

## AN UNLUCKY ENCOUNTER

‘Hm, well, it seems rather a waste of time,’ said Mr Frampton, putting his hands into his coat-pocket, and bringing out a Yale key labelled Bartlett Lodge No 2. ‘But I think on the whole that I’d better go into this. Let that boy go, Grim. I’m inclined to believe they are not after any mischief. Now, where is the front-door key? Ah, here it is. We’ll go in and see if there’s any truth in this extraordinary tale!’

In a short while they were all in the big hall of Bartlett Lodge. Grim, looking as dour as his name, marched Mr Frampton to the kitchen, and showed him the gas-meter, the electricity switch, and the tap to the water main.

‘Every one turned off, as you can see,’ he said. Mr Frampton looked at them, and nodded.

‘Right. Now let’s go upstairs to this balcony room where the mysterious gas-fire is supposed to be burning. Lead the way, Grim, lead the way!’

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PETER IS VERY ANGRY

GRIM LED the way, first up one wide flight of steps and on to a fine long corridor, and then up another flight of stairs to the second floor. The house seemed very dark because of the drawn curtains, and Mr Frampton stumbled once or twice. It smelt musty and shut up, too.

'Here's the balcony room,' said Grim, opening a door. A crack of light came in through the place where the curtains did not quite meet. Grim went across and drew them apart with a noise that made everyone jump.

Peter looked for the gas-fire. Yes, there it was, but no red light glowed from it! It stood there, unlit and cold! He stared at it in silence, unable to believe his

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eyes, for he had felt certain that it would be just as red and glowing as it had been when he had peeped in from the balcony and seen it.

Mr Frampton made a clicking noise of exasperation. 'Well! You've been making up a nice little story, haven't you, my boy? This fire is certainly not alight and can't have been before either, because all the gas is turned off. You should know better than to make up tales like that. I'm ashamed of you. You seem quite a decent lad, too. Well, Grim, shall we hand them over to the police and let them tell their fairy-tale to *them*, and see what the police have to say about it?'

Grim shook his head. 'I reckon the police have enough to do these days, without having to listen to silly tales like this. The boy made the whole thing up to amuse all his friends, and then made the tale an excuse to come trespassing.'

'I did *not*!' said Peter, angrily. 'And I'd like to tell you—'

### THREE CHEERS, SECRET SEVEN

'That's enough!' said Mr Frampton, sharply. 'And now, just listen to me. I will not have you children trespassing like this, whether it's to fetch balls or aeroplanes or anything. And I'm not listening to any more excuses or tales. If Grim had wanted to hand you over to the police I would have done so with pleasure, but he's let you off, and so will I – just this once! Grim, if you have any more trouble with these boys, ring me up and I'll deal with them.'

'Right,' said Grim, sounding extremely pleased.

'But I've got something else to—' began Peter, desperately, but Mr Frampton snapped at him at once.

'Silence! I will not listen to another word. I thought you were a decent lad. I'm mistaken, it seems. Get down the stairs and out of the gates before I chase you out with my umbrella.'

Peter gave Mr Frampton such a glare that Jack was quite astonished. Whatever was the matter with Peter? He had been proved wrong, so why did he go

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on arguing and interrupting? He took Peter's arm and pushed him to the stairway.

'Come on, idiot,' he said. 'Let's go while the going's good. You made a mistake. It's no use arguing about it!'

Looking very angry indeed, Peter went down the stairs with Jack, and out of the front door. He slammed it hard, and the noise echoed all around. It made Jack jump in fright, and he stared at Peter, really astonished.

'What *is* the matter?' he said. 'Surely you're not in a rage because you were proved wrong, Peter, old chap?'

Peter didn't answer. He took Jack's arm and led him at top speed down the drive and into the road. He didn't say a word all the way down the little lane to the field, and not until they were well out in the middle of the field did he open his mouth to the puzzled and rather scared Jack.

Then he turned and faced him. 'So *you* think I was mistaken too, do you?' he said. 'Well, I'm *not*. That