

Scam on the CAM



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Scam on the CAM



by
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illustrated by
Sarah Horne

Holiday House/ New York

CAMBRIDGE



RIVER CAM

NORTHAMPTON STREET

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

TRINITY COLLEGE

CLARE COLLEGE

KING'S COLLEGE

KING'S BRIDGE

QUEEN'S COLLEGE

DARWIN COLLEGE

BRIDGE ST

KING'S PARADE

MICHAEL HOUSE CAFE

GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE

CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE

PEMBROKE COLLEGE

TO SCHOOL

MAGDALENE COLLEGE

JESUS LANE

SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE

CHRIST'S COLLEGE

ST. ANDREW'S ST

DOWNING COLLEGE

JESUS COLLEGE

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM



CHRIST'S COLLEGE



I

We had to win that race.

Not because there was anything exciting to win, like our own weight in cotton candy; teachers are just as stingy as parents. But because Julius Hawthorne and his crew from the Laurels School were in the other boat.

The problem was that they'd overtaken us approximately ten minutes before, shouting, "Look at the cute little kids from Goodall! Don't damage the boat too much—it's ours, remember!"

It was. The Laurels, out of immense kindness (according to Mr. Halitosis) or pity (according to us), were sharing their boats and oars with our school that term. Goodall School doesn't



have any boats; it barely has enough money to pay Mr. Halitosis a decent salary, judging by his very economical use of toothpaste.

Anyway, a little bird was telling me that it would be difficult to catch up with the Laurels crew. That little bird was a tiny yellow duckling who was also racing us, and also beating us.

I stared glumly at my pathetically slow crew. Due to being perfectly useless at sports, but very good at bossing people around, I'd been made cox. Sitting at the back of the boat, facing the meanders of the dangerous river, I was responsible for the steering of the splendid ship and the survival of its seamen and seawomen, by shouting to them that they should row harder.

Gemma, sitting opposite me, was stroke, setting the rhythm for the rest of the crew. She was the only one who was actually motivated to win. Due to having recently developed a detestable crush on Julius Hawthorne, she was eager to impress the eye-scratchingly ugly boy. Behind her, Solal, Lily, Emerald, Ben and,



at bow, Toby, were idly splashing along and staring at the landscape like a group of senior citizens on a Sunday outing.

“Bow, take a stroke!” I commanded.



Bow, at the front of the boat, didn't take a stroke.

“Bow, take a stroke!” I shouted louder.

Bow still wasn't taking a stroke.

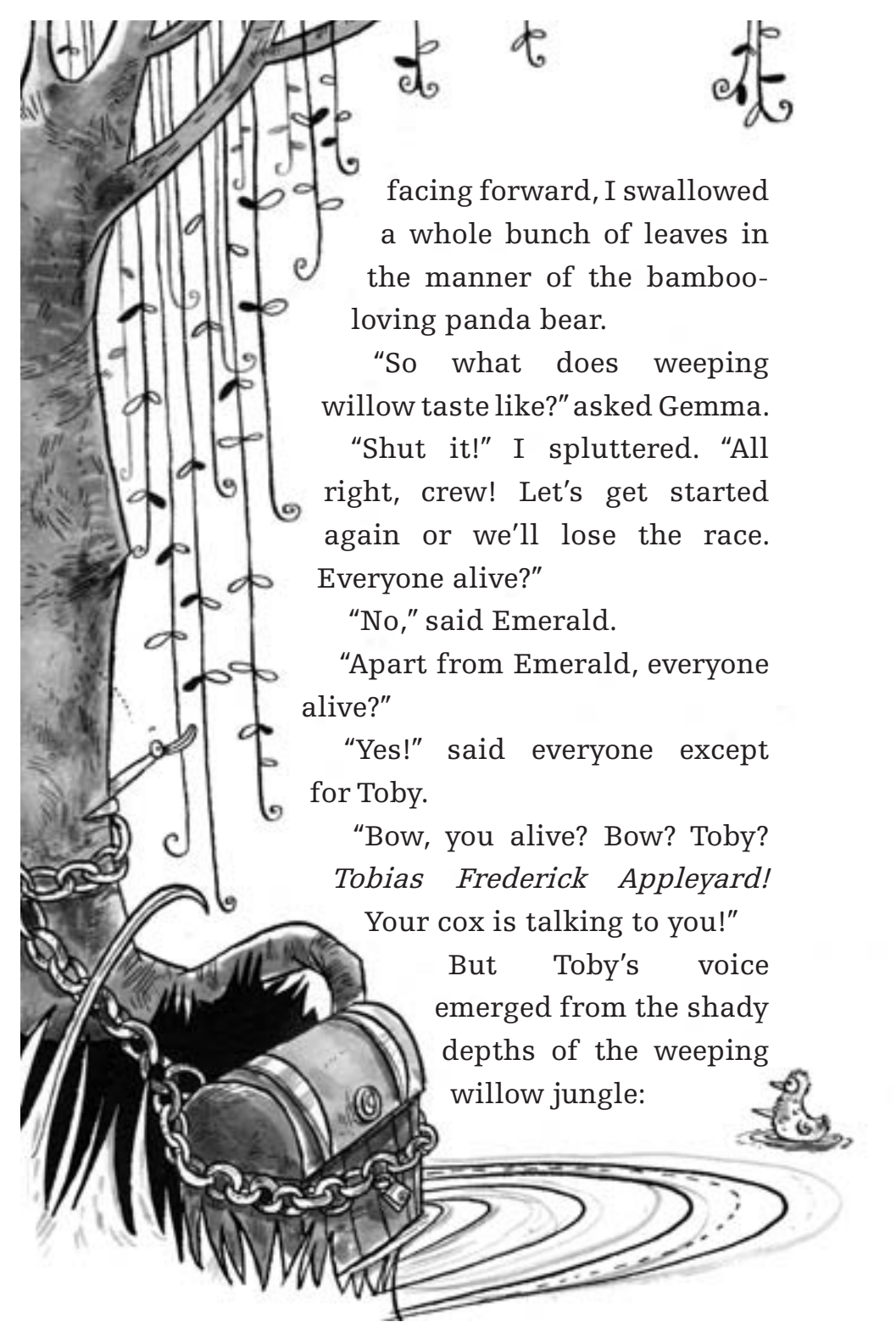
“Bow! Bow, do you copy? Take a stroke or else!”

(He said later that he'd been watching a very fast frog.)

“TOBY! Take a stroke, you useless sloth! We're heading straight to disas—”

I was unable to finish my sentence due to crashing into a weeping willow. This was only moderately fun, as everyone in the crew got ferociously whipped and strangled. Since I was





facing forward, I swallowed a whole bunch of leaves in the manner of the bamboo-loving panda bear.

"So what does weeping willow taste like?" asked Gemma.

"Shut it!" I spluttered. "All right, crew! Let's get started again or we'll lose the race. Everyone alive?"

"No," said Emerald.

"Apart from Emerald, everyone alive?"

"Yes!" said everyone except for Toby.

"Bow, you alive? Bow? Toby? *Tobias Frederick Appleyard!* Your cox is talking to you!"

But Toby's voice emerged from the shady depths of the weeping willow jungle:

“Oh, give it a rest, Sesame! I’ve found a treasure!”

So, like a parliament of owls, everyone turned their necks one hundred and eighty degrees to look at Toby, who’d half-crashed into the bank. Underneath the cascade of willow leaves was the pirate chest.



“There are no pirate chests in Cambridge,” said Professor Seade (my mother).

“There are no pirate chests anywhere in the United Kingdom,” said Reverend Seade (my father).

“There are no pirate chests anywhere in Europe,” they both said.

“There *so* is. We *saw* it. It was just sitting there on the bank under the weeping willow near the university boathouse. And it was so heavy we couldn’t move it. And it had an old, rusty lock. And it was chained up to the trunk of the willow. And it was so well hidden that no one would ever have found it if Toby hadn’t been



watching a frog instead of taking a stroke."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Mum, and Dad said, "Me neither, as usual."

"Why are you so anti-pirates? It would be the coolest thing if there were some in Cambridge!"

"Why are you nagging us with silly questions? Aren't you supposed to be playing with your friends? They're waiting for you in the garden."

"I came in to see if there was anything we could munch on."

Dad sighed and walked to the kitchen. He came back with a luscious-looking Bakewell tart, saying, "Don't eat it all!" (but accidentally we did).

When I hopped back out into the garden, Toby and Gemma were sitting underneath the big tree, which shed shattered sunlight all over them. They'd started drawing a map on my geography notebook, but Peter Mortimer had elected the notebook as his own particular throne and was spitting at them.

"Why does your cat hate us so much?" asked Gemma.



"He doesn't hate you, he's just shy," I said, and just then Peter Mortimer reached out, scratched Gemma's arm, turned around, bit Toby's knee and finally strutted away and climbed up the big tree.

"Right—what do we have here?" I asked.

"Toby thinks he saw an engraving on the chest," said Gemma, "just before Halitosis turned up to tell us off."

We all shuddered. Mr. Halitosis had been cycling along the bank on his creaky bike for just enough time for his entire T-shirt to be drenched in bile-yellow sweat. Five or six cows in the field behind him had galloped away at jaguar speed when he'd arrived. Hardly had we laid hands on the pirate chest than he'd screamed at us from the other side of the river:

"You're a disgrace to Goodall School! What have you been doing? The Laurels crew passed the finish line twenty minutes ago!"

And that's why we'd had to abandon the treasure and row mournfully back to the Laurels' boathouse, where we'd found that



the winners had been carefully filling our shoes with river weed.

"An engraving? Of what?" I asked.

"I don't know," replied Toby, frowning in a way that seemed painful. "It looked like a crest. Just above the lock."

"Well, what was it? A mermaid? An octopus? A skull and crossbones?"

"I can't remember."

Gemma and I huffed and puffed so forcefully that we ripped all the fluff off a bunch of white dandelions. How's that for birthday cake practice? Next time I'll have twelve candles, so I try to train whenever I can.

"Seriously, Toby, you're so disappointing," said Gemma. "You were the closest to the pirate chest. You *should* remember what that engraving was."

"Stop stressing me out! It's there in my head somewhere," pleaded Toby, "but for some reason the only things I can think about right now are the lyrics to 'Rule, Britannia' and the definition of *peninsula*."



“Okay—then we need to hypnotize you,” I said. “Get up, everyone!”

We all jumped to our feet and I blindfolded Toby with my scarf before he could say “wait a minute.”

“Sit down on this deck chair. We have to make you live that moment again—exactly as it was!”

“There’s no river,” observed Gemma.

“Well observed,” I observed. “However, we do have a small stream.”

The Master’s Garden at Christ’s College, Cambridge, which is where I live for parent-related reasons, has a stream at the bottom of it. I never approach it if I can avoid it, because it frizzes and slithers with disgusting fish, who I refuse to believe are vegetarian.

But when necessary, Sesame Seade, Cambridge’s first self-made superheroine, puts away her fears. So we dragged the deck chair, with Toby in it, all the way to the fishy stream, and I can tell you he wasn’t exactly light, and I can also tell you that Gemma wasn’t putting



in all the effort she would have if Julius Hawthorne had been there to watch.

We got there in the end, sweating and panting, and Toby said, "Well, that was fun. Otherwise, we could have moved the deck chair, and I would have sat in it afterward."

I wondered why Gemma hadn't thought of that, and she looked at me like she was wondering why *I* hadn't.

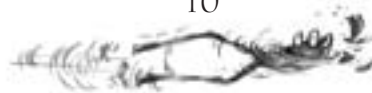
"Right. Can you hear the water?" I asked.

"Yes, it's super relaxing. And what with that scarf covering my eyes, I think I might fall asleep."

"You'd better not, you lazy dormouse," I exclaimed. "We haven't dragged you all the way here for you to get a little doze on the house. You need to remember what was engraved on the chest. Gemz, grab the deck chair and rock it slowly, to mimic the soft cradling of the rippling waves."

"If she does that, there's absolutely no way I won't fall asleep," declared Toby.

"I'll pinch him if he does," said Gemma, and



Toby winced. I went to fetch a broomstick and stuck it in Toby's hands.

"What's that?"

"Your oar. Now everything is just like it was this morning."

"Why are you whispering?"

"I'm trying to hypnotize you, Toby, remember?"

"Yeah, but whispers make me sleepy."

"Pinch him, Gemma."

"Ouch!"

"Now listen. You've crashed into a weeping willow, and half-crashed into the bank. What's under the weeping willow?"

"A pirate chest."

"Describe it to me."

"It's made of wood with metallic bands and a metal lock. It's chained to the trunk of the tree."

"Very good. What else?"

"You're shouting your head off in the cox box, and it's annoying me."

"Yes, that's not important. What else?"

"I wonder where the frog is!"

"What frog?"





"The one I saw before we crashed."

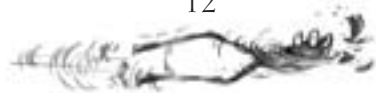
"Before *we* crashed?" exclaimed Gemma. "*We* didn't crash—you crashed *us*!"

"Shush, Gemma! You're going to ruin the deep hypnotic state! Never mind the frog, Toby."

"It was a super strong frog, you know. It was swimming ultra fast!"

"I said, never mind the frog. What else can you see?"

"Ben's hair. It's really greasy. There's a louse



in it going up and down, up and down, like a little dolphin."

"No, look at the bank, not at Ben. The pirate chest. What's on it?"

Dramatic silence. Gemma's still rocking the deck chair. The fish are still swimming in circles next to us, ready to pounce. Will Sesame Seade succeed as Cambridge's greatest hypnotist?

And suddenly everything happened at the same time:

"I know! I know! I remember!" screamed Toby.

"Sophie! Gemma! What on earth are you doing to Toby?" screamed my parents.

"*Hakuna matata!*" screamed my ridiculous mobile phone, which is its way of telling me that someone is calling me.

So Toby leapt out of the deck chair and grabbed a pencil, my parents leapt out of the house and grabbed Gemma (she's not fast enough) and I leapt out of grabbing distance and grabbed my phone. It was, the screen said, Jeremy Hopkins—or rather, '*Susie*,' as I call him in my phone's address book so as not to awaken



the suspicions of my parents. I climbed up the big tree and sat down next to Peter Mortimer.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Sesame, it's Jeremy."

"I know," I whispered. "Listen, I can't talk to you for very long. I've found refuge on a branch, but Professor and Reverend Seade are prowling around the tree and looking up at me in the manner of a couple of growly grizzly bears who've located a beehive. Sticky situation."

"Sounds terrifying. Okay, I'll be quick: can I send you on a mission?"

"Of course! I haven't had one of those for ages. Well, three weeks. What do you need me to investigate?"

Through the leaves I could see Toby drawing and Gemma looking all nice to try and convince Mum and Dad that nothing strange had been happening at all. Apparently she was succeeding, which didn't surprise me; she does wear pearl earrings.

"Well," said Jeremy, "there have been some



strange events in the lead-up to the Boat Race between Cambridge and Oxford. It's in less than two weeks now, and some rowers on the Cambridge team have been falling mysteriously ill."

"Wicked! Arsenic? Cyanide?"

"I didn't say *dead*, I said ill. Ill enough that they can't take part in the race. Three of them so far have had to drop out. Bit of a strange coincidence, isn't it?"

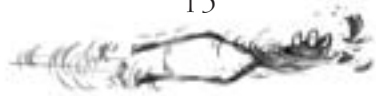
I love coincidences. "Indeed. What do you want me to do?"

"Well, the newspaper is going to run a story on that, of course, and we'd love to have some special revelations to make, as usual . . ."

I could already picture the big red headlines of *UniGossip*: "Cambridge Crew Crushed by Baffling Bacteria!"

"Sounds good," I said. "So . . . I go to the university boathouse and investigate?"

"Yes. We can't send a student there; they won't trust us. Why don't you go and pretend you're writing a cute little article for your cute



little school newspaper? They'll let you in and answer all your questions, and once you're in the place . . ."

"Say no more! I will sneak in and smuggle out all their dirty secrets, in the name of *UniGossip!*"

And I theatrically hung up, repocketed the phone and slid down the big trunk all the way to the ground where Mum and Dad were beaming at Gemma as if she was God's gift to parents.

"What were you doing up that tree, Sophie?" asked Mum.

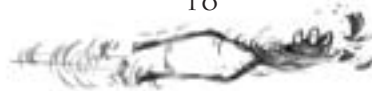
"Rummaging around for squirrel eggs."

"Squirrels don't lay eggs: they are mammals," said Dad.

"That explains why I couldn't find any. If they existed, though, do you think they'd be furry?"

"That's a ridiculous question," Dad declared. And he and Mum both made their way to the house, which is what I'd been hoping for.

"Thought they'd never leave," said Toby. "Right, here's the drawing I've just done.



Sesame, you're the awesomest hypnotist in the world. Maybe you should do it as a job!"

"I can't," I replied sadly. "I'm already a superheroine. But I can keep it as a hobby."

And we all looked at the drawing and went "Wow!," because it was a true pirate engraving: a red crest with a round, golden, many-beamed rudder.

"Pirates," I whispered, "are among us."

