

CHAPTER VI

WILLIAM AND THE NASTIES

"WHAT did you say they were called?" said William.

"Nasties," replied Henry, who as usual was the fount of information on the subject.

"They can't be called nasties," said William. "No one would call themselves a name like that. That mus' be what people call them that don't like them."

"No, it's their real name," persisted Henry. "They really are called nasties. Nasty means something quite different in Germany."

"Don't be silly," said William. "Nasty couldn't mean anything but nasty anywhere. What do they do?"

"They rule all the country," said Henry, "an' make everyone do jus' what they like an' send them to prison if they don't."

"I'd be one of them if I was in that country," said William, "but I bet I'd find a better name than nasty."

"I tell you nasty means somethin' else in Germany," said Henry.

"Well, why can't they say somethin' else instead of nasty then?" demanded William. "Haven't they got any sense? What else do they do?"

"They chase out Jews," volunteered Henry.

"Why?" said William.

"'Cause Jews are rich," explained Henry, "so they chase 'em out and take all the stuff they leave behind. It's a jolly good idea."

"Yes," agreed William, "but we couldn't do that even if we started bein' nasties 'cause there aren't any Jews here."

"Ole Mr. Isaacs is a Jew," said Ginger.

They stared at each other with sudden interest. Mr. Isaacs had recently succeeded Mr. Monks in the proprietorship of the village sweetshop. Mr. Monks had been an old friend and ally of the Outlaws, always ready for gossip and conversation, always generous with a few extra sweets when the scales had gone down, occasionally making the boys presents of liquorice ribbons, popcorns, or lollipops. Mr. Isaacs, however, from his first entering upon possession of the shop, had displayed a meanness that shocked and infuriated the Outlaws. They affirmed with much indignation that he stopped putting on sweets as soon as the scale quivered and long before it actually descended.

"Mean?" said William. "Well, it's more than mean. It's what people ought to be put in prison for. It's *stealin'*, that's what it is."

Their memory of the easy-going days of Mr. Monks increased their bitterness. They avenged themselves upon the newcomer as best they could by shouting the time-honoured taunt "Cheats never prosper," as they passed his open doorway, and varied this proceeding by clustering round his windows and loudly depreciating his wares. The hook-nosed little man used to rush out

at them in fury, chasing them down the road with threats and imprecations.

“Yes, he’s a Jew all right,” said Ginger, “an’ if we were in Germany an’ were nasties we could chase him out an’ take everything in his shop. You’re allowed to by lor in Germany—chase ’em out an’ take everything in their shops. If you’re nasties, I mean.”



THE LITTLE MAN RUSHED OUT AT THEM IN A FURIOUS RAGE.

"Crumbs!" said William with a deep sigh of ecstasy, as there came to him glorious visions of chasing Jew after Jew out of sweetshop after sweetshop and appropriating the precious spoils. "Crumbs! I jolly well wish I was one."

"So do I," said Ginger, "an' if I'd got enough money I'd go to Germany an' be one to-morrow. I never remember in all my life," he added pathetically, "having as many sweets as I wanted."

"Why shouldn't we have them here?" said William suddenly.

"What? Sweets? 'Cause that ole Isaacs is so mean. 'Cause he only makes the thing wobble an' doesn't wait till it goes down."

"No, nasties. Why don't we have nasties here? If we had nasties here we could join 'em an' chase him out of his shop an' take all his stuff."

"Crumbs!" said Douglas. "An' he's jus' got a whole new box of liquorice allsorts."

"Jus' *think!* Bottles an' bottles an' bottles of lollipops, an' boxes an' boxes an' boxes——"

Words failed them.

They stared at each other in silence as the vision of the well-stocked shelves of Mr. Isaacs swam temptingly before their eyes.

"Well," said William at last, "someone's got to start them, wherever they are."

"Start what?"

"Nasties. I bet that once there weren't any in Germany an' then someone thought of it. An' I bet the first one thought of it 'cause there was someone like ole Mr. Isaacs in his village who was so mean that he stopped puttin' sweets on as soon as the thing began

to wobble an' didn't let it right down. Well, I bet this man got so mad that he started the nasties jus' to chase this mean sweetshop man out of his shop an' take his sweets. I bet he felt it was all sort of owed him from all the times this man had stopped puttin' sweets on as soon as the thing began to wobble, same as we feel about ole Mr. Isaacs. Well, I votes we start 'em here."

"Who'll we have?" said Ginger.

"Everyone'll want to belong once they know what we're goin' to do," said Douglas.

"Well, there won't be many sweets for us," said Henry thoughtfully, "if they're all goin' to start joinin'."

"No, there jolly well won't," agreed William. "I vote we don't have anyone else in it, but just us. Not till we've cleared ole Isaacs out an' eaten all his sweets, anyway. An' we won't let anyone else know about it, else they'll all want to be nasties, too. We'll be secret nasties an' bags me the liquorice allsorts."

"I bet there'll be enough of everything to go round all right," said Henry. "I bet they'll last us a jolly long time, 'cause there's a storeroom full of sweets upstairs as well. Don't you remember Mr. Monks showed it to us once?"

"Well, we'd better start bein' nasties straight away," said William in a business-like manner. "I'll be the chief one. What's he called in Germany?"

"Her Hitler," said Henry.

"Her!" echoed William in disgust. "Is it a woman?"

"No, it's a man all right," said Henry, "but 'her' means a man in German. It's the same as 'him.'"

"It can't be the same as him," objected William. "Her can't ever be the same as him in any language. Well, I'm jolly well not going to call myself her anything. Nasty's bad enough. People that talk foreign languages never seem to have any sense. I don't mind being called Hitler all right, but I'm jolly well not going to be called Her Hitler. *Tell* you what! I'll be called Him Hitler. That sounds all right. Now I'm Him Hitler an' we four are the nasties. And now let's talk about what we're goin' to do."

"There's only one thing we want to do," said Ginger simply, "an' that's to chase out ole Isaacs an' take his sweets."

"Yes. Well, we'd better talk about how we're goin' to do it," said William.

There was a long silence during which something of the animation died from the Outlaws' faces, as they considered for the first time the magnitude of the task that confronted them.

"Well, how do *they* do it?" demanded William of Henry.

"They jus' chase 'em out an' take their things."

"Yes, but *how*?" said William rather irritably.

"I mean, how do they *start* doin' it?"

"They sort of get 'em scared," said Henry.

"How?" demanded William once more.

"Well, they've got a sort of picture of a snake all curled up called a swastika, an' it sort of scares 'em."

"Why does it scare 'em? It wouldn't scare me."

"I s'pose Jews are scared of snakes. I dunno."

"Well, let's try it, anyway. Who'll draw the snake?"

"I will," said Douglas.

Douglas had a distant cousin who had once had a

picture displayed in the local exhibition of arts and crafts, and on the strength of this he was regarded as an expert in things artistic.

"I bet I could draw this curled-up snake all right. What did you say it was called?"

"Swastika," said Henry. "Swastika means snake in German."

"Yes, I knew that all right," said Douglas, who was occasionally irritated by Henry's airs of omniscience.

"Well, what do they *do* with the swast—, this curled-up snake?" said William.

"They have its picture on a sort of banner, an' they carry it through the streets, an' the Jews get scared an' run off an' then they take all the sweets an' things out of their shops."

"Well, let's try that first, anyway," said William.

"I bet it'll act all right," said Henry. "It does in Germany, anyway."

"Well, I'll start on this sw—, this curled-up snake," said Douglas. "I'll do it soon as I get home, an' then we can start scarin' him off this afternoon."

The Outlaws met again immediately after lunch. Upon the lid of a hatbox that he had discovered in the boxroom Douglas had drawn a somewhat erratically curled-up snake and coloured it a violent green. The Outlaws examined it critically.

"You've drawn ears on it," objected Henry. "Snakes don't have ears."

"Course they have ears," said Douglas. "How d'you think they can hear without ears?"

This seemed unanswerable.

"Well, it's a snake all right, an' it ought to scare

him," said William. "Come on. Let's make a banner of it."

The "banner" was made by the simple means of fastening Douglas's drawing to a walking-stick by drawing-pins.

"Let's all go'n' stand outside his shop with it now," said Ginger. "I bet it'll scare him off all right."

In single file the Outlaws marched to Mr. Isaacs' sweetshop, William walking at the head and carrying the "banner."

They stood in a group at the open door in full sight of Mr. Isaacs, fully expecting his face to become distorted with terror as his eyes fell upon the dreaded emblem, more than half expecting to see him rush out of the shop and vanish in panic-stricken flight in the direction of the station. But their expectations were only partially fulfilled. Mr. Isaacs' face certainly became distorted, but it was with anger, not terror. He dashed out of the shop, but instead of vanishing in the direction of the station, flung himself tempestuously upon the Outlaws. William received a box on the ear that made both him and the whole world reel.

"Well," he said, panting, when they had reached the shelter of the old barn, "that wasn't much good." He turned to Henry: "I don't think much of your ole swash idea."

Henry in his turn looked accusingly at Douglas.

"Why did you draw ears on it?" he said. "I told you snakes don't have ears."

"All right," said Douglas pacifically. "I'll do another without ears an' we can try that on him."

But the Outlaws did not receive the suggestion with enthusiasm.

"No, it's no use tryin' that again, ears or no ears," said William firmly. "Seems to me people don't know how to *act* with nasties in England."

"I bet he doesn't know we're nasties," said Ginger. "I bet that that swash thing was all wrong. Either it doesn't mean a snake or else it's a different sort of snake."

"It was a jolly good snake," said Douglas firmly, "and they do have ears. How do you think it heard Eve in the Bible, if it hadn't got ears? I may've made its ears a bit too big, but I bet you anything they *do* have ears."

"I don't think it was jus' its ears," said Ginger. "I think it was prob'ly a wrong sort of snake altogether. There's all sorts of snakes, you know."

"Well, we won't bother about snakes any more," said William. "I'm sick of snakes. Snakes don't seem to scare him, anyway. They only seem to make him mad. But we've gotter make him know we're nasties somehow."

"Well, let's jus' go'n' tell him then," suggested Douglas.

"Yes, an' he'll have half killed us before we've had time to get it out. He's the savagest person I've ever come across, an' I've come across some jolly savage people, I can tell you."

"I bet he'd be scared all right if he knew you were the same as that Hitler man. They're all scared of him. If he knew that you were the same in England as that Hitler man in Germany, I bet he'd be scared all right. Tell you what. Send him a sort of secret message an' *tell* him that you're the same as that Hitler man. I bet that'd scare him off."

This idea commended itself to the Outlaws, and they set to work on it without delay. Ginger managed to purloin one of his mother's visiting cards, and they crossed out her name and address and wrote in large, if irregular, letters :

HIM HITLER

NASTY.

At the foot of this they wrote P.T.O., and on the other side Douglas drew a skull and crossbones and wrote in red ink the sinister word BEWEAR.

"*That'll* show him," said William with satisfaction when this masterpiece was completed. "*That'll* show him all right. I bet *that'll* scare him off."

They waited till the shop was shut for Mr. Isaacs' lunch hour and dropped the card through the letter-box.

They then hung about expectantly, hoping once more to see Mr. Isaacs' figure in panic-stricken flight stationwards. But Mr. Isaacs continued to go about his work in the shop calmly and placidly. He did not even look annoyed. As a matter of fact he had swept up the shop after lunch without noticing the card, and it now reposed in his dustbin along with the other sweepings.

"Well, we've gotter think of something else," said William firmly. His blood was up, and he was determined not to be cheated of his prey. "If those nasties in Germany had given up jus' 'cause the first Jew they tried to chase out wasn't scared of 'em they'd never have got to be rulers of the country, an' *we've* not gotter give up jus' 'cause the first Jew we try to chase out isn't scared of us. We've jolly well gotter go on

an' scare him." He turned to Henry. "Don't you know what they did next, if they found they weren't scared of that picture thing?"

"I'll find out," said Henry, feeling that his reputation as an inexhaustible fount of knowledge was at stake. "I'll find out an' I'll tell you after tea."

"An' we'll start doin' it at once," said William determinedly.

Henry approached the old barn after tea with an air of importance.

"I've found out jus' what they do," he said to the assembled Outlaws. "They've got people called storm troops an' when these Jews don't run away they knock 'em about till they do."

"Oh."

The Outlaws looked rather blank.

"Knock 'em about," repeated William, recalling the small but stalwart figure of Mr. Isaacs and remembering the blow from which his ear still tingled.

"We could call ourselves storm troops all right," said Ginger slowly. "That's quite easy."

"Yes, but could we knock him about?" said Douglas doubtfully.

"We've gotter do *something*," said William. "We can't jus' give in now. We'll never get to be rulers of the country if we give in at every little thing like this. *Tell* you what!"

"Yes?" said the Outlaws expectantly.

"Let's get into his house very quietly after his shop's closed an' lock him into whatever room he's in an' take all his sweets an' things an' then he'll know we're nasties an' he'll clear off."

"All right," said the Outlaws, quelling whatever

doubts and apprehensions rose in their minds at the suggestion.

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It was a small and silent group that gathered outside Mr. Isaacs' shop that evening when he had put up his shutters.

"Don't you think we'd better wait till to-morrow?" whispered Douglas.

"No," said William firmly, "we've gotter do it now. Come on. Let's go round very quietly an' see if we can find anything left open. We've gotter get 'im locked in a room an' then take all his stuff. Come on," he repeated, trying to stiffen his followers' obviously wavering courage. "Think of boxes an' *boxes* of liquorice allsorts an' bags an' *bags* of popcorn an' bottles an' *bottles* of bull's-eyes!"

Thus encouraged, the storm troops uttered a feeble cheer and began to follow him round the side of the house. Cautiously they tried the side door. It was locked. Cautiously they tried the window. It was locked. Cautiously they tried the kitchen door. It was locked. Cautiously they tried the little window next to the kitchen door. It was open. William gave a low whistle.

"Come on!" he said excitedly, already hoisting himself up towards the aperture. They followed him one by one through the window, Douglas bringing up the rear and still murmuring something about "waiting till to-morrow."

They found themselves in a small dark pantry and there they stood for a moment, listening intently. But for the ticking of a distant clock the house was completely silent.

"P'raps he's gone out," whispered Ginger.

"No, he's not," said William. "We've been watching ever since he put up the shutters, an' we'd have seen if he'd gone out. Come on. Let's see if he's in the shop."

Very quietly they crept down the passage towards the shop—then stopped as if suddenly turned to stone. For there, in a little room that was hardly more than a closet, a small stocky figure was bending over an open safe. Mr. Isaacs was evidently putting away his day's earnings. The door was just ajar. The key was on the outside. William crept forward, slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock. Then he put his mouth to the keyhole and shouted: "We're the nasties an' I'm Him Hitler an' we're goin' to take all your stuff so you'll jolly well have to clear out."

Instead of the angry tumult that the storm troops had expected there followed complete silence. Then came the sound of the locked door being cautiously tried.

"He's scared all right," said William. "He's scared now he knows we're nasties. Come on, let's start takin' his stuff. . . ."

The storm troops stood rather hesitatingly at the door that led into the shop.

"I—I dunno about it," said William at last. "There's holes in the shutters, an' if people saw us from the street they mightn't believe about us being nasties an' storm troops an' that sort of thing. They might think it was jus' ordinary stealin'. Tell you what. Let's go up to that storeroom Mr. Monks once showed us. No one'll see us there."

They went down the passage to the foot of the stairs.

There was now complete silence in the small locked room.

"I hope he's not died of fright," said Ginger. "We shall get into an awful row if he's died of fright. They'll prob'ly hang us for murder."

Suddenly they heard again that cautious fumbling at the lock.

"No, he's not dead," said Ginger.

"P'raps he's struck dumb with fright," suggested William.

"We might get in an awful row for that, too," said Douglas dejectedly. "I expect there's some lor against strikin' people dumb with fright."

"Well, come on upstairs," said William, "an' let's start takin' his stuff."

But a strange distaste for the whole adventure was creeping over the Outlaws. They went upstairs slowly, draggingly. Even the thought of the bull's-eyes and liquorice allsorts failed to raise their drooping spirits.

"It—it *does* seem a bit like ordin'ry stealin'," said Ginger, voicing their doubts.

"But it's not stealin' when you're nasties," said William. "It's by lor if you're nasties."

"I know, but they mightn't understand," said Ginger. "They might say we weren't nasties. It—it's jus' the sort of thing that people get sent to prison for in newspapers."

"I don't want to get sent to prison," said Douglas. "It's my birthday next week."

"Well, I votes we jus' go an' take a *little*," said William. "I votes we don't take all his stuff. Let's take, say, ten sweets each an' then go home. An' let's not bother any more about chasin' him out. I

bet it's p'raps not much use tryin' to be nasties in England. I bet it's different in Germany. Come on,"



EVEN MR. ISAACS WAS SURPRISED AT THE AMOUNT HIS
RESCUERS COULD CARRY.

he admonished them, "let's jus' take a few now we've had all this trouble."

He opened the door of the storeroom, and the Outlaws stood transfixed by amazement.

For there among the jars and boxes and tins of sweets lay a curious figure. Its arms were bound close to its sides, its eyes gleamed wildly above a tight black bandage. It made strange strangling noises.



GINGER COULD SCARCELY BE SEEN FOR BOTTLES OF PEAR-DROPS AND OTHER SWEETS, AND HENRY'S ARMS WERE COMPLETELY OCCUPIED.

"Gosh!" said William. "He's been keepin' a poor man up here a prisoner. It's prob'ly a nasty he kidnapped in Germany. It's time we got on his track all right. He oughter get put in prison for this."

He took his penknife from his pocket and began to cut the ropes that bound the prostrate figure. The prostrate figure sat up and began to fumble at the black bandage.

The Outlaws offered willing assistance, and the gag was soon removed. Then came another surprise. For the removal of the gag revealed, not a victim of the hated Mr. Isaacs, but the hated Mr. Isaacs himself. He sputtered inarticulately for a few minutes, then panted: "Vere is he? Vere is the thief?"

William took in the situation with commendable quickness.

"It's all right," he said. "We've gottim locked in a room downstairs."

Within five minutes the police were summoned and the thief secured. Mr. Isaacs, still rather hysterical, gave his version of the affair.

"The thief vas hiding in my storeroom an' overpowered me ven I came up to count over my stock. Then he vent down to my little office and these brave boys, seeing him through the vindow, and realising vat had happened, made their vay into the house, locked him into my office, an' came up here to rescue me."

"Interferin' little 'ounds," commented the thief dispassionately as he was led away.

"Now take vat you vant," went on Mr. Isaacs to the dazed Outlaws, waving his hand around the storeroom. "Take vatever you vant. You can have as

much as you can carry," he went on with reckless generosity. "See how much you can carry."

The Outlaws, roused by this challenge, set to work, and even Mr. Isaacs was somewhat surprised at the amount his rescuers could carry. William staggered under the weight of an enormous bottle of bull's-eyes, a box of liquorice allsorts, and two gigantic tins of mixed toffees. Ginger could scarcely be seen for bottles of peardrops and boxes of toasted squares and a bag of lollipops. Nougat and mixed fruit drops almost obliterated Douglas, while Henry, his arms being completely occupied by bottles of buttered almonds and boxes of pontefract cakes, carried two bags of popcorn in his teeth.

Mr. Isaacs, still beaming upon them gratefully, saw them off at the shop door.

"And ven you come to spend your Saturday pennies here," he said, "you vill find that I still have not forgotten."

The Outlaws staggered homeward through the dusk with their precious burdens.

"Seems like the sort of thing you dream of," said William, his voice hoarse with emotion.

"It's better than if we'd gone on being nasties," said Ginger. "I bet the police wouldn't have understood about us bein' nasties. I bet if that man had said he'd done it 'cause he was a nasty, they'd still have taken him to prison."

"I feel I shan't want to eat any ordin'ry food for weeks an' weeks," said Douglas.

Henry grunted ecstatic acquiescence through his bags of popcorn.