



Grand new story about the boys of Linbury Court

# JENNINGS, AS USUAL

by Anthony Buckeridge

A new craze has started at Linbury Court: all the boys are busy making paper chains and Christmas cards. Jennings makes an unflattering sketch of Mr. Wilkins in his geography book, and before he has time to erase it, the master arrives to give a geography test.

## 14. The plan

THE geography test occupied most of the lesson. Jennings was thankful that he had done a certain amount of revision in his own time, for he found that he could answer most of the questions reasonably well. Indeed, he finished the test with ten minutes to spare.

This was all to the good, for it meant that he could now devote the rest of the time to a problem that demanded his immediate attention—the question of what to do about the assistant masterpiece. Obviously, if Mr. Wilkins was not to see his portrait, the drawing must be rubbed out or removed before the books were collected at the end of the lesson. Perhaps if he were careful he could cut the page out without being seen.

He glanced at the master's desk. Mr. Wilkins was immersed in an atlas. Now was the time!

## Tell-tale page

Jennings slipped the book into his desk, leaving the lid raised as a cover for his operations. Should Mr. Wilkins chance to look up from his reading he might well think that his pupil was getting his books ready for the next lesson. From his trouser pocket Jennings extracted his penknife and opened the blade. Then he folded the tell-tale page along the margin and inserted the knife blade in its fold.

"Jennings!"

Mr. Wilkins' voice rang out so suddenly that the boy jumped as though he had been stung.

"What are you doing inside that desk?"

Jennings' face was a picture of guilty confusion as he shut the exercise book and hurriedly pushed it under the brown paper which he was intending to use for Christmas decorations.

"I—er—I wasn't really doing anything, sir. Nothing much, that is," he faltered.

"Don't prevaricate, boy. And don't talk to me over the top of the desk!"

Obediently Jennings closed the lid.

"Now then, what's that penknife doing in your hand?"

"This knife, sir? Well, you see, I'd finished the test and I was just

filling in time—er—cutting a piece of paper, sir."

Mr. Wilkins' mind leaped at once to the wrong conclusion. "Cutting up paper, eh? These Christmas decorations are getting completely out of hand!" he barked. "It's bad enough with you boys spending all your free time on these everlasting contraptions, and I'm certainly not going to have you doing it in class, whether you've finished your work or not."

"No, sir."

"Bring that penknife up to me. I shall confiscate it."

With a slow tread Jennings approached the master's desk and placed the penknife in Mr.



A sudden terrifying suspicion flashed into Jennings' mind

Wilkins' outstretched hand. "Shall I be able to have it back at the end of term, sir?" he inquired anxiously.

"That's for me to decide," came the curt answer.

"But, sir . . ."

"Don't argue with me. You've caused quite enough distraction already when other boys are still working," Mr. Wilkins said. "That being so, you can leave the room and stay out for the rest of the lesson."

## No danger

Outside in the corridor Jennings reviewed his fortunes. Apart from losing his penknife, things hadn't gone too badly, thanks to Mr. Wilkins jumping to the wrong conclusion. There was no danger now of the drawing falling into his hands, for as soon as the lesson was over he could go back into the classroom and remove the evidence to a place of safety before . . .

Jennings' train of thought was broken by the bell sounding for the end of the lesson, and a moment later Mr. Wilkins emerged from the classroom. The boy

stood aside to let him pass, and as he did so he caught sight of the pile of exercise books tucked under Mr. Wilkins' arm.

A sudden terrifying suspicion flashed into Jennings' mind, and his hand shot up to his mouth in alarm. Supposing, just supposing . . .

In a state of wild panic he dashed into the classroom and collided with Bromwich I, who was making for the door.

"Hey, Bromo, quick! Who collected up the books after the test?" he demanded.

"I did. Old Wilkie told me to," Bromwich replied. "You needn't worry about your book, though. When I saw it wasn't on top of your desk I rummaged about inside till I found it."

"What!" Jennings stared at the book collector in wide-eyed horror. "You—you mean you actually took my book out of my desk and gave it to Old Wilkie?"

"Well, of course I did," the elder Bromwich replied. "You want to have your test marked, don't you?"

The full horror of his plight swept over Jennings like a tidal wave. "You great big addle-pated clodpoll, Bromo!" he stormed. "What on earth did you want to go and do a thing like that for?"

The elder Bromwich stared at him in bewilderment. "No harm in getting your book out of your desk, was there?"

"No harm!" Jennings echoed bitterly. "It only so happens that you've given Old Wilkie a comic drawing of himself with his name underneath in large letters. He'll go through the roof like an H-bomb when he sees it."

## Silent frustration

Bromwich I emitted a little whistle of sympathy. "Phew! Super sorrow," he apologised. "Still, you can't blame me for it. How was I to know what you'd done?"

There was no time then to discuss the matter further, for at that moment Mr. Carter arrived to take an English lesson; and all through the two remaining periods Jennings had to sit and chafe in silent frustration.

It came as a shock to Darbshire, Temple, and Atkinson to hear at the end of afternoon school that the portrait had gone astray.

"Wow! And his name underneath in big letters, too!" breathed Darbshire in horror. "What on earth are you going to do?"

"It's a pity you made it such a comic drawing," said Atkinson, shaking his head sadly. "I can

just imagine what he'll say when he sees it."

"He mustn't see it—ever!" Jennings cried in resolute tones. "I must get hold of the book and rub it out before he starts marking the test."

The decision, though admirable in theory, was fraught with certain hazards when considered from a practical point of view. To begin with, nobody could tell for certain when Mr. Wilkins would begin marking the test, and, furthermore, the task of erasing the drawing could be done only when the staff room was empty and the masters were engaged in other parts of the building.

"I shall go along to the staff room with a piece of india rubber and knock on the door," Jennings announced.

## Doubtful plan

Darbshire pursed his lips doubtfully. "I should use your knuckles. No one will ever hear you tapping with a bit of bungee," he said.

Jennings rounded on his friend warmly. "Don't be so stark raving haywire, Darbi! The bungee is only for rubbing out the drawing if there aren't any masters there."

"Yes, but supposing there are?"

"In that case I shall go back and have another shot later." After some discussion, it was agreed that his chance of success would be increased if Jennings had a secret band of helpers, and eventually they produced a plan whereby all four boys, if

necessary, would visit the staff room in turn.

It might well be that the first boy to present himself at the staff room would find the room occupied; and having made some ingenious excuse would then have to withdraw from the operation, lacking any reason for a further visit. The second person might possibly share the same fate if luck was against him; and even possibly the third. But with four boys all timing their visits and varying their excuses, surely one would be bound to succeed!

## Best time

Upon reflection they decided it was unlikely that Mr. Wilkins would begin marking the tests until the boys were in bed, for it was known that he was on duty that evening. The best time for the operation would be during the half-hour before the dormitory bell, when the master on duty might well be occupied making his routine tour of the building.

"That's what we'll do, then," Jennings decided when the plan had been thoroughly discussed. "We'll synchronise our watches so we don't all get there at the same time, and we'll draw names out of a hat to see who goes first."

"Wow! How super!" The conspirators' eyes sparkled with excitement. Synchronised watches, split-second timing, and the drawing of lots raised the whole project to the level of a secret commando raid. Here was an adventure calling for stout hearts and nerves of steel!

To be continued

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