



SCHOOLGIRL SERIES N° 3

The Jape of the Term



G. R. DUFF

**HILDA
RICHARDS**

Authoress of

BESSIE BUNTER

A COMPLETE 'PAM DUNCAN & CO' STORY

4½

MASCOT SCHOOLGIRL SERIES No. 3

THE JAPE OF THE TERM

by

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A "Pamela Duncan & Co." Story

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CHAPTER I.

PAINFUL FOR PEG.

MUNCH! Munch! Munch!

It was an unaccustomed sound in the Fourth Form room at St. Olive's.

Pamela Duncan looked round quickly. May Carhew suppressed a chuckle. Other girls turned their heads.

It was quite a loud munching sound. When Peg Pipping's teeth got going on a large ripe apple, they got going in earnest.

Peg, at that moment, was enjoying life!

Miss Moon, who was taking the Fourth in geometry, had turned her back to the class, while she chalked on the blackboard.

That seemed to Plump Peg an excellent opportunity for taking a bite out of the apple hidden in her desk.

It was a large apple. It was a lovely apple. Peg liked large lovely apples. True, it was strictly forbidden to bring anything of an edible nature into the form-room. But that ripe red apple was worth a spot of risk.

Peg had had no time to eat it before class. She had found it in Gwendoline Page's study only just as the bell rang for third lesson, which was geometry with Moon. Peg had had only one bite at that apple before she had to rush down to class. Since then it had been in her desk—and Peg's capacious mouth had fairly watered for it.

Now her chance had come. The class had a view of Miss Moon's back, as she wielded the chalk. Having no eyes in the back of her head, Miss Moon naturally could not see Plump Peg.

So the plumpest girl at St. Olive's had grabbed the apple, intending to take just one more bite.

She did not expect to have time for more than one bite. So she made it a good one!

Peg Pipping's mouth was extensive. But that bite from the ripe red apple filled it to capacity. In fact it rather over-filled it. She munched with vigour to get through that mouthful. Munch! Munch! Munch!

All the girls in the St. Olive's Fourth heard that sound of vigorous munching. They looked at Peg—and they looked at Miss Moon. They wondered whether the maths mistress would hear. There was a ripple of suppressed merriment in the class. Nobody wanted to draw Miss Moon's attention to Plump Peg at that moment. But the sight of Peg's fat face, crimson with exertion, as she munched and chewed, and chewed and munched, to get rid of that cargo of apple, was almost too much for them. But they suppressed their merriment as much as they could.

Miss Moon became conscious that something was going on behind her back. She looked round.

"Goodness gracious! What is that?" she exclaimed. She peered round the form-room through her spectacles. For the moment she did

not look at Peg. That strange sound of munching surprised her. She did not realise, for the moment, that it proceeded from her class. "Is there some animal in the room?"

"Yes, a jolly fat animal!" murmured May Carhew, not loud enough for the maths mistress to hear, and there was a chuckle in the Fourth.

Peg Pipping made a desperate effort. She had to get rid of that chunk of apple somehow before Miss Moon's eyes, and spectacles, fell on her. But that chunk, ripe and red as it was, was a tough mouthful. It was too substantial for hasty measures. Peg munched madly without getting through.

Miss Moon peered under the high desk in the form-room. She peered round the blackboard. She peered into corners.

"Has anyone let a dog into the form-room?" she exclaimed. "Is there some dog here gnawing a bone?"

"Ha ha, ha!" trilled the junior girls.

"This is not a laughing matter," exclaimed Miss Moon, angrily, "I will not allow the lesson to be disturbed by such tricks. Pamela!"

"Oh! Yes, Miss Moon!" gasped Pamela Duncan.

"Do you know whether some animal has been let into this form-room?"

"I—I think not, Miss Moon."

"Then what——?" Miss Moon's eyes and spectacles swept over the class, "Oh!" she exclaimed, as they fixed on a fat crimson face, with distended cheeks, the plump jaws working frantically, "Margery! Margery Pipping! You are eating in class! Disgusting! Margery, stand up."

"Urrrrrggh!" gurgled Peg, as she stood up.

"What are you eating?" thundered Miss Moon.

Peg tried to speak. But she couldn't! That chunk of apple was in the way. She made frantic efforts to disintegrate it and swallow it. But for the moment it was too much for her. She munched, and chewed, and gurgled.

"Will you answer me, Margery?"

"Gurrrrrggh!" gasped Peg. She tried to answer: but that was the best she could do.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Margery, you greedy girl, you are eating in class, instead of attending to the lesson. I shall report you to your form-mistress."

Peg made a tremendous effort. She did not want to be reported to Miss Ducat. That would mean lines or a detention. With a final effort, she bit the chunk of apple through, and swallowed.

The next moment there was something like an explosion in class. It was too much to go down all at once. Peg choked.

"Urrrggh! Groooogh! Ooooo-er! Wooooooch!" spluttered Peg frantically, "Oooogh! Grooooooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fourth.

"Yaroooooch! Woooch! Groooogh!"

"Godness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Moon, "The girl is choking! Pamela—May—Millicent——pat her on the back——quick!"

"Yes, Miss Moon," gasped the three.

They surrounded the unfortunate Peg, to render first aid. May Carhew slapped her on the back, with considerable vigour. Peg's suffocated gurgle became a frantic yell.

"Oooogh! Leave off, you cat! Woooogh! Leave off hitting me, you minx." Peg had found her voice, "Stoppit! I'll scratch you! Groooogh."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smack! smack! smack! It seemed to be doing Peg good, for at least she was able to speak now, so May got on with the good work. Smack! smack! smack! sounded like a series of pistol-shots in the form-room.

"Yaroooh! Leave off!" yelled Peg, "I'm all right! I'm not chick-chock-choking—I wasn't eating anything—leave off smacking me, you cat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That will do, May!" exclaimed Miss Moon, hastily, "You may all sit down. Silence in the class! May—Pamela—Millicent—sit down at once! Gwendoline—Asolda—Brenda—be silent—there is nothing to laugh at in this ridiculous occurrence. Annabel—Yvonne—Lorna—if you are not silent I shall set you a problem to work out after class. Silence! Now, Margery—"

"Urrrrggh! I—I wasn't eating anything, please, Miss Moon," gasped Peg. The channel for speech was clear at last, though Peg was still crimson, and her eyes were watering. "I—I haven't been eating an apple, Miss Moon."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the maths mistress, "Margery, you are the most untruthful girl in the school."

"Me!" ejaculated Peg, "Oh, Miss Moon! Do you mean Pamela?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! You were eating an apple in class, Margery."

"I—I wasn't! I hadn't an apple," wailed Peg, "I don't like apples! I never found Gwen's apple in her study before class—I never went into her study, and there wasn't any apple there when I went in, either. And—and I left it just where it was, too—I never touched it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You will bring me at once what remains of that apple, Margery!" said Miss Moon, sternly.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Peg. Half the apple remained in her desk. Peg wanted it to remain there. There might be another chance later. "I—I there isn't any left, Miss Moon, please. I—I finished it! Besides, I never had an apple at all. I—I haven't tasted an apple for weeks."

Miss Moon, with a grim brow, came round to Peg's desk. From that desk she grabbed half of a large ripe apple, and held it up accusingly.

Peg blinked at it.

"Oh! I—I wonder how that got there, Miss Moon!" she gasped, "I—I've never seen it before! I—I hope you can take my word, Miss Moon."

"Margery, I shall take you to your form-mistress at the end of the lesson. Now sit down, and give attention."

"Yes, Miss Moon, but I never—"

"Silence!"

Miss Moon stalked away, apple in hand. She set the remnant of the apple on the high desk, and then resumed at the blackboard. Peg Pipping sat down, with an indignant grunt.

"That's the sort of justice we get here!" she whispered to Pamela Duncan, "She would take your word! She won't take mine! Cat!"

Miss Moon's head turned.

"If you speak again in class, Margery—"

"Please I wasn't speaking, Miss Moon. I only said to Pamela—"

"Silence!" hooted Miss Moon.

And Plump Peg relapsed into indignant silence.

CHAPTER II.

THE JAPE OF THE TERM.

"**H**OW did Plumpers know that we had jam roll?" asked May Carhew, addressing space.
Pamela laughed.

The chums of the Fourth were in Study Two, after class that day. May had found a little parcel on the study table, recently arrived by post. Unpacking it, a jam roll was revealed—a thoughtful present from home. It was quite a large jam-roll: and Pamela and May decided to dispose of it without delay, asking several other girls in the Fourth to the feast. And it was at that moment that the study door was pushed open, and the plumpest figure at St. Olive's rolled into the study.

Peg Pipping, certainly, couldn't have known that there was jam roll going, in Study Two. But she had arrived at a fortunate moment—for herself! Her little round parrot's eyes shot to the jam roll at once.

"I say, I never knew that you had jam-roll!" said Peg, "I came to speak to you about something else. But I'll have some, if you like. I'll let you girls have something out of my hamper from Pipping Park—when it comes."

"When!" said May. "Do you mean if?"

"No, I don't," snapped Peg, "I mean when! Hampers get delayed in the post these days, you know. It may come any day from Pipping Park!"

"If any!" murmured May, and Pamela laughed. The St. Olive's juniors had heard a great deal—from Peg—about Pipping Park. It was—according to Peg—a most magnificent residence. Even Wentworth Hall, the stately home of Isolda Wentworth, the wealthiest girl at St. Olive's, was—according to Peg—a mere trifle in comparison. Peg was always on the point of receiving a hamper from Pipping Park. But that hamper never seemed to materialise.

"I'll cut it for you," said Peg, taking the knife, with a gloating eye on the jam-roll.

"You needn't trouble, Plumpers," interjected May.

"No trouble at all," said Peg, "Besides, I don't mind taking trouble for a girl I really like! There you are! Shall I help myself? All right. Just a slice!"

Peg helped herself to a slice. It was a large slice. In fact the slice was larger than what remained of the jam-roll on the table. The next moment there was a sound in Study Two that reminded Pam and May of the apple incident in the form-room that morning. Peg had, it seemed, come to Study Two to say something to the chums of the Fourth. But her plump jaws were too busy for speech now. She munched, and munched, and munched.

May made a grimace, and Pamela laughed. Then they started on the remainder of the jam-roll. It was not much use now asking a party to the study to share it. Peg was a party in herself.

Peg's big slice disappeared before Pam and May's smaller ones. Peg was a quick worker, in that line. She cast an eye at the empty plate, and wiped up a spot of jam with a fat finger, and transferred it to her mouth. Then she was ready for speech.

"I say, that cat's given me a hundred lines," she said. "Moon took me to her, and made out that I'd been eating in the maths lesson. What do you think of that?"

"I think that if you're speaking of Miss Ducat, you ought to have

your ears boxed," said May, "Miss Ducat is a duck, not a cat."

"She's given me a hundred lines," hooted Peg, "and if they're not handed in to-day, I have to stay in tomorrow and write them, and to-morrow's a half-holiday."

"Better write them to-day, then!" suggested Pamela.

"Well, I mayn't have time," said Peg. "But fancy that cat Moon taking me to the Duck, and getting me lines. I told her, and I told the Duck, that I wasn't eating an apple in class. A fat lot they cared what I said! Moon's a cat. She's got a down on me," said Peg, shaking her head sorrowfully, "I believe she always thought it was I that poured a bottle of ink into her box of instruments."

"So it was!" said May.

"Well, I told her it wasn't, and it's jolly unlady-like to doubt a girl's word," said Peg, "But teachers are all the same—a suspicious lot. That's really why I've come to speak to you girls. I say, you'd like a lark, wouldn't you?"

"That depends," said Pamela, "What sort of a lark?"

Peg chuckled. She stepped to the study door, and closed it carefully, and then turned back to the two juniors. Evidently there was something mysterious about Peg's "lark," and she did not want other ears to hear. Pam and May regarded her curiously. Something unusual, it was clear, was working in Plump Peg's fat brain.

"It will make Moon as mad as a hatter," said Peg, impressively.

Pamela and May looked dubious. They were not averse from a "lark," so far as that went. But they had no special desire to make Moon as mad as a hatter. Moon was not really a bad sort. Sometimes, she was tart—but that was all in the day's work. Few girls liked mathematics: but it really wasn't Moon's fault that she was maths mistress. And she had redeeming qualities—she was a little absent-minded, and frequently forgot problems she had set the girls as penalties.

"She's a cat," said Peg, "Reporting me to the Duck, you know—and practically making me out a liar! That's the limit ain't it? But it's not only a lark—there's more in it than that. You girls like apples?"

"Apples!" repeated Pamela and May, blankly. They could not see any connection between apples, and making Moon as mad as a hatter!

"Yes, apples!" said Peg, her eyes glistening, "The Duck was phoning to Green's at Oscombe when Moon took me to her study—that's what put it into my head really. She was phoning an order for Matron—she does sometimes, you know. Well, suppose she phoned an order for apples!"

Pamela and May looked quite blank.

"Well, suppose she did?" said May, "What about it?"

"I mean, suppose it wasn't the Duck who phoned at all?" giggled Peg, "What?"

May looked at her, looked at Pam, and touched her forehead significantly. It seemed to May Carhew that Plump Peg was wandering in her mind—such as it was.

"Suppose the Duck phoned—and suppose she didn't!" said Pamela, "How do we make head or tail of that, Peg?"

"He, he, he! I mean, suppose somebody barged into her study when she wasn't there, and phoned the order and they thought it was the Duck!" giggled Peg.

"Oh!" exclaimed Pam and May together. They began to catch on to the "lark."

"I mean, suppose you did, Pam!" explained Peg Pipping, "You

watch for a chance when the Duck is out, nip into her study, ring up Green's at Oscombe, and order a bushel of the very best apples——"

"Oh, suffering cats!" ejaculated May.

"Well, they think the order comes from Moon," grinned Peg, "You see, you give Moon's name on the phone. Deliver a bushel of apples to Miss Moon at St. Olive's—see? I don't know how much a bushel is—but it's a lot! Well, along comes Green's man from Oscombe on his bike with a bushel of apples in his carrier for Moon. Just fancy Moon's face, when she knows she never ordered them! He, he, he!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Pamela. She could imagine Miss Moon's face—in such circumstances!

"But that isn't all!" pursued Peg. Evidently, Peg Pipping had been giving this big idea a great deal of thought, "There's three greengrocers in Oscombe, and they've all got lots of apples—they're grown round here, you know. Well, next you ring up Snooks', and tell them to deliver a bushel of apples to Miss Moon——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled May. It was beginning to interest May, at least.

"And then," continued Peg, "you ring up Carter's, and tell them to deliver a bushel of apples to Miss Moon! See? As fast as Moon gets over one lot, there's another. Bushel after bushel of apples. But even that isn't the cream of the joke? Because—what will they do with all those apples, you see? There'll be heaps and heaps of apples in the school, and they'll have to do something with them. Well, it stands to reason they'll be used up at meals—or at elevenses—and we all get our whack! Moon will have to pay for them——!"

"Oh!" gasped Pam.

"Of course she will, as she ordered them!" chuckled Peg, "That will pay her out for being a cat, and reporting a girl to the Duck! It may come to pounds! He, he, he! That doesn't matter, as it will be Moon who will have to pay. All the girls get apples all round for days and days, perhaps weeks. Loads of apples—he, he, he! The tradesmen won't take them back, whatever Moon says, as they were ordered. Tradesmen are jolly uppish these days, you know—they think they're doing you a favour if they deliver anything at all—let alone take it back! That's all right! And—and fancy Moon's face! I'll give her apples!"

Pam and May laughed. Undoubtedly, Peg's big idea had its risible side. Peg, encouraged by this appreciation, grinned from one fat ear to the other.

"So you watch for a chance to cut into the Duck's study and use her telephone, Pam!" she said, "And there you are!"

"Not quite!" said Pam, laughing, "I'm not going anywhere near the Duck's study, and I'm not going to telephone."

"If you're funky, Pam, May will do it, won't you, May?"

"Hardly," said May, with a chuckle.

"Now, look here," exclaimed Peg, in great exasperation, "Don't be cats! I've told you how to make Moon mad as a hatter, and to get apples all round. It will be the jape of the term. You needn't be afraid—there's absolutely no danger of being found out——"

"None at all?" asked Pam.

"Not in the least! Safe as houses! Who's to know who used the phone? It's absolutely safe all round," said Peg, impressively. "The girl who uses Miss Ducat's phone will never be spotted. That's all right."

Pam and May exchanged a laughing glance.

"Then go ahead with it!" suggested Pam.

"Eh!" ejaculated Peg.

"And we'll stand round and cheer!" said May.

Peg Pipping stared from one to the other, and then from the other to the one. She had declared that it was the jape of the term, and that it was absolutely safe. So really there seems no solid reason why Peg herself should not go ahead with it. But she did not seem to like the idea, somehow.

"Best of luck," added Pam, laughing.

"But I—I say, I—I don't want to do the phoning!" stammered Peg, "Why if it came out, a girl would get into an awful row with the Head! They'd take her to Miss Buss."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Pam and May. "Doesn't it seem quite so safe now?"

"Oh! Yes! But—but I'd rather you did it!" said Peg, "I don't care which of you does it, so long as one of you does! See?"

"Time we went down to tennis, Pam," remarked May rising, "Where's my racket?"

"Look here, are you going to do it or not?" hooted Peg.

"Not!" said Pam and May, together.

"Cats!"

And having thus expressed her feelings, Plump Peg marched out of Study Two in great dudgeon, and shut the door after her with a bang that woke all the echoes of the Fourth-Form passage. She went away frowning—leaving Pam and May laughing.

CHAPTER III

ORDERED BY PHONE!

"**M**MARGERY!"

Plump Peg turned a deaf ear.

Miss Ducat, form-mistress of the Fourth spoke in a very clear voice, with a sharp tone in it. But Peg, like the ancient gladiator, heard but heeded not. She was walking out of the House, and, like Felix the cat, she kept on walking.

It was the following afternoon. It was, as Peg had mentioned in Study Two the day before, a half-holiday. After dinner the St. Olive's girls had the afternoon to themselves, till preparation at 7.30—unless there were detentions. Unluckily Peg hadn't done the hundred lines she had been awarded for eating an apple in the geometry class.

So as soon as dinner was over, Peg was rather anxious to fade out of the public view, lest she should be asked for those lines. It was just like the Duck, she reflected bitterly, to spot her and call her back. But there was a last hope—if she didn't hear the Duck calling, she might yet escape. So, instead of looking round at the call of her name, Peg accelerated.

"Margery!" called out Miss Ducat, from the doorway, in louder tones.

Six or seven girls looked round at Peg in the quad. Clara Corton, a big girl of the Fifth Form, shouted across to her,

"Your beak's calling you, Plumpers."

Still Peg did not heed. She marched on.

"Peg, you little donkey!" called out May Carhew, "The Duck's calling you."

"Go back, you duffer!" said Pamela.

"Eh! I can't hear her!" said Peg, "I—I think she's calling somebody else, Pam. Go and ask her if she wants you."

And Peg, rolled on: and like the Iser in the poem, she rolled rapidly! There was a ripple of laughter in the quadrangle: and Miss Ducat's face, in the doorway, grew pink with wrath.

"Anemone! Please send that girl here!" she called out.

"Certainly, Miss Ducat."

Anemone Rance, a prefect of the Sixth-Form, bore down on Peg. A hand dropped on a plump shoulder, and Peg Pipping had to stop.

"Your form-mistress is calling you, Margery!" said Anemone, sternly. And she twirled the fat junior round and walked her back to the House.

"Thank you, Anemone," said Miss Ducat, "Margery! How dare you walk on when you heard me call your name?"

"I—I never heard you, please," squeaked Peg, "and I thought you were calling somebody else, Miss Ducat. I—I couldn't hear your voice where I was."

Miss Ducat breathed hard through her nose. That particular member of her form often tried her patience very hard. Fortunately—for Peg—Miss Ducat had a great deal of patience.

"Follow me to the form-room, Margery," she said, severely.

"Please, Miss Ducat, I did my lines!" bleated Peg.

"Then why have you not handed them to me?"

"I—I was going to, but I—I lost them."

"You lost them!" exclaimed Miss Ducat.

"Yes! I—I put them down somewhere, and forgot where I put them, Miss Ducat. C-c-can I go now?" asked Peg, hopefully.

"You may not go, Margery. You will follow me to the form-room. And if you tell me any more untruths, I shall double your imposition."

Peg did not tell any more untruths! She rolled dismally after her form-mistress to the form-room. Evidently she was for it: Miss Ducat, as usual, did not take her word: unladylike as Peg considered it to doubt a girl's word!

"Now," said Miss Ducat, when they entered the Fourth-form room, "You will write out your imposition, Margery, and remain here till it is finished. I am going out now, but I shall return in an hour's time, and shall expect the lines to be done."

And with that, Miss Ducat departed, leaving Peg to her task.

"Cat!" breathed Peg. Everybody who caused Plump Peg a spot of bother was, in Peg's estimation, a "cat." Indeed, to judge by Peg, St. Olive's had an almost wholly feline population. The fat junior sat down at her desk. She had to write out a hundred times "I must not eat apples in class!" That, Miss Ducat hoped, might fix it in Peg's memory that she musn't eat apples in class—which would be a useful lesson to her.

But "Plumpers" had no use for useful lessons. Peg was the laziest as well as the plumpest girl at St. Olive's. She wrote three lines: and then she was conscious of that tired feeling!

So she paused in her labours, extracted a paper bag from her tunic pocket, and helped herself to a large chunk of toffee. It was a big hard chunk, and likely to last quite a long time, which was a great comfort. Having sucked at it for a few minutes, Peg picked up her pen again, and wrote "I must not eat apples in class" industriously, for a few minutes.

Then she laid down the pen again. After all, the Duck would not be back for an hour, so there was no hurry! Peg's fat brow was sulky, and she was feeling a sense of deep injury. All the other girls were

enjoying their leisure—only Peg was stuck in the form-room writing lines. She could hear cheery voices from the distance. And it was all the fault of that cat Moon, reporting her to her form-mistress. Peg felt that she would have liked to scratch Miss Moon!

Scratching Miss Moon was, of course, quite out of the question. But Peg, as she sat and reflected on her wrongs, instead of writing her lines, pondered on the great jape she had unfolded in Study Two the day before. It was such a splendid idea, and it was certain to make that cat Moon as mad as a hatter: but neither of those cats, Pam or May, would do it—safe as it was, especially as the Duck had gone out now, and anybody could walk into her study undiscovered and use the telephone.

Other "cats" had proved equally recalcitrant. Peg had retailed that great scheme up and down the Fourth-Form passage, in almost every study there. She had put it up to half the form in turn. Some of the girls had laughed, some had told her not to be a little ass: but not one of them had become the catspaw Peg wanted. It was, in fact, clear that if anybody japed Peg's great jape, it had to be Peg herself—and that did not seem to appeal to Peg at all.

But now she was thinking of it! After all, it was safe enough! Miss Ducat had gone out—that was a stroke of luck! It was a glorious afternoon, and practically everybody was out of the House. It would be as easy as pie to slip out of the form-room, whisk along to the Duck's study, and use the phone—and then cut back to the form-room—unseen, undiscovered, unsuspected.

There might be a row about it! But there would be no clue to the performer on the telephone! It might have been anybody that did it!

Peg considered it under all its aspects! She would much rather that some other girl did it—safe as it was! But all the "cats" had let her down! It was Peg or nobody—and "Plumpers" decided, at last, that it was going to be Peg!

She went quietly to the form-room door, opened it, and peered out.

The corridor was deserted: nobody was about. She stepped quietly out, and walked down to the end of the corridor. Still nobody was in sight. In little more than a minute, she arrived at the door of Miss Ducat's study. She had not passed a soul!

Swiftly, she opened that door, stepped in, and shut it after her. Her plump heart was beating fast—in her excitement, she almost swallowed the big chunk of toffee in her mouth. Luckily, she stopped it in time.

Miss Ducat's telephone stood on a little table near the window. Peg stood listening for a moment, and then sat down to the telephone, looked out a number in a book, and dialled OSC 101. That was Green's, the greengrocer's.

"Green's!" came a voice from Oscombe.

Peg opened her mouth to reply, but the big chunk of toffee was in the way of speech. Hastily she inserted finger and thumb into her capacious mouth, extracted it therefrom, and laid it on the telephone table. Then she spoke into the transmitter.

"Miss Moon speaking from St. Olive's School."

"Yes, Miss Moon. Good afternoon, madam! What can we have the pleasure of doing for you, Miss Moon?"

Evidently, Mr. Green, at the other end, had not the slightest suspicion that it was not Miss Moon speaking. No doubt he had heard of Miss Moon: but probably he had never heard her voice. Anyway it was clear that he had no doubts.

"I want you to send me some apples this afternoon, Mr. Green."

"Very good, madam. We have very fine apples, grown locally, in ample supply. How much can we send you, madam?"

"Six bushels, please," said Peg. Peg had thought of one bushel at first. But her ideas had expanded since then. After all, one could not have too much of a good thing!

"Very good, madam. To go down to the school account, I suppose?"

"Oh! No! These apples are for me personally—for Miss Moon personally. Please tell your young man to ask for Miss Moon, and deliver the apples to—to me. Please send the bill with them, to be paid. Tell the man to wait for the money."

"Very good, madam. The apples shall be delivered this afternoon without fail. I will send my boy on his bicycle."

"Thank you, Mr. Green."

"We are always at your service, madam."

Peg grinned as she rang off. It had been easy—even easier than she had ventured to anticipate. Green, the greengrocer, had not the slightest suspicion that that order had not come from Miss Moon. The apples would be delivered that afternoon—with the bill to be paid. How much the bill would come to, for six bushels of apples, Peg had no idea. Neither did Peg care! That was something for Miss Moon to care about!

Having succeeded so well with Mr. Green, Peg had no hesitation in ringing up the other greengrocers at Oscombe. She rang up Mr. Snooks, and found him as obliging as Green. Then she rang up Carter's, and Carter's were as ready to deliver apples at St. Olive's as either Green or Snooks.

It was all so easy, indeed, that Peg rather wished that there had been a few more greengrocer's at Oscombe, to take an order apiece for six bushels of apples. Still, a total of eighteen bushels of ripe red apples was not bad! Miss Moon would have the pleasure—or otherwise—of paying three greengrocer's bills one after another—which would serve her right for reporting Peg to Miss Ducat! And there would be lots and lots of apples about: some of which, surely, would come Peg's way! What could be done with such a cargo of apples, except add them to the school provender?

After her third call, Peg chuckled over the telephone. It had all been as easy as falling off a form. She rather wished now that she had thought of ordering a few pineapples also. Expense was really no object in the circumstances! But the sound of a footstep outside the study door made Peg jump, and banished from her fat mind both pineapples and ordinary apples. If somebody was coming to the study—if she was found there—! There was a tap at the door.

Peg made one jump from the telephone, and ducked behind Miss Ducat's writing-table. She was just in time. The door opened.

"Mees Ducat—!" came the voice of Mademoiselle Monceau, the French mistress of St. Olive's.

Peg trembled.

She was out of sight behind the writing table, so long as Mamzelle did not come in. But if she came in—!

"Pas ici!" she heard Mamzelle mutter. Seeing that Miss Ducat was not there, the French mistress did not enter. She drew the door shut and passed on.

Peg gasped with relief. But she realised that she was in danger. Miss Ducat was safe out of gates—but someone might come to the study, as Mamzelle had done. The plump junior crept to the door,

and listened, her fat heart thumping. She heard Mamzelle's squeaky shoes turn a corner. The coast was clear once more. Peg opened the door and peered into the passage. The corridor was empty, and Peg shot away. A minute later she was back in the form-room.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Peg.

From the form-room window, she had a glimpse of Miss Moon, in the quad, talking to Anemone Rance, of the Sixth. Peg grinned at the maths mistress. A surprise was coming shortly for Moon!

But Peg remembered that Miss Ducat would be coming for her lines when she returned to the school. If those lines were done, it would be evidence that Peg had been busy during her form-mistresses absence, and hadn't left the form-room!

Peg plumped down at her desk, dipped her pen in the ink, and began to scribble and scrawl industriously "I must not eat apples in class"—concentrating on getting her task done, without a pause—probably the first time that Plump Peg had ever concentrated on work since she had been at St. Olive's. With that unaccustomed burst of energy, she got through—and she had just written the hundredth line when the form-room door opened, and Miss Ducat came in.

CHAPTER IV.

APPLES FOR MISS MOON!

"APPLES!" ejaculated Miss Moon.

"Yes, mum!" said Thomas.

"Absurd!" said Miss Moon. "You should not have come to me, Thomas. Tell the man to deliver his goods at the tradesmen's door. Absurd!"

Miss Moon was in her study. She was busy with mathematics—drawing up a paper that was to make hapless seniors cudgel their brains in the Sixth Form. Miss Moon revelled in mathematics. Her knowledge of that abstruse subject was fearful and wonderful. Outside mathematics she was not, perhaps, very bright, which often happens with mathematicians. She was absent-minded, forgetful, rather dreamy—and rather owlish in her big glasses. When Thomas, the House page, tapped at her door with the news that Green's boy had arrived with apples, it took Miss Moon at least a minute to detach her mighty brain from mathematics, and get back to common earth. And when she understood, she was irritated.

"Go away!" said Miss Moon.

"But the boy says it was a special order, and he's got to deliver them to you, mum," said Thomas, "He's got the bill, mum, and he says he's to wait for the money, mum."

"Nonsense!" rapped Miss Moon, "It is some mistake! Go away at once."

She turned away and immersed herself in mathematics once more. Thomas blinked at her, and retired, and closed the door.

But Miss Moon was not long left in peace. A couple of minutes later, there was a rap at the door, and it opened to reveal Mrs. Spandler, matron and house-keeper of St. Olive's. Mrs. Spandler was a buxom lady of ample proportions—there was twice as much of her as of the maths mistress. Usually she was kindly and genial. But she looked a little annoyed now.

"If you please, Miss Moon—!" she said with asperity.

"Dear me! What is it, Mrs. Spandler?" asked Miss Moon, coming up out of deep mathematics, like a diver from the deep sea.

"The apples, miss!" said Mrs. Spandler.

Miss Moon had already forgotten Thomas and the apples. Now she was reminded of them. Behind Mrs. Spandler, at the doorway, appeared a figure very unaccustomed in that part of the House. It was that of a lad with a huge wicker basket on his arm—a huge basket crammed with apples, ripe and red, that scented the corridor with a very pleasant fragrance. Miss Moon blinked at him, through her big spectacles, and blinked at Mrs. Spandler.

"I must not be interrupted like this, Mrs. Spandler," said the maths mistress, severely, "I have nothing to do with the household supplying—"

"So I should have thought, miss!" said Mrs. Spandler, "But Green's boy says that these apples were ordered by phone to be delivered to you personally."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Moon.

"Here is the bill, if you will look at it."

"I am busy, Mrs. Spandler—"

"So am I, miss," said the Matron, "Please look at this bill."

Miss Moon breathed hard through her nose, and looked at the bill. Then she stared at it. She blinked at it. It ran:

GREEN'S: GREENGROCERS, OSCOMBE.

To 6 Bushels Apples 14 0

*Miss Moon, St. Olive's School. Ordered by phone.
Cash on delivery.*

Miss Moon wondered, for a moment, whether she was dreaming. Mrs. Spandler looked impatient. She was a busy lady. She could make allowances for school-mistresses, whom she did not expect to have much common-sense. Her experience of them was that they knew all sorts of fantastic things, but not much that was of any practical use. Still, she thought that there ought to be a limit. Really it was too bad for even a schoolmistress to telephone an order for a large quantity of apples, and then, apparently, forget all about it!

"Will you pay the young man, miss?" asked Mrs. Spandler, "He was instructed to wait for the money. Place the apples here, please."

"Yes, mum," said Green's lad, "I'll leave the barskit, mum." He deposited the big wicker basket of apples in Miss Moon's study.

"I—I—I fail to understand this!" stammered Miss Moon, completely bewildered, "I have not ordered apples—"

"Perhaps you've forgotten, miss," said Mrs. Spandler.

"Nothing of the kind! I have no use for apples—especially such an enormous quantity. The lad must take them away."

Green's lad stared.

"I can't take them apples away, mum," he said, "I got to finish my round. It's fourteen bob, please mum."

"I never ordered apples!" almost shrieked Miss Moon.

Green's lad simply stared. Mrs. Spandler compressed her lips.

"The apples were ordered, miss," she said, "If you have forgotten—"

"I have not forgotten! I never ordered them, by telephone or otherwise. It is some absurd mistake!" gasped Miss Moon.

Sniff, from Mrs. Spandler. What was written on the bill was enough for the matron. Obviously they knew, at Green's in Oscombe, who had ordered those apples! Miss Moon was well known to be absent-minded—but really, really this was too much!

"Very well! If you have forgotten—"

"I have not forgotten!" shrieked Miss Moon, "I never—"

"If you have forgotten," pursued Mrs. Spandler, grimly regardless, "I will take the apples—they can be used. Please take the basket and follow me, my lad."

"Yes, mum!" said Green's boy, and he picked up the basket again, and followed the Matron, and Miss Moon's door shut once more.

"Upon my word!" gasped Miss Moon, "Absurd—nonsensical—scandalous! Pah!" And she turned to mathematics again. But it was a full minute before she could lose herself once more in those delightful depths.

Still, the incident, inexplicable as it was, was over! She hoped she had heard the last of apples. Luckily for her peace of mind and her mathematics, she did not know that two more consignments were on their way from Oscombe to St. Olive's!

CHAPTER V.

MORE APPLES FOR MISS MOON!

"**H**E, he, he!" chuckled Peg Pipping.

Peg's fat face was irradiated by a wide grin—a grin so wide, that it reached from one of Peg's fat ears to the other. It could not have become wider, without going right round Peg's bullet head.

Peg was amused. So were other St. Olive's girls! Some were perplexed. All were interested. It was quite an unusual spot of excitement on a half-holiday. Green's boy taking a vast basket of apples to Miss Moon's study had, naturally, met many eyes and received a great deal of attention. Six bushels of apples was a large order. And now Snooks's young man had arrived—with a similar basket containing a similar quantity of apples.

Mrs. Spandler, no doubt, had been astonished by his arrival. But she was not going to waste more of her valuable time on such nonsense. She simply made Thomas direct Snooks's young man to Miss Moon's study, and left it at that. Miss Moon could deal with the matter herself this time.

The sight of Snooks's young man with that huge wicker basket on his shoulder, following Thomas to the Staff corridor, caused quite a sensation.

Peg chuckled happily. She was glad that she had finished her lines and got out of detention in time for this entertainment.

"More apples for Miss Moon!" said May Carhew, and she gave the grinning Peg a suspicious look, "Peg, you little idiot, did you—?"

"Oh, no," said Peg, "Did you?"

Pamela gave the fat junior a suspicious look also. Neither of them had forgotten the "jape of the term" propounded by Peg in Study Two the day before. Apples for Miss Moon meant that that jape was materialising! Peg had asked nearly every girl in the Fourth to undertake the telephoning part of the scheme. Evidently some girl with a misdirected sense of humour had done it!

"Peg! Did you——?" began Pamela.

"I've been in detention haven't I?" demanded Peg. "How could I phone when I was in detention?"

"Somebody has!" chuckled May.

"What on earth," said Clara Corton of the Fifth, "does Miss Moon want all those apples for?"

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away!" remarked Anemone Rance, of the Sixth.

"Moon seems to have ordered enough to keep the whole medical profession away for the rest of her life!" said Clara.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was quite a crowd at the corner of the Staff corridor, where the members of the Staff had their studies. They watched Snook's young man follow Thomas to Miss Moon's door, where he tapped. They heard his voice:

"Please, Miss Moon, the apples from Snookses——!"

There was a loud angry exclamation in the study.

"What! Apples? How dare you, Thomas! Go away at once."

Miss Moon appeared in the study doorway. She did not glance towards the staring crowd down the corridor. Her eyes, and her spectacles, were fixed on the young man from Snook's, and his huge basket of apples. Thomas, quite scared by the expressive expression on her face, faded out of the picture round the nearest corner, leaving it up to Snook's young man.

That young man, quite unconscious that anything was wrong, produced a bill. Miss Moon waved an angry hand at him.

"Go away! Take those apples away! How dare you bring them here?"

Snook's young man blinked at her in surprise.

"Ain't you Miss Moon?" he inquired.

"I am Miss Moon. But——"

"Then the apples is for you, miss," said Snook's young man. "'Ere's the bill——six bushels of apples, fourteen shillings, ordered by phone, pay on delivery——"

"I have ordered no apples!" shrieked Miss Moon. "It is some mistake——some absurd mistake. Take the apples and yourself away at once."

"That won't do, miss," said Snook's young man, "If you don't want the apples you ordered——"

"I have not ordered apples," almost foamed Miss Moon, "I have not used the telephone to-day at all. Go away."

"I can't take them apples back, miss," said Snook's young man, stolidly, "Trouble enough to deliver goods, these 'ere days, without taking them back again. I got to wait for the money. Fourteen bob, please."

"I shall not pay for apples I never ordered. I do not want apples. Take them away at once and tell Mr. Snooks not to make such silly mistakes."

"There ain't no mistake, miss—I 'eard the order took down on the phone——Miss Moon, at St. Olive's School. 'Ere's the apples, and 'ere's the bill, and I'm a-waiting to be paid!" said Snook's young man, his manner becoming a little unpleasant, "You can't waste a man's time like this 'ere, miss, changing your mind after he's done two mile on a bike with a basket of apples——"

"I will pay you nothing! Go away!" foamed Miss Moon, and she retired into her study and slammed the door, almost on the nose of Snook's young man.

"Well, I'll eat my 'at!" said Snook's young man, blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a trill along the corridor. Snook's young man stared round, at a mob of laughing faces. Then he rapped on Miss Moon's door. It was a loud rap——almost a thump! It echoed down the Staff corridor.

"Go away!" came a shriek from within.

"I'm waiting for fourteen bob!" shouted Snooks's young man, "I was hordered to wait for the money, and I'm a-waiting for it!"

"I will telephone for a policeman if you do not go away at once!" came a shrill angry voice from the study.

"Well I'll eat my 'at and boots!" said Snooks's young man, "'Ere's a go!" He stared round at the laughing school girls, "I say, young ladies, is the old 'un orf her onion, or what? Hordering happles, and then changing 'er blooming mind, and telling a bloke to hike 'em back again! Wot's a bloke to do with these 'ere apples? I ain't carting 'em back to Oscombe, I know that!"

And he rapped on the door again. Rap! rap! rap! rap!

"Here comes the Duck!" breathed May Carhew.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Peg.

Miss Ducat came out of her study. The expression on her face was extraordinary. Evidently, she had heard all: and perhaps wondered, like Snooks' young man, whether Miss Moon was "off her onion."

"Please stop that knocking," she said to Snooks' young man.

"I got to be paid for them apples, ma'am," said Snooks' young man, "I ain't carting them apples back to Oscombe arter carting of 'em 'ere, and don't you think it! I got to be paid fourteen bob, and I'm a-waiting for it."

Miss Ducat breathed hard. This unseemly scene had to be stopped. There was some extraordinary mistake somewhere: but one thing at least was clear, that Snooks' young man was not going without his money.

"I will pay for the apples, and settle the matter later with Miss Moon," she said, hastily.

"O.K. by me, s'long as I'm paid," said Snooks' young man.

And Snooks's young man departed, with fourteen shillings, leaving a receipted bill in Miss Ducat's hand, and a basket of apples standing against the corridor wall. Miss Ducat stared at the crowd down the corridor.

"Disperse at once!" she rapped.

And the laughing girls faded away. Miss Ducat went back to her study, quite perplexed and disturbed. Miss Moon tried to concentrate again on mathematics. But she really couldn't. She was too upset and flurried and angry. Sounds of laughter from the quadrangle did not help to calm her. It seemed to Miss Moon that the greengrocers at Oscombe must have gone mad, or else that they had leagued together to play this extraordinary, unheard-of trick on her. She, at least, knew that she had not ordered any apples by telephone! Evidently it was a joke—an absurd practical joke—at her expense! She almost wished that she had boxed the ears of Snooks' young man! Her study window was open, and voices floated in:

"Has Moon gone crackers? Ordering apples by the bushel——!"

"And forgetting all about it——!"

"Must be crackers!"

Mis Moon slammed her window shut. It was useless to think of mathematics in such circumstances! She paced her study, angry, flustered, bewildered, and fearfully exasperated. It was a practical joke, but who——why——how——? Her agitated thoughts were interrupted by a yell from the distance:

"Here comes Carter's boy!"

"More apples for Miss Moon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER VI.

TOO MANY APPLES!

PAMELA laughed—she could not help it. She thought it was too bad on poor Miss Moon—but she could not help laughing. May was laughing till the tears ran down her cheeks. Peg was doubled up with merriment. Everybody was laughing. Most of the Fourth-form girls had heard of Peg's wonderful wheeze, and guessed how the matter stood. Other St. Olive's girls were quite in the dark. Some thought that it must be some extraordinary practical joke—others that it was an unusual sample of Miss Moon's well-known forgetfulness and absence of mind—while others really wondered whether the maths mistress had gone "crackers."

Nearly all St. Olive's crowded to see Carter's boy, when the news spread that a third cargo of apples had arrived for Miss Moon. Mrs. Spandler had lost all patience: this time she did not even send Thomas to guide the greengrocer's boy to Miss Moon's study. Carter's boy, a chubby-cheeked lad who looked too small for the huge wicker basket crammed with apples that he was carrying, seemed surprised to find himself in the midst of a crowd of laughing schoolgirls.

There was nothing comic, so far as Carter's boy could see, in delivering six bushels of apples ordered by telephone. But the mere sight of that stack of apples caused howls of laughter among the St. Olive's girls.

"Please can you tell me which is Miss Moon's room?" asked Carter's boy, blinking at the hilarious crowd.

"I'll show you," said Pamela, and she guided the greengrocer's boy up the corridor, and tapped at Miss Moon's door.

"Thank you, miss," said Carter's boy: and Pamela promptly retreated to rejoin the crowd at the end of the Staff corridor. May clutched her arm, almost weeping with laughter, as Miss Moon's door suddenly opened.

"Oh! Look!" gasped May.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Peg.

Miss Moon stepped out of her study. Her face was almost crimson—her eyes, and her very spectacles, glittered with wrath. Carter's boy jumped, at the sight of her angry face. He had never seen a customer look like that before! Miss Moon gave him a paralysing glare.

"What do you want?" she thundered.

"Oh, golly!" gasped Carter's boy, "I—I—I've brought the apples, miss—"

"The apples! How dare you?"

"The—the guv'nor sent me with them on my bike, miss!" stammered the astonished greengrocer's boy, "Six bushels of apples, miss, and I'm to wait for the money. Fourteen shillings, please, miss, and 'ere's the bill."

"How dare you play such tricks?" shrieked Miss Moon, "I have ordered no apples as you know very well. This is the third time—it is a trick—a prank—a practical joke—how dare you come here with apples?"

"It's the apples what you ordered by phone, miss—Yaroooh!" roared Carter's boy, staggering, as, to his utter surprise, the exasperated maths mistress boxed his ears! 'Ere! 'Ands off! Gone mad? Yoooop!"

Smack! smack! Carter's boy staggered back, dropping the big basket to the floor. There was a crash as it landed, and rolled over: and innumerable apples scattered on the floor, rolling in all directions.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a shriek from the end of the corridor.

"Now go away at once, and take your apples with you!" exclaimed Miss Moon.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Carter's boy. He rubbed his ears, staring in bewilderment at Miss Moon, "Look 'ere, what are you smacking my 'ead for, I'd like to know. I got to wait for the money for them apples—'ere, 'ands off!" He jumped back, as Miss Moon reached at him again, with the evident intention of delivering another sounding smack. He dodged just in time.

"Go!" thundered Miss Moon.

"I got to be paid for them apples—!" gasped Carter's boy.

He did not finish! Miss Moon, with glittering eyes and outstretched hand, was striding at him. Carter's boy forgot all about waiting for the money—he turned and ran down the corridor.

The laughing crowd of schoolgirls opened to let him pass, and Carter's boy vanished into space: leaving his basket in the corridor, and the floor strewn with apples.

Miss Moon gave one glare at the laughing crowd, went back into her study, and slammed the door with a slam that woke most of the echoes of St. Olive's.

"Oh, dear!" gasped May Carhew, "I—I wonder if there will be any more apples for Miss Moon to-day?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Crackers, you know," said Clara Corton of the Fifth, "That's three lots of apples she's ordered and forgotten all about. Must be quite crackers!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Here comes the Head!" gasped Pamela.

"Oh, scissors!" gurgled Peg.

There was a sudden hush, as the stately figure of Miss Buss, head-mistress of St. Olive's, was seen approaching.

Evidently news of the extraordinary happenings of that afternoon had reached the Head: and she was coming to look into the matter. Peg gave her one uneasy blink and rolled away as fast as she could roll. And one glance from Miss Buss dispersed the rest of the crowd. They crowded out into the quad, while Miss Buss, with stately tread, proceeded to Miss Moon's study.

"Poor old Moon!" gasped May, "The Beak will comb her hair! Peg, you little fat duffer, there will be an awful row about this."

"Think Buss will believe that Moon didn't phone?" asked Peg.

"Of course she will, when Miss Moon explains," said Pamela. "It will come out that it was a jape. Miss Buss will know that somebody else phoned in Miss Moon's name."

"Well, I don't know anything about it," said Peg. "I was in detention at the time, as you know. I never left the form-room for a minute, and I got back without anybody seeing me, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you girls get saying it was me, you know," said Peg. "My mind's a perfect blank on the subject. I never did it—and I shouldn't have done it if Moon hadn't reported me to the Duck, either. I—I think very likely it was somebody outside the school—not a St Olive's girl at all! What do you girls think?"

But Pam and May did not state what they thought. They only chuckled.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLUE!

WHO did it?

It was quite a mystery.

Some of the girls in the Fourth knew. Others guessed. But not one of them, of course, said a word about Peg.

Nobody was going to give "Plumpers" away. It was quite probable that "Plumpers" would have given herself away, had she been questioned. But Peg was not questioned. Nobody outside the Fourth thought of Peg. Miss Ducat, certainly, did not think of her. Peg had been in detention at the time: so she really was the least likely girl in the Fourth to be suspected.

The whole school was assembled in hall for inquiry. But nothing came of it. It was known that someone had telephoned to three different greengrocers at Oscombe, ordering bushels of apples in the name of Miss Moon. It had been a tremendous jape on the maths mistress—the jape of the term! But the mysterious telephoner might have been any girl at St. Olive's, from the Sixth to the Second. The whole school laughed over it—even the Staff, in the Staff-Room, laughed—with the single exception of Miss Moon. Miss Buss was determined to find the offender—if she could—and make an example of her. Only—she couldn't. It was not even known which of the school telephones had been used by the practical joker! Peg seemed quite safe.

She remained safe, till after tea! Then Miss Ducat had occasion to go to her telephone to ring up the library at Oscombe.

Miss Ducat sat at the telephone table, and was about to dial, when suddenly she stopped.

Her eyes fixed on a small object that lay on the table near the telephone!

It was a chunk of toffee!

She stared at that chunk of toffee!

Miss Ducat herself did not indulge in such things as toffee. Even if she had, she would not have been likely to deposit a sticky lump on the table while she phoned! But somebody had!

Miss Ducat rose to her feet, breathing hard. Someone had used her phone in her absence that afternoon—and that someone had removed a chunk of toffee from her mouth to speak into the instrument—and left it there! She could guess whom.

Up to that moment Miss Ducat had not suspected that the offender was in her own form! Now she knew! A minute later Plump Peg was called into the study. Miss Ducat fixed accusing eyes on her.

"Margery! You used this telephone while I was out this afternoon!"

Peg almost fell down.

"You will now come with me to Miss Buss!"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Peg.

How the Duck knew, Peg could not begin to guess. It seemed rather like magic to her. And Plump Peg trailed away after Miss Ducat to the Head's study—wishing from the bottom of her plump heart that she had never, never thought of the Jape of the Term!

THE END.