

Mitford Bertram

Haviland's Chum



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Chapter One. The New Boy

“Hi! Blacky! Here – hold hard. D’you hear, Snowball?”

The last peremptorily. He thus addressed, paused, turned, and eyed somewhat doubtfully, not without a tinge of apprehension, the group of boys who thus hailed him.

“What’s your name?” pursued the latter, “Caesar, Pompey, Snowball – what?”

“Or Uncle Tom?” came another suggestion.

“I – new boy,” was the response.

“New boy! Ugh!” jeered one fellow. “Time I left if they are going to take niggers here. What’s your name, sir – didn’t you hear me ask?”

“Mpukuza.”

“Pookoo – how much?”

For answer the other merely emitted a click, which might have conveyed contempt, disgust, defiance, or a little of all three. He was an African lad of about fifteen, straight and lithe and well-formed, and his skin was of a rich copper brown. But there was a clean-cut look about the set of his head, and an almost entire absence of negro development of nose and lips, which seemed to point to the fact that it was with no inferior race aboriginal to the dark continent that he owned nationality.

Now a hoot was raised among the group, and there was a tendency to hustle this very unwonted specimen of a new boy. He, however, took it good-humouredly, exhibiting a magnificent set of teeth in a tolerant grin. But the last speaker, a biggish, thick-set fellow who was something of a bully, was not inclined to let him down so easily.

“Take off your hat, sir!” he cried, knocking it off the other’s head, to a distance of some yards. “Now, Mr Woollyhead, perhaps you’ll answer my question and tell us your name, or I shall have to see if some of this’ll come out.” And, suiting the action to the word, he reached forward and grabbed a handful of the other’s short, crisp, jetty curls – jerking his head backwards and forwards.

The African boy uttered a hoarse ejaculation in a strange tongue, and his features worked with impotent passion. He could not break loose, and his tormentor was taller and stronger than himself. He put up his hands to free himself, but the greater his struggles the more the bully jerked him by the wool, with a malignant laugh. The others laughed too, enjoying the fun of what they regarded as a perfectly wholesome and justifiable bout of nigger baiting.

But a laugh has an unpleasant knack of transferring itself to the other side, and in this instance an interruption occurred – wholly unlooked-for, but sharp and decisive, not to say violent, and to the prime mover in the sport highly unpleasant – for it took the shape of a hearty, swinging cuff on the side of that worthy’s head. He, with a howl that was half a curse, staggered a yard or two under the force of the blow, at the same time loosing his hold of his victim. Then the latter laughed – being the descendant of generations of savages – laughed loud and maliciously.

“Confound it, Haviland, what’s that for?” cried the smitten one, feeling round upon his smiter.

“D’you want some more, Jarnley?” came the quick reply. “As it is I’ve a great mind to have you up before the prefects’ council for bullying a new boy.”

“Prefects’ council,” repeated Jarnley with a sneer. “That’s just it. If you weren’t a prefect, Haviland, I’d fight you. And you know it.”

“But I don’t know it and I don’t think it,” was the reply. The while, something of a smothered hoot was audible among the now rapidly increasing group, for Haviland, for reasons which will hereinafter appear, was not exactly a popular prefect. It subsided however, as by magic, when he darted a glance into the quarter whence it arose.

“Come here – you,” he said, beckoning the cause of all the disturbance. “What’s your name?”

“Mpukuza.”

“What?”

The African boy repeated it unhesitatingly, willingly. He was quick to recognise the difference between constituted authority and the spurious and usurped article – besides, here was one who had intervened to turn the tables on his oppressor.

“Rum name that!” said his new questioner, eyeing him with some curiosity, at the full-throated native vowels. “Haven’t you got any other?”

“Other? Oh, yes, Anthony. Missionary name me Anthony.”

“Anthony? Well, that’s better. We can get our tongues round that. What are you, eh? Where d’you come from, I mean?”

“I’m a Zulu.”

A murmur of real interest ran through the listeners. Not so many years had passed since the dramatic episodes of ’79 but that some of the bigger boys there, including Haviland, were old enough to remember the war news reaching English shores, while all were more or less familiar with it in story. And here was one of that famous nationality among them as a schoolfellow.

“Now look here, you fellows,” said the prefect, when he had put a few more questions to the newcomer. “This chap isn’t to be bullied, d’you see, because he doesn’t happen to be like everybody else. Give him a fair show and see what he’s made of, and he’ll come out all right I expect.”

“Please, Haviland, he cheeked Jarnley,” cut in a smaller boy who was one of the last-named’s admirers.

“Small wonder if he did,” was the uncompromising answer. “Now clear inside all of you, for you’re blocking the way, and it’s time for call-over. Who’ll ring the bell for me?”

“I will!” shouted half a dozen voices; for Haviland was prefect of the week, and as such responsible for the due ringing of the calling-over bell, an office almost invariably performed by deputy. There was no difficulty in finding such; incipient human nature being as willing to oblige a very real potentate as the developed and matured article.

It was half term at Saint Kirwin’s – which accounted for the arrival of a new boy in the middle of the term. Now, Saint Kirwin’s was not a first-rate public school, but it was run as nearly as possible upon the lines of one. We say as nearly as possible, because the material was so essentially different. There was no such thing as the putting down of names for the intending pupil, what time that interesting entity was in the red and squalling phase of existence. At Saint Kirwin’s they would take anybody’s son, provided the said anybody was respectable, and professed to belong to the Established Church; and whereas the terms were excessively moderate, well – they got anybody’s son. There was, however, a fair sprinkling of those who but for the shallowness of the parental purse would have been at Eton or Harrow or some kindred institution – among whom was Haviland, but the majority was composed of those at whom the more venerable foundations would not have looked – among whom was Jarnley. However, even these latter Saint Kirwin’s managed to lick into very tidy sort of shape.

The situation of the place left nothing to be desired. The school buildings, long, high-gabled, drawn round two quadrangles, were sufficiently picturesque to be in keeping with the beautiful pastoral English scenery amid which they stood – green field and waving woodland studded with hamlet and spire, undulating away to a higher range of bare down in the background – all of which looked at its best this fair spring afternoon, with the young leaves just budding, and the larks, soaring overhead, pouring forth their volume of song.

As the calling-over bell jangled forth its loud, inexorable note, upwards of three hundred and fifty boys, of all sorts and sizes, came trooping towards the entrance from every direction – hot and ruddy from the playing fields – here and there, an athletic master, in cricket blazer, amid a group of bigger boys who had been bowling to him; others dusty and panting after a long round across country in search of birds' eggs – performed nearly all the time at a run – others again of a less energetic disposition, cool and lounging, perchance just gulping down some last morsels of “tuck” – all crowded in at the gates, and the cool cloisters echoed with a very Babel of young voices as the restless stream poured along to fill up the big schoolroom. Then might be heard shouts of “Silence!” “Stop talking there!” “Don't let me have to tell you again!” and so on – as the prefect in charge of each row of boys stood, note-book in hand, ready to begin the “calling-over.”

“I say, Haviland,” said Laughton, the captain of the school, in a low voice, “you're to go to the Doctor after call-over. I'm afraid you're in for it, old chap.”

“Why? What on earth about? I haven't been doing anything,” answered the other, in genuine surprise – “at least – ” he added as a recollection of the smack on the head he had administered to Jarnley occurred to him. But no, it couldn't be that, for therein he had been strictly discharging his duty.

“I don't know myself,” rejoined Laughton. “He stopped me as I passed him in the cloisters just now, and told me to tell you. He was looking jolly glum too.”

Another half-smothered shout or two of “Silence” interrupted them, and then you might have heard a pin drop as the master of the week entered, in this case the redoubtable “Head” himself, an imposing figure in his square cap and flowing gown as he swept up to the great central desk, and gave the signal for the calling-over to begin.

Haviland, shouting out name after name on his list, did so mechanically, and his mind was very ill at ease. His conscience was absolutely clear of any specific offence, but that was no great consolation, for the Doctor's lynx eye had a knack of unearthing all sorts of unsuspected delinquencies, prefects especially being visited with vicarious penalties. That was it. He was going to suffer for the sins of somebody else, and it was with the gloomiest of anticipations that he closed his note-book and went up to make his report.

Chapter Two. The Headmaster

The Reverend Nicholas Bowen, D.D., headmaster of Saint Kirwin's, ruled that institution with a sway that was absolutely and entirely despotic. His aim was to model it on the lines of the greater public schools as much as possible, and to this end his assistant staff were nearly all university graduates, and more than half of them in Holy Orders. He was a great believer in the prefectorial system, and those of the school selected to carry it out were entrusted with large powers. On the other hand, they were held mercilessly responsible even for unconscious failures of duty, and on this ground alone the luckless Haviland had ample cause for his misgivings.

The outward aspect, too, of the Doctor was eminently calculated to command the respect of his juvenile kingdom. He was very tall and strongly built, and half a lifetime of pedagogic despotism had endowed him with a sternness of demeanour awe-inspiring enough to his charges, though when turned towards the outside world, as represented by his clerical colleagues for instance, it smacked of a pomposity bordering on the absurd. He had his genial side, however, and was not averse to the cracking of pedagogic jokes, at which he expected the form to laugh. It is almost unnecessary to add that the form never by any chance disappointed him.

To-day, however, no trace of such geniality was discernible, nothing but a magisterial severity in every movement of the massive iron grey head, a menace in the fierce brown eyes, as in a word, sounding like the warning bark of an angry mastiff, he ordered the whole school to keep their places. The whole school did so, and that with a thrill of pleasurable excitement. There was no end of a row on, it decided, and as it only concerned the one who was standing alone before the dread presence, the residue prepared to enjoy the situation.

It was the more enjoyable to the vast majority of the spectators because the delinquent was a prefect, and not a very popular one at that.

"Have you any further report to make, Haviland?" said the headmaster.

"No, sir," answered Haviland in genuine surprise, for he had made his reports, all in order, his own roll, and the general report as prefect of the week. Yet he didn't like the tone. It sounded ominous.

"Ah! Let Finch and Harris step forward."

Two quaking juniors slunk from their places, and stood in the awful presence. The crime charged against the luckless pair was that of trespass. The system of "bounds" did not exist at Saint Kirwin's, though there were limits of time, such being constituted by frequent callings-over. Otherwise the school could wander as it listed, the longest stretch obtainable being about an hour and three-quarters. There had, however, been a good many complaints of late with regard to boys overrunning the neighbouring pheasant coverts in search of birds' nests, for egg-collecting had many enthusiastic votaries in the school, and now these two luckless ones, Finch and Harris, had been collared red-handed that very afternoon by a stalwart keeper, and hauled straight away to the Doctor.

But where did Haviland come in? Just this way. In the course of a severe cross-examination in private, the headmaster had elicited from the two frightened juniors that when emerging from some forbidden ground they had seen Haviland under circumstances which rendered it impossible that he should not have seen them. It is only fair to the two that they hardly knew themselves how the information had been surprised out of them – certain it was that no other master could have done it – only the terrible Doctor. It had been ruled of late, by reason of the frequency of such complaints, that all cases of trespass on preserved land should be reported, instead of being dealt with as ordinary misdemeanours by the prefects; and here was a most flagrant instance of breach of trust on the part of one of the latter. As for Haviland, the game was all up, he decided. He would be deprived of

his official position, and its great and material privileges, and be reduced to the ranks. He expected nothing less.

“Now, Haviland,” said the Doctor, “how is it you did not report these boys?”

“I ought to have, sir,” was the answer.

“You ought to have,” echoed the Doctor, his voice assuming its most awe-inspiring tones. “And, did you intend to report them?”

Here was a loophole. Here was a chance held out to him. Why not grasp it? At best he would get off with a severe wiggling, at worst with an imposition. It would only be a white lie after all, and surely under the circumstances justifiable. The stern eyes of the headmaster seemed to penetrate his brain, and every head was craned forward open-mouthed for his answer. It came.

“I’m afraid I did not, sir.”

“You are afraid you did not! Very well. Then there is no more to be said.” And the Doctor, bending down, was seen to be writing something on a slip of paper – the while the whole school was on tenterhooks, but the excitement was of a more thrilling nature than ever now. What would be the upshot? was in every mind. A swishing of course. Not for Haviland though; he was too old, and a prefect. He would be reduced.

Then the headmaster looked up and proceeded to pass sentence.

“These continual complaints on the part of the neighbours,” he said, “are becoming very serious indeed, and are getting the school a very bad name. I am determined to put a stop to them, and indeed it is becoming a grave question with me whether I shall not gate the whole school during the remainder of the term. These two boys, who have been brought up to me, represent a number of cases, I am afraid, wherein the offenders escape undetected and unpunished: therefore I shall make a severe example of them, and of any others in like case. And now a word to the prefects.”

A long, acrid, and bitter homily for the benefit of those officials followed – the juniors listening with intense delight, not that the order was especially unpopular, but simply the outcome of the glee of juvenile human nature over those set in authority over it being rated and brought to book in their turn. Then, having descanted on authority and trust, and so forth, until every one of those officially endowed with such responsibility began almost to wish they were not – with the exception perhaps of the one who stood certain to be deprived of it – the headmaster proceeded:

“Harris and Finch, I shall flog you both to-morrow morning after divinity lesson, and I may add that any boy reported to me for the same offence will certainly receive the same treatment. As for you, Haviland,” handing him the slip of paper on which he had been writing, “you will post this upon the board. And I warn you that any further dereliction of duty on your part brought to my notice will entail very much more severe consequences.”

Mechanically Haviland took the paper, containing of course the notice of his suspension, and could hardly believe his eyes. This is what he read:

“Haviland. Prefect.

“Fifteen hundred lines (of Virgil). For gross neglect of duty. Gated till done.

“Nicholas Bowen, D.D., Headmaster.”

The great bound of relief evolved by the respite of the heavier penalty was succeeded in his mind by resentment and disgust as he realised the magnitude of this really formidable imposition. The Doctor had left the desk and the room, and now the whole gathering was pouring forth to the outer air again. Not a few curious glances were turned on Haviland to see how he took it: the two condemned juniors, however, being surrounded by a far more boisterously sympathetic crowd – those who had been swished before undertaking, with a hundredfold wealth of exaggeration, to explain to these two, who had not, what it felt like, by way of consolation.

“What’s he given you, Hav?” said Medicott, a fellow prefect, and rather a chum of the principal victim’s, looking over the notice. “That all! You’ve got off cheap, I can tell you. We reckoned it meant suspension – especially as Nick has a down on you.”

“Nick,” be it observed, was the inevitable name by which the redoubtable headmaster was known among the boys. It had started as “Old Nick,” but the suggestion diabolical had been sacrificed to brevity.

“That all!” echoed Haviland wrathfully. “Fifteen hundred’s a howling stiff impos, Medicott. And it really means two thou, for the old brute always swears about a third of your stuff is so badly written you’ve got to do it over again. It’s a regulation time-honoured swindle of his. And – just as the egg-season is getting at its best! It’s too beastly altogether.”

Haviland was an enthusiastic egg-hunter, and had a really fine collection. In the season he lived for nothing else, every moment of his spare time being given up to adding to it. Of course he himself frequently transgressed the laws of trespass, but he was never known to bring a junior to book for doing so – on the contrary, he was always careful to look the other way if he suspected the presence of any such.

Now, having fixed the hateful notice to the board nailed to the wall for such purposes, he got out a Virgil and sat down to begin his odious task. The big schoolroom was empty save for a few who were under like penalty with himself. What a lovely afternoon it was, and he would have had nearly an hour and a half, just time to go over and secure the two remaining eggs in that sparrow-hawk’s nest in the copse at the foot of the down – a programme he had mapped out for himself before this grievous misfortune had overtaken him. Now some other fellow would find them, or they would be “set” and useless before he could get out again. “Gated till done.” Half the sting of the penalty lay in those abominable words – for it meant that no foot could be set outside the school gates until the whole of it was completed.

“I say, Haviland. We’re no end sorry.”

The interruption proceeded from the two smaller culprits, predestined to the rod on the morrow. Haviland looked up wrathfully.

“Sorry, are you, you young sweeps? So am I – sorry I didn’t ‘sock’ your heads off.”

“Please, Haviland, can’t we do your impos for you – or at any rate some of it?”

“D’you think Old Nick’s such an ass as all that? Why, he’d spot the fraud a mile off! Besides, remember what he said about breach of trust and all that. He’d better keep that for chapel next Sunday,” he added sneeringly. “Look here, you youngsters, you’ll be well swished to-morrow, a round dozen at least, and you’d better toss for second innings, because then Nick’ll be getting tired – but anyway you’re not gated and I am. Will you go and take a nest for me?”

“Rather. Where is it?” chorussed both boys eagerly.

“Smallest of the two tree patches, foot of Sidebury Down. Sparrow-hawk’s – in an ivy-hung ash. It’s quite an easy climb. You can’t miss it, and there should be two eggs left in it. I collared two a couple of days back, and put in stones. You won’t get pickled for it any more either, because it isn’t on preserved ground. You’ll have to run all the way though.”

They promised, and were off like a shot, and it is only fair to say that they brought back the spoil, and duly and loyally handed it over to its legitimate claimant.

Left to himself, Haviland set to work with an effort. After a hundred of the lines he flung his pen down angrily.

“Hang it, I hate this beastly place,” he muttered to himself. “I don’t care how soon I leave.”

This was not strictly true. He liked the school and its life, in reality more than he was aware of himself. He was always glad to get back to it, for his home life was unattractive. He was the son of an extremely conscientious but very overworked and very underpaid parson, the vicar of a large and shabby-genteel suburban parish, and the fresh, healthy, beautiful surroundings of Saint Kirwin’s all unconsciously had their effect upon his impressionable young mind, after the glaring dustiness, or

rain-sodden mud according to the season of the year – of the said suburb. He was a good-looking lad of seventeen, well-grown for his age, and seeming older, yet thus early somewhat soured, by reason of the already felt narrowing effects of poverty, and an utter lack of anything definite in the way of prospects; for he had no more idea of what his future walk in life was to be than the man in the moon.

And so he sat, that lovely cloudless half-holiday afternoon, grinding out his treadmill-like imposition, angrily, rebelliously, his one and only thought to get that over as soon as possible.

Chapter Three. The Bully

Haviland's gloomy prediction proved in so far correct, in that when, after nearly a weary week of toil during his spare moments, he handed in his imposition, his insatiable taskmaster insisted on his re-writing two hundred of the lines. Then with lightened heart he found himself free to resume his all-engrossing and gloriously healthy pursuit.

There is, or used to be, a superstition that a boy who didn't care for cricket or football must necessarily be an ass, a loafer, and to be regarded with some suspicion. Yet in point of fact such by no means follows, and our friend Haviland was a case in point. He could cover as many miles of ground in the limited time allowed as any one in the school, and more than most. He could climb anything, could pick his way delicately through the most forbidden ground, quartering it exhaustively every yard, what time his natural enemy the keeper, his suspicions roused, was on the watch in the very same covert, and return safe and sound with his pearly treasures – to excite the envy and admiration of the egg-collecting fraternity; yet though this represented his pet hobby, he was something of an all-round naturalist, and his wanderings in field and wood were by no means confined to the nesting season.

He might have liked cricket could he have been always in, but fielding out he pronounced beastly slow. As for football he declared he couldn't see any fun in having his nose jammed an inch and a half deep into liquid mud, with ten or a dozen fellows on top of him trying to jam it in still deeper: and in the result he always wanted to hit some one when he got up again. Besides, a game you were obliged to play whether you wanted to or not, ceased to be a game at all – and during its season football was compulsory on half-holidays, at any rate for the juniors. Now, as a prefect, he was exempt, and he appreciated his exemption. But, his distaste for the *two* great games notwithstanding, there was nothing of the loafer or the muff about Haviland. He was always in the pink of hard training, clear-eyed, clean-skinned, thoroughly sound in wind and limb.

In the matter of his school work we regret to say that our friend cut a less creditable figure; for in it indeed he shone in no particular branch. His sole object was to get through his work as quickly and as easily as possible, thereby to have more time for his favourite pursuit, wherefore his ambition soared no higher than a respectable middle of the fifth form. The ethics of Saint Kirwin's held "cribs" to be perfectly justifiable – needless to say not from the masters' point of view – and a large proportion generously availed themselves of such dubious aid, being of course careful to avoid all the stock catches. Even a certain amount of cribbing in form was held not to be unlawful, although perilous; and when the Reverend Joseph Wilmot – an absent and star-gazing type of master – gravely and impressively warned his Greek Testament form one Sunday, *à propos* of some suspiciously technical construing, that he should, detect in a moment if any one used the English version, the form was simply dying to roar; the point of the joke being that every fellow composing it had got his English version concealed beneath his locker, and was surreptitiously reading up the part where he would be put on, this having been the practice of the form from time immemorial, and, we grieve to say, destined to continue so indefinitely.

"Serve 'em right," pronounced Haviland, who was one of the offenders. "They've no business to make us work on Sundays. It's smashing up the fourth commandment. So if we take the English in to form with us it saves us from working, and we get out of smashing the fourth commandment. See?"

They did see, for a shout of acclamation hailed this young casuist's special pleading. "Besides," he added, "Old Joe is such an ass. Detect in a moment if any one used the English! Faugh! As if any one in this form had ever done anything else?"

It may be thought that by reason of his own delinquencies Haviland's authority as a prefect would have been partially if not entirely undermined, yet such was not the case, for under the school

code they were justified, whereas the terrible crime of “sneaking” was as much the one unpardonable sin at Saint Kirwin’s as elsewhere. And in the enforcement of that authority he was pitiless, hence his unpopularity – but it answered – and whether he presided over preparation, or in the dormitory, or elsewhere, order reigned. The spirits of misrule were laid.

Once indeed an offender thought to round on him. He had unearthed a smoking case, and the use of tobacco was of course a capital offence. One of the offenders – three biggish fellows by the way – had said meaningly:

“If you do anything in this, Haviland, we can hand you up. We saw you in Needham’s Cope only last week, and other places besides.”

“All right, Starford. You must go before the next prefects’ council, all three of you. This’ll mean a licking I’m afraid, but you’ll have an appeal to the Doctor. You can give me away then if you think it’ll do yourselves any good, but I believe you know Nick better than that.”

He was right, except that the headmaster took the matter out of the prefectorial hands and soundly flogged the culprits himself. But no word did these utter with regard to any delinquency on the part of him who was instrumental in bringing them to justice.

Meanwhile the Zulu boy, Anthony, otherwise Mpukuza, was not finding life at Saint Kirwin’s exactly a bed of roses, the more so that Jarnley and a few other choice spirits were making it their especial business that he should not. Deprived of the protection of his first and accidental defender, he was very much at their mercy. Haviland was gated, and would so remain for some days to come, and so long as they could catch their victim outside, this rough element promised itself plenty of fun. There was no fear of the victim himself giving it away, for although complaining to a prefect was immeasurably less heinous than complaining to a master, still it was not held justifiable except in very extreme cases.

“Come down and have a bathe with us, Snowball,” cried Jarnley, catching sight of his intended victim, while proceeding with a group of his followers to one of the school bathing-places.

“Can you swim, Cetchy?” cried another of the group – that being the Zulu boy’s nickname as the nearest they could get to Cetywayo.

“Swim – eh? Well, I dunno.”

“Come along then, and we’ll teach you,” and grins of malignant delight went round the group. They anticipated no end of fun. They were going to duck this somewhat unusual specimen until they nearly drowned him. Jarnley, in particular, was radiant.

Mpukuza grinned too. There was no escape. They had hedged him about too completely for that. He might as well accept the situation good-humouredly. And – he did.

About half a mile from the school buildings there flowed an insignificant sluggish river, opening here and there into broad deep pools. One of these, screened off, and fitted with a diving board, constituted the bathing-place of those who had passed a certain swimming test, and thus were entitled to disport themselves aquatically when they listed. It was not a good bathing-place, far from it, for the bottom was coated thickly with slimy mud. Still, it was the best obtainable under the circumstances.

Jarnley and Co. unvested in a trice, nor did their intended victim take any longer.

“Come along, Cetchy,” laughed Jarnley, grabbing the other by the scruff of the neck, and leaping out into deep water with him. “Now I’ll teach you, you black beast,” he snarled, between the panting and puffing extracted by the coldness of the water as they both rose to the surface. “I’m going to duck you till you’re nearly dead. Take that first though,” hitting him a smart smack on the side of the face. Those still on the bank yelled with delight, and hastened to spring into the water in order to get their share of the fun.

They got it. The African boy uttered an exclamation of dismay, broke away from his tormentors, and in a few swift strokes splashed across to the furthest and deepest side of the pool. This was what they wanted. With more yells of delight all hands swam in pursuit.

Mpukuza was holding on to a trailing bough, his copper-coloured face above water, showing every indication of alarm, as his assailants drew near.

“Now we’ll duck him!” yelled Jarnley. “It’s jolly deep here.”

But as they swooped towards him something strange happened – something strange and utterly unexpected. The round head and dark scared countenance had disappeared. So, too, at that moment did Jarnley, but not before he had found time to utter a yell – a loud yell – indicative of surprise and scare – drowned the next second in bubble and splash.

What on earth did it mean? That Jarnley was playing the fool, was the first idea that occurred to the spectators as they swam around or trod water – the next that he had been seized with cramp. But what about Cetchy? He too, was under water, and they hadn’t gone down together, for Jarnley hadn’t touched him yet.

No – he hadn’t. But Mpukuza knew a trick worth two of waiting for that. These confiding youths had overlooked the possibility that this descendant of many generations of savage warriors might be far more at home in the water than they were themselves. But such in fact was the case. Watching his opportunity, as his would-be tormentors bore down upon him, the Zulu boy had simply dived, and grabbing Jarnley by both ankles dragged him under water. And there he held him – and all the bully’s frantic attempts to escape were in vain. The grasp on his ankles was that of a vice; and when at last it did relax, Jarnley rose to the surface only to sink again, so exhausted was he. He was in fact drowning, and but for his intended victim – who rose unruffled, unwinded, even smiling, and at once seized him and towed him to the bank – he would actually have lost his life. For the African boy could remain under water a vast deal longer than they could, and that with the most perfect ease.

“What’s all this about?”

The voice – sharp, clear, rather high-pitched – had the effect of a sort of electric shock on the streaming and now shivering group gathered round the gasping and prostrate Jarnley, as it started round, not a little guiltily, to confront a master.

The aspect of the latter was not reassuring, being decidedly hostile. With his head thrown back he gazed on the dumb-founded group with a stony stare.

“Umph! Bathing before permission has been given?” he said.

“That black beast! I’ll kill him,” muttered the muddled and confused Jarnley.

“Eh? What’s the fellow saying?” cried the new arrival sharply, who, by the way, was dressed in clerical black himself, and was now inspired with the idea that the speaker was suffering from sunstroke, and was off his head. For all its apprehensiveness, a sickly grin ran round the group.

“He’s talking about Cetchy – er – I mean Anthony, sir,” explained some one.

Now the Reverend Alfred Augustus Sefton was endowed with a vast fund of humour, but it was of the dry quality, and he was sharp withal. He had seen more than they knew, and now, looking from one to the other, the situation suddenly dawned upon him, and it amused him beyond words. But he was a rigid disciplinarian.

“What have you been doing to him?” he said, fixing the African boy with his straight glance.

“Doing? Nothing, sir. We play in the water. He try how long he keep me under. I try how long I keep him under. That all. That all, sir.” And a dazzling stripe of white leaped in a broad grin across the speaker’s face – while all the other boys tittered. Mr Sefton gave a suspicious choke.

“That all!” he echoed. “But that isn’t all,” and extracting an envelope and a pencil from his pocket, he began to take down their names. “No, that isn’t all by any means. Each of you will do four hundred lines for bathing before permission has been given, except Anthony, who will do one hundred only because he’s a new boy. Now get into your clothes sharp and go straight back and begin, and if you’re not in the big schoolroom by the time I am, I’ll double it.”

There was a wholesome straightforwardness about Mr Sefton’s methods that admitted of no argument, and it was a very crestfallen group that overtook and hurried past that disciplinarian as he made his way along the field-path, swinging his stick, his head thrown back, and his soft felt hat very

much on the back of it. And on the outskirts of the group at a respectful distance came Anthony, keen-eyed and quick to dodge more than one vengeful smack on the head which had been aimed at him – for these fairplay-loving young Britons must wreak their resentment on something – and dire and deep were the sinister promises thrown at the African boy, to be fulfilled when time and opportunity should serve.

Chapter Four. Concerning an Adventure

Mr Sefton did not immediately repair to the big schoolroom. When he did, however, the half-dozen delinquents were at work on their imposition. He strolled round apparently aimlessly, then peered into the fifth form room, where sat Haviland, writing his.

Haviland was not at first aware of the master's presence. An ugly frown was on his face, for he was in fact beginning the extra two hundred lines of which we have made mention. It was a half-holiday, and a lovely afternoon, and but for this he would have been out and away over field and down. He felt that he had been treated unfairly, and it was with no amiable expression of countenance that he looked up, and with something of a start became aware of the master's presence.

"Sit still, Haviland," said the latter kindly, strolling over to the desks. "Have you nearly done your imposition?"

"I've done it quite, sir, but you can always reckon on having to do a third of it over again when it's for the Doctor," he added with intense bitterness.

"Look here, you mustn't talk like that," rejoined Mr Sefton briskly, but there was a kindliness underlying his sharp tones which the other's ear was quick to perceive. They were great friends these two, and many an informal chat had they had together. It involved no favouritism either. Let Haviland break any rule, accidentally or not, within Mr Sefton's jurisdiction, and the imposition entailed was not one line shorter than that set to anybody else under like circumstances, as he had reason to know by experience. Yet that made no difference in his regard for this particular master.

"Well, it's hard luck all the same, sir," he now replied. "However, this time I've got off cheap with only a couple of hundred over again. But it has done me out of this afternoon."

Mr Sefton had hoisted himself on to one of the long desks and sat swinging his legs and his stick.

"What d'you think?" he said. "I've caught half a dozen fellows bathing just now. The new boy Anthony was among 'em. And he'd nearly drowned Jarnley – the beggar! What d'you think of that?"

"What, sir? Nearly drowned him?"

"I should think so," pursued the master, chuckling with glee. "Jarnley lay there gasping like a newly caught fish. It seems he'd been trying to duck Cetchy, and Cetchy ducked him instead. Nearly drowned him too. Ha – ha!"

Haviland roared too.

"That chap'll be able to take care of himself, I believe, sir," he said. "I need hardly have smacked Jarnley's head for bullying him the other day."

"I know you did," said the other dryly, causing Haviland to stop short with a half grin, as he reflected how precious little went on in the school that Sefton didn't know.

"Well, he's got four hundred lines to get through now," went on the latter. "I let Cetchy off with a hundred."

"I expect the other fellows made him go with them, sir," said Haviland. "And he's hardly been here a week yet."

"If I let him off them, the other fellows'll take it out of him," said Mr Sefton, who understood the drift of this remark.

"They'll do that anyhow, sir. But I've a notion they'll tire of it before long."

So Anthony was called and made to give his version of the incident, which he did in such manner as to convulse both master and prefect – and, to his great delight, the imposition was remitted altogether.

“He’s no end of an amusing chap that, sir,” said Haviland when the African boy had gone out. “He has all sorts of yarns about Zululand – can remember about the war too. He’s in my dormitory, you know, sir, and he yarns away by the hour – ”

The speaker broke off short and somewhat confusedly – as a certain comical twinkle in Mr Sefton’s eyes reminded him how guilelessly he was giving himself away: for talking in the dormitories after a certain time, and that rather brief, was strictly forbidden. Mr Sefton, secretly enjoying his confusion, coughed dryly, but made no remark. After all, *he* was not Haviland’s dormitory master.

“What a big fellow you’re getting, Haviland!” he said presently. “I suppose you’ll be leaving us soon?”

“I hope not, sir, at least not for another couple of terms. Then I expect I’ll have to.”

“You’re not eager to, then?” eyeing him curiously.

“Not in the least.”

“H’m! What are they going to make of you when you do leave?”

The young fellow’s face clouded.

“Goodness only knows, sir. I suppose I’ll have to go out and split rails in the bush, or something about as inviting, or as paying.”

“Well, I don’t know that you’ll be doing such a bad thing in that, Haviland,” rejoined Mr Sefton, “if by ‘splitting rails’ you mean launching out into some form of colonial life. But whatever it is you’ve got to throw yourself into it heart and soul, but I should think you’d do that from what I’ve seen of you here. At any rate, life and its chances are all in front of you instead of half behind you, and you’ve got to determine not to make a mess of it, as so many fellows do. Well, I didn’t come in here to preach you a sermon, so get along with your lines and start clear again.” And the kind-hearted disciplinarian swung himself off the desk and departed, and with him nearly all the rankling bitterness which had been corroding Haviland’s mind. The latter scribbled away with a will, and at length threw down his pen with an ejaculation of relief.

Even then he could not go out until the lines had been shown up. The next best thing was to look out, and so he climbed up to sit in the open window. The fair English landscape stretched away green and golden in the afternoon sunlight. The shrill screech of swifts wheeling overhead mingled with the twittering of the many sparrows which rendered the creepers clinging to the wall of the school buildings untidy with their nests. Then the clear song of larks soaring above mead and fallow, and farther afield the glad note of the cuckoo from some adjoining copse. Boys were passing by twos and threes, and now and then a master going for his afternoon stroll. Haviland, gazing out from his perch in the window, found himself thinking over Mr Sefton’s words. He supposed he should soon be leaving all this, but didn’t want to. He liked the school: he liked the masters, except the Head perhaps, who seemed for no reason at all to have a “down” on him. He liked the freedom allowed by the rules outside school hours, and thoroughly appreciated his own post of authority, and the substantial privileges it carried with it. A voice from outside hailed him.

“Hi – Haviland! Done your impos yet?”

“Yes.”

“Come with me after call-over. I’ve got a good thing. Owl’s nest. Must have two to get at it.”

The speaker was one Corbould major, a most enthusiastic egg-hunter, and, though not a prefect, a great friend of Haviland’s by reason of being a brother sportsman.

“Can’t. I’m gated. Won’t be able to take the lines up to Nick till to-morrow.”

“Why not try him in his study now? He’s there, for I saw him go in – and he’s in a good humour, for he was grinning and cracking jokes with Laughton and Medlicott. Try him, any way.”

“All right,” said Haviland, feeling dubious but desperate, as he climbed down from the window.

It required some intrepidity to invade the redoubtable Head in his private quarters, instead of waiting until he appeared officially in public; however, as Corbould had divined, the great Panjandrum

happened to be in high good humour, and was graciously pleased to accept the uttermost farthing, and release the prisoner then and there.

Half an hour later two enthusiastic collectors might have been seen, speeding along a narrow lane at a good swinging, staying trot. A quick glance all round, then over a stile and along a dry ditch skirting a long high hedge. Another quick look round, and both were in a small hazel copse. On the further side of this, in a field just outside it, stood a barn. This was their objective.

Now, before leaving cover, they reconnoitred carefully and exhaustively. The farmhouse to which the barn belonged stood but two fields off, and they could distinctly hear the cackling of the fowls around it – and in another direction they could see men working in the fields at no great distance. Needless to say, the pair were engaged in an act of flagrant trespass.

“That’s all right so far,” whispered Corbould major, as they stood within the gloom of the interior, feebly illuminated by streaks of light through the chinks. “There’s the nest, up there, in that corner, and you’ll have to give me a hoist up to the beam from the other end. We can’t take it from this because there’s a hen squatting on a lot of eggs right underneath, and she’ll kick up such a beastly row if we disturb her.”

A warning “cluck-cluck” proceeding from the fowl in question had already caused Haviland something of a start. However, they were careful not to alarm her, and she sat on. Meanwhile, Corbould had reached the beam, and with some difficulty had drawn himself up and was now creeping along it.

Haviland’s heart was pulsating with excitement as he stood there in the semi-gloom, watching his companion’s progress, for the adventure was a bold one, and the penalty of detection condign. Now a weird hissing arose from the dark corner overhead, as Corbould, worming his way along the beam, drew nearer and nearer to it, and then, and then, to him above and to him below, it seemed that there came a hissing as of a thousand serpents, a whirlwind of flapping wings, a gasp, a heavy fall, a crash, and he who had been aloft on yonder beam now lay sprawling beneath it, while the hen, which had saved itself as though by a miracle, was dashing round and round the barn, uttering raucous shrieks of terror.

“You ass! You’ve done it now!” exclaimed Haviland, horror-stricken, as he surveyed his chum, who, half-stupefied, was picking himself up gingerly. And he had. For what he had “done” was to lose his hold and tumble right slap on top of the sitting hen, or rather where that nimble fowl had been a moment before, namely on the nest of eggs; and these being in a state of semi-incubation, it followed that the whole back of his jacket and trousers was in the most nauseous mess imaginable.

This was too much for Haviland, and, the peril of the situation notwithstanding, he laughed himself into a condition that was abjectly helpless.

“Shut up, Haviland, and don’t be an ass, for heaven’s sake! We must get out of this!” cried Corbould. “Scrag that beastly fowl. It’s giving away the whole show!” And indeed such was likely to be the result, for what with the owl hissing like a fury overhead, and the hen yelling below, it seemed that the din should be heard for miles.

A hedge stake, deftly shied, silenced the latter, and this first act of stern self-preservation accomplished, the second followed, viz.: to slip cautiously forth, and make themselves remarkably scarce. This they succeeded in doing. Luck favoured them, miraculously as it seemed, and, having put a respectable distance between themselves and the scene of the adventure, they made for a safe hiding-place where they could decide on the next move, for it was manifestly impossible for Corbould to show up in that state.

Snugly ensconced in a dry ditch, well overhung with brambles, they soon regained wind after their exertions and excitement. But Haviland, lying on the ground, laughed till he cried.

“If you could only have seen yourself, Corbould,” he stuttered between each paroxysm, “rising like Phoenix from the ashes! And that infernal fowl waltzing round and round the barn squawking like mad, and the jolly owl flapping and hissing up top there! O Lord, you’d have died!”

“We didn’t get the eggs, though. Wouldn’t have minded if we’d got the eggs.”

“Well, we won’t get them now, for I don’t suppose either of us’ll be such asses as to go near the place again this season after the to-do there’ll be when old Siggles discovers the smash up. It’s a pity to have done all that damage though, gets us a rottener name than ever.”

“It couldn’t. These beasts of farmers, it doesn’t hurt them if we hunt for nests. Yet they’re worse than the keepers. *They* have some excuse, the brutes.”

“How on earth were you such an ass as to come that cropper, Corbould?” said the other, going off into a paroxysm again.

“Oh, it’s all jolly fine, but what’d you have done with that beastly owl flapping around your ears and trying to peck your eyes out? But I say. What are we going to do about this?” showing the horrible mess his clothes were in.

Both looked blank for a few moments. Then Haviland brightened.

“Eureka!” he cried. “We’ll plaster you up with dry mud, and if you’re asked, you can swear you had a fall on your back. You did too, so that’ll be no lie.”

The idea was a good one. By dint of rubbing in handfuls of dry earth, every trace of the eggs, half-incubated as they were, was hidden. But as far as further disturbance at the hands of these two counted for anything the owl was allowed to hatch out its brood in peace. Not for any consideration would they have attempted further interference with it that season.

Chapter Five. “Haviland’s chum.”

When Haviland expressed his belief, in conversation with Mr Sefton, that the Zulu boy would prove able to take care of himself, he uttered a prediction which events seemed likely to bear out.

When three or four of the fellows who sat next to him in chapel conceived the brilliant idea of putting a large conical rose thorn – point uppermost of course – on the exact spot where that dark-skinned youth was destined to sit down on rising from his knees, they hardly foresaw the result, as three or four heads were quickly and furtively turned in anticipation of some fun. They were not disappointed either – for Simonds minor, the actual setter of the trap, shot up from his seat like a cork from a soda-water bottle, smothering an exclamation expressive of wild surprise and something else, while the descendant of generations of fighting savages sat tight in his, a rapt expression of innocence and unconcern upon his dark countenance. Nor did the fun end there, for the prefect in charge of that particular row, subsequently and at preparation time sent for Simonds minor, and cuffed him soundly for kicking up a disturbance in chapel, though this was a phase of the humour which, while appealing keenly to the spectators, failed to amuse Simonds minor in the very least. He vowed vengeance, not on his then executioner, but on Anthony.

Under a like vow, it will be remembered, was Jarnley. Not as before, however, did he propose to make things unpleasant for his destined victim. This time it should be on dry land, and when he got his opportunity he promised to make the very best of it, in which he was seconded by his following – who connected somehow the magnitude of the impos, given them by “that beast Sefton,” with the presence of “Cetchy” in their midst. So the party, having completed their said impos, spent the next few days, each armed with a concealed and supple willow switch, stalking their quarry during his wanderings afield; but here again the primitive instincts of the scion of a barbarian line rendered it impossible for them to surprise him, and as to catching him in open pursuit, they might as well have tried to run down a bird in the air. He would simply waltz away without an effort, and laugh at them: wherein he was filling Jarnley and Co.’s cup of wrath very full. But an event was destined to occur which should cause it to brim over.

One afternoon, owing to the noxious exhalations arising from a presumably poisoned rat within the wainscoting common to the third and fourth form rooms, both those classes were ordered to the big schoolroom, and allotted desk work to fill in the time.

Now the rows of lockers were arranged in tiers all down one half of the long room, leaving the other half open, with its big desk in the centre dominating the whole. Ill chance indeed was it that located Anthony’s form in the row beneath, and himself immediately in front of, his sworn foe.

Now Jarnley began to taste the sweets of revenge. More than one kick, hard and surreptitious, nearly sent the victim clean off the form, and the bright idea which occurred to Jarnley, of fixing a pin to the toe of his boot had to be abandoned, for the cogent reason that neither he nor any of his immediate neighbourhood could produce the pin. Meanwhile the master in charge lounged in the big desk, blissfully reading.

“Look here, Cetchy,” whispered Jarnley, having varied the entertainment with a few tweaks of his victim’s wool. “Turn round, d’you hear: put your finger on that.”

“That” being a penholder held across the top of one of the inkwells let into the desk.

“Put it on, d’you hear. I’ll let you off any more if you do. No – press hard.”

For Anthony had begun to obey orders, but gingerly. Once more was Jarnley digging his own grave, so to say. The black finger was now held down upon the round penholder, and of course what followed was a foregone conclusion. Its support suddenly withdrawn, knuckle deep went that unlucky digit into the well, but with such force that a very fountain of ink squirted upward, to splash down,

a long running smudge, right across the sheet of foolscap which Jarnley had just covered, thereby rendering utterly useless the results of nearly half an hour's work. This was too much. Reaching forward, the bully gripped the perpetrator of this outrage by the wool where it ended over the nape of the neck, and literally plucked out a wisp thereof.

"I'll kill you for this, you black devil," he said, in a snarling whisper.

But the reply was as startling as it was unexpected. Maddened by the acute pain, all the savage within him aroused, and utterly regardless of consequences, the Zulu boy swung round his arm like a flail, hitting Jarnley full across the face with a smack that resounded through the room, producing a dead and pin-dropping silence, as every head came round to see what had happened.

"What's all this?" cried the furious voice of the master in charge, looking quickly up. "Come out, you two boys. Come out at once."

Then, as the two delinquents stood up to come out of their places, a titter rippled through the whole room, for Jarnley's red and half scared, half furious countenance was further ornamented by a great black smear where his smiter's inky hand had fallen.

Now the Reverend Richard Clay was hot of temper, and his method under such circumstances as these short and effectual, viz.: to chastise the offenders first and institute enquiry afterwards, or not at all. Even during the time taken by these two to leave their places and stand before him, he had flung open the lid of the great desk, and jerked forth the cane always kept there; a long supple, well-hardened cane, well burnt at the end.

"Fighting during school time, were you?" he said. "Hold up your coat."

"Please sir, he shied a lot of ink over my work," explained Jarnley in desperation. Anthony the while said nothing.

"I don't care if he did," was the uncompromising reply. "Stand up and hold up your coat."

This Jarnley had no alternative but to do, and as Mr Clay did nothing by halves the patient was soon dancing on one foot at a time.

"No, no, I haven't done yet," said the master, in response to a muttered and spasmodic appeal for quarter. "I'll teach you to make a disturbance in schooltime when I'm in charge. There! Stand still."

And he laid it on – to the bitter end; and with such muscle and will that the bully could not repress one or two short howls as he received the final strokes. But the Zulu boy, whose turn now came, and who received the same unsparing allowance, took it without movement or sound.

"Go back to your seats, you two," commanded Mr Clay. "If any one else wants a dose of the same medicine, he knows how to get it," he added grimly, locking up the cane again.

"Oh, wait till I get you outside, you black beast," whispered the bully as they got back to their seats. "I'll only skin you alive – that's what I'll do."

"Come out again, Jarnley," rang out Mr Clay's clear, sharp voice. "Were you talking?" he queried, as the bully stood before him, having gone very pale over the prospect of a repetition of what he had just undergone.

"Yes, sir," he faltered, simply not daring to lie.

"I know you were," and again quickly the cane was drawn forth from its accustomed dwelling place. Then, as Jarnley was beginning to whine for mercy, the master as quickly replaced it.

"I'll try another plan this time," he said. "There's nothing like variety." The room grinned – "You'll do seven hundred and fifty lines for talking in school hours, and you're gated till they're done." The room was disappointed, for it was looking forward to another execution, moreover the bulk of it hated Jarnley. It consoled itself, however, by looking forward to something else, viz.: what was going to happen after school, and the smaller boys did not in the least envy Anthony.

The latter, for his part, knew what a thrashing was in store for him should he fail to make good his escape; wherefore the moment the word to dismiss was uttered, he affected a strategic movement which should enable him to gain the door under convoy of the retiring master, while not seeming to do so by design. Even in this he would hardly have succeeded, but that a simultaneous rush for

the door interposed a crowd between him and his pursuers, and again his luck was in the ascendant, and he escaped, leaving Jarnley and Co. to wreak their vengeance on some of the smaller boys for getting in their way.

Anthony had been put into Haviland's dormitory, which contained ten other boys, and was a room at the end of a much larger one containing forty. This also was under Haviland's jurisdiction, being kept in order by three other prefects. At night he was left entirely in peace, beyond a slight practical joke or two at first, for the others were not big enough to bully him, what time their ruler was perforce out of the room. Besides, they rather liked him, for, as we have heard so unguardedly divulged, he would tell them wonderful tales of his own country – for he was old enough to just remember some of the incidents of the war, and could describe with all the verve and fire of the native gift of narrative, the appearance of the terrible impis, shield- and spear-armed as they went forth to battle, the thunder of the war-song, and the grim and imposing battle array. He could tell, too, of vengeful and bleeding warriors, returning sorely wounded, of sudden panic flights of women and children – himself among them – and once indeed, albeit at some distance, he had seen the King. But on the subject of his parentage he was very reticent. His father was a valiant and skilled fighter – so too, had been all his ancestors – but he had fallen in the war. He himself had been educated by a missionary, and sent over to England to be further educated and eventually to be trained as a missionary himself, to aid in evangelising his own people; although with true native reticence he had refrained from owning that he had no taste for any such career. His forefathers had all been warriors, and he only desired to follow in their steps. Later on he imparted this to Haviland, but with all the others he kept up a certain reserve.

To Haviland, indeed, the African boy had attached himself in doglike fashion, ever since that potentate had interfered to rescue him from Jarnley; yet his motive in so doing was not that of self-preservation, for no word did he utter to his quondam protector that he was still a particular object of spite to Jarnley and his following. At first Haviland was bored thereby, then became interested, a change mainly brought about by a diffident entreaty to be allowed to see his collection of eggs, and also to be allowed to accompany him during the process of adding to it. This was granted, and Haviland was amazed at the extent of the Zulu boy's knowledge of everything to do with the bird and animal life of the fields and woods, although totally different from that of his own country. So he was graciously pleased to throw over him the wing of his patronage, and the beginning of this strange friendship was destined to lead to some very startling experiences indeed before it should end.

But the school regarded it with partly amused, partly contemptuous wonder, and in like spirit Anthony became known as "Haviland's chum."

Chapter Six. The Haunted Wood

“What a rum chap Haviland is!” said Laughton, the captain of the school, as from the window of the prefects’ room, he, with three or four others, stood watching the subject of the remark, rapidly receding into distance, for it was a half-holiday afternoon. “He and Cetchy have become quite thick.”

“I expect he finds him useful at egg-hunting,” said Medicott.

“Yes – and how about it being wrong form for us to go about with juniors?” struck in Langley, a small prefect who had attained to that dignity by reason of much “sapping,” but was physically too weak to sustain it adequately. “Haviland’s never tired of jamming that down our throats, but he doesn’t practise what he preaches. Eh?”

“Well, Corbould major’ll be a prefect himself next term,” said Medicott.

“Yes, but how about the nigger, Medicott? A nigger into the bargain. Haviland’s chum! I don’t know how Haviland can stick him,” rejoined the other spitefully, for he loved not Haviland.

“I wish he’d chuck that confounded egg-hunting, at any rate for this term,” said Laughton. “He’ll get himself reduced as sure as fate. Nick’s watching him like a cat does a mouse. He’s got a down on him for some reason or other – don’t know what it can be – and the very next row Haviland gets into he’ll reduce him. That’s an absolute cert.”

“Haviland did say he’d chuck it,” replied Medicott. “But what’s he to do? He’s a fellow who doesn’t care for games – swears cricket’s slow, and football always makes him want to hit somebody.”

“He’s a rum card,” rejoined Laughton. “Well, I’m going round to the East field to do some bowling. I expect Clay’ll be there. Coming, Medicott?”

“No. I don’t care about bowling to Clay. He expects you to keep at it all the time just because he’s a master. Never will bowl to you. I bar.”

The two under discussion were speeding along – Haviland jubilant over having obtained leave from call-over – thus being able to get very far afield. He fancied Mr Sefton, the master of the week, had eyed him rather curiously in granting it, but what did that matter? He had the whole afternoon before him.

As they proceeded, he was instructing the other in various landmarks, and other features of the country.

“Think you could find your way back all right, Cetchy?” he said, when they had proceeded some distance, “if you were left alone, I mean?”

“Find way? Left alone? What do you mean?”

“Why sometimes, if you get chevvi’d by a keeper it’s good strategy to separate, and get back round about. It boggles the enemy and at worst gives one of you a chance.”

“Find way – ha!” chuckled Anthony. “Well, rather. All that tree – hill over there – plenty church steeple. Fellows who can’t find way here must be thundering big fools.”

“Quite right. I hope we shan’t be put to it to-day, but it has saved both of us before. Though as a rule, Cetchy, I never go out with another fellow, except Corbould now and then. Much rather be alone – besides, when there are two fellows together they get jawing at the wrong time. Remember that, Cetchy. Once you’re off the road don’t say a word more than you can help – and only that in a whisper.”

The other nodded.

“I know,” he said.

“One time I had an awful narrow squeak,” pursued Haviland. “It was in Needham’s Copse, the very place Finch and Harris were swished for going through. There’s a dry ditch just inside where you can nearly always find a nightingale’s nest. I’d just taken one, and was starting to get back, when

I heard something and dropped down like a shot to listen. Would you believe it, Cetchy, there was a beast of a keeper with a brown retriever dog squatting against the hedge on the other side! It was higher than where I was lying, and I could see them against the sky, but they couldn't see me, and fortunately the hedge was pretty thick. The wonder was the dog didn't sniff me out, but he didn't. It was lively, I can tell you, for nearly an hour I had to squat there hardly able to breathe for fear of being heard. At last they cleared out and so did I. I was late for call-over of course, but Clay – it was his week – only gave me a hundred lines – said I looked so jolly dirty that I must have been running hard. He's a good chap, Clay, and a bit of a sportsman, although he is such a peppery devil. Well, Cetchy, you see if there had been two of us, one would have been bound to make a row, and then – what with the dog we couldn't have got clear. That would have meant a swishing, for I wasn't a prefect then."

With similar narratives did Haviland beguile the way and instruct his companion, therein however strictly practising what he preached, in that he kept them for such times as they should be upon the Queen's highway, or pursuing a legitimate path.

So far, they had found plenty of spoil, but mostly of the commoner sorts and not worth taking – at least not from Haviland's point of view – all of whose instincts as a sportsman were against wanton destruction.

"Why don't you begin collecting, Cetchy?" he said, as, seated on a stile, they were taking a rest and a look round. "I should have thought it was just the sort of thing you'd take to kindly."

"Yes. I think I will."

"That's right. We'll start you with all we take to-day, except one or two of the better sorts, and those we'll halve. What have we got already? Five butcher-bird's, four nightingale's, and five bullfinch's, but I believe those are too hard-set to be any good. Hallo!" looking up, "I believe that was a drop of rain."

The sky, which was cloudy when they started, had now become overcast, and a few large drops fell around them. Little enough they minded that though.

"Are you afraid of ghosts, Cetchy?" said Haviland.

"Ghosts? No – why?"

"See that wood over there? Well, that's Hangman's Wood, and we're going through that. It's one of the very best nesting grounds in the whole country – it's too far away, you see, for our fellows to get at unless they get leave from call-over, which they precious seldom can."

He pointed to a line of dark wood about three-quarters of a mile away, of irregular shape and some fifty acres in extent. It seemed to have been laid out at different times, for about a third of it was a larch plantation, the lighter green of which presented a marked contrast to the dark firs which constituted the bulk of the larger portion.

"It's haunted," he went on. "Years and years ago they found a man hanging from a bough right in the middle of it. The chap was one of the keepers, but they never could make out exactly whether he had scragged himself, or whether it was done by some fellows he'd caught poaching. Anyway the yarn goes that they hung two or three on suspicion, and it's quite likely, for in those days they managed things pretty much as they seem to do in your country, eh, Cetchy – hang a chap first and try him afterwards?"

"That's what Nick does," said the Zulu boy with a grin.

Haviland laughed.

"By Jove, you're right, Cetchy. You've taken the length of Nick's foot and no mistake. Well, you see now why they call the place Hangman's Wood, but that isn't all. They say the chap walks – his ghost, you know – just as they found him hanging – all black in the face, with his eyes starting out of his head, and round his neck a bit of the rope that hung him. By the way, that would be a nice sort of thing for us to meet stalking down the sides of the wood when we were in there, eh, Cetchy?"

The other made no reply. Wide-eyed, he was taking in every word of the story. Haviland went on.

“It sounds like a lot of humbug, but the fact remains that more than one of the keepers has met with a mortal scare in that very place, and I’ve even heard of one chucking up his billet rather than go into the wood anywhere near dusk even, and the rum thing about it too is that it never gets poached: and you’d think if there was a safe place to poach that’d be it. Yet it doesn’t. Come on now. I got a lot out of it the season before last, and we ought to get something good to-day.”

Keeping well under cover of the hedges the two moved quickly along. Then, as they neared the wood, with a “whirr” that made both start, away went a cock-pheasant from the hedge-row they were following – springing right from under their feet. Another and another, and yet another winging away in straight powerful flight, uttering a loud alarmed cackle, and below, the white scuts of rabbits scampering for the burrows in the dry ditch which skirted the covert.

“Confound those beastly birds! What a row they kick up!” whispered Haviland wrathfully as he watched the brilliantly plumaged cocks disappearing among the dark tree tops in front. “Come along, though. I expect it’s all right.”

“There you are,” he went on disgustedly, as they stood in the ride formed by the enclosing hedge of the first line of trees. “Trespassers will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law.’ Nice free country this, eh, Cetchy?”

The notice board, nailed some seven or eight feet from the ground, stared them in the face. But Haviland was used to such.

Cautiously, noiselessly, they stole in and out among the trees, one eye and ear keenly alert for that which they sought, the other for indication of possible human, and therefore hostile, presence. The shower had ceased, but the odour of newly watered herbage hung moist upon the air, mingling with the scent of the firs, and the fungus-like exhalations of rotten and mouldering wood. A semi-twilight prevailed, the effect of the heavy foliage, and the cloud-veiled and lowering sky – and the ghostly silence was emphasised rather than disturbed every now and then by the sudden flap-flap of a wood-pigeon’s wings, or the stealthy rustle in the undergrowth as a rabbit or pheasant scuttled away.

“Look, Cetchy,” whispered Haviland. “This is the place where they found the chap hanging.”

Right in the heart of the wood they were, and at this spot two ridges intersected each other. A great oak limb reached across this point like a huge natural gallows beam.

“The fellow who found him,” went on Haviland, pointing at this, “did so by accident. He was coming along the ride here in the dark, and the chap’s legs – the chap who was hanging, you know – sort of kicked him in the face as he walked underneath that bough. Then he looked up and saw what it was. Ugh! I say, Cetchy, supposing that sort of thing was to happen to you or me! Think we’d get in a funk, eh?”

The Zulu boy, coming of a race which is intensely susceptible to superstitious fears, shook his head, and muttered something in his own tongue. The drear and dismal aspect of the place and its gruesome legend impressed him. He did not like it at all, but would not own as much. If Haviland, to whom he looked up as something of a god, was not afraid, why should he be? Haviland, moved by some spirit of mischief, went on, sinking his voice to a still more impressive whisper:

“Supposing we were to see the ghost now, Cetchy, looking just as they say it walks – black in the face, and with its eyes and tongue all bulging out of its head, and the bit of rope dangling from its neck! Think we should get in a beastly funk, eh? There, just coming out from under those dark firs – can’t you imagine it?”

For answer the other started violently, and uttered a scared ejaculation. Even Haviland’s nerves were not entirely proof against the interruption, coming when it did. Something had happened to startle them both.

Chapter Seven. The Ghost

The next moment Haviland burst into a fit of smothered laughter.

“It’s only a hen pheasant, Cetchy,” he whispered, “but she made such a row getting up right under our feet just as we were talking about the ghost. It quite gave me the jumps.”

“She’s got nest too,” said the other, who had been peering into the undergrowth. “Look, nine, ten eggs! That’s good?”

“Yes, but you can’t take them. Never meddle with game eggs.”

“How I make collection if I not take eggs?”

This was pertinent, and Haviland was nonplussed, but only for a moment.

“I’ve got some extra specimens I’ll give you,” he answered. “Come on, leave these, and let the bird come back.”

The other looked somewhat wistfully at the smooth olive-hued eggs lying there temptingly in their shallow bowl of dry leaves and grass. Then he turned away.

“We’ll find plenty of others,” said Haviland. “Last time I was here I took a nest of blackcap’s, and the eggs were quite pink instead of brown. That’s awfully rare. We’ll see if there are any more in the same place.”

Round the cover they went, then across it, then back again, all with a regular system, and soon their collecting boxes were filled – including some good sorts.

“There! Big bird go away up there,” whispered Anthony pointing upward.

They were standing under a clump of dark firs. Over their tops Haviland glimpsed the quick arrowy flight.

“A sparrow-hawk, by Jingo!” he said. “Sure to have a nest here too.”

A keen and careful search revealed this, though it was hidden away so snugly in the fir-top, that it might have been passed by a hundred times. The Zulu boy begged to be allowed to go up.

“I think not this time, Cetchy,” decided Haviland. “It’s an easy climb, but then you haven’t had enough practice in stowing the eggs, and these are too good to get smashed.”

It was not everything to get up the tree: half the point was to do so as noiselessly as possible, both of which feats were easy enough to so experienced a climber as Haviland. He was soon in the fir-top, the loose untidy pile of sticks just over his head; another hoist – and then – most exciting moment of all, the smooth warm touch of the eggs. The while the parent bird, darting to and fro in the air, came nearer and nearer his head with each swoop. But for this he cared nothing.

“Look, Cetchy,” he whispered delightedly as he stood once more on *terra firma* and exhibited the bluish-white treasures with their rich sepia blotches. “Three of them, and awfully good specimens. Couple days later there’d have been four or five, still three’s better than none. You shall have these two to start your collection with, and I’ll stick to this one with the markings at the wrong end. What’s the row?”

For the Zulu boy had made a sign for silence, and was standing in an attitude of intense listening.

“Somebody coming,” he whispered. “One man.”

Haviland’s nerves thrilled. But listen as he would his practised ear could hear nothing.

“Quick, hide,” breathed the other, pointing to a thick patch of bramble and fern about a dozen yards away, and not a moment too early was the warning uttered, for scarcely had they reached it and crouched flat to the earth, when a man appeared coming through the wood. Peering from their hiding-place, they made out that he was clad in the velveteen suit and leather leggings of a keeper, and, moreover, he carried a gun.

He was looking upward all the time, otherwise he could not have failed to see them, and to Haviland, at any rate, the reason of this was plain. He had sighted the sparrow-hawk, and was warily stalking her, hence the noiselessness of his approach. The situation was becoming intensely exciting. The keeper was coming straight for their hiding-place, still, however, looking upward. If he discovered them, they must make a dash for it that moment, Haviland explained in a whisper scarcely above a breath. The gun didn't count, he daren't fire at them in any event.

Suddenly the man stopped. Up went the gun, then it was as quickly lowered. He had sighted the flight of the hawk above the tree tops, but the chance was not good enough. And he had sighted something else, the nest to wit. The bird was sure to come back to it, and so give him a much better chance. Accordingly he squatted down among the undergrowth, his gun held ready, barely twenty yards from the concealed pair, but with his back to them.

That sparrow-hawk, however, was no fool of a bird. She seemed possessed of a fine faculty for discrimination, and manifestly knew the difference between a brace of egg-collecting schoolboys, and a ruthless, death-dealing gamekeeper, and although at intervals she swooped overhead it was always out of range, but still the latter sat there with a patience that was admirable, save to the pair whom all unconsciously it menaced with grave consequences.

For, as time fled, these loomed nearer and nearer. As it was, they would need all their time to get back, and were they late for evening chapel, especially after being granted leave from calling-over, it was a dead certainty that the Doctor himself would have something to say in the matter, at any rate in Haviland's case. And still that abominable keeper lurked there, showing no sign whatever of moving within the next half-hour, in which event it mattered little if he did not move at all. A thin, penetrating drizzle had begun to fall, which bade fair to wet them to the skin, but for this they cared nothing, neither apparently did their enemy, who furthermore was partly sheltered beneath a great fir. Haviland grew desperate.

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