

As we came level with the shop we saw a cardboard notice hanging on the door.
CLOSED.

We stopped and stared. We had never known the sweet-shop to be closed at this time in the morning, even on Sundays.

'What's happened?' we asked each other. 'What's going on?'

We pressed our faces against the window and looked inside. Mrs Pratchett was nowhere to be seen.

'Look!' I cried. 'The Gobstopper jar's gone! It's not on the shelf! There's a gap where it used to be!'

'It's on the floor!' someone said. 'It's smashed to bits and there's Gobstoppers everywhere!'

'There's the mouse!' someone else shouted.

We could see it all, the huge glass jar smashed to smithereens with the dead mouse lying in the wreckage and hundreds of many-coloured Gobstoppers littering the floor.

'She got such a shock when she grabbed hold of the mouse that she dropped everything,' somebody was saying.

'But why didn't she sweep it all up and open the shop?' I asked.

Nobody answered me.

After a while, Thwaites broke the silence. 'She must have got one heck of a shock,' he said. He paused. We all looked at him, wondering what wisdom the great medical authority was going to come out with next.

'Well now,' Thwaites went on, 'when an old person like Mrs Pratchett suddenly gets a very big shock, I suppose you know what happens next?'

'What?' we said. 'What happens?'

'You ask my father,' Thwaites said.

'He'll tell you.'

'You tell us,' we said.

'It gives her a heart attack,' Thwaites announced. 'Her heart stops beating and she's dead in five seconds.'

For a moment or two my own heart stopped beating. Thwaites pointed a finger at me and said darkly, 'I'm afraid you've killed her.'

'Me?' I cried. 'Why just me?'

'It was your idea,' he said. 'And what's more, you put the mouse in.'

All of a sudden, I was a murderer.

At exactly that point, we heard the school bell ringing in the distance and we had to gallop the rest of the way so as not to be late for prayers.

The Headmaster is the only teacher at Llandaff Cathedral School that I can remember, and for a reason you will soon discover, I can remember him very clearly indeed. His name was Mr Coombes.

Mr Coombes now proceeded to mumble through the same old prayers we had every day, but this morning, when the last amen had been spoken, he did not turn and lead his group rapidly out of the Hall as usual. He remained standing before us, and it was clear he had an announcement to make.

'The whole school is to go out and line up around the playground immediately,' he said. 'Leave your books behind. And no talking.'

Mr Coombes was looking grim. His hammy pink face had taken on that dangerous scowl which only appeared when he was extremely cross and somebody was for the high-jump. I sat there small and

frightened among the rows and rows of other boys, and to me at that moment the Headmaster, with his black gown draped over his shoulders, was like a judge at a murder trial.

'He's after the killer,' Thwaites whispered to me.

I began to shiver.

As we made our way out into the playground my whole stomach began to feel as though it was slowly filling up with swirling water. I am only eight years old. I told myself. No little boy of eight has ever murdered anyone. It's not possible.

I half-expected to see two policemen come bounding out of the school to grab me by the arms and put handcuffs on my wrists.

A single door led out from the school on to the playground. Suddenly it swung open and through it, like the angel of death, strode Mr Coombes, huge and bulky in his tweed suit and black gown, and beside him, believe it or not, right beside him trotted the tiny figure of Mrs Pratchett herself!

Mrs Pratchett was alive!

The relief was tremendous.

Suddenly she let out a high-pitched yell and pointed a dirty finger straight at Thwaites. 'That's 'im!' she yelled. 'That's one of 'em! I'd know 'im a mile away, the scummy little bouncer!'

The entire school turned to look at Thwaites. 'W-what have I done?' he stuttered, appealing to Mr Coombes.

'Shut up,' Mr Coombes said.

Mrs Pratchett's eyes flicked over and settled on my own face. I looked down and studied the black asphalt surface of the playground.

'Ere's another of 'em!' I heard her yelling. 'That one there!' She pointed at me now. 'You're quite sure?' Mr Coombes said.

'Of course I'm sure!' she cried. 'I never forget a face, least of all when it's as sly as that! 'Ee's one of 'em all right! There was five altogether. Now where's them other three?'

The other three, I knew very well, were coming up next.

'There they are!' she cried out, stabbing the air with her finger. 'Im ... and 'im ... and 'im! That's the five of 'em all right! We don't need to look no farther than this, 'Eadmaster! They're all 'ere, the nasty little pigs! You've got their names 'ave you?'

'I've got their names, Mrs Pratchett,' Mr Coombes told her. 'I'm very much obliged to you.'

6 News

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(A1 = Announcer 1; A2 = Announcer 2)

A1: And here are the news headlines.

Following severe droughts in Africa, the President of the USA has announced that he is going to send food and provisions to the people of Somalia, who have lost their homes and livelihood.

A2: Robert Holmes, Minister for the Environment, has resigned. The Prime Minister has ordered an investigation into the mysterious disappearance of a large sum of money. A spokesman for the minister told us that he was out of the country and not available for comment.

A1: Schoolgirl Pauline Gates has not been allowed back into school after the summer holidays, because she has had her nose pierced. According to headmistress Jean Bradley, Pauline knew that piercing was against the school rules. The girl will be allowed back into school when she removes the offending ring.

A2: And finally, to end on a happier note, wedding bells are ringing for 81-year-old Max Williams, who won £16 million in the lottery last month. He's going to marry 22-year-old dancer Sally Lister. The happy couple posed for photographers outside the millionaire's luxury home in Essex and Sally held out her hand to show off her £10,000 engagement ring for the cameras.

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(K = Ken; S = Steve)

K: Hi, Steve. How are you?

S: Oh, not too bad. Actually, it's my wedding anniversary today.

K: Oh, congratulations!

S: But um, I forgot and my wife was really upset.

K: Oh, no. That's terrible.

S: But I just rang Le Petit Blanc and they actually had a table free, so we're going out for dinner.

K: Excellent.

S: Anyway, I must go.

K: Er, yeah, me too. See you!

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a

A: Have you heard about Chris and Shirley?

B: No ... what about them?

A: They've split up.

B: That's terrible!

b

C: Hello. You're looking very pleased with yourself.

D: I am! I've just passed my driving test!

C: Well done! Can I have a lift?

E: Guess what. I've won a holiday to Florida.

F: Lucky you! Is it a holiday for two?

E: Yes, I'm taking my mum.

F: Oh.

G: I've just had some bad news.

H: What's happened?

G: I've failed my final exams.

H: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Are you going to resit them?

I: Oh, no!

J: What's the matter?

I: I've left my bag on the bus.

J: You idiot! What are you going to do?

I: I suppose I'd better ring the bus company.

K: Have a glass of champagne!

L: Thank you. What are you celebrating?

K: My wife's just had a baby.

L: Congratulations! Boy or a girl?