

BILLY BUNTER'S MYSTERY CHRISTMAS

A Comedy

MAURICE McLOUGHLIN

Introducing
Characters from the Greyfriars School Stories

by
FRANK RICHARDS

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LONDON
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BILLY BUNTER'S MYSTERY CHRISTMAS

Produced at the Palace Theatre, London, on 27th December 1958, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

HARRY WHARTON	}	Scholars at Greyfriars School	<i>John Downing</i>
BOB CHERRY			<i>Alistair Speed</i>
FRANK NUGENT			<i>Anthony Rea</i>
JOHNNY BULL			<i>Anthony Toller</i>
HURKE SINGH (INKY)			<i>Roy Brown</i>
BILLY BUNTER			<i>Gerald Campion</i>
LORD MAULEVERER (MAULY)			<i>Peter Bartlett</i>
HENRY SAMUEL QUELGH, a form master			<i>Ronald Adam</i>
PORTWELL, butler at Mauleverer Towers			<i>Edward Evans</i>
DR SCHMIDT			<i>Michael Anthony</i>
ALFIE CRUMP			<i>Tope Townley</i>

The play directed by Jordan Lawrence

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

PROLOGUE

The Hall at Greyfriars School. A day or two before the end of the Christmas term

SCENE I

A room at Mauleverer Towers. Late afternoon on Christmas Eve

SCENE II

The same. Early the same evening

SCENE III

Later the same evening

SCENE IV

Midnight the same night

Time—the present

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BILLY BUNTER'S MYSTERY CHRISTMAS

PROLOGUE

SCENE—*The Hall at Greyfriars School. A day or two before the end of the Christmas term.*

The setting is a front cloth with an entrance in the form of an arch up LC. A desk and chair stand R.

When the CURTAIN rises, HARRY WHARTON and BOB CHERRY enter up LC from R. They stand LC and look around.

WHARTON. Are you sure you saw him come in here, Bob? *(He crosses to RC)*

CHERRY. He must have come in here, I saw him rush down the passage. Where else can he be? The fat burglar! *(He turns to go)*

(FRANK NUGENT, JOHNNY BULL and HUREE SINGH enter up LC from R. HUREE is known as "INKY". They look around)

NUGENT *(crossing to L of Wharton)* Is he in here?

BULL. He might be in the Common Room. He can't be far.

WHARTON. Let's look in the Common Room, then.

HUREE. The lookfulness is terrific.

(WHARTON, CHERRY, NUGENT, BULL and HUREE exit up LC to R.)

BUNTER enters up LC from L. He carries an impressive iced fruit cake. He crosses to the chair R, sits at the desk, takes a knife from his pocket and cuts the cake. *Voices are heard off)*

CHERRY *(off)* I'd already looked in the Common Room.

(BUNTER hears the voices, rises, grabs the cake and hides under the desk.)

CHERRY and WHARTON enter up LC from R)

I tell you he *is* in here somewhere, Harry. The fat gormandizer.

BUNTER *(sotto voce)* Beast!

WHARTON. What was that?

CHERRY. Hallo, hallo, hallo, I thought as much. *(He looks around)* Bunter, you fat robber, where are you? I saw you come in here.

BUNTER. Oh, Lor'! I—I'm not here, Cherry.

WHARTON *(crossing to the desk)* There he is—under the desk.

(NUGENT, BULL and HUREE enter up LC from R)

NUGENT. Find him?

CHERRY. No, he's not in here—he's just told us. (*He moves to the desk*) Come out, you fat pirate.

(BUNTER, *clutching the cake, emerges from under the desk*)

BUNTER. I say, you fellows, I was just looking for you.

WHARTON. What? Under that desk?

BUNTER. I wanted to share this cake with you. I had it sent from Bunter Court—one of our chefs made it.

CHERRY. What a coincidence—it looks exactly like the cake Mauly's uncle sent him in the hamper.

BUNTER. Really, Cherry! I hope you don't think I took this cake from Mauleverer's study?

BULL. Not much, we don't.

(LORD MAULEVERER *drifts in up LC from R. He is known as "Mauly"*)

NUGENT. Here's Mauly, now.

MAULY. Did you find him? (*He sees Bunter*) Oh, yes, I see you have—the cake, too.

CHERRY. You're mistaken, Mauly. This isn't Bunter. He's not here—he just said so. Must be a ghost.

WHARTON. Jolly fat ghost.

HURRY. The fatfulness is terrific.

BULL (*grabbing Bunter*) Give him a kick—see if it goes through him.

(*The others laugh*)

BUNTER. Look here, Bull, don't you want a piece of my cake from Bunter Court?

NUGENT. My hat! The nerve! Offering round Mauly's cake.

WHARTON. There's no doubt it is your cake, I suppose, Mauly?

MAULY. If it isn't, then my cake has a twin brother.

CHERRY. Perhaps the chef at Bunter Court has a twin brother that works for your uncle, Mauly.

BULL. Oh, let's bump the fat gormandizer.

HURRY. The bumpfulness is terrific.

(*They move on BUNTER who backs away R, cuddling the cake*)

BUNTER. I say, you fellows—this is all a mistake. Our chef at Bunter Court sent this. I'm quite willing to share it with Mauly, though. I don't want to be bumped.

CHERRY. You can't be bumped, old fat man. You're not here, you told us so yourself, remember?

BUNTER (*backing*) Beasts!

(*The others encircle Bunter, make a concerted grab and collar him*)

Mind my specs!

WHARTON. Mind the cake!

HUREE (*taking the cake from Bunter*) I've got it. (*He hands the cake to Mauly*) Look after it, Mauly.

(*MAULY takes the cake and moves away* LG. BULL, NUGENT, WHARTON and CHERRY grab Bunter by his arms and legs and suspend him in mid-air)

BUNTER. Yaroooh! Let me go!

CHERRY. He's pretty heavy for a chap who isn't here.

(*They bump BUNTER who yells "yaroooh" at each bump*)

BUNTER. Yaroooh! Let me go!

(*HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, an austere figure, appears in the arch up* LG)

MAULY. Oh, dear! Look out, you fellows! Quelchy! (*He nips quickly behind the desk and hides the cake on the chair*)

(*The others drop Bunter to the floor. QUELCH comes in*)

QUELCH. And what, pray, is the meaning of this uproar? Why are you in the Hall instead of doing your preparation for to-morrow?

BUNTER (*on the floor; writhing*) Ooooooh! Ouch!

QUELCH. Cease those absurd noises, Bunter.

(*BUNTER rises and rubs his seat. The others group up L of the desk*)

BUNTER (*crossing to Quelch*) I think I've fractured my clavicle, sir.

QUELCH. You seem to be misinformed as to the whereabouts of your clavicle, Bunter. What are you doing in the Hall, pray?

BUNTER. I was just going across to the classroom—to—to get my geography book, sir. I'm frightfully keen on geography, sir.

QUELCH. Indeed! Your enthusiasm had escaped my notice.

BUNTER. Oh, I am, sir. I hope you don't think I hid in here to scoff a cake.

(*The other Boys laugh*)

QUELCH (*to the other Boys*) Be silent!

BUNTER. You see, I'm spending the Christmas hols with Toddy—Peter Todd, that is—and he's entering for that Essay Competition next term. He's a bit rusty. I thought I might give him a hand.

QUELCH (*incredulously*) Bless my soul, Bunter! Do I understand you to say that you intend to assist Peter Todd in his studies?

BUNTER. Yes, sir. I know Toddy is keen on winning the Essay Prize. I'm going to coach him in the hols. I expect you've noticed I'm rather a dab hand at geography, sir.

QUELCH (*flabbergasted*) You—you expect I've noticed . . . (*He*

recovers himself. *With irony*) Bunter, if you really *have* developed a talent for geographical research—(*he crosses and stands behind the desk*) I shall be pleased to test your knowledge of the subject. (*He opens a book on the desk*)

BUNTER (*edging to the arch up LC*) Oh, crikey!

QUELCH. What did you say?

BUNTER. I'd be delighted, sir—(*he moves C*) but I have my Latin prep to do. I'm very fond of Latin, too.

(*The other Boys laugh*)

QUELCH. Indeed! You seem to have developed an amazing appetite for learning. Never mind, I'm quite sure you will find time for your Latin. You can sacrifice your evening recreation period.

(*The other Boys laugh and move towards the arch up LC*)

(*To the other Boys*) Since you boys have time to indulge in horse-play, you may as well take advantage of Bunter's geographical knowledge.

WHARTON. But there's footer practice, sir. It'll be dark.

QUELCH. You seem to have been taking adequate exercise, Wharton—man-handling Bunter. You will remain.

BUNTER. Hee, hee!

BULL (*to Bunter*) Wait till I get you—you fat burglar . . .

QUELCH. Silence, Bull! (*He stands behind the desk and several times nearly sits on the cake during the following cross-questioning of Bunter*) Now, let me see. (*He turns the pages of the book*) Yes. No. Yes. No. (*To Bunter*) You are of course aware, Bunter, of the main geographical issues to be covered in the Royal Geographical Society's Prize Essay?

BUNTER. Me, sir? Oh, yes, sir. Of course, sir.

QUELCH. Excellent! What are they?

BUNTER. Oh, Lor'!

(*The other Boys chuckle*)

QUELCH. Silence. (*Heavily*) No doubt it has slipped your memory, Bunter, but the title of the Essay is "The Results of the Diversion of the Gulf Stream".

BUNTER. Eh? Oh, is it? That is to say—of course, sir.

QUELCH. You know what the Gulf Stream is, naturally?

BUNTER. Oh, naturally, sir.

QUELCH (*crossing to R of Bunter*) What is it, then?

BUNTER. A—a—stream, sir. In fact a *Gulf* stream.

QUELCH. Bunter! The Gulf Stream is a warm current which comes from the Gulf of Mexico.

BUNTER. Oh, yes, sir—a currant.

QUELCH. How would you describe this current?

BUNTER. Jolly tasty, sir.

(*The other Boys laugh*)

QUELCH. Quiet, please! (*To Bunter. Smoothly*) Tell me more about this current—where does it finish?

BUNTER. In a cake, sir—or a bun. Mexican currants are in a lot of very decent puddings, too.

(*The other Boys laugh*)

QUELCH. Indeed, Bunter—you astound me. Can you really be so ignorant?

BUNTER. Mind you, sir, I didn't actually *know* that currants came from Mexico—but if you say so . . .

QUELCH. I did *not* say so, Bunter.

BUNTER. Oh, you jolly . . .

QUELCH. For your information, the Gulf Stream is a current of warm water which spreads across the Atlantic Ocean to these shores.

BUNTER. I say, jolly interesting.

QUELCH. So it should be. (*He crosses to the desk*) Off the coast of North America it meets the icy northern current. (*He crosses to R of Bunter*) Have you ever heard of Labrador ice, Bunter?

BUNTER. Oh, yes, sir, definitely.

QUELCH. Then what are its effects?

BUNTER. Jolly nice, but too much of it can give you a stomach-ache.

CHERRY. Oh, my hat!

(*The other Boys laugh*)

QUELCH. Goodness gracious! Are you being insolent, boy? Are you really under the impression that I am referring to something edible?

BUNTER. Something what, sir?

QUELCH. Edible! Are you under the impression that the Labrador ice is eaten?

BUNTER. Oh, no, sir. You suck it.

(*The other Boys roar with laughter*)

QUELCH. *Silence!* Upon my word, Bunter, I am at a loss as to how to deal with you. Labrador ice consists of gigantic icebergs. When they meet the Gulf Stream it causes fog.

BUNTER. Does it, sir?

QUELCH. It does, making the area a dangerous place for shipping.

BUNTER. A bit tricky for buses, too, sir.

(*The other Boys chuckle*)

QUELCH. *Bunter!* Wretched boy. You have no more knowledge of the effects of the Gulf Stream than that desk.

BUNTER. It just slipped my mind, sir.

(QUELCH moves above the desk, takes off his spectacles and puts them on it)

QUELCH (*grimly*) Then I think it would be as well if I make every effort to imprint the facts in your mind. (*He picks up a cane from the desk*) Bend over that desk.

BUNTER. You—you weren't thinking of caning me, sir?

QUELCH. Your assumption is correct. Bend over the desk, Bunter.

BUNTER. But, sir . . .

QUELCH. Bend over the desk, Bunter!

BUNTER (*crossing to the desk*) Oh, crikey! (*He reluctantly bends over the desk*)

(QUELCH raises the cane)

BUNTER. Yarooooooooooh!

QUELCH (*lowering the cane*) Be silent, Bunter—I haven't touched you yet. (*He raises the cane*)

BUNTER. Owwwwwwwwww!

QUELCH (*lowering the cane; patiently*) Do you imagine, Bunter, that by making these absurd noises you will escape your punishment? (*He quickly raises the cane and brings it down on Bunter*)

(BUNTER yells and rolls about in agony. The other Boys laugh)

BUNTER. My clavicle! It's gone!

(The other Boys laugh. BUNTER subsides)

QUELCH. I hope that will assist in establishing the geographical facts of the Gulf Stream on your mind, Bunter.

BUNTER. On my mind, sir?

(The other Boys laugh)

QUELCH. Silence! (*He puts down the cane, picks up the book and refers to it*) On page twenty-four you will see a map. You will copy it three times for me, Bunter, by tomorrow. (*He replaces the book on the desk*)

BUNTER. Oh, Lor'!

(The other Boys laugh)

QUELCH (*crossing to R. of the group of boys*) And since you boys have so much time to indulge in horseplay, you may copy the map twice, each of you.

(The Boys react)

WHARTON. What? Now, sir?

QUELCH. I shall expect your impositions at the same time, on my desk, before the first lesson tomorrow. And, Bunter, if you really wish to assist Todd in his efforts to win the Essay Prize, I advise you to get out of his way.

(QUELCH sweeps out up L.C., leaving his spectacles on the desk)

BUNTER. Cheeky beast!

(The other Boys turn on Bunter)

I—I say, you fellows . . .

(MAULY moves behind the desk and picks up the cake)

BULL. Let's punt him round the quad like a footer.

(MAULY puts the cake on the desk)

BUNTER (backing down R) Now, look here, you fellows—Quelch will hear you.

WHARTON. He's right. There's plenty of time, and at least we've got the cake back.

BUNTER. I say, there's a mistake about that cake. It isn't yours at all, Mauly.

MAULY. It's the spittin' image of it, old bean.

BUNTER. That's just a coincidence. Look, I tell you what we'll do. I hope I'm not mean. You've lost your cake and I've got this one so much like it from Bunter Court—

NUGENT. Terribly like it.

BUNTER (expansively) —so I'll share it with you.

CHERRY. You really mean that, Bunter? You'll share your cake with us?

BULL. That's not Bunter's cake, it's Mauly's.

CHERRY. There seems to be some doubt about it. Let's have your penknife, Frank.

(NUGENT takes his penknife from his pocket and hands it to Cherry)

NUGENT. You aren't going to give any to that fat robber?

CHERRY. Why not, it's a huge cake and he did offer us a share.

BUNTER. Just a little over half will do for me, Cherry, I'm not greedy, I hope.

(CHERRY prises a currant from the cake)

CHERRY (handing the currant to Bunter) There you are, Bunty.

BUNTER. Wh—what's this? It's just a currant.

CHERRY. It's your share of the cake—don't choke on it. It might be one of those Mexican currants you told Quelch you were so fond of.

(The other Boys laugh)

BUNTER. Why, you beast!

(The other Boys laugh)

It's a burnt one, too.

NUGENT. I expect it got burnt in the Mexican sun.

(The other Boys laugh)

CHERRY. Burnt by your chef at Bunter Court—I should give him the sack.

BUNTER. Beasts! All right! Keep your rotten cake. There'll be plenty of tuck at Toddy's place over Christmas. His people have plenty of money.

CHERRY. A pity you're staying with Peter Todd. We're all going to Mauleverer Towers with Mauly. You could have come with us.

BUNTER. I shouldn't want to, I don't care for these old castles. Dreary holes—I like comfort.

CHERRY. You're quite sure?

BUNTER. Positive. If you asked me on bended knees I wouldn't come.

CHERRY (*going down on his knees*) Please, Bunter, come to Mauleverer Towers, for Christmas.

(*The other Boys chuckle*)

BUNTER. Not likely, not with a bunch of greedy beasts who won't even give me a piece of cake.

CHERRY (*rising*) Well, chaps, I think that's pretty definite. Bunter has turned us down for Christmas.

WHARTON. We'll just have to struggle along without him, Mauly—while he's having a marvellous time with Toddy.

BUNTER. Toddy was most pressing, he begged me with tears in his eyes to spend Christmas with him.

(*The other Boys laugh.*)

QUELCH *enters up* LC. MAULY *hastily picks up the cake. The boys pass it quickly from one to the other and hide it on the chair behind the desk*)

QUELCH (*crossing to the desk*) I should advise you boys to attend to those impositions. Don't imagine I shall show any leniency because term ends in a day or two. (*He picks up his spectacles from the desk, puts them on, then crosses to the arch LC and turns*) Bunter, did I understand you to say you were spending the Christmas holidays with Peter Todd?

BUNTER. Yes, sir.

QUELCH. Indeed! I have just met the Headmaster and he informs me that Todd's parents are abroad and that Peter Todd is spending the Christmas at the Headmaster's house.

BUNTER. Oh, I see, sir. I should like to spend . . . (*He does a double-take*) Wha-a-a-a-t!

QUELCH. Perhaps Todd is misleading you. I should consult him.

(*QUELCH exits up* LC. *The boys burst into hysterical laughter*)

BUNTER (*livid*) The beast! He's staying at Greyfriars with the Head!

(There is more laughter)

After all I've done for him.

(The other Boys laugh)

Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at, you silly idiots. I only said I'd go, to give the place a bit of tone for Christmas.

WHARTON. My hat! Tone! Listen to him!

(The other Boys laugh)

BUNTER. The fact is Toddy is probably shy taking someone of my class home.

BULL. You've got something there.

BUNTER. Beast! Still, it means I can come to Mauleverer Towers after all—a bit of luck for you, Mauly.

MAULY. Sorry, old bean—you've turned me down. Dreary hole, you know—remember?

BUNTER. I say, I hope I'm not the sort of chap to grumble about a little discomfort.

CHERRY. You are! Just the chap.

BUNTER. Beast!

(The other Boys laugh)

All right, laugh. I'm not the sort of chap to stay where I'm not wanted.

WHARTON. Not much you aren't.

BUNTER *(moving to the arch up L.C.)* I've no doubt Vernon-Smith will be delighted to ask me for Christmas, now I'm free. *(He stops suddenly, puts his hand to his back and groans)* Ooooooh! *(He staggers to the desk)* My back!

WHARTON *(a little anxiously)* What's up, Bunter?

BUNTER. Oooooh, my tummy! *(He doubles up, moaning)*

WHARTON. I thought you said it was your back?

BUNTER. It's my—ooooh—back and my—ooooh—stomach. Ooooooh!

BULL. He's only spoofing, another bumping will put him right.

(The other Boys cluster around Bunter)

WHARTON. Wait a minute, better be sure.

CHERRY. Where's the pain now, Bunter?

BUNTER. In my foot.

BULL. It's just an act.

WHARTON. Better be on the safe side. Go and fetch Matron, Inky.

HURR. The Matronfulness is terrific.

(HURR exits up L.C. The other Boys lift Bunter on to the chair)

NUGENT. Don't sit him on the cake—take it, Mauly.

MAULY. Right! (*He transfers the cake from the chair to the desk*)
 BUNTER. Move the desk, don't squash me.

(*The other BOYS collect above, below and L. of the desk, preparatory to moving it.*)

BUNTER suddenly jumps up, grabs the cake, kicks the desk over on the others and rushes out up LC to L. They gather themselves up quickly)

BULL. After the fat spoofer!

CHERRY. Our cake!

WILARTON, BULL, CHERRY, MAULY and NUGENT rush out up LC to L. There is a slight pause then BUNTER, clasping the cake, re-enters up C. He moves C and laughs as—

the CURTAIN falls

SCENE I

SCENE—A room at Mauleverer Towers. Late afternoon on Christmas Eve.

The room is off the entrance hall which is through an arch down R. There is a door down L leading to the library and an arch up LC, leading to other parts of the house. There is a large open fireplace L, with ornamental scroll work on the surround. In the wall up RC, there is a "secret panel" giving access to a passage. This panel is presumed to be operated by pressing a section of the scroll work surrounding the fireplace. The room is panelled in dark oak, and has a warm, lived-in appearance, despite its obvious antiquity. A suit of armour stands R of the arch up LC. The room is not over-furnished. An easy chair is above the fireplace and there is a longish, polished refectory-type table C with three chairs to match, one L of it, one R of it and one above it. There is a large chest above the arch down R and a large oil painting of a Mauleverer ancestor hangs over the fireplace. The room is lit by electric-candle wall-brackets with switches beside the arches up LC and down R. Other suitable dressing may be added at the discretion of the Producer.

When the CURTAIN rises, the room is in darkness except for the log fire burning in the fireplace, which throws dancing shadows on the walls. There are sprigs of holly and mistletoe decorating the room. The front door bell clangs off R. PORTWELL, the butler, enters up LC and switches on the lights. He is a man in his fifties and walks in a dignified manner across the room and exits down R.

PORTWELL (*off*) Good evening, my Lord.

MAULY (*off*) Good evening.

(PORTWELL enters down R and stands above the arch.

WHARTON and MAULY enter down R. WHARTON crosses to c)

(He crosses to RC) Well, here we are, Harry. (He turns to Portwell) I suppose you're Portwell?

PORTWELL. That is correct, my Lord. Your uncle engaged me to take over while Beechcroft is visiting his sister.

MAULY. This is my friend Wharton—(he crosses to LC) the rest of my pals are outside helpin' with the bags. Too fatiguin' for me. (He flops into the easy chair)

PORTWELL. I'll go and assist them, my Lord. (He crosses to RC) Did Crump meet you with the station wagon?

(WHARTON moves above the table)

MAULY. Oh, that's his name, is it—Crump?

PORTWELL. Yes, sir. He's employed as a chauffeur-gardener, but the head gardener tells me he does very little gardening. (Sniffily) He doesn't do a great deal of chauffeuering, either. (He moves towards the arch down R)

(CHERRY bursts in down R. He carries a suitcase)

CHERRY. Hallo. (He hands the suitcase to Portwell)

(PORTWELL puts down the case, crosses and exits down R)

(He moves to R of the table) Are you going to leave us to drag all those bags in, Mauly?

PORTWELL (off) Don't you young gentleman bother—I'll bring in the rest of the bags with Crump.

CHERRY (seeing Mauly in the chair) Look at the slacker! (He crosses below the table to Mauly) Come on, Harry, let's get him on his two feet.

MAULY. Now, chuck it! No larks! I'm absolutely exhausted after the journey.

CHERRY. Exhausted! You didn't wake up once—we could hardly hear the engine for your snores. (He crosses to the fireplace)

WHARTON. Let him rest, Bob. (He crosses to Cherry) It's Mauly's place, after all.

(BULL and NUGENT enter down R)

BULL (moving RC) All standing round the fire while Frank and I help that midget chauffeur with the luggage. (He crosses down L)

WHARTON (moving above the left end of the table) Don't worry, the butler is going to get it in.

NUGENT (crossing to the fireplace) Let me get at that fire, I'm frozen. It's started to snow heavily.

CHERRY (moving up C) Where's Inky?

(HURIE enters down R)

Oh, here he is. No chance of losing Inky if it snows.

(The others laugh)

HUREE. The weatherfulness is terrific. Brrrrrr!

CHERRY. I suppose in your own country you'd spend Christmas chasing leopards and tigers in a bathing suit.

HUREE. My esteemed Bob—I think your weather is absurd.

WHARTON. Never mind, Inky—get near the fire.

(HUREE, shivering, crosses to the fireplace.)

(PORTWELL enters down R, carrying two suitcases)

MAULY. Is my uncle here, Portwell?

PORTWELL *(putting down the cases and moving to R of the table)* No, my Lord. We had a telegram from your uncle. He was flying home today but the weather has grounded all aircraft.

MAULY. Then he won't be home for Christmas?

PORTWELL. I fear not, sir. He instructed Mrs Gray and myself to do everything to make your friends comfortable. If you care to go through, Mrs Gray will show you your rooms.

(PORTWELL exits down R)

WHARTON. It's a shame your uncle won't be here, Mauly.

MAULY. He's always getting stuck in the most outlandish places. He's Chairman of some National Museum Trust or some such rot. Flies all over the place chasin' Egyptian mummies and what not.

CHERRY. He wouldn't like Bunter for his museum, would he? He's well stuffed, you know.

(They laugh)

NUGENT. Poor old Bunter. I felt almost sorry for him.

WHARTON. I wonder where he'll go?

CHERRY. He'll have to go to Bunter Court and spend Christmas with all his titled relations.

(They laugh)

I'd like to see Bunter Court—just once.

BULL. So would Bunter.

NUGENT. I believe it's really a little semi-detached house in Surrey.

CHERRY. With a notice on the gate: "Beware of the Titled Relations."

BULL. Let's forget Bunter—we have enough of him at Greyfriars. Who else is here, Mauly?

MAULY. Dr Schmidt. He's a frightfully brainy bird, an Austrian. He's the curator for all nunky's junk for the museum.

(PORTWELL enters down R with a trunk which he puts down up R)

WHARTON. Whose is that—it's not ours, is it?

PORTWELL. It's addressed to Mauleverer Towers, sir. And there's another one outside. It's very heavy. It was sent C.O.D. and I had to pay twenty-five shillings on it.

(PORTWELL exits down R.)

DR SCHMIDT enters up LC. He is a tall, ascetic-looking man dressed in black. He is about forty-five, and wears thick-lensed spectacles. He has a German accent, but speaks correct English)

MAULY (rising) Here's the doctor.

(SCHMIDT moves to L of the table)

These are my friends, Dr Schmidt—they're here for Christmas.

SCHMIDT (bowing) A pleasure. You heard that your uncle will not be here? (He shakes hands with the boys)

MAULY. Yes.

SCHMIDT. It is a great shame. (He crosses and stands below the table) He has recently made a wonderful acquisition on behalf of the Museum Trust. The Aegean Scrolls.

MAULY. The what?

SCHMIDT. The Aegean Scrolls. (He moves to R of the table) They are a series of parchment scrolls found in a cave on an island off the Greek coast. They are of great historical value if genuine. Hundreds of years old.

CHERRY. If they're Ancient Greek, Mauly—your uncle can keep them.

SCHMIDT (frigidly) These writings may throw a whole new light on certain aspects of life in ancient Greece. They are priceless. Your uncle has invited an expert to examine them. He will be staying here at Christmas.

WHARTON. Perhaps that's who the trunk belongs to.

SCHMIDT (crossing to L of the table) Possibly.

CHERRY (to Mauly) I suppose the mottoes in your crackers will be written in Latin, Mauly.

WHARTON. Dry up, Bob! Dr Schmidt, you must forgive our lack of enthusiasm for Ancient Greek—but our form-master is obsessed with it.

SCHMIDT. I must confess my "obsession" is for Egyptian mythology and history, but our expert has studied the first of the scrolls from Greece and is most excited about them, I understand.

(PORTWELL and ALFIE CRUMP enter down R with a large, heavy trunk, which they place R of the table. CRUMP is a perky little Cockney in his fifties)

CRUMP (wiping his brow) 'Struth! What's in 'ere? A dead elephant?

SCHMIDT (sharply) That will do, Crump. Leave it there.

CRUMP. Thanks very much. I was going to pick it up and juggle with it.

SCHMIDT (*turning to the boys*) Now, gentlemen, if you so wish, Mrs Gray will show you your rooms.

(WHARTON, CHERRY, NUGENT, BULL, HUREE *and* MAULY *exit up LC*)

PORTWELL. Shall I leave the trunks here, Doctor? No-one seems to know to whom they belong.

CRUMP. If we leave 'em, when he wants to change his clothes, he can come down here.

SCHMIDT. Speak when you are addressed, Crump. (*To Portwell*) They possibly belong to the expert who is coming to examine the Aegean Scrolls. Leave them here for the time being. Crump—take the station wagon—

CRUMP. I've just been.

SCHMIDT. —down to the station when the next train arrives. There should be a number of cases for me. Do you understand?

CRUMP. I thought it was only Santa Claus who lugged parcels about on Christmas Eve. You don't want me to drop 'em down the chimney, do you?

SCHMIDT. Of course not. Bring them here.

(SCHMIDT *exits up LC*)

CRUMP. Nice chap. But these foreigners haven't got no sense of humour. Ever noticed that, Portwell?

PORTWELL. I've noticed some chauffeur-gardeners don't like work.

CRUMP. You're a one to talk! Who dragged them bloomin' cases up here. All you have to do is open doors and carry people's hats.

PORTWELL. That's enough!

CRUMP. The only time you have anything 'cavy to carry is when they have a deep-sea diver to tea and he 'ands you 'is 'elmet.

PORTWELL. You'd better take the wagon to the station—you'll have the radiator frozen.

CRUMP (*crossing to the arch down R*) It won't be the only thing frozen round here. How would you like to do gardening this weather? Before I'm done here, I'll turn into a blinkin' penguin.

(CRUMP *exits down R*)

PORTWELL (*calling after Crump*) You're in luck, Crump, we have kippers for tea.

(PORTWELL *smiles and exits up LC. There is a slight pause, then the lid of the second trunk opens cautiously.*)

BUNTER *peers out of the trunk. He looks carefully around, then steps out, puffing and blowing*)

BUNTER. Beasts! (*He looks around*) So this is that slacker Mauly's place. (*He wanders round the room, stepping back warily as he nearly bumps into the suit of armour*) Ah! Crikey! (*He suddenly stops, listens, then moves quickly to the trunk, gets in and closes the lid*)

(PORTWELL enters up L.C. carrying a heaped tray of sandwiches. He puts them on the right end of the table then exits up L.C.)

(*He raises the lid, sees the sandwiches, greedily grabs the tray, sits in the trunk and starts to eat*) I'm starved. Chicken!

(*Voices are heard off up L.C.*)

WHARTON (*off*) Your housekeeper has fixed us up well, Mauly.

(BUNTER scoops the remainder of the sandwiches off the tray into the trunk, replaces the tray on the table, sinks down and closes the lid)

MAULY (*off*) She's a good soul is Mrs Gray.

(MAULY, WHARTON, BULL, HUREE, NUGENT and CHERRY enter up L.C. WHARTON stands above the right end of the table. MAULY stands L. of Wharton. BULL crosses to R. HUREE goes to the fireplace. NUGENT stands below the easy chair and CHERRY stands up L. of the table)

(*He looks at the empty tray*) Didn't Portwell say he'd brought some food in here?

NUGENT. I thought so.

CHERRY. Probably said he was going to.

(PORTWELL enters up L.C. carrying a tray of mince-pies)

Here he is now. Good old Portwell.

PORTWELL (*pulling the tray on the table*) I wondered if you young gentlemen would care for some of Mrs Gray's mince-pies as we— (*He suddenly sees all the sandwiches are gone and gives the boys an odd look*) You—ahem—appear to be extremely hungry.

CHERRY. We are. I was just going to tackle some of that mistletoe. You've saved our lives.

(PORTWELL gives the Boys a second look then exits up L.C. The Boys help themselves to mince-pies)

BULL. What's the matter with Portwell? Notice how he looked at us?

HUREE. The lookfulness is terrific!

MAULY. Don't take any notice—butlers are always a little peculiar, don't you think?

CHERRY. Ask Bunter. They must have twenty of them at Bunter Court—one for each titled relation.

(*They laugh. BUNTER'S trunk moves a little petulantly*)

NUGENT. Did that trunk move?

WHARTON. Get on with your mince-pie, Frank—you're seeing things.

CHERRY. Let's take a look at the lake. We might get some skating if the ice is thick enough.

MAULY. Oh, I say—I don't care for skatin'.

WHARTON. We'll teach you, Mauly. Come along, chaps. Bring Mauly with you. Let him look at the snow.

(WHARTON, BULL, CHERRY, NUGENT and HUREE exit up LC, dragging MAULY with them. As soon as they are gone, BUNTER opens the trunk and grabs the tray of mince pies)

BUNTER. I'll show the rotters! (He sinks down in the trunk with the tray of mince-pies and closes the lid)

(WHARTON, BULL, CHERRY, NUGENT, MAULY and HUREE enter up LC)

MAULY. It's too cold. (He crosses to the fireplace)

HUREE (rushing to the fireplace) BRITTTTT! I have no desire to proceed skatefully on the ice.

MAULY. I'm with you, Inky, old lad.

CHERRY. Rot! Nothing like skating to warm you up.

(PORTWELL enters up LC)

PORTWELL (moving above the table) Are those cases in your way just there? I'll move . . . (He suddenly sees all the mince-pies have gone and does a terrific "take") Did—did—you want anything else to eat, gentleman? (He stares at the table)

CHERRY. Anything else? We've only had one mince-pie. (He follows Portwell's transfixed stare at the table) Oh, you've taken them. We hadn't finished, you know. We eat like horses, this weather.

PORTWELL. S-s-so I've noticed. Did any one of you gentlemen eat the tray, by any chance?

MAULY. The tray?

PORTWELL. The tray the pies were on.

BULL. We haven't touched it.

PORTWELL. You—you haven't?

MAULY. What about a few sandwiches, Portwell?

PORTWELL. A few sand . . . (He gives up) Very good, my Lord.

(PORTWELL moves to the arch up LC, slaps, looks at the boys then shrugs and exits)

BULL. Weird cove, isn't he?

MAULY. He's not used to the place like Beechcroft is. Still, as I say, all butlers are slightly potty.

CHERRY. I hope he doesn't forget the turkey tomorrow.

MAULY. It should be too big to forget. Nunky always buys the prize-winner from the Agricultural Show—weighs about twenty pounds.

WHARTON. Almost enough for Bunter.

(They laugh. The trunk moves)

NUGENT. I could have sworn that trunk moved again.

WHARTON. He's off again. You'll have to get glasses, Frank.

(PORTWELL enters up L. He carries an absolutely gigantic tray full of pies, tarts, sandwiches, etc. He puts it deliberately on the table)

My hat! Look at that!

CHERRY. You mean us to have enough, Portwell.

PORTWELL *(with dignity)* I am only hoping it *will* be enough, sir.

(PORTWELL, shaking his head, exits up LC)

WHARTON. What a mountain!

HURKE. I am remindfully recollected of the Himalayas.

(They all grab something from the tray and start to eat. CHERRY wanders up C and stands by the suit of armour)

CHERRY *(looking at the armour)* Your ancestors wear this stuff, Mauly?

MAULY. I suppose so, old beat. Frightfully fatiguin' to fag about in clobber like that.

WHARTON. If they had pyjamas like it, they've had suited you, Mauly—you'd never be able to get out of bed.

CHERRY *(looking at the battle-axe)* I say, this is sharp—come and feel it.

(All except Mauly gather round the suit of armour. MAULY sits in the easy chair and dozes. The lid of the trunk slowly rises and BUNTER'S hand gropes out for a cake from the tray)

BULL. You could easily whip off a chap's head with that, I should think.

WHARTON. Well, that's what they were for, champ. *(He rattles the battle-axe)*

(The rattling disturbs MAULY who opens his eyes and sees Bunter's hand)

MAULY *(jumping up)* Help!

(BUNTER quickly withdraws his hand. MAULY stands by the fireplace and stares across at the trunk. The others turn and move towards Mauly)

WHARTON. What's the matter, Mauly?

MAULY. I—I—saw a hand come out of that trunk.

CHERRY. You saw what?

MAULY. A hand. It came out of that trunk and waved about, I was just dozin' off, when you rattled that armour and I opened my eyes . . .

BULL. Now we're coming to it. You're sure you opened your eyes, Mauly?

CHERRY. He's had a nightmare—or rather, an afternoon-mare.

(They laugh)

NUGENT *(moving to R of the trunk)* I told you I thought I saw that trunk move. I suppose there couldn't be anything alive in there?

WHARTON. It belongs to the chap who's coming to look at those Greek scrolls. What would he have alive in there?

CHERRY. A Greek. Was it a Greek arm, Mauly—an ancient one?

MAULY. I tell you I saw it. I wasn't asleep.

BULL *(moving down R)* Let's open it and have a look.

WHARTON. Perhaps we ought to wait until the owner appears.

NUGENT *(moving to L of Bull)* Let's open it.

CHERRY. Hang on! It might be a monster from outer space. *(He moves to L of the table)* Was it a monster's arm, Mauly?

MAULY. It's no joke—I tell you I saw it.

(They gather round the trunk and eye it)

BULL. Get that battle-axe from Mauly's ancestor.

CHERRY. Righto. *(He gets the battle-axe from the armour up RC)*

WHARTON. I'll get the other one. *(He gets a battle-axe from the hall down R)*

BULL. Might as well be ready.

NUGENT *(examining the trunk)* I say, the catch is undone.

BULL. That's odd.

NUGENT. I'll pull the lid back.

CHERRY. Righto, Franky—then if anything comes out we'll hit it with these battle-axes.

NUGENT. Right. One—two . . .

(Before he can count "three", the trunk opens and BUNTER jumps out)

BOYS *(ad lib.)* Bunter!

BUNTER. I say, you fellows, put those battle-axes down. It's me!

WHARTON. Bunter. What the dickens . . . ?

BULL. The fat spooner. What's he doing here?

BUNTER. I say, that's a fine welcome after I decide to spend Christmas with you after all.

(The Boys cluster around Bunter)

CHERRY. You've decided what?

BUNTER. To spend Christmas with you. Hello, Mauly. *(He crosses down L)* Not a bad old place you've got here. Not up to Bunter Court, of course.

BULL. Why, you cheeky fat owl! Grab him, you chaps!

WHARTON. Wait a minute. (*He crosses to Bunter*) You mean to say you packed yourself in that trunk and got on the train? (*He goes up L.*)

MAULY (*moving to R of Bunter*) You cheeky young porker—you sent yourself C.O.D.

NUGENT (*moving to R of Mauly*) You owe Portwell twenty-five shillings.

BUNTER. Well, it wasn't my fault. No-one would give me the fare—and a postal-order I was expecting didn't come. You know how the post is at Christmas.

CHERRY. It's the same all the year round for your postal-orders.

BUNTER (*ignoring Cherry*) And knowing how disappointed you fellows would be if I didn't come—it was the only way. I turned Smithy down.

NUGENT (*crossing to R of Bunter*) Are you trying to tell us that Vernon-Smith invited you to spend Christmas with him?

BUNTER. He didn't invite me—he begged me with tears in his eyes. He said: "Bunter, if you don't spend Christmas with us, I don't know what I'll do."

(*The others laugh*)

You can cackle, but a fellow has to be careful where he goes. I weighed things up, and decided to come to Mauleverer Towers. I know how draughty these old places are—

WHARTON. Listen to him!

BUNTER. —and of course the plumbing is pretty frightful. But for the sake of you fellows, well here I am.

CHERRY. Where does he get all that cheek, I wonder?

BUNTER. Really, Cherry, I hope you aren't going to be unpleasant in another fellow's home?

HURR. The unpleasantfulness is terrific!

BUNTER. Cheeky beasts!

CHERRY. But before I start being unpleasant, there's only one thing worries me. Why didn't you go straight to Bunter Court?

BUNTER. Eh? Oh, I see what you mean. As a matter of fact, things are a bit difficult there. The—er—er—builders are there. Alterations to the battlements.

CHERRY. More likely, putting up a bicycle shed for your titled relations.

WHARTON. The Duke of Bunter . . .

(*They laugh*)

BUNTER. You can cackle, I might tell you you're jolly lucky to get me to come to a draughty, dismal dump like this.

CHERRY. Bunter, old man.

BUNTER. Yes, Cherry?

CHERRY. We've got something for you, Bunter.

BUNTER. Is it cake?

NUGENT. No, it's not cake.

BUNTER. Some tarts? You know I jolly well like tarts.

WHARTON. No, Bunter, it's not tarts.

BUNTER. Well, I'll settle for some ice-cream. I'm not choosy, I'll eat anything.

HURRE. The anythingfulness is terrific.

BULL. We know that, you fat gourmand.

BUNTER. Cheeky beast, Bull.

NUGENT. It's not cake. It's not ice-cream or anything like that.

BUNTER. I know—it's toffees.

CHERRY. Come on, you fellows, let's bump him.

BULL. Oh, yes, let's bump him.

(They converge on Bunter and grab him)

BUNTER. I say, you fellows! Keep off!

(They bump him)

I didn't mean to say Mauly's place is dismal.

(They bump him)

I don't care about the terrible plumbing.

(They bump him)

Help! Hands off! Yaroooh! I'll tell Quelchy.

(QUELCH enters down R. He wears a black overcoat, etc., and carries a brief-case. The BOYS, aghast, drop Bunter and back slowly L.)

(He gets up, unaware that Quelch is there and faces the others) That made you think, didn't it? Quelchy may be an old beast, but he'd soon stop you bumping me. You're all scared of Quelchy, except me. I very nearly told him what I thought of him over that Gulf Stream business. Of course, he's a fathead over that. It was on the tip of my tongue to say . . .

QUELCH *(thundering)* Bunter!

BUNTER. That sounded just like him, then. I could have . . . *(He turns, sees Quelch and does a "double-take")* Oh, my aunt!

QUELCH *(icily)* What was it on the tip of your tongue to say to me, Bunter?

BUNTER. Oh, crikey! I—I was going to say what a decent form-master you were, sir. Not a beast like the Head or old Prout.

QUELCH. Bless my soul! I had hoped I would be spared your prevarications and stupidity during the Christmas holiday.

BUNTER. Oh, really, sir . . . *(He moves and sits on the chest R.)*

QUELCH. Be silent! *(To Mauly)* Is your uncle here, Mauleverer? *(He crosses to C)* He is expecting me.

MAULY. He—he's expecting you, sir?

QUELCH. Indeed he is. He has asked me to examine some most interesting Greek scrolls. I intend to study them here during the vacation.

WHARTON. Good grief! Quelchy's the expert.

BUNTER. Oh, Lor'!

QUELCH. I beg your pardon, Wharton?

WHARTON. I said—it was nice to have you here, sir.

QUELCH. Indeed! My ears must be deceiving me. Would you take me to your uncle, Mauleverer?

MAULY. He's not here, sir. He was flying back from the Continent, but the planes are all grounded. He hopes to be back tomorrow if the weather picks up.

QUELCH. I am sorry. Is your curator—Dr Schmidt—here?

MAULY. Yes, sir. I'll get him. Sit down, sir.

(MAULY rushes out up L.C. There is an awkward silence. QUELCH wanders around the room, examining the panelling, etc)

QUELCH (moving to L. of the table and breaking the silence) I should have thought you boys would have conducted yourselves more creditably while staying here. Are you not aware that Mauleverer Towers is one of the most historic of our country residences?

WHARTON. Oh, yes, sir. Of course, sir.

QUELCH. Many people would consider themselves privileged to be surrounded by our glorious past. You may not know it, but the Tudors were great friends of the Mauleverer family.

CHERRY. Were—were they, sir?

BUNTER (rising) I knew that, sir.

QUELCH (slyly) Indeed, Bunter! I'm surprised that you've even heard of the Tudors.

BUNTER. Oh, I know them frightfully well, sir. They stayed at Bunter Court, too.

QUELCH. You surprise me, Bunter. (He sits c, above the table) Although there are many families who claim misguidedly that Elizabeth Tudor stayed at their houses.

BUNTER (slyly) Oh, she stayed with us all right, sir. My sister Bessie played tennis with her last summer.

(The other Boys laugh)

QUELCH. Bless my soul! Are you aware what you are saying, Bunter?

BUNTER. Yes, sir. I played a couple of games with her myself.

(The other Boys laugh)

QUELCH. You incredible boy! Queen Elizabeth died three hundred years ago.

(The other Boys laugh)

BUNTER (*disconcerted*) She looked a bit seedy, but she wasn't dead.

QUELCH. Bunter, you seem to be unaware that the Tudors were a dynasty of English sovereigns who followed the Plantagenets and preceded the Stuarts.

BUNTER. Oh, were they, sir?

QUELCH. They were. The first Tudor was Henry the Seventh, followed by his son, Henry the Eighth . . .

BUNTER (*eagerly*) I know Henry the Eighth, sir.

QUELCH. You do?

BUNTER. Yes, sir, he married six times.

QUELCH. That is correct. I presume your knowledge doesn't extend to the names of his wives.

BUNTER. You what, sir?

QUELCH. Do you know the *names* of any of Henry the Eighth's wives?

BUNTER. Oh, yes, sir. Of course, sir. Er . . .

QUELCH. Well?

BUNTER. There was Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc . . .

(*The other Boys roar with laughter*)

QUELCH (*rising*) Bless my soul! Is there no end to this nonsense?

BUNTER. Not until he'd married another four, sir.

QUELCH. I suppose I should be used to your crass ignorance, Bunter, but I must confess you astound me.

BUNTER. I surprise myself sometimes, sir. Lots of chaps are crass, but no-one's crasser than me.

QUELCH. Than *I*, Bunter?

BUNTER. Oh, yes, sir—you're jolly crass, too.

(*The other Boys laugh*)

QUELCH. I see no need for you boys to laugh.

WHARTON. No—yes, sir. Of course, yes.

(*SCHMIDT and MAULY enter up LC*)

MAULY (*moving down LC*) Here's Dr Schmidt, sir. This is Mr Quelch, Doctor.

QUELCH (*meeting Schmidt up LC*) A pleasure to meet you, Dr Schmidt.

SCHMIDT. The pleasure is mine. Lord Mauleverer tells me you are a professor at his school.

QUELCH. That is correct. Although, as you know, I have always devoted a great deal of my spare time to the study of Greece and its glorious past.

SCHMIDT. I was fortunate enough to hear you lecture on the subject at Oxford, once. Did you bring the first of the Aegean Scrolls with you, sir?

QUELCH (*tapping his brief-case*) I have it with me. You may be

sure I should not let such a priceless historical document out of my personal care.

SCHMIDT. Would you care for a meal before you see the rest of the scrolls?

QUELCH. To be truthful, I cannot wait to see them—if it's convenient.

SCHMIDT. They are at the Dower House. I will take you there—you shall have the key of the safe and the scrolls will be in your charge. *(He crosses to the arch down R)* This way, Dr Quelch. Portwell will take your trunk to your room.

QUELCH *(following Schmidt down R)* I hope you boys will conduct yourselves in a manner more fitting to your surroundings. *(He turns to Schmidt)* Mauleverer tells me his uncle's return is delayed.

(SCHMIDT and QUELCH exit down R. The Boys look at each other)

CHERRY. Well, how do you like that! Quelchy for Christmas!

MAULY. I'm sorry, you chaps, but I had no idea uncle had invited him. Still, he'll be poking about at the Dower House most of the time—he won't bother us.

BUNTER. I say, Mauly, your uncle can't be very sophisticated.

CHERRY. You mean "sophisticated"?

BUNTER. Don't split hairs, Cherry. I think it's rather a nerve to invite a fellow for Christmas and then when he gets here he finds Quelchy.

WHARTON. Listen to him! I don't remember anyone inviting you here, Bunter.

HURSE. The don't-rememberfulness is terrific.

BUNTER. Of course, I don't want to disappoint you fellows . . .

CHERRY. You don't?

BUNTER. No. On reflection—I shall stay.

BULL. Why, you cheeky fat porker!

CHERRY. Wait a minute, Johnny. *(To Bunter)* You're sure you don't want to disappoint us, old fat man?

BUNTER. I said I wouldn't. Some chaps are unreliable, but not me. If I said I'll stay—I'll stay. That's me all over.

CHERRY. That's very decent of you, Bunter. And since the only way you'd disappoint us is *by* staying, that means you're leaving. *(He advances on Bunter)*

BUNTER *(backing down R)* Now, look here . . .

WHARTON. That's the ticket, Bob.

CHERRY. We'll see him to the station—there is another train, isn't there, Mauly?

MAULY. Yes.

BUNTER. I can't go on the train, I haven't a ticket.

CHERRY. We can even overcome that little difficulty, Bunty. You came without a ticket, you can go back the same way.

BUNTER. Now, wait a minute . . .

BULL. Jolly good idea. Pack him in . . .

BUNTER (*rushing up c*) I say, you fellows . . .

(CHERRY and WHARTON *seize Bunter*)

BULL. Where are we going to send him? Back to school?

CHERRY. No fear. We'll address him to Bunter Court. He can spend Christmas on the railway while they look for it.

(*The others cheer. CHERRY and WHARTON carry Bunter to the trunk and lift him in to it*)

BUNTER. Help! Yaroooh!

They are packing the struggling BUNTER into the trunk as—

the CURTAIN falls

SCENE II

SCENE—*The same. Early the same evening.*

When the CURTAIN rises, SCHMIDT is standing down RC, looking off into the hall.

SCHMIDT (*calling*) Bring the cases in here. I don't want them in the Dower House until I have examined them.

(CRUMP and PORTWELL *enter down R, each carrying a packing case*)

Have a care. They are valuable specimens.

(PORTWELL *carefully sets his case on the floor R. CRUMP drops his with a crash*)

Dummkopf! Fool! Idiot! Dummkopf!

CRUMP. Sorry, Guv!

SCHMIDT. Leave them there. I'll attend to them tomorrow. You may go, Portwell.

PORTWELL. Yes, sir.

CRUMP. I hope you 'aven't strained yourself, Portwell. Bit 'eavier than 'ats.

PORTWELL. I suggest you bend your attention to a shovel and the snow, Crump, instead of indulging in idle repartee and badinage.

(PORTWELL *exits with great dignity up LC*)

CRUMP. He'll take to his bed for a week, now, luggin' that box in 'ere.

SCHMIDT. Silence! (*He looks carefully around*) Crump, you must not forget that you are pretending to be a servant here.

CRUMP. That's all right for you. I have to do all the bloomin' donkey work. I even had to help them young coves take their fat mate to the station, packed in a trunk—if you ever 'eard such a thing.

SCHMIDT. Stop your complaints. Now that the set of scrolls is complete, my plans can go forward.

CRUMP. Thank the Lord for that! I'm sick of gardening in this weather.

SCHMIDT. If all goes well, your task will be completed to-morrow.

CRUMP. You mean I can push off?

SCHMIDT. *Ja!* Now, listen. This Quelch has examined the scrolls. He has stated they are genuine, and all that need concern you is that to certain people they are worth a fortune, that they are wrapped in oil silk and that they are in the safe. Tonight, when they are all asleep, you will open the safe and remove them. You know the safe. Can you open it?

CRUMP. I should say so. *(He crosses to the fireplace)* I'd like to warm up, first, though—with me 'ands like this I couldn't open a swing door. Berrrrrr!

(SCHMIDT goes to the suit of armour up c, lifts the visor of the helmet and takes out an oil silk package)

SCHMIDT *(crossing to Crump)* And, Crump, you will take these and place them in the safe from where you take the scrolls. *(He hands the package to Crump)*

CRUMP. They're the false ones? *(He puts the package in his pocket)*

SCHMIDT. *Ja!* They are exact duplicates—only an expert can tell the difference.

CRUMP. Isn't this Quelch bird an expert?

SCHMIDT. That is so.

CRUMP. Suppose he raises a stink?

SCHMIDT. He should do what?

CRUMP. Makes a fuss, says they've been switched.

SCHMIDT. How can he say that when he has had the key. There's only one key here.

CRUMP. You mean, Lord Mauleverer's uncle has the other one on the Continent with him?

SCHMIDT. He has. So you must be careful in the way you open this safe. Disturb nothing.

CRUMP. O.K., Guv. What happens when I've got 'em?

SCHMIDT. You will meet me here at midnight. I shall ensure they are in order, then you will proceed to an address in London.

CRUMP. What—at night?

SCHMIDT. *Ja!* You will borrow the station wagon and return in the morning. Then you will be paid. *(He moves up c)*

CRUMP. Then I can push off for good.

SCHMIDT. No. You will continue to work here until the end of the week.

CRUMP. Eh? Me? (*He crosses to Schmidt*) Work here for another week?

SCHMIDT. Thus you will avoid suspicion—should anything go wrong.

CRUMP. But I'll 'ave to sweep all that bloomin' snow off the drive tomorrow. Have you seen that drive? It looks like the Great North Road.

SCHMIDT. I should have said you will be paid in part tomorrow—the rest of the money will be held until the end of the week. Understand?

CRUMP. I understand all right. I've got to slave in that snow for another week. When I get me 'ands on that lolly I'm goin' to spend it on a blinkin' furnace. (*He crosses to the fireplace*)

SCHMIDT (*moving to Crump*) Meet me here at midnight. Now, go.

CRUMP. Let's get me 'ands warm, first. Hey, suppose this Quelch geezer is there when I go to the safe at the Dower House?

SCHMIDT. He will not be. I intend to detain him in his room for the rest of the evening. Now, go quickly. It is not good for you to be seen too much in the house. You are a gardener, remember.

CRUMP. As though I'm likely to forget. I just want to warm me 'ands, that's all.

SCHMIDT. Ach! There's something else to bring in from the hall.

CRUMP. Oh, not that blinkin' coffin?

SCHMIDT. That is not a coffin—it is a valuable mummy case.

CRUMP. A what?

SCHMIDT. It belongs to an Egyptian mummy.

CRUMP. Well, what are you doing with it?

SCHMIDT. It belongs to the museum.

CRUMP. I give up. (*He crosses to the arch down R*) Are you going to give me a hand with it, or shall I get that ornament of a butler? I feel sorry for him—he gets tired raising his eyebrows.

SCHMIDT (*crossing to Crump*) Come, I will help you.

(*CRUMP and SCHMIDT exit down R and re-enter immediately dragging a large Egyptian mummy case*)

CRUMP (*as they enter*) What do you know—coffins for Christmas. I know why this place isn't haunted—the ghosts couldn't stand it.

SCHMIDT. Leave it there.

(*They leave the mummy case on the floor C*)

CRUMP (*crossing to the fireplace*) It's made me 'ands cold again.

SCHMIDT (*moving to the arch up LC*) Don't delay here. And be careful—there must be no sign of a robbery.

CRUMP. Leave it to me. Meet you at midnight.

SCHMIDT. Silence. I shall leave the library window open for you.

CRUMP. And if it's not too much trouble, bring me an 'ot-water bottle.

(SCHMIDT exits up LC. CRUMP turns and warms his hands at the fire. The lid of the mummy case slowly opens. Whenever the lid is opened or closed, there is a loud creak. CRUMP hears the creak, turns and sees the lid rising)

(He gasps) Oh, cor! (He scampers behind the suit of armour up RC)

(The lid rises to its full extent. BUNTER, a weary and bedraggled figure, emerges from the mummy case)

BUNTER (closing the lid) Ooooh! I'm freezing. (He crosses to the fire, muttering) Beasts! I'll show them. (He hears footsteps, hurries to the mummy case, cannot open it in time and backs against the armour up RC)

(PORTWELL enters up LC, and without seeing Bunter, crosses and exits down L. BUNTER, standing in front of the armour, scratches his head and looks for somewhere to go. He lowers his hand, and CRUMP, behind the armour, raises the armoured hand and scratches Bunter's head. BUNTER feels his head being scratched, then looks aghast at his hand. He turns round and the armour is still)

I—I am certain someone touched my head.

CRUMP (in a deep voice) They did, cock—it was me.

BUNTER. I jolly well . . . Eh? Ow! Help!

(BUNTER, scared, runs off down R. CRUMP comes from behind the armour, rubbing his hands, and crosses towards the door down L.)

PORTWELL enters down L.)

PORTWELL. Crump! What are you doing in here?

CRUMP. You may well ask. I been draggin' that bloomin' coffin and them cases about. I'm beginning to wonder who tips you off when there's anything to be moved.

PORTWELL. For your information, it is no part of a butler's duties to unload vans.

CRUMP. For my information, it seems no part of a butler's duties to do anything much—except walk about like an 'ead-waiter at the Savoy.

PORTWELL. As soon as the master returns, I shall make him a report on your conduct, Crump. (He moves to the fireplace) You may find yourself out of a job.

CRUMP. You'll have to be quick—because if the weather don't pick up I shall be frozen stiff out there in the goldfish pond.

PORTWELL. It's time you returned to your quarters in the

gardener's cottage. Or do you intend to move those cases to the Dower House?

GRUMP. I intend nothing of the sort. I'd advise you to get a good night's sleep, an' all—because I'm going to need some 'elp with them in the morning. *(He moves down R.)*

PORTWELL *(moving to L of the table)* Remove yourself at once.

GRUMP. You take it easy. *(He eyes the mummy case)* I reckon you'd just about fit that.

(GRUMP grins and exits down R. PORTWELL moves towards the arch up LC.)

CHERRY enters up LC)

CHERRY. Hello, Portwell. Stopped snowing yet?

PORTWELL. I believe so, sir.

CHERRY. Any chance of a spot of moonlight skating on the lake? *(He moves down RC)*

PORTWELL. I should imagine the ice will be thick enough, but as to the moon, I couldn't say.

CHERRY *(seeing the mummy case)* Hello, what's this?

PORTWELL *(moving to Cherry)* An Egyptian mummy case, I believe, sir.

CHERRY. Anything in it?

PORTWELL. I haven't examined it, sir.

(CHERRY opens the lid, which creaks loudly as usual)

CHERRY. Empty. *(He closes the lid)*

PORTWELL. It might be better to stand it against the wall, sir. It could get damaged there.

CHERRY. I'll give you a hand.

(PORTWELL and CHERRY stand the mummy case upright against the wall R)

You might tell the others it's stopped snowing—we might take a look at the ice.

PORTWELL. Very good, sir.

(PORTWELL exits up LC. CHERRY stands with his back to the arch down R, opens the mummy case, and examines the inside. BUNTER backs cautiously in down R. They neither of them see each other until BUNTER, who has backed right up to Cherry, suddenly turns and sees him.)

BUNTER, in a panic, pushes CHERRY into the mummy case, slams the lid and runs off down L.

WHARTON, NUGENT, BULL, HURIE and MAULY enter up LC)

WHARTON. Hallo, where's Bob?

NUGENT. Portwell said he was in here.

(A muffled noise comes from the mummy case)

BULL. What was that?

(There is further noise from the mummy case. The Boys turn and look at it)

WHARTON. It—it's that mummy case.

MAULY. That's the stuff nunky was expecting from the Middle East.

(There is a faint tapping noise from the mummy case)

NUGENT. W-w-what do you think it is? A m-m-mummy?

(The Boys edge away)

BULL. It can't be, they're all d-d-dead, m-m-mummies are.

HURRE. The deadfulness is terrific. You don't think it could have eaten our esteemed chum, Cherry?

(The mummy case rocks)

WHARTON. There's something alive in there—I'm going to look.

BULL. Get those battle-axes again. *(He gets the battle-axe from the hall down R)*

(WHARTON gets the battle-axe from the armour up RC)

WHARTON. Open the lid, Franky.

NUGENT. M-me?

HURRE. I will openfully handle the lid.

WHARTON. That's the ticket, Inky.

HURRE. Have your weapons in readiness to cosh this absurd mummy.

(BULL and WHARTON stand at the ready with the battle-axes as HURRE moves to the mummy case and tries to open it)

BULL. Pull hard, Inky.

HURRE. Really, my esteemed Bull, I am pullfully doing my best. The lid is stuckfully fixed. *(He gives a final pull and the lid comes open)*

(CHERRY bursts out of the mummy case. WHARTON and BULL take a swipe at him with their weapons)

Boys *(ad lib.)* Bob!

WHARTON. Bob! What are you doing in there?

CHERRY. What do you mean—what am I doing? Which one of you jokers shoved me in there?

WHARTON. Shoved you in there? We've only just come into the room.

CHERRY. I tell you I was pushed in there.

WHARTON. Well, it wasn't us. It must have been someone else.

NUGENT. I don't see Portwell pushing people in mummy cases.

MAULY. Or Dr Schmidt.

BULL. I don't see how it could have been anyone else but Portwell—perhaps he's gone off his rocker.

WHARTON. You're sure you didn't trip and fall?

CHERRY. Of course I'm sure. If I find out who did it, I'll land him one.

WHARTON. You might have tripped—and the lid hit you in the back. It would have felt like a shove.

CHERRY (*doubtfully*). But it *felt* like a shove.

BULL. Forget it. What were you looking in there for, anyway?

CHERRY. I just wanted to see what was in there.

NUGENT. Well, now you know what was in there—you!

(*They laugh*)

CHERRY. Come on. Let's get the skates.

MAULY. You fellows go ahead. (*He sits in the easy chair*) I think I'll have a nap.

WHARTON. A nap! You slept in the train and you've been dozing ever since we arrived.

MAULY. I always find Christmas tiring.

CHERRY. You find all the year round tiring, old bean. It's no good, Mauly—we're determined to get you fit by next term.

WHARTON. That's the ticket! Mauly—captain of soccer.

(*They laugh*)

MAULY (*rising*). You go and enjoy yourselves. Don't bother about me.

CHERRY. But we do. It won't be the same without you. Let's help to get his skates, you fellows.

MAULY. No—really . . .

(*The other BOYS laugh, grab MAULY and rush him out up L.C.*)

BUNTER *enters down L. He is shivering and goes to the fire*)

BUNTER. Oh, crikey! I'm frozen. (*He gives a nervous look over his shoulder at the suit of armour and warms his hands. He holds the overmantel and raises each foot in turn to the fire*)

(*As BUNTER presses the ornamental scroll work, a creaking noise is heard and the panel up R.C. slowly opens*)

(*He hears the noise, turns and sees the panel*) Oh, crikey! A secret panel.

(*As BUNTER takes his hand from the overmantel, the panel closes*)

Now, which bit was it? I'll try this. (*He presses*)

(*The panel opens. BUNTER takes his hand away and the panel remains open*)

(*He crosses to the panel and peers inside*) A secret passage with a room at the end. I wonder if it opens from inside? (*He goes through the opening and feels around*)

(The panel closes. After a moment it reopens and BUNTER reappears)

Yes, it does. I'd better close it. *(He crosses to the overmantel and presses)*

(The panel closes. BUNTER presses again and the panel opens)

NUGENT *(off)* Come on, you fellows, the moon's out.

(BUNTER flits across and hides in the panel passage, closing the panel after him.)

NUGENT *enters up LC and catches a fleeting glimpse of Bunter. He carries a pair of skates. He looks all around, mystified, when he sees the room is empty.*

WHARTON, BULL, CHERRY and HUREK *enter up LC, dragging a reluctant MAULY. They carry skates)*

CHERRY. What's the matter, Frank? You look as though you've seen a ghost?

NUGENT. I—I think I have.

CHERRY. Was it one of Mauly's ancestors or Elizabeth Tudor?

BULL. It couldn't be her—she's playing tennis with Bunter.

(They laugh)

NUGENT. That's who I thought it was.

WHARTON. Who? Elizabeth Tudor?

NUGENT. No—Bunter.

BULL. Bunter?

NUGENT. As I came into the room I thought I saw him nip—*(he points up RC)* over there.

WHARTON *(looking up RC)* Over there?

CHERRY. Bunter is probably in some station-master's office trying to remember where Bunter Court is.

(They laugh)

BULL. I suppose the fat spoofer couldn't have got back here?

WHARTON. We left him packed up in the guard's van. But if Frank saw him go over there—where can he be?

NUGENT. That's right. *(He points to the wall up RC)* He went over to that wall.

CHERRY. If Bunter went through the wall—there'd be a hole in it.

HUREK. The holefulness would be terrific.

BULL. You've said it, Inky.

WHARTON. Wait a minute. What about that mummy case? He could be in there.

NUGENT. He didn't seem to go in there. More that way.

CHERRY. It's the only place. That way is all solid wall.

WHARTON *(moving to the mummy case)* Let's open it.

(They open the mummy case and peer inside, leaving the lid open)

CHERRY. Well, if Bunter's in there he's lost a lot of weight.

NUGENT. I felt I could have touched him.

BULL. If it was Bunter he'd have touched you.

NUGENT. It must have been a hallucination.

CHERRY. It was. You know, Mauly, I'm ashamed of you. After the build-up Quelchy gave this place, you can't rake up a better ghost than Bunter.

(They laugh)

BULL *(moving to the arch down R)* Let's get out to the lake—the moon might go in.

MAULY. You know, I've been thinking. Perhaps I could stay here and see if there really is a ghost. I could sit quietly in the chair and . . .

CHERRY. We know—have a nap.

WHARTON. It's no good, Mauly—you're going to skate.

(The other Boys take MAULY gently by the arms, lead him down R and exit. MAULY yawns as he goes. There is a slight pause.)

PORTWELL enters up L.C., sees the room is empty, switches out the lights and exits up L.C. The room is in darkness, except for the glow of the fire.

CRUMP enters down R and crosses to R of the table. The panel opens, creaking as it does so. CRUMP hears the noise and quickly hides in the mummy case, leaving the lid open.

BUNTER emerges from the secret passage)

BUNTER. Golly, I must have some food if I've got to spend the night in there. *(He crosses to the fireplace)* I suppose I'd better close it. *(He presses the overmantel)*

(The panel closes)

That's it. *(He moves towards the arch up L.C.)*

A noise is heard off down R.

BUNTER dashes to the mummy case, tries to get in, yells when he feels someone there and dashes off up L.C. as—

the CURTAIN falls

SCENE III

SCENE—*The same. Later the same evening.*

When the CURTAIN rises, the lights are on and the fire is still blazing. The table is piled high with food, sandwiches, sausage rolls, mince-pies, etc. MAULY is in the easy chair, dozing. WHARTON, NUGENT, CHERRY, HUREK and BULL are standing round the table, eating.

WHARTON. Nothing like skating to bring on the appetite.

CHERRY. As far as Mauly's concerned, it's brought on sleeping sickness. *(He turns to Mauly)* Hey, Mauly! Have a mince-pie.

(MAULY snuffles in his sleep. The others laugh)

NUGENT. Let him doze, Bob, we've nearly worn him out.

CHERRY *(moving to Mauly)* Mauly! *(He shouts)* Fire!

MAULY *(his eyes still closed; smiling)* No, thank you.

(The others laugh)

CHERRY. Would you believe it? I think he's in a trance.

BULL. He just flopped straight out when we came back. He's had nothing to eat, even.

CHERRY. Let's hold one of those hot pies under his nose—that might get him up. *(He picks up a mince-pie and waves it under Mauly's nose)*

(The others gather round to watch. Unseen by them, the panel opens.)

BUNTER *(whips out of the passage, grabs the plate of mince-pies, returns to the passage and closes the panel behind him)*

WHARTON. Leave him, Bob. We'll have to rouse him when we go to bed.

(SCHMIDT enters up LC and looks impatiently at the Boys)

SCHMIDT *(crossing to R of the table)* Are not you boys staying up very late?

WHARTON *(turning)* Oh, hallo, Dr Schmidt. We shan't be long, now. We've been skating on the lake.

SCHMIDT. You have? Near the Dower House?

WHARTON. Yes, I think Mauly said that's what it was. Where you keep all your museum junk—er—specimens, that is.

SCHMIDT. I see. Well, I should advise you to get to bed very soon. Tomorrow it will be Christmas, you know. It is nearly midnight, now.

CHERRY. We shan't be long, Dr Schmidt. We were just thinking about taking Mauly up to bed.

SCHMIDT. Excellent. *(He eyes Mauly)* He is asleep, perhaps?

CHERRY. He is asleep—not half.

(The others laugh)

Don't worry about us.

SCHMIDT. Good night to you.

(SCHMIDT looks at his watch and exits up LC)

WHARTON. Trying to pack us off to bed early.

NUGENT. I suppose he thinks with Mauly's uncle away he has to keep an eye on us.

BULL. Funny chaps, these foreigners.

CHERRY. He'll probably tuck us into bed and hang our Christmas stockings up. I'm going to have another mince-pie before I . . . *(He sees the pies have gone)* Who's scoffed all the mince-pies?

WHARTON. They were on the corner of the table.

CHERRY. They're not there, now—look!

NUGENT. Where have they gone? No-one has been here except Dr Schmidt. *(He paces)* Do you think he could have scoffed the lot?

WHARTON. How could he? He wasn't here a minute.

BULL. He came in behind us while we were watching Mauly.

CHERRY. He still couldn't have eaten a plate of mince-pies in that time. There's only one man who could do that—Bunter.

WHARTON. Jolly weird! But for once we can't blame Bunter.

CHERRY. Franky saw his ghost. Perhaps the ghost swiped them.

BULL. You don't think that Schmidt could have whipped them while we weren't looking?

WHARTON. Why should he do that?

HUREE. The whipfulness is terrific.

BULL. He might have thought if he took the grub away we'd go to bed.

WHARTON. I can't see it myself—but let's take a look.

(WHARTON, CHERRY, NUGENT, BULL and HUREE exit up LC, leaving MAULY asleep in the chair. The panel opens.)

BUNTER slips out of the passage, grabs the plate of sausage rolls, returns to the passage and closes the panel behind him)

CHERRY *(off)* Nothing out here. I can't understand it.

(The Boys re-enter up LC)

(He moves to the table) Well, let's tuck in to the sausage rolls, they're still . . . *(He breaks off and stares in astonishment)* No, they're not!

BULL. Where have they gone? It's becoming difficult to get a bite in this house.

CHERRY. See if Mauly knows anything about it. *(He crosses to Mauly and shakes him)* Wake up, Mauly.

(MAULY sits up)

MAULY. Where's the fire?

(The other Boys cluster around Mauly)

CHERRY. Listen to him. He's living in the past. I shouted "Fire", five minutes ago, fathead. Our cakes and things are being swiped again.

MAULY. Eh? What? I haven't had any cakes.

WHARTON. Did you see anyone come in here and take them?

MAULY. I was asleep. I'm rather tired, you know. (*He leans back and closes his eyes*)

BULL. You surprise us.

WHARTON. Portwell didn't come in to clear the table or anything?

NUGENT. He couldn't have taken the first lot.

BULL (*to Mauly*). You're sure you didn't see Portwell, Mauly? My hat! He's asleep again.

CHERRY. Would Mrs Gray have sneaked in and taken them? (*He shakes Mauly*) Mauly! Did you see Mrs Gray?

MAULY. I can't see any fire.

BULL. For goodness' sake drag him out of that chair. He can go and ask Mrs Gray himself.

WHARTON. We'll go with him, Bob, in case he drops off to sleep on the way. (*He seizes Mauly*) Come on, Mauly, up.

MAULY. I'm fagged out.

(*The Boys pull MAULY to his feet*)

CHERRY. Put your hands out in front, Mauly—you can sleep-walk.

(*They laugh.*)

CHERRY and WHARTON lead MAULY out up LC)

NUGENT. I'd like to know where all that food went.

BULL (*crossing to the fireplace*). I expect either Portwell or Mrs Gray took it—there's always a natural explanation for these things.

NUGENT. It could have been that foreign bird—Schmidt.

HURR. I think the esteemed Schmidt wishes us to bedfully disperse.

NUGENT (*glancing up LC*). Talk of the devil . . .

(SCHMIDT enters up LC)

SCHMIDT (*looking at his watch*). It is time you boys were in bed. Have your friends gone?

BULL. They've gone to see Mrs Gray, first. Someone swiped our tuck. I suppose you didn't collar it, Dr Schmidt?

SCHMIDT. You suggest I did what? Something to your collar?

NUGENT. What Johnny means is, that for a lark, you might have stolen our mince-pies and . . .

SCHMIDT (*angrily*). Do I understand you—you suggest I am a thief? I shall have to speak to Mauleverer's uncle when he returns. I do not take insults from boys.

BULL. Here! Hold on! I only thought you might have taken them for a joke or something.

SCHMIDT. I see nothing amusing in stealing. I think it is time you were in bed.

(SCHMIDT turns sharply on his heel and exits up LC)

NUGENT. Touchy sort of chap.

BULL. Foreign bird—no sense of humour.

NUGENT. All the same, I think we ought to push off to bed when the others come back. It is late.

(WHARTON enters up LC)

WHARTON. Mrs Gray says she hasn't taken anything. She says Portwell has a mania for tidying up—but he's gone to bed.

(CHERRY and MAULY enter up LC. CHERRY carries a dish with a huge, uncooked turkey)

CHERRY. Hallo, hallo, hallo!

BULL. What's that? A replacement for the mince-pies?

CHERRY (putting the turkey on the table) Fathead! It's not cooked, yet—it's tomorrow's dinner. Mrs Gray said we could show it to you—she's just going to stuff it.

BULL. Makes my mouth water to look at it.

CHERRY. It's a lot more than I could eat myself—I shall need help with it.

(There is a sudden, loud crash off down R)

WHARTON. What was that?

BULL. It was too solid for Bunter's ghost.

NUGENT. It was outside the house—not in the hall.

WHARTON. Let's go out and look.

(The Boys exit down R.)

CRUMP creeps in down L. He carries the Aegean Scrolls)

CRUMP (calling softly) Hey, Dr Schmidt. (He moves up C and calls again) Dr Schmidt.

MAULY (off) Must have been some snow falling off the roof.

(CRUMP is panic-stricken. He looks wildly around, sees the turkey and stuffs the scrolls inside it.)

The Boys re-enter down R)

Hello, here's Crump. What are you doin' here, old bean?

CRUMP. I thought I seen someone prowling about—I found the library window open so I just climbed through. (Virtuously) Some very funny people about these days.

CHERRY. We heard a noise outside—that's why we went out.

CRUMP. That might have been me—I fell over one of them ornamental pots in the drive.

MAULY. What were you doing there in the first place?

CRUMP. Who, me? I was—er—looking the drive over. I've got to sweep it in the morning. I went out to see if the snow was still there.

WHARTON. Let's just take another look, where Crump thought he saw this prowler.

CRUMP (*eagerly*) Yes. You go and take a look. Can't be too careful. Six of you could handle 'im all right. Didn't seem a big fellow.

CHERRY (*leading Crump R*) Well, you'd better come and show us where you saw him.

CRUMP. I can tell you from 'ere. Just round the corner by the library window.

WHARTON. Fathead! Come and show us, yourself.

CRUMP. It's cold out there.

HUREE. The coldfulness is no more for you than for me.

CRUMP. It is, you know. I've got anaemia. My blood's like water. Liable to freeze up.

CHERRY. Well, don't worry, old horse, we'll thaw you out. Come on.

(*The Boys exit down R, taking CRUMP with them. CRUMP reluctantly eyes the turkey as he goes. The panel opens.*)

BUNTER *emerges, sees the turkey, blinks in amazement and grabs it*)

BUNTER. I'll save those rotters the wishbone.

(*BUNTER takes the turkey into the passage and closes the panel behind him.*)

CRUMP *and the Boys re-enter down R*)

WHARTON. There's no-one there, now.

CRUMP. Might have been me imagination. Tripping over that pot could have affected me mind. (*He suddenly sees the turkey has gone*) Hey! Where's that turkey.

BOYS (*ad lib.*) What?

CHERRY. Now *that's* disappeared.

WHARTON. I shouldn't worry. I expect Mrs Gray's been in for it.

CRUMP. Why would she take it?

CHERRY. She wants to stuff it.

CRUMP. I've already stuff—that is to say—she *what*?

MAULY. Haven't you ever heard of roastin' and stuffin' a turkey? For Christmas, you know.

CRUMP (*agitated*) She's going to do it *now*?

MAULY. She may not cook it till tomorrow. (*He crosses to the fireplace*) Can't afford to take a chance. That's a valuable bird.

CRUMP. I'll say it is!

MAULY. Why are you so interested in it?

CRUMP. Me? Oh, I'm not interested. (*Quickly*) You're sure she won't cook it tonight?

MAULY. Not unless she wants to stay up all night.

(*SCHMIDT enters up LC. He starts when he sees Crump*)

SCHMIDT. Crump! (*He moves to L of the table*) What are you doing here?

MAULY. It's all right, Dr Schmidt. He thought he saw someone prowling round the house.

SCHMIDT. Did you, Crump?

CRUMP. I thought so—(he moves to Schmidt) but it might have been me imagination—me and these young fellers had another look.

MAULY (moving up LC) I'm goin' to bed. I'm fagged out.

CHERRY (moving up LC) Right. I feel a little drowsy myself.

HURR (moving up LC) The sleepfulness is imminent.

SCHMIDT. In my opinion you boys have stayed up far too late.

MAULY. In my opinion, too. Come along, you fellows.

(The Boys exit up LC, calling "Good night" to Schmidt and Crump. As soon as they have gone, SCHMIDT turns on Crump)

SCHMIDT. *Dummkopf!* Why did you come in here while they were here?

CRUMP. I came in through the library window. I saw the light under the door—I thought it was you in here.

SCHMIDT. You could have ruined everything. Did you get the scrolls?

CRUMP. Yes.

SCHMIDT. Then show them to me.

CRUMP. Well, I 'aven't got 'em just this minute.

SCHMIDT. You just said you had them.

CRUMP. I said I got 'em. Now I 'aven't got 'em.

SCHMIDT. You mean you have let them out of your possession? Idiot! Fool!

CRUMP. I know—Dummkopf!

SCHMIDT. *Ja! Dummkopf!* Where are they?

CRUMP. In the turkey?

SCHMIDT. What?

CRUMP. I hid 'em in the turkey.

SCHMIDT. You . . . ? You are making a foolish joke, Crump, are you not?

CRUMP. That's right. I am not making a foolish joke. I 'ad to get them out of sight—I seen the turkey—and shoved 'em in there.

SCHMIDT (moving above the right end of the table) *Donner und Blitzen!* You tell me those priceless scrolls are shoved in the innards of a turkey? *Mein Gott!*

CRUMP (moving to L of Schmidt) We can get them back—she's not cookin' it tonight.

SCHMIDT. Cooking it! You mean the Aegean Scrolls may be roasted? (He crosses down L) What a ghastly thought.

CRUMP. A ghastly taste, too.

SCHMIDT (moving to L of Crump) It must be stopped. (He pulls Crump down LC) We must get this turkey. Does Mrs Gray have it?

CRUMP. Yes. Of course, she may find the scrolls when she

shoves the stuffin' in.

SCHMIDT. This is disaster! (*He crosses down R*) If she finds them we are undone. As you English say—our goose is cooked.

CRUMP. As long as the turkey isn't.

SCHMIDT. Listen, Crump. I will go to the kitchen and engage Mrs Gray, call her on some errand. You will enter the kitchen and recover the scrolls.

CRUMP. Yes, that'll do it, Guv.

SCHMIDT. This time—do not bungle.

(*The Boys enter up LC*)

MAULY. I say, Mrs Gray says she didn't collect the turkey.

CRUMP. Eh? You mean she 'asn't got it?

WHARTON. No. She hasn't seen it since we brought it in here. It must have been taken while we were out looking for the prowler.

CRUMP. Oh, crumbs!

SCHMIDT. It must be found. We must search the house.

MAULY. It must be somewhere. A twenty-pound turkey can't vanish into thin air.

CHERRY. Our mince-pies did.

NUGENT. And the sausage rolls.

BULL. What about waking up Portwell—he might know where it is.

CRUMP. He's not in bed. I saw him a couple of 'ours ago. Went down to the village on 'is bike.

MAULY. The village? What for?

CRUMP. Well, it's none of my business, but I understand the landlord of the village inn has a little private party on Christmas Eve. I don't think you'll see Portwell for some time yet.

SCHMIDT. We must search. (*Excitedly*) This turkey must be found at all costs.

MAULY. You seem very excited about it, Dr Schmidt.

SCHMIDT. The Christmas turkey is a most important thing. Now, we shall go into the passage and divide up. I will take Crump with me. You boys go the other direction.

(*SCHMIDT and CRUMP exit up LC*)

BULL. He's really concerned about it.

CHERRY. Perhaps he likes turkey.

MAULY. He couldn't be more worked up if it was a mummy we'd lost. You know, I think I'll pop up to bed. (*He moves up LC*) I don't really care for turkey.

CHERRY. You jolly well stay up with us. Franky, you come with me and Mauly, we'll try the library.

NUGENT (*crossing to the door down L*) Righto. (*He opens the door*)

MAULY. Really—I'm . . .

CHERRY. We know—fagged. Come on. You others look upstairs.

WHARTON. That's the ticket! We'll try the kitchen first.

(WHARTON, BULL and HUREE exit up LC.)

NUGENT, CHERRY and MAULY exit down L. As soon as they have gone the panel opens.

BUNTER emerges from the passage)

BUNTER. Beasts! It isn't even cooked. If I can only light a fire in that little room at the end of the passage . . . (He sees the packing cases) Some wood! (He removes the lid from one of the cases, dumps it in the passage, then looks around and grabs the chair from above the table) This ought to burn well.

(BUNTER slips into the passage with the chair, closing the panel after him.)

QUELCH enters down R and catches a fleeting glimpse of Bunter. QUELCH is wearing his overcoat and looks distressed. He does a quick "take" as BUNTER flits across)

QUELCH. My goodness! I must be losing my grip altogether. I could have sworn I saw Bunter. (He moves to R of the table)

(SCHMIDT and CRUMP enter up LC)

Dr Schmidt—I must speak to you at once.

SCHMIDT. Yes, Mr Quelch? What can I do for you? I thought you had gone to bed.

QUELCH. I was about to retire when I felt I had to consult a particular verse in the first scroll. I went to the Dower House and opened the safe.

SCHMIDT. Yes?

QUELCH. I examined the first scroll. The one I had at the school—and—and—there is something wrong, I tell you.

SCHMIDT. Something wrong? What do you mean, Mr Quelch?

QUELCH. The scrolls are not genuine.

(CRUMP surreptitiously nudges Schmidt)

SCHMIDT. Not genuine? But I understood from your report that you were ready to stake your reputation on their being genuine.

QUELCH. I was. That is what I can't understand. Upon re-examining it just now I am forced to conclude it is a fake. (He sits R of the table with his head in his hand)

SCHMIDT. A fake?

(MAULY, CHERRY and NUGENT enter down L)

MAULY (moving up LC) Even if we have bread and water, I am going to bed.

CHERRY (seeing Quelch) Good evening, sir—or rather, good morning, sir—or—happy Christmas.

QUELCH. Oh!

MAULY. What's the matter, sir? Are you feeling under the weather?

SCHMIDT. Mr Quelch has re-examined the Aegean Scrolls—he finds they are not genuine. Naturally, it is a melancholy discovery.

QUELCH. I do not understand it. Although I hadn't closely examined the scrolls that you kept here, from what I saw this afternoon, I would have been prepared to take my oath they were not fakes.

CHERRY (*crossing to Quelch*) I suppose someone couldn't have switched them over, sir? I know it sounds dramatic—but you read of people doing it with pearls and so on.

SCHMIDT. I don't see how that can have happened. Mr Quelch has had the key to the safe. You haven't let it out of your possession, have you, Mr Quelch?

QUELCH. No—no. (*He rises*) I have it in my waistcoat pocket. (*He takes out the key and displays it*) The affair is beyond my comprehension. (*He moves down R*)

CHERRY. Have you looked in the safe—did it look as though it had been tampered with? Crump, here, thinks he saw someone prowling about tonight.

MAULY (*crossing to L of Cherry*) It might have been a jolly old burglar.

QUELCH. I don't know what to say. When I opened the safe everything seemed exactly as I left it. The scrolls were in their oiled silk wrapping. It was only on close examination I saw they were not genuine.

CRUMP. You couldn't open a safe without disturbing something.

CHERRY (*crossing to Crump*) How do you know?

CRUMP. Me? Oh, well, I wouldn't think so, if you see what I mean.

SCHMIDT. I don't see how there could have been a robbery. However, perhaps it would do no harm to conduct a search of the grounds.

CHERRY. Let's have one more look round for this bird Crump thinks he saw. Bit of fresh air will wake us all up.

MAULY (*groaning*) Oh . . .

CHERRY (*moving down C*) You come to the Dower House with me, Mauly. Frank, you tell Harry, Johnny and Inky to look out for a burglar as well as a turkey.

(NUGENT *exits up L*)

QUELCH. I will accompany you, Cherry.

(QUELCH, CHERRY and MAULY *exit down R*)

SCHMIDT (*turning on Crump*) Why do you not keep your mouth shut? Do you want these people to think you know anything about safe-breaking?

CRUMP. Sorry, Guv.

SCHMIDT. Do not call me "Guv". Now, go into the library and see if the turkey is there. I will go to the kitchen.

(SCHMIDT exits up LC.)

CRUMP exits down L. The panel opens.

BUNTER peers out. He sees all is clear and comes out, bringing the turkey with him. A cloud of smoke follows him out!

BUNTER (coughing) Crikey! (He puts the turkey on the table) Must get some more firewood. (He gets the lid of the second packing case and tosses it into the passage)

(CRUMP enters down L)

(He sees Crump) Crikey!

(BUNTER grabs the turkey, rushes into the passage and closes the panel behind him. CRUMP does a "take", crosses and stares at the panel, aghast.)

SCHMIDT enters up LC)

SCHMIDT. There is no sign of the bird. (He stares at Crump) What is the matter, Crump? Why do you stand with your mouth open?

CRUMP. I—I—seen it.

SCHMIDT. You seen what?

CRUMP. The turkey!

SCHMIDT. Well, where, *Dummkopf!* Where?

CRUMP. It went through that wall.

SCHMIDT. Idiot! Lunatic! Double *Dummkopf!* How can it go through a wall? Are you insane?

CRUMP. That little fat geezer I took down to the train, the one they shoved in the box. 'E 'ad it. 'E nipped through that wall with it—I seen 'im.

SCHMIDT. I despair of you, Crump. You have ruined my plans. Now, you have hallucinations. (He crosses to the fireplace)

CRUMP (moving close to the panel) Through 'ere. Hey, can you smell something burning? (He turns and moves to R of the table)

SCHMIDT. A million dollars' worth of scrolls is lying in a turkey—and you talk of fires and fat geezers in walls. (He turns to the fireplace, leans on the mantelpiece with his head in his hands, and without knowing it, presses the scroll work)

(The panel opens, revealing BUNTER, gnawing at the turkey.

CRUMP, also with his back to the panel, does not see BUNTER, who is intent on his eating. SCHMIDT straightens up. The panel closes)

(He turns) I cannot understand you, Crump. You say you are a well-known safe-breaker but at the first sign of trouble, you panic.

CRUMP. I thought it was a good 'iding-place.

SCHMIDT. Listen to him! A good hiding-place. A turkey's gizzard. *(He turns and rests his head on his hands as before)*

(The panel opens, again revealing BUNTER intent on his food)

CRUMP. What about knockin' an 'ole in the wall?

(SCHMIDT straightens up. The panel closes)

SCHMIDT *(turning)* *Ja!* That would be very clever to knock a hole in the wall. What would we say when they found us?

CRUMP. Say we saw a mouse or something.

SCHMIDT. Who would knock a house down to find a mouse? Idiot! Lunatic! Fool!

CRUMP. All right, all right—*Dummkopf!* *(He leans miserably against the panel)*

(SCHMIDT, in despair, turns to the fireplace and again puts his head in his hands and presses the scroll work. The panel opens and CRUMP falls smack into the secret passage)

(He yells) Help!

(SCHMIDT turns. The panel remains open)

The house is falling down!

SCHMIDT *(crossing quickly to Crump)* *Donner und Blitzen!* A secret passage, Crump.

CRUMP. This is where he went. *(He rises)* That little fat geezer. *(He peers down the passage)* There's a room down the far end. Come on. A candle alight in there.

(CRUMP and SCHMIDT exit into the passage. After a few moments BUNTER'S voice is heard)

BUNTER *(off)* Help! Yarooch! Hands off, you beasts!

(CRUMP and SCHMIDT emerge from the passage, firmly holding BUNTER between them)

CRUMP. I said it was him. Now who's a *dummkopf?*

SCHMIDT *(to Bunter)* Where is the turkey, fat youth?

BUNTER. Stop it! You're hurting my arms.

CRUMP. Don't break his arm, Doctor—he's only a kid.

(They bring BUNTER down c)

Now, tubby—where's the flippin' turkey?

BUNTER. I've hurt my clavicle! I'll sue you for this.

(SCHMIDT twists Bunter's arm)

Yarooch!

SCHMIDT. Quiet, you fat *dummkopf!* Do you wish to bring everyone here?

BUNTER. Of course I do. (*He slips from them and runs down LC*) Help!

(CRUMP chases Bunter)

(*He runs up c*) Help! Help!

(SCHMIDT intercepts Bunter up c)

(*He goes down LC*) Help! I'll tell Quelchy—he'll give you a hundred lines.

SCHMIDT (*producing a gun*) If you make another sound—I will shoot you.

CRUMP. Careful, Doc, that's liable to go off.

SCHMIDT (*grimly*) It's extremely liable to go off. Now, tell me, boy, where is this turkey you stole?

BUNTER. I—I—didn't. I hope you don't think I'm the sort of chap to collar anyone's turkey . . .

CRUMP. That's just what we do think, cock. Now, where is it?

BUNTER. Don't point that gun at me—I've got a weak heart.

SCHMIDT. For the last time—where is the turkey?

BUNTER. I haven't seen it. Anyway, you can't shoot a chap for swiping a turkey—it's against the law.

SCHMIDT. Where is the turkey?

BUNTER. I haven't seen it. I didn't take it to the end of the passage and try to cook it. Anyway, it wouldn't cook with a wood fire. It's practically raw.

CRUMP. Hark at 'im! You know an awful lot about what happened to that turkey—for a bloke who's never seen it.

SCHMIDT. Crump, go into the passage. Look for the bird.

(CRUMP crosses to the open panel)

It must be there somewhere. (*He looks around*) Hand me a bit of rope from that packing case first.

CRUMP (*moving to the packing case*) Right, here you are, Guv—sorry—Doc. (*He tosses the rope to Schmidt*)

BUNTER. I say, what are you going to do with that rope?

CRUMP. Truss you like the turkey.

(CRUMP exits to the passage)

BUNTER. Look here, you can have the turkey, Dr Schmidt. I don't like turkey, anyway.

(SCHMIDT ignores Bunter and ties his hands behind his back)

(*He shouts*) Stop it! Help!

SCHMIDT. Right! We shall soon stop that. (*He takes a handkerchief from Bunter's top pocket and gags him with it*)

BUNTER. M—mmmmmm—mmmmmm . . .

(CRUMP re-enters from the passage, carrying the turkey)

GRUMP. It's all right, Dr Schmidt—I've got it.

SCHMIDT. *Gut!* Help me back into the passage with this boy. We shall have to change our plans and leave together. He shall remain hidden while we make our getaway. *(He pushes Bunter to the open panel)*

GRUMP. Right. *(He puts the turkey on the table)*

SCHMIDT. Bring some rope, we will tie his feet when we get in there.

(GRUMP collects another piece of rope from the packing cases)

BUNTER. Mmmmmmm—mmmmmm . . .

GRUMP. Pipe down, sonny boy. We'll send 'em a post-card to let 'em know where you are.

(GRUMP and SCHMIDT exit to the passage with BUNTER. As soon as they have gone, PORTWELL, dressed in a suit of armour, enters down R, picks up the turkey and exits with it down R.)

SCHMIDT and GRUMP re-enter from the passage. SCHMIDT, wiping his face with his handkerchief, moves to the arch up LC)

We'll have to let them know where 'e is. They might never find 'im in there.

SCHMIDT *(off-handedly)* Of course. Get the turkey.

GRUMP. Right—I'll . . . *(He looks at the table)* Oh, lummy! *It's gone again!*

SCHMIDT *(turning to the table)* *Donner und Blitzen!*

They stare aghast at—

the CURTAIN falls

SCENE IV

SCENE—*The same. Midnight.*

When the CURTAIN rises, the room is in darkness except for the flicker of the embers in the fire. The panel is closed. GRUMP staggers wearily in up LC and collapses into the chair L of the table. SCHMIDT follows him on.

GRUMP *(startling)* Wh-wh-oo's that?

SCHMIDT *(wearily)* Dr Schmidt. Don't worry.

GRUMP. Put the lights on, Doc—I've got the creeps.

(SCHMIDT switches on the lights)

SCHMIDT. Now, make no noise. For two hours we have searched *(He crosses and sits R of the table)* Let us think where we might have missed.

GRUMP. The only place I can think of is the television aerial.

SCHMIDT. There is no television aerial.

CRUMP. Thank the Lord! That's one place we don't have to look. I suppose it couldn't have flown anywhere.

SCHMIDT. Idiot! Fool!

CRUMP. 'Ere we go—dumkoff, again. You read about them things coming to life again—Zombies. Perhaps that turkey's a Zombie.

SCHMIDT. How could a turkey be a Zombie?

CRUMP. Don't ask me. I don't even know 'ow a Zombie can be a Zombie. It's just a thought I 'ad.

SCHMIDT. Then keep your stupid thoughts. (*He rises*) Let us reconstruct the incident. (*He indicates the table*) You put the turkey down here. Yes?

CRUMP (*rising*) I put it down there. Yes.

SCHMIDT. Then the turkey must have been taken behind our backs.

CRUMP. Yes. Now all we want to know is—who took it and where they are now.

SCHMIDT (*moving above the table*) Those boys and Quelch could have come back.

CRUMP. We was 'ere when they came back.

SCHMIDT. *Ja!* I wonder could that fat *dummkopf* have seen anyone?

CRUMP. Let's get 'im out and ask 'im.

SCHMIDT (*crossing to the fireplace*) An excellent idea. (*He presses the scroll work*)

(*The panel opens.*)

CRUMP and SCHMIDT cross and exit to the passage. They re-enter with BUNTER)

BUNTER. Mmmmmmm—mmmmmm . . .

CRUMP. All right—all right.

SCHMIDT. Untie his hands and take his gag off.

(CRUMP removes the gag and unties Bunter's hands)

(*To Bunter*) Sit down. I want to ask you some questions. (*He sits in the armchair*)

BUNTER. Ow—I'm stiff. I've got pins and needles. (*He sits L of the table*) I've strained my clavicle. I say, I'm starving. You don't have a sandwich, do you?

CRUMP. Yes, I've got one in me wallet. You answer our questions—you'll get some grub.

BUNTER. I haven't had anything to eat for hours. Except for those couple of dozen sausage rolls.

CRUMP. Eh?

BUNTER. And fourteen or so mince-pies.

CRUMP. And what?

BUNTER. And the sandwiches—I couldn't eat the turkey.

CRUMP. You—you couldn't?

BUNTER. It wasn't cooked enough.

CRUMP. It wouldn't 'ave been because you didn't 'ave room, by any chance?

BUNTER. No, I told you—it wasn't cooked. If you have any of it left—I could eat a leg and a couple of wings.

SCHMIDT. Idiot! We don't have the turkey—it was stolen.

BUNTER. I hope you aren't going to keep it all to yourselves? After all, if it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't have had it at all.

CRUMP. We're telling you—it was knocked off while we was putting you in the passage.

SCHMIDT. Did you see anyone when we were putting you in there? Did anyone come in from—*(he points down R)* that door and take the turkey from the table?

BUNTER. Eh? Oh, no—oh—yes.

SCHMIDT *(rising)*. You saw someone? Who? Who was it?

BUNTER. A tall fellow with a mask on—there were two of them.

CRUMP. Two men with masks?

BUNTER. There might have been more, they were very quick. They had revolvers.

SCHMIDT. They came in here?

BUNTER. Yes. If I hadn't been tied up I would have tackled them. I'm rather a dab hand at boxing.

CRUMP. And they took the turkey?

BUNTER. Yes. I tried to tell you—but I was gagged.

SCHMIDT. Wait a second. If you saw these men take the turkey, why did you just ask us for a piece to eat? If they had the bird then why should you think we had it?

BUNTER. Oh, cripes! I hadn't thought of that.

SCHMIDT. You are telling lies, fat youth. You saw nothing.

BUNTER. Can I go now? *(He crosses towards the hall)*

(CRUMP moves between Bunter and the hall. SCHMIDT crosses to L of Bunter)

If I went to the kitchen I might be able to get a bite to eat. They might have a ham or something to tide me over until breakfast.

CRUMP. To—to—tide you over? Your mother wasn't an 'ippopotamus, by any chance?

BUNTER. Oh, really! Surely a chap is entitled to a little food after being tied up like that?

CRUMP. A little food! You wouldn't like a beef sandwich—a bull between two slices of bread?

BUNTER. There's no need for check. I say, I think you chaps have really got that turkey. I think this talk about it being pinched is just a scheme to do me out of my share.

SCHMIDT. Idiot! (*To Crump*) He cannot help us. Let us put him back in the room in the passage.

BUNTER. Don't you put me back in there—I shall starve. (*He moves down RC*)

CRUMP. It'll be a good many years before you turn into a skeleton, cock.

(*CRUMP and SCHMIDT close in on Bunter*)

BUNTER. Leave me alone! I'll tell Quelch and the Head. (*He suddenly nudges Schmidt in the stomach*)

SCHMIDT. Ouch! (*He collapses, sitting on the floor*)

(*BUNTER nudges Crump in the stomach*)

CRUMP. Ow! Ooooh! (*He collapses, sitting on the floor*)

BUNTER (*running up L*) Help! Murder!

(*BUNTER exits up L. SCHMIDT and CRUMP try to collect themselves*)

SCHMIDT (*gasping*) Af-af-after him, Crump.

CRUMP (*gasping*) You—you get after him.

(*SCHMIDT and CRUMP rise unsteadily*)

SCHMIDT (*crossing to the fireplace*) We have to get him before he gets to Quelch.

(*CRUMP moves up LC*)

Wait. (*He crosses to Crump*) He may not go to Quelch. Do not forget the other boys do not want him here. We have a chance, because he will try to keep out of their way. We must search for him ourselves.

CRUMP. I'm tired. What about the morning?

SCHMIDT. Fool! The morning may be too late. What if Quelch should send for the police? They will know you have a record . . .

CRUMP. It won't do for us to be seen 'ere this time of night.

SCHMIDT. No—it will not. We must have a care.

CHERRY (*off; calling*) Anyone there?

CRUMP. Blimey! Someone comin'!

SCHMIDT (*crossing quickly to the panel*) Quick. The panel. Quickly, Crump.

(*SCHMIDT and CRUMP exit to the passage, closing the panel behind them.*)

CHERRY and NUGENT enter up LC. They are in pyjamas and dressing-gowns)

CHERRY. No-one in here, Franky. (*He crosses to the fireplace*)

(*NUGENT goes RC and stands near the panel*)

But the light's on. I could have sworn I heard that fat spoofer Bunter yell out. Might have been a dream.

NUGENT. I heard it, too. It wasn't a dream.

CHERRY. There's something odd about this place, Franky. *(He scratches his head and looks towards the library)* Turkeys disappearing—

(Unseen by CHERRY or NUGENT the panel opens. SCHMIDT appears, grabs NUGENT, pulls him into the passage and closes the panel)

—cakes and mince-pies vanishing into thin air. Don't you think there's something queer, Franky? *(He turns and sees Nugent has gone)* Frank! *(He crosses to RC)* Where are you? *(He looks around in a panic)*

(BULL enters up LC)

BULL *(moving above the table)* What was all that yelling?

CHERRY. Frank—he's gone!

BULL. Gone where?

CHERRY *(moving near the panel)* He was in the room with me a minute ago. He disappeared.

BULL. How could he? He must be in the hall. *(He moves down RC and peers into the hall)*

(Unseen by BULL or CHERRY, the panel opens. SCHMIDT appears, grabs CHERRY, pulls him into the passage and closes the panel)

Can't see him out there. *(He turns into the room)* He might be in the library or . . . *(He sees Cherry has gone)* Bob! Where are you? *(He crosses to RC)* Bob!

(HURER enters up LC)

HURER *(moving above the table)* What is the esteemed rumpus, my dear Bull? I hear shoutfully yelling noises.

BULL. It's Bob. Did you meet him out there?

HURER. I have not seen Cherry. I have just enterfully arrived.

BULL. He was here a second ago. He was just telling me Frank had disappeared. *(He moves near the panel)* I looked into the hall and now he's gone himself.

HURER *(crossing to the door down L)* He may be in the library *(He opens the door)*

(Unseen by HURER or BULL, the panel opens. SCHMIDT appears, grabs BULL, pulls him into the passage and closes the panel)

I will searchfully investigate. *(He peers into the library and switches on the light)* Are you there, Bob? *(He turns and sees Bull has gone)* My dear Bull—where have you gone? *(He crosses to RC)*

(WHARTON and MAULY enter up LC)

WHARTON. What's the racket, Inky?

(MAULY moves to L of Hurer)

(*He moves to L of Mauly*) Why is everyone wandering about downstairs again?

HUREE. Johnny Bull has gonefully been spirited away.

MAULY. What do you mean, Inky? After tonight I'm going to spend the rest of the holiday in bed. What are you getting at?

HUREE. He was speaking to me about Cherry having gonefully been spirited away and then he made an absurd disappearance himself, into the air, thinfully. (*He moves near the panel*)

WHARTON. How can they have gone into thin air?

MAULY (*crossing to R*) You've had a nightmare, Inky. (*He sits on the chest R*) I wish I had the chance of a nightmare. (*He leans back, yawns and closes his eyes*)

WHARTON (*turning away to the armour up C*) I suppose the silly ass—

(*Unseen by the Boys, the panel opens. SCHMIDT appears, grabs HUREE, pulls him into the passage and closes the panel*)

—wouldn't be hiding in there for a jape. Have you looked there, Inky? (*He turns*) Inky, I said have you . . . (*He sees Inky has gone*) Good grief! He's gone!

MAULY (*opening his eyes and rising*) My sainted aunt! (*He crosses to R of Wharton*) Inky, where are you?

WHARTON. Did you see what happened, Mauly?

MAULY. No, I was yawnin'. He—he can't have gone into nowhere. (*He moves down R and looks into the hall*)

WHARTON. That's what he said happened to Johnny.

MAULY. Harry, it's a bit eerie. (*He moves near the panel*) I—I don't like it.

WHARTON. You know this place ought to be tackled by those psychic people—ghost hunters.

MAULY. We haven't any ghosts. There used to be one. A Cavalier type. An ancestor of mine, but he hasn't been seen for years.

WHARTON. But why would he go for Inky? I mean, he was here a second ago. (*He turns away to the arch up LC*) I'm going—

(*Unseen by WHARTON or MAULY, the panel opens. SCHMIDT appears, grabs MAULY, pulls him into the passage and closes the panel*)

—to look out in the hall. (*He looks in the hall*) On second thoughts you'd better come with me. Next thing we know, you'll be gone. (*He turns*) Mauly, I said . . . (*He sees Mauly has gone*) Oh, my hat! Mauly! Where have you gone? Mauly!

(*WHARTON rushes to the door down L and exits to the library.*)

BUNTER enters up L. *He carries a huge tray of food*

BUNTER. They've gone, the beasts! I'll bet they're eating that turkey somewhere. (*He puts the tray on the table*) Now for a bit of

grab. (*He moves the chair L of the table, sits on it, above the table, and starts to eat*)

(*WHARTON enters down L*)

WHARTON (*as he enters*) Mauly, where are . . . ? (*He sees Bunter*) Bunter! (*He crosses to L of the table*)

BUNTER (*rising*) Now, look here, Wharton—I'm just having a little snack. (*He pulls the tray to the right end of the table*) I've hardly had a bite since you put me in that rotten trunk.

WHARTON (*advancing on Bunter*) So it was you! You've been here all the time.

BUNTER (*retreating below the table to L of it*) I didn't want to let you down. So I forced the trunk open—(*he points to the mummy case*) and came here in that.

WHARTON (*looking at the mummy case*) Why, you fat spoofer. So it was you that shoved Cherry in there and swiped all our mince-pies and the turkey?

BUNTER (*moving above the table*) Well, really, I hope you don't begrudge a chap a bite to eat. (*He draws the tray of food C, sits above the table and eats*) I say, there's something odd about that fellow Schmidt. He wants to eat the turkey all on his own.

WHARTON (*moving to R of Bunter*) Never mind about Schmidt. Have you seen Mauly or Inky? They were here a minute ago—now they've gone.

BUNTER. Perhaps they took the turkey.

WHARTON. Oh, dry up about the turkey. (*He moves up L*) That's all you think about—food.

BUNTER. Oh, really, Wharton. That fellow Schmidt tied me up, I tell you, and took the turkey, then he tried to make out someone else had taken it.

WHARTON (*turning to Bunter*) What do you mean—Dr Schmidt tied you up? (*He moves to the fireplace*)

BUNTER. He jolly well did, I tell you. I can spare one of these mince-pies if you want one.

WHARTON (*crossing to Bunter*) Listen to me, you fat robber. (*He grips Bunter's ear*) If you try to blame that turkey's disappearance on to Dr Schmidt, you'll find yourself in trouble.

BUNTER. But he did, I tell you. That little chauffeur chap—Crump, helped him.

WHARTON. Why should they tie you up?

BUNTER. So that I shouldn't have any of that turkey, I suppose. A lot of people are jolly greedy, you know.

WHARTON (*crossing down R*) Are they? Well, let me tell you something—(*he crosses to R of Bunter*) you're going to be packed off home tomorrow morning—and it's no good trying to push the blame for swiping the turkey on to Dr Schmidt.

BUNTER. I'm fed up with this. *He did*. They put me in the secret panel. They gagged me, too.

WHARTON. What secret panel? You're potty!

BUNTER (*rising and pointing to the panel*) The one over there.

WHARTON (*moving up R and looking at the wall*) Where?

BUNTER. You watch. (*He crosses to the fireplace and presses the scroll work*)

(*The panel opens*)

There! You see! Who's potty, now?

WHARTON (*turning to face Bunter*) But . . . How did you find that out?

(*SCHMIDT appears, grabs WHARTON and pulls him into the passage*)

Help!

(*BUNTER turns.*)

CRUMP *enters from the passage and advances on Bunter*)

BUNTER. Beast, you keep away from me.

(*CRUMP chases BUNTER around the room.*)

SCHMIDT *enters from the passage*)

SCHMIDT (*to Crump*) Come and help me tie this one up, Crump—he's a handful. The fat youth can wait.

(*CRUMP and SCHMIDT exit to the passage, closing the panel behind them*)

BUNTER. Crikey! That was a lucky escape. They've got that turkey in there. The beasts, I'll frighten them.

(*BUNTER skips out up L.*)

PORTWELL, *concealed in the suit of armour, creeps in down R, carrying the turkey. He deposits the turkey on the left end of the table, then exits down R. The panel opens.*

SCHMIDT and CRUMP *enter from the passage*)

SCHMIDT (*crossing to the fireplace*) Those boys will be safe enough in there. (*He presses the scroll work*)

(*The panel closes*)

CRUMP (*crossing to L of the table*) I don't like the idea of tying up a lot of kids—I've always been just a gentle peace-lovin' burglar.

SCHMIDT. If we can't keep them quiet until we find that turkey, you'll be a gentle peace-loving convict.

CRUMP. Where can the bloomin' thing be? (*He leans on the table*) There must be somewhere we haven't looked. (*He suddenly realizes he is touching something soft*) Quick, Doc—there's something behind me on the table—I felt it with me hand—felt like a body.

SCHMIDT. *Duunkotf!* Move out of the way.

CRUMP (*moving up LC, without looking behind him*) What is it—for Pete's sake?

SCHMIDT. Eureka! Look, fool! The turkey!

CRUMP. The turkey! (*He turns*) Struth! Now, where did that come from?

SCHMIDT. Who cares where it came from? (*He feels inside the turkey and extracts the oiled silk package*) The Aegean Scrolls! We are saved.

CRUMP. There's a bit of luck. I told you no-one would think of looking there for them.

SCHMIDT (*moving up LC*) We must get away from here as quickly as possible.

CRUMP. I'll say we must. (*He moves to R of Schmidt*) I've just had a thought.

SCHMIDT. What?

CRUMP. I shan't 'ave to sweep that blinkin' snow in the mornin'.

(SCHMIDT and CRUMP move down RC)

SCHMIDT. Idiot! Now, you go and get the station wagon. We have until dawn to get clear.

(BUNTER enters up LC. He is dressed as a Cavalier)

BUNTER. Ooooooo! Hear ye! I am the ghost of Lancelot Mauleverer. (*He moans*) Ooooooooh!

CRUMP (*petrified*) Oh, luvus! A-a-bloomin' ghost! (*He backs down R*)

SCHMIDT (*backing down R; shaken*) Crump, go and get the station wagon—I will follow you.

BUNTER. Fear me, ye villainous varlets. Avaunt!

CRUMP. I fear you all right, cock. Help! Avaunt!

(CRUMP dashes out down R)

BUNTER (*moving down LC*) Hand me that which you have stolen. (*He moves towards Schmidt and falls over his sword*) Ouch! Yaroooh! Help!

SCHMIDT. Ha! The fat youth! I thought I recognized that voice. (*He crosses to Bunter*) You're the last person to be afraid of. (*He takes his gun from his pocket and gives Bunter a sharp rap with the butt*)

(BUNTER collapses flat on the floor.)

SCHMIDT exits quickly down R. There is a pause, then BUNTER regains consciousness and sits up)

BUNTER. W-where am I? (*He rises and backs up L*) Those beasts! Schmidt! (*He sees the turkey*) The turkey! They've left it behind. (*He puts his hat on the easy chair and moves above the table*)

(There is a knocking behind the panel)

Hullo! They surely haven't gone back in there again.

WHARTON *(off; behind the panel)* We're behind here—open up—help!

BUNTER. Oh, corks! It's Wharton. *(He crosses to the fireplace and presses the scroll work)*

(The panel opens revealing WHARTON. His gag has slipped down, but his hands and feet are tied. He hops into the room)

WHARTON. Quick, Bunter. The others are all still tied and gagged in the room at the end of the passage.

BUNTER. I won't be a minute. *(He sits above the table)* I just want a bite to eat. I say—I scared them off and got the turkey back.

WHARTON. Don't sit down there—get a knife.

BUNTER. I don't need a knife—I'm too hungry to bother.

WHARTON. I don't mean a knife for yourself, you chump—I want to cut these ropes.

BUNTER. Sit down. There's no hurry, I got the turkey.

WHARTON. Get me undone. *(He hops to R of the table)* Who cares about a rotten turkey?

BUNTER. You know, now I come to think of it—they didn't seem at all worried about the turkey. They were more concerned about some silly scrolls.

WHARTON. Some scrolls? So that's it! The Aegean Scrolls—trying to swipe them.

BUNTER. I don't care, as long as they didn't swipe our dinner. That's a jolly tasty bird.

WHARTON. For goodness' sake get a knife, Bunter. I've got to get Quelchy—we must go after Schmidt.

BUNTER. I can't really see why you want to get Quelchy up—I mean, he'll stop me eating.

WHARTON. As long as someone stops you eating! Get me a knife—look in the kitchen.

BUNTER. There's no need to go to the kitchen—I've got one in my pocket.

WHARTON. Then get it out!

BUNTER. Just a minute—these mince-pies make your fingers sticky. *(He rises and takes his time about wiping his fingers)*

WHARTON. Huffy up!

BUNTER *(fishing in his pockets)* Don't be so impatient.

(WHARTON stands chafing at the delay. Eventually BUNTER finds the knife, moves to Wharton and cuts the cords on his hands)

WHARTON. Ouch, you fathead! You're digging it in me.

BUNTER. Keep still, then.

(WHARTON gets his hands free)

WHARTON (*snatching the knife*) Give me the knife.

(WHARTON *freezes his feet then exits hurriedly to the panel. BUNTER settles at the table and eats*)

(*Off*) O.K., chaps. I'm free.

(MAULY and CHERRY *enter from the passage*)

MAULY (*as he enters*) Fancy that rotter Schmidt taking the Aegean Scrolls. Poor old Quelchy will be relieved.

CHERRY. He'll be more relieved if we get them back for him.

(BULL *enters from the passage*)

My hat! Look at BUNTER! (*He moves to R of Bunter*)

(MAULY *crosses to L of Bunter*)

BULL (*moving to R of Cherry*) Which way did Schmidt go, Bunter?

BUNTER. I don't know. I dressed up like this to frighten him.

(WHARTON, NUGENT and HUREE *enter from the panel. NUGENT goes to R of Bull. HUREE goes to R of Nugent. WHARTON stands above Bunter*)

CHERRY. There was no need to dress up!

BUNTER. Cheeky beasts! I think I heard them say they were going in the station wagon.

NUGENT (*moving down R*) Let's go out and see . . .

WHARTON. In our pyjamas? We'd do better to telephone the police.

MAULY (*crossing towards the door down L*) Yes, I'll do that.

(QUELCH *enters up LC. He is in his dressing-gown*)

QUELCH. What on earth is going on down here? Bless my soul, Bunter, why are you dressed like that?

CHERRY. He's part of the rich historical background, sir.

QUELCH (*moving to the fireplace*) I find it difficult enough to sleep, worrying about your uncle's scrolls, Mauleverer, without this unseemly conduct.

WHARTON. We've found the scrolls, sir—(*he crosses to Quelch*) or rather, we know where they are.

QUELCH. You mean—the genuine scrolls?

CHERRY. Yes, sir. You see—Schmidt is a crook—he and that little fellow Crump changed them over.

QUELCH. Good gracious! Are you sure of this, Cherry?

CHERRY. Yes, sir. Schmidt tied us all up and hid us in a secret passage.

QUELCH. Then where is Dr Schmidt now?

MAULY. He's got away. I was just going to phone the police.

QUELCH. An excellent idea. Perhaps it would be better if I telephoned them.

BUNTER. I say, sir, they didn't get the turkey.

QUELCH. What did you say, Bunter?

BUNTER. I said you'd be pleased to hear I stopped them getting away with the turkey.

QUELCH. Really, Bunter! As though they would be interested in a turkey. What an absurd boy you are.

(SCHMIDT backs in down R, with his hands up,

PORTWELL, in the armour and holding a gun, follows Schmidt on)

PORTWELL (behind the visor; in a muffled voice) I can assure you, they were very interested in the turkey, Mr Quelch.

QUELCH. Schmidt! (To Portwell) And—who are you, sir?

PORTWELL. I am Detective-Inspector Francis of Scotland Yard. I was put on the job to watch the scrolls—we suspected there might be an attempt to steal them.

SCHMIDT. *Schweinhund!*

PORTWELL. Not that we suspected this gentleman. (He turns to Schmidt) You were unfortunate, Doctor.

CHERRY. Where's Grump?

PORTWELL. He managed to get into the van and drive off—he won't get far. (To Schmidt) Would you care to give me the Aegean Scrolls, now. (To Quelch) He had them hidden in the turkey.

(SCHMIDT hands the package to Portwell)

QUELCH (crossing to RC) Let me have them, please. (He takes the package from Portwell, crosses down L and examines the contents)

SCHMIDT (to Bunter) *Fat dummkopf!* You will pay for this.

BUNTER. Cheeky foreign beast!

QUELCH. Just a minute, Inspector. These are not the genuine scrolls—they are the fakes.

PORTWELL. They are, sir. You are correct, Mr Quelch. I left them in the turkey as a bait for our friend, here. I wanted to catch him red-handed.

QUELCH. You have the real ones?

PORTWELL. Yes. I switched them over in case this man should escape. I have them here in my armour. (He removes his helmet) I'll take this off. It's getting rather heavy.

(They all stand and stare at Portwell, shaken)

MAULY. My hat—Portwell!

(PORTWELL hands the helmet to BULL who puts it on the table)

CHERRY. The giddy butler was the detective.

PORTWELL. I must apologize for the deception. This was the most convenient way for me to remain in the household.

CHERRY. Then you didn't go to the village inn?

PORTWELL. I doubled back and put on the armour. An excellent disguise, you will agree. Our little fat friend here, was of great assistance to me. Unintentionally, of course.

BUNTER. Oh, I don't know—I had them pretty well sized up. I'm nobody's fool, you know.

CHERRY. You're everybody's fool.

(The other Boys laugh)

BUNTER. Have a mince-pie, Inspector? I expect you can eat on duty.

PORTWELL. Thank you, no.

(SCHMIDT suddenly grabs the gun from PORTWELL, knocking him to the floor)

SCHMIDT. Now, stand back, all of you.

(The Boys group LC)

Now, Detective-Inspector, perhaps you will be good enough to give me the *genuine* scrolls from in your armour.

WHARTON. Let's jump him.

(The Boys start to move)

SCHMIDT *(threatening the Boys with the gun)* I should advise you to keep away.

QUELCH. Yes, boys, stand back. Don't take foolish risks with an armed man.

(The Boys back to the fireplace. SCHMIDT bends over Portwell, feels under his breastplate, takes out the package and pockets it)

SCHMIDT. Come, Mauleverer—you are coming with me.

(MAULY crosses to R)

If anyone tries to follow me, I shall know just how to deal with this boy. Where is the fat youth?

(BUNTER edges down R with a pie hidden under his cloak. He backs into Schmidt and suddenly pushes the pie into Schmidt's face. MAULY grabs the gun. PORTWELL rises. MAULY hands the gun to him)

PORTWELL. I'm very glad this little matter has been settled satisfactorily. *(To Mauly)* And thank you, my Lord, for the loan of your fancy dress. I'll return it at a future date.

SCHMIDT. And a Merry Christmas to you all!

(PORTWELL and SCHMIDT exit down R)

MAULY. I say, Bunter, that was jolly brave of you—weren't you afraid of the gun?

BUNTER. Afraid of the gun—me—no. *(He falls in a faint)*

CHERRY (*kneeling beside Bunter*) Good old Bunter.

(*BUNTER comes to*)

You saved the day. You're a hero, now, Buntty, old man.

MAULY. Hear, hear! I really think the old bean ought to stay and be our guest of honour for Christmas.

WHARTON. I'm with you, Mauly.

(*BUNTER rises. The Boys cluster around him and thump him on the back*)

BUNTER. I say, you fellows! Of course, I'll be glad to stay here, Mauly, in spite of the rotten plumbing.

BULL. He's off!

(*BULL and CHERRY grab Bunter*)

BUNTER. I don't want to be bumped.

CHERRY. Of course not. We're not going to bump you, old fat man.

(*BULL and CHERRY carry Bunter down L.*)

BUNTER. Well, you want to be careful with a chap in my state.

CHERRY. In your state? What's the matter with you, old fat man?

BUNTER. I'm starved.

(*The Boys laugh and cluster around Bunter. QUELCH laughs, gets a plate of food from the table and offers it to him. The CURTAIN starts to fall*)

WHARTON. Three cheers for Bunter.

Boys. Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!

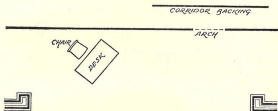
BUNTER. Hurray!

BUNTER *starts to eat as—*

the CURTAIN falls

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT

PROLOGUE



On stage: Desk. *On it:* cane, book
Chair

Off stage: Iced cake, knife (BUNTER)

Personal: BUNTER: spectacles
QUELCH: spectacles
NUGENT: penknife

Personal: CRUMP: handkerchief
SCHMIDT: spectacles

SCENE II

Strike: Trunks and suitcases
Trays and food from table
Replace battle-axes

Set: In armour helmet up c: oil silk package
Fire on
Fittings on

Off stage: 2 roped packing cases (CRUMP and PORTWELL)
Mummy case (SCHMIDT and CRUMP)
6 pairs of skates (BOYS)
Battle-axe (BULL)

SCENE III

Set: On table: plates of mince-pies, cakes, sausage roll, sandwiches, etc.

Off stage: Dish. On it: large, uncooked turkey (CHERRY)
Scrolls (CRUMP)
Armour (PORTWELL)

Personal: SCHMIDT: watch, gun
QUELCH: key
BUNTER: handkerchief

SCENE IV

Setting as at the end of the previous Scene
Close panel
Fire dim
Fittings off

Off stage: Tray of food (BUNTER)
Turkey. In it: package (PORTWELL)

Personal: SCHMIDT: gun
BUNTER: handkerchief, knife
PORTWELL: gun, package

LIGHTING PLOT

Property fittings required: log fire, wall-brackets

PROLOGUE. A front-cloth setting. Interior.

THE MAIN ACTING AREAS are LC, C, and at a desk RC

To open: General effect of daylight

Flood outside arch up LC, on

No cues

SCENE I. Interior. A living-room. Late afternoon

THE APPARENT SOURCES OF LIGHT are wall-brackets

THE MAIN ACTING AREAS are the whole stage

To open: The room in darkness

Fittings off

Fire on

Flood in arch backing up LC, on

Strip outside door down R, on

Strip outside door down L, off

Cue 1 PORTWELL switches on lights

(Page 10)

Snap in wall-brackets

Snap in onstage lights

SCENE II. Early evening

To open: Fittings on

Fire on

Strip outside door down R, on

Strip outside door down L, off

Flood on arch backing up LC, on

Cue 2 PORTWELL switches out lights

(Page 32)

Snap out wall-brackets

Snap out onstage lights

SCENE III. Late evening

To open: Fittings on

Fire on

Strip outside door down R, on

Strip outside door down L, off
Flood on arch backing up LC, on

No cues

SCENE IV. Midnight

To open: The room in darkness

Fittings off

Fire dim

Flood on arch backing up LC, on

Strip outside door down R, on

Strip outside door down L, off

Cue 3 SCHMIDT switches on lights

(Page 45)

Snap in wall-brackets

Snap in onstage lights

Cue 4 HURRE switches on library light

(Page 49)

Snap in strip outside door down L.

EFFECTS PLOT

PROLOGUE

No cues

SCENE I

Cue 1 After rise of CURTAIN (Page 10)
Sound of front-door bell

SCENE II

Cue 2 BUNTER: "That's it."
Noises off down R. (Page 32)

SCENE III

Cue 3 CHERRY: ". . . help with it."
Crash off R. (Page 36)

SCENE IV

No cues