

# LEAVE IT TO JENNINGS!

Jennings is in trouble with Mr. Wilkins for disguising his library book with a brown paper wrapper to replace an arithmetic book which he has lost. As he still cannot find it, he writes to ask Aunt Angela to send him a new copy.

## 9. Aunt Angela blunders

THE parcel post was late in arriving that Monday, and all through lunch Jennings was worried in case his copy of *Elementary Arithmetic* did not arrive in time for afternoon school.

So when, shortly after the meal, the word went round that Mr. Carter was distributing parcels in the common-room, he bounded up the stairs, hurtled along the landing and skidded in through the door as though a fire-breathing dragon was hard on his heels.

"Sir! Sir! Anything for me, sir?" he thrilled, skating across the linoleum and using Mr. Carter as a bollard to halt his progress. "Sorry, sir, I couldn't stop," he apologised.

The human bollard was not perturbed. Collisions with Jennings were a common occurrence at Linbury Court School. Mr. Carter merely made him wait until all the other parcels had been claimed and then handed him a flat, oblong package addressed on a hand which he recognised at once...

"Open it, then," Darbshire said impatiently.

Jennings tore off the wrapping and revealed a copy of *Elementary Arithmetic* by R. Kirby, B.Sc. "Jolly good," he approved, searching for the postal order which should have been enclosed with the book.

BUT there was no postal order. Instead he found a letter.

"Dear John, he read aloud. "I was delighted to hear that you are at last taking an interest in your work and..." He ran his eye down the page and groaned: "Oh no!"

"What's up?" his friend demanded.

Jennings passed him the letter. "So instead of sending you some money I have used it to buy the book which you asked me to get for you. I am sure you will agree that this is a good arrangement as it means that the money has been put to good use instead of being frittered away on sweets and other trivialities..."

Darbshire paused, for Jennings was staring down at his aunt's present with a look of horror and dismay. "Now what?"

"She's sent me the wrong book." Jennings jabbed his forefinger at the line of print under the title. *With Answers*, it said.

AT first Darbshire couldn't see what his friend was making a fuss about. And then the full significance dawned on him and he whistled in apprehension. "Wheew! You mustn't let Old Wilkie see this. If he finds out you've got answers in the back, he'll accuse you of cheating."

"I know! But I can't go into class without it—not after the hoo-hah he kicked up last time."

Jennings frowned in thought. Surely the best way to prevent Mr. Wilkins from finding out would be to cover the book with the brown paper wrapper he had used to disguise his library book. Admittedly the ruse hadn't worked on that occasion, but this time there was less danger of discovery for there was nothing wrong with the book in itself: it was merely the tell-tale cover and the answers at the back that had to be concealed.

Venables poked his head round the classroom door and said:

by Anthony  
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"Hey, Jennings, Matron wants you at once, about your new blazer."

"Oh fish-hooks, she would send now, when I'm busy." As he made for the door he called back over his shoulder to Darbshire. "It's okay about the arith book. I've got an idea. I'll fix it when I get back."

THERE were several boys lining up outside Matron's room waiting to be fitted with new blazers, and the bell rang for afternoon school before Jennings reached the head of the queue. Bromwich emerged carrying a smart magenta blazer over his arm.

"If you're going to the classroom you might do me a favour," Jennings urged. "It's terribly important."

"What is it?" Bromwich was wary of granting favours.

"You'll find my library book in my desk: *The Secret of the Mysterious Galleon*. I want you to put the cover on my new arith book before Old Wilkie gets in."

Bromwich nodded. Obviously another of Jennings's crack-brained camouflage schemes, he guessed, and didn't press for details. Having hung up his blazer in the lobby he trotted off to Form 3 classroom and opened Jennings's desk. He didn't recognise the library book in its sombre brown paper cover, but what immediately caught his eye was the gaily-coloured book jacket lying loose in the desk depicting a bevy of swarthy desperadoes dancing the hornpipe.

Bromwich slipped the wrapper on to the new text book, turned to the examples on the multiplication of mixed fractions, and left the volume open on the desk.

THE lesson had been in progress for only a few minutes when Jennings arrived. Mr. Wilkins

accepted his excuse for being late and waved him away to his desk in the back row.

"I'm going to mark those sums I set you to work out," the master told his class. He turned to the blackboard and chalked up the first sum involving the multiplication of mixed fractions which he had set the previous lesson.

Jennings's text book was open on the desk so it was some minutes before he discovered, to his dismay, that Bromwich had mistaken his instructions and covered the book with the wrong wrapper. To remove it might attract Mr. Wilkins's attention, whereas if it were left alone he would probably not notice the substitution.

At the moment all was well, for Mr. Wilkins was busy at the blackboard with his back to the class. It would be interesting, Jennings thought, to check the master's result with the answers... Cautiously he fingered his way to the back of the book.

Mr. Wilkins glanced at his working on the blackboard and rubbed out the offending figures.



A MINUTE later Mr. Wilkins finished the sum and turned to face his class. "Answer's fourteen and two-fifths. Hands up right!" he said.

No hands were raised. "Tut, tut, tut! This form will have to pull its socks up," he reproved.

In the back row Jennings nudged Darbshire and whispered: "He's got it wrong himself. It should be fourteen and three-tenths."

Unfortunately, Mr. Wilkins noticed the nudge. "Were you talking, Jennings?"

"I—er—I did just speak, sir," the boy admitted.

Mr. Wilkins bridled. "What did you say?" he demanded.

"Nothing really, sir. Nothing important, that is. I just said fourteen and three-tenths."

"Why?"

"The answer to that last sum, sir. You said two-fifths, but it should be three-tenths."

Mr. Wilkins glanced at his working on the blackboard and immediately noticed a slip he had made in the last line of the sum. He rubbed out the offending figures and made the correction.

"WELL done, Jennings! Quick of you to spot that," he said. He strolled across to the back row and stood looking down at the working in Jennings's exercise book. "But that's nothing like what you've written down in your book," he pointed out. "Your working is hopelessly wrong, so why were you so quick to spot that I'd made a mistake?"

"Well, I—er—the answer sort of—came to me in a flash," Jennings floundered.

"Did it, indeed!" The clean text book lying open on the desk attracted Mr. Wilkins's attention. He picked it up.

"That's my new book, sir. My aunt sent it to me," Jennings said hurriedly.

"Mind you look after it, then," Mr. Wilkins advised. "No ink blots all over the..." His words tailed away as he turned the

BUT Mr. Wilkins had slipped off the cover and solved the mystery. "This book has got answers!" he said in shocked surprise.

"Well, only at the back, sir," Jennings replied, as though hoping to soften the blow.

There was a painful silence. Then Mr. Wilkins said: "This is a very serious matter, Jennings. This is cheating!"

"Oh no, sir. You see..."

"Don't try to deny it, boy. The facts are plain. You sent away for an answer book with the deliberate intention of using it to get your sums right. I never heard such disgraceful conduct!"

"But I didn't mean to do anything wrong, sir. I asked my aunt to send me an arith book and she sent me one with answers by mistake."

THERE was a host of witnesses eager to prove that Jennings's letter to his aunt had been written with the best of intentions, and Mr. Wilkins was soon convinced that his accusation was unjust.

"H'm, I see," he said frowning. "All the same, you obviously can't be allowed to have an answer book in your possession. You'd better let me have it and I'll give you my copy instead."

It was not possible to exchange books there and then for as so often happened Mr. Wilkins had left his copy in the staff room.

"Come along after school and I'll let you have it," he said. "It means you'll have to put up with a second-hand copy instead of a brand new one, but that can't be helped."

"Yes, sir," said Jennings, relieved that the dangerous situation was now resolved. A thought struck him and he added: "I think it's a jolly good idea, really, because it means you'll be able to get your sums right first time in future, won't you?"

MR. WILKINS was not in the staff room when Jennings went along after school to collect the book. However, Mr. Carter managed to find the volume among his colleague's possessions and handed it to him.

Jennings thanked him and departed without further comment, but when he got outside the room he took a closer look at the book for there was something about it that seemed strangely familiar.

He was still staring at it in shocked surprise when Darbshire came trotting along the corridor on his way to the changing room. "What are you looking so fossilised about, Jen?" he inquired.

Jennings waved the book in the air like a semaphore flag. "Jolly well not fair!" he cried. "This book Old Wilkie's given me in exchange for Aunt Angela's! It's mine! It's the one I've been looking for everywhere!"

"Wow! Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure." Jennings thrust the book so close to Darbshire's nose that it knocked his spectacles askew. "I knew I'd lent it to someone. I was sure I hadn't lost it." His voice was shrill with indignation.

"And there was Old Wilkie going off the deep end and making me write for a new one when he'd got it in the staff room all the time. Jolly well not fair!"

To be continued

The full text of LEAVE IT TO JENNINGS, of which this serial forms part, will be published in the autumn by William Collins & Sons Ltd.

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