members of his Form had anything to do with it.

What did it mean? Had the wretch repented of his rascality,

and decided to keep away? It did not seem likely. Yet why had he not come? Was there going to be a telephone call from him—or a letter by the last post? Mr. Lamb, in great uneasiness, wondered.

Tap!

"Come in!" said Mr. Lamb, faintly: and he breathed fast, as the House page brought in a letter, and laid it on the table.

"Thank you!" articulated Mr. Lamb. He did not touch the letter till the page was gone. But he looked at it, and saw that it was addressed in a hand he had seen once before. It was from Quail.

When the door was closed, Mr. Lamb picked up the letter, and with trembling fingers opened it. What was he to find inside?

What he found inside made him stare blankly. There was a note written apparently on a leaf torn from a pocket-book. It ran:

Sir,

I regret having taken the enclosed letter, which is your property, and which I now return to you.

Signed, James Quail.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Lamb.

He examined the letter that had been folded in the note. It was his own letter—the fatal letter written to Messrs. Tonge, Isaacs, and Tucker, and purloined from the firm's office by the rascally Quail.

"Bless my soul!" repeated Mr. Lamb.

For a long minute he stared at that letter, almost dazed.

"Bless my soul!" he repeated, for the third time.

He stepped across to the study fire, and dropped that letter into it. With deep relief he watched it consume to ashes.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lamb, for the fourth time.

He could only conclude that the man Quail, bad as he was, had repented of his intended rascality, and made amends. Whatever was the explanation, his trouble was over—he was no longer in the man's power. Mr. Lamb's step was light, and his face was bright, as he left his study—in a cheery mood now, for the company of the other beaks in the Common-Room!

"LAMB'S got over his tantrums!" Carboy remarked, in the Fourth form-room on Monday morning.

He had.

When Plum Tumpton dropped his Virgil with a resounding bang Mr. Lamb mildly told him to be more careful! When Tom Rake stumbled over his con, Mr. Lamb gently pointed his errors. When Lazy Lovelace yawned in class, Mr. Lamb glanced at him—and merely smiled. He was once more the "Pet Lamb": which was very pleasant for his form, and indeed for Lamb himself. And certainly neither Form nor Form-master dreamed that that happy change was due to Harry Vernon and Co., and most of all to Barnes-Paget, the scapegrace of the Fourth. What Mr. Lamb would have thought, had he known the facts, the Co. could not guess—but the Little Lamb was never likely to know that those cheery members of the form had been "Looking after Lamb!"

THE END.