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**Opening Extract from...**

# **Blotto, Twinks**

And the Ex-King's Daughter

Written by Simon Brett

Published by Constable

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**BLOTTO,**  
**WINKS**  
*and the*  
**Ex-King's**  
**Daughter**

**S I M O N   B R E T T**

Constable • London

Constable & Robinson Ltd  
3 The Lanchesters  
162 Fulham Palace Road  
London W6 9ER  
[www.constablerobinson.com](http://www.constablerobinson.com)

First published in Great Britain by Constable,  
an imprint of Constable & Robinson Ltd 2009

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A copy of the British Library Cataloguing in Publication  
Data is available from the British Library.

UK ISBN: 978-1-84529-935-4

Printed and bound in the EU

To Pete,  
who always had a taste for the silly

## Blotto Finds a Body

'It's frightfully awkward, Mater, but I'm afraid there's a dead body in the library.'

'Not now, Blotto. We have guests.' And, on waves of breeding, perfume and fine silk, the Dowager Duchess of Tawcester wafted away from her younger son to continue being the perfect hostess. Her eyes sparkled semaphore to Grimshaw, the butler, indicating which of her guests should have their drinks topped up and, more importantly, which should not.

An expression of confusion took up residence in the face of the Right Honourable Devereux Lyminster. This was not unusual. The impossibly handsome features of the Dowager Duchess of Tawcester's younger son frequently wore an expression of confusion. The fine brow beneath his blond thatch would furrow, and lines would crinkle around his cornflower-blue eyes. Young women had on occasion been known to interpret this look as a sign of sensitivity and deep thought. They were invariably wrong in their estimation. Blotto's thoughts rarely ran deep enough to dampen the soles of his handmade brogues.

He refused the proffered champagne from the butler's silver salver. Devereux Lyminster drank little. His nickname certainly did not derive from his drinking habits. Amongst people of his class it was thought bad form for

nicknames to have logical explanations; they were items to be scattered about with random largesse, like small donations to charity.

'Grimshaw,' he murmured, 'you haven't seen Twinks, have you?'

'No, milord,' the butler replied. 'I believe her ladyship is still changing after her strenuous afternoon of tennis.'

'Oh, rodents!' The confusion on Blotto's face made room for a little anxiety.

'Was there something you wished your sister to sort out for you, sir?' Long experience had taught Grimshaw that this would indeed be the case. Blotto always turned to Twinks when faced with one of life's minor challenges, like which tie to wear or whom to marry.

'Yes. Bit of bother in the library.'

'What kind of bother?'

'Dead body.'

'I will deal with it at once, milord.'

Grimshaw enlisted the help of Harvey, who was one of the housemaids at Tawcester Towers. (Tawcester, it should be emphasized at this point, despite being spelt 'Taw-ces-ter', is pronounced 'Taster'. Everyone knows that.) That Harvey was considerably above the age of most housemaids, and that she had remained in employment after certain ethical lapses which might have ended other careers, reflected the fact that she had an agreement with the butler. The precise nature of this 'agreement' was something that the family and staff at Tawcester Towers were far too polite to investigate.

Harvey wore the black dress and apron of her calling. On most women such costume is expected to obscure the details of femininity; on Harvey it accentuated them. This was partly because of the unusually short length of dress that she (or perhaps more accurately Grimshaw) favoured. She carried a feather duster, though not in the expectation that it might be of much use in dealing with a dead body.

But it did give her an air of purpose. Any passing house guest or member of the staff would assume her to be engaged on some more innocent domestic mission.

The important point was that, from long experience of needing to, Grimshaw knew that he could trust Harvey's discretion. And he knew that dead bodies could threaten considerable inconvenience to the smooth running of a country house weekend. Below stairs, Tawcester Towers had hardly yet recovered from the shock of discovering Lord Tawcester himself, seated in front of his study fire with a face the colour of the vintage port which proved to be his final indulgence. And his lordship's demise had happened a full five years before.

The library, as most people of culture know, is one of the great glories of Tawcester Towers. It had been added during the substantial renovations of the property conducted by the seventh Duke, who unlike his predecessors, Black Rupert and Rupert the Fiend, had reversed the trend of losing the family money at cards. Instead he had proved himself an astute financial manager, had restored the Tawcester fortunes, expanded the Towers and earned the ungenerous nickname of Rupert the Dull.

The library is on the ground floor at the back of the mansion. Tall windows look out over the gently undulating fields of Tawcestershire, most of which is owned by the family. On the other three walls mahogany bookshelves, filled with symmetrical volumes, rise from floor to ceiling. The books are uniformly bound in brown leather with gilt lettering, and uniformly unread. Reading does not feature highly amongst the pastimes of the British aristocracy. Though many calves undoubtedly gave up their lives to provide bindings for their books, the Tawcester family tended to prefer their recreational killing to be more immediate. For them the inability to see what they were shooting at always took away much of the fun.

The impression should not be given that the Tawcesters

did not value their library. It was one of their proudest boasts, and no weekend house guest was in Tawcester Towers for more than half an hour before being invited to marvel at its splendours. The books were acknowledged to form a unique collection, and over the years many minor academics had been employed on the task of compiling and updating the catalogue. The Dukes of Tawcester had always had great respect for books; just so long as nobody expected them to read any.

The library had witnessed many scenes of misbehaviour and depravity – particularly during the time of Rupert the Dull’s profligate heir Rupert the Libertine – but this was its first dead body . . . (if one discounts domestics . . . and in Tawcester Towers domestics had always been discounted. So the fact that in the early 1820s an under-housemaid had been crushed in the library by the descent of an ill-balanced bust of Homer had never even been mentioned to the ducal family. Staff problems had always been the butler’s responsibility.).

The dead body which confronted the current butler and Harvey that afternoon was not in that state of serene repose recommended by the ancients for the final act of life. Its passing from the corporeal to the incorporeal had been neither willing nor elegant. Fortunately it was the body of a man, for the paroxysms which had preceded death would have rendered unbecoming the costume of a lady. He wore white tie and tails, the uniform that identified him as one of the Dowager Duchess’s house guests. Which, Grimshaw recognized, was extremely inconvenient. Here was no servant, whose body could be discreetly shuffled off to the local undertaker with no questions asked. This death was going to require investigation.

‘Shall I tidy him up, Mr Grimshaw?’ asked Harvey. To her the butler was always ‘Mr Grimshaw’, even in private moments when a less formal appellation might have been expected. She stood, feather duster poised, as though that implement might somehow prove useful in the disposal of a corpse.



Grimshaw shook his head. 'I fear not. Until proved otherwise, this library must be treated as a crime scene.'

'You mean the police will have to be called?'

'Yes. And, once they have failed to identify the murderer, there will no doubt turn out to be a private detective among the Dowager Duchess's house guests, who will continue the investigation. Either way, the household is liable to undergo a period of irritating disruption.'

Harvey's feather duster quivered instinctively in her hand. 'So shouldn't I even dust him, Mr Grimshaw?'

'I fear not. At such moments, even the most basic instincts of domestic hygiene must be curbed.'

'How do you think he died, Mr Grimshaw?'

The butler's eyes narrowed as they focused on the contorted corpse before him. The face was claret red, eyes bulging, mouth gaping, hands still clasping at the throat as though to remove a collar that had been bought in too small a size.

'I would imagine it was something he ingested.'

'Poison?'

'That might be the logical conclusion which a professional investigator might reach, but it is not our place to reach conclusions, Harvey, logical or otherwise.'

'No, Mr Grimshaw.' There was a tentative silence before she continued, 'But might it be our place to speculate who the dead man is – or was?'

The butler conceded that it might be. The face, now so hideously distorted, had once been that of a good-looking young man, though of a sallow complexion that suggested he had not grown up on a diet of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Across his stiff shirt-front was a purple sash, clasped in place by a starburst of jewelled insignia. The flamboyance of this suggested that the man had not been trained in sartorial reticence by an English public school.

'My surmise would be,' said Grimshaw, 'that he is – or was – part of the entourage of the ex-King of Mitteleuropa.'

'I am sure you are right, Mr Grimshaw,' Harvey agreed. 'Are you going to ring the police?'

'Yes. That is my next duty.'

'Not yet!' The voice tinkled through the library like a cut-glass chandelier caught in the gentlest of zephyrs. But it was not a feeble voice. It carried the upper class authority that can only be developed by exploiting serfs through many generations.

The voice belonged to Lady Honoria Lyminster, known to her brother Blotto and everyone else the right side of the green baize door as 'Twinks'.

Her beauty had frequently been remarked on by the swarms of young swains who had fallen in love with her. But since they were all of her own class, their descriptions had rarely been more articulate than 'a fine filly', 'a corker', 'a bit of a looker' or 'an absolute bobbydazzler'. To do proper justice to her charms would have required the skills of a poet, and sadly, in the social circles where she moved, Twinks was never likely meet one.

But in the unimaginable event of a poet ever being invited to Tawcester Towers, he might have commented on the deep azure of her bewitching eyes, a complexion of ivory overlaid with rose petals, and ash-blond hair spun as fine as the filigree of a spider's web. He might have lauded the fragile voluptuousness of her perfect figure, and observed that she moved in a way that made butterflies look clumping.

Had, however, this conjectural poet ever expressed such views to Lady Honoria Lyminster, he would have received the dismissive response, 'What guff!' Twinks was not unaware of her beauty; she just didn't regard it as important. There were more interesting things in her life. And of these the most interesting was acting as an amateur detective.

So the appearance of a dead body in the library in the middle of a particularly dreary house party was to Twinks a bonus comparable to finding a pearl in the grittiest of oysters.

At her arrival Grimshaw and Harvey had dutifully drawn back, to allow her unimpeded access to the body.

'Oh, larks!' she said. 'A poisoning at Tawcester Towers! Larksissimo!' She lowered her elegant head to the victim's mouth and sniffed the evanescent aroma of almonds. 'Cyanide – or I'm very much mistaken.'

Even had he been unaware of Twinks's exhaustive knowledge of toxins, Grimshaw would still have known his place sufficiently to say, 'I'm sure you are right, milady. Is there anything you wish me to do?'

'No, you and Harvey go back to the guests. Keep topping them up with bubbly. I'll just have a snoopy-snuffle round here.'

'And, milady, would you wish me to alert the proper authorities?'

'No, Grimshaw, I'll do it. I will summon the estimable Chief Inspector Trumbull. I like to do these things honourably – level playing field and all that. I must allow the police to have a fair wallop at the investigation . . . before I run circles round them and tell them who really committed the murder.'

'Very good, milady.'

'Oh, there you are.' It was Blotto, who had just appeared in the doorway of the library. He nodded to Grimshaw and Harvey as they melted imperceptibly past him, then moved forward to his sister. 'Rum do, Twinks me old muffin. Bit of a candle-snuffer, isn't it?'

'But very jolly. Jollissimo!' The blue eyes sparkled like the scales of a leaping salmon caught in a shaft of sunlight.

'Do you recognize the poor old pineapple?'

'One of ex-King Sigismund's factotums.'

'Got a moniker for him?'

Blotto knew his sister would have. Had only to be introduced to someone once, and the name would stick in her retentive brain like a limpet. Whereas the interior of Blotto's brain had more in common with a well-used toboggan run; everything slid away down the sides.

'Captain Schtoltz, he was called.'

'Oh yes, vaguely remember the name from when they all arrived. Odd to be in ordinary evening blacks, though. If he was a Captain, why wasn't he wearing his dress uniform?'

'That, Blotto, is exactly the question I was asking myself.'

'Oh, really?' He was rather cheered to hear that. Blotto had accepted from an early age that, when it came to brain-power, his younger sister was a huge ocean liner to his little rowing boat. So to have actually had the same idea as her gave him quite a lift.

'And I think I know the answer,' Twinks went on.

'Well, don't keep it to yourself. Uncage the ferrets, old thing.'

'The reason Captain Schtoltz was not in uniform was . . .'

'Yes?'

'Because he was a spy.'

'Crikey.'

'Now, Blotto, will you hurry and get my camera? Before the peelers arrive with their hobnail boots to tread in all the evidence, I want to make a very detailed examination of the crime scene . . .'

## The Police Are Called

Chief Inspector Trumbull had not been at the front of the queue when the intellect was handed out. Indeed, he appeared not to have been in the same county. But that did not prevent him from rising through the ranks of his chosen profession. Indeed, in those days for anyone in that profession to have shown intelligence or originality would have been a positive disqualification. The role of the police was to do a lot of boring legwork and paperwork, to trail up investigatory cul-de-sacs, to be constantly baffled, and dutifully amazed when an amateur sleuth revealed the solution to a murder mystery.

These skills Chief Inspector Trumbull possessed in abundance. He also knew his place, particularly when the aristocracy was involved. It therefore seemed to him entirely appropriate that he should obey the Dowager Duchess's summons to the Blue Morning Room before investigating the body in the library.

Though a deeply stupid man, Trumbull was not without bravery. But he, like most of his gender, always quailed in front of the Dowager Duchess of Tawcester. She was constructed on the lines of a transatlantic steamer and it was comparably difficult to make her change her course once she was under way.

'Now, Trumbull . . .' she said to the quaking Inspector. She always called him 'Trumbull'. She would address

appropriate royal personages by their titles, friends of her own class by their nicknames, and everyone else by their surname. For the Dowager Duchess the difference between a Chief Inspector, doctor, solicitor, vicar or under-housemaid was imperceptible. 'The main thing about this situation is that it's incredibly inconvenient. I have guests for the weekend.'

'Yes, Your Grace,' Trumbull concurred. 'Most unfortunate.'

'So I'm relying on you to treat the whole affair with all the sensitivity of which you are capable.'

'Oh, I'll certainly do that, Your Grace.' This was an easy promise to make. The amount of sensitivity of which Chief Inspector Trumbull was capable corresponded pretty well with that of a rhinoceros who'd woken up with a hangover and then sat on a hornets' nest.

'There will have to be an enquiry, will there?' Her words took the form of something she had learnt about in Latin lessons at school but long forgotten: 'a question expecting the answer no'.

Sadly, Chief Inspector Trumbull was unable to oblige. 'I'm sorry, Your Grace. I'm afraid the Chief Constable will insist on an enquiry.'

'Oh,' the Dowager Duchess mused. Needless to say, she had known the Chief Constable from birth. 'Bertie Anstruther . . . Maybe I should have a word with him . . .?'

'I'm afraid, until I receive orders to the contrary, Your Grace, I will be compelled to investigate this murder.'

'How tiresome. Still, if you have to . . .'

'May I ask, Your Grace, whether the fact of the . . . incident is already known to your guests?'

'Good Lord, no! I hope not. That wouldn't be much of a recommendation for Tawcester Towers hospitality, would it? Blotto and Twinks know, obviously.'

'I'm sorry?'

'My son and daughter.'

'Ah.'

'And a couple of the domestics . . . butler and one of the housemaids. Apart from that, no one.'

'Except for one person,' the Chief Inspector announced weightily.

'What are you talking about?'

'The murderer, Your Grace. The individual who committed the atrocity.'

'Good Lord, are you suggesting it was done by somebody in the house?'

'Geographical considerations alone would make that a likely possibility.'

'Hm.' The concept that the murder had required not only a victim but also a perpetrator had not occurred before to the Dowager Duchess. It was a double inconvenience. Then she saw a glimmer of reassurance in the gloom. 'But the murderer is not likely to tell anyone what he has done, is he?'

'Extremely unlikely, Your Grace.'

'Oh well, that's all right then. No social embarrassment there. Now, Trumbull, my guests are at dinner. I must join them very quickly. I am their hostess, after all.' She looked up at the ormolu clock on the carved mantelpiece. 'They will be on their fish course by now. I'm relying on you to have the whole thing cleared up before the ladies withdraw.'

'The whole thing?'

'Yes, your investigation. I want that done – and I want the body off the premises before the gentlemen go off to the billiard room.'

'But, Your Grace, that's not much more than half an hour away.'

'A lot can be achieved in half an hour. The conception of most children takes a considerably shorter time.' A very much shorter time when it had had anything to do with her, the Dowager Duchess recollected with distaste.

'Your Grace, it will be necessary for the purposes of my investigation for me to speak to your guests.'

‘Speak to my guests? I am sorry, Chief Inspector, but you are not the kind of person to whom they are used to speaking.’

‘Maybe not, Your Grace, but –’

‘They include ex-King Sigismund of Mitteleuropa. Is he the kind of person whom you and Mrs Trumbull meet in your customary social round?’

‘No, we do not.’

‘Then why should you suddenly expect all the rules of society to be broken for you to be introduced to him?’

‘A murder has been committed, Your Grace.’

‘We don’t know that. A person has died – that’s all we know. There are many unfortunate circumstances that can cause people to die.’

‘Yes, but, Your Grace –’

‘I require your investigation – and the removal of the body – to be completed within the next half-hour, before the ladies withdraw and the gentlemen retire to the billiard room and the smoking room. Are you telling me it can’t be done, Trumbull?’

The proper answer dallied on the edge of the Chief Inspector’s lips. Distantly, from the earliest moment of his training, he remembered being told the duties of a policeman. Nobody was above the law. Investigations must all be carried out with the same punctilious and even-handed attention to detail, regardless of the status of the people involved. A policeman had to be incorruptible, concerned only with solving every crime with which he was presented.

‘Very well, Your Grace,’ he said. ‘Half an hour it is.’

There was a Sergeant with whom Chief Inspector Trumbull always worked, and the law of averages might have dictated that this person should be more intelligent than his superior. This, however, was not the case. Sergeant Knatchbull was, if such a concept is possible, even less well intellectually endowed.



Their examination of the scene of crime did not therefore yield many startling insights, though there was a striking unanimity in their views of the situation. The man lying on the library floor was undoubtedly dead. Neither policeman questioned that. And from the expression on his face, both agreed that he had not departed this life in a relaxed and voluntary manner.

But beyond that . . . 'A case for the experts,' concluded Chief Inspector Trumbull, showing fitting self-knowledge by not including himself in that category. He shrugged, not over-confident even of the skills of the 'experts' when they did come to examine the body. He had been through the same manoeuvres so many times before on other cases. Now, as he approached retirement, an innate laziness in him wanted to shorten the process. Why couldn't the whole business be speeded up? Why did he have to go through all the tedious preliminaries of investigating the case himself? Why couldn't a polymathic amateur sleuth arrive straight away and solve the thing?

Their cursory scene-of-crime examination completed, Chief Inspector Trumbull and Sergeant Knatchbull, with the help of Grimshaw, smuggled the body out of Tawcester Towers wrapped in a Turkish carpet. They used the backstairs, confident they would not be seen at that time of the evening. It was not until later that the bolder and more inebriated male guests might enter that area in search of acquiescent chambermaids.

By the time dinner had ended, and the gentlemen adjourned to the billiard and smoking rooms, the body of Captain Schtoltz was already in the dicky of Chief Inspector Trumbull's car, joggling its way to Tawsworthy police station.

Lady Honoria Lyminster was quite a girl. Not only did she sometimes smoke cigarettes, she also actually had one of those new-fangled electric kettles in her bedroom and often made hot drinks without the intervention of either a cook

or housemaid. It was thanks to her kettle that she and Blotto were sipping cocoa that evening. Twinks looked at her brother appraisingly. 'Well, you certainly seem to have hit the bull's-eye with ex-Princess Ethelinde.'

'What? Who're you talking about?'

'Ex-Princess Ethelinde. You know, Blotto. There's only one ex-Princess Ethelinde staying here. And she's as pretty as a cream tea with extra dollops of cream. Come on, you must've noticed. Ex-King Sigismund's daughter.'

'Oh, her.'

'She was eyeing you all evening like a cat over a goldfish bowl. She certainly thinks you're the crystallized ginger.'

'Don't be a Grade A poodle, Twinks. Why would a breathsapper of a girl like that be interested in a prize chump like me?'

'Because you're dashed attractive – and a good bloke with it.'

'Oh, biscuits,' said Blotto, embarrassment spreading redly upwards from his wing collar.

'You're never going to find a bride if you can't spot the ones who're interested in you.'

'Well, I'm not sure that that matters so frightfully much. There are lots of things a chap can do in life without finding brides. Cricket and hunting and . . . well . . . adventures. In fact, from what I see, a lot of fellows would be much better off without brides. I mean, some of the boddos I used to be at school with have actually married Americans.'

Twinks let out a tinkling laugh. 'Well, at least nobody in our family has ever been reduced to that.'

'No, but in many ways I'm not sure that Loofah's done much better.'

Twinks couldn't argue about that. Their elder brother had drawn a bit of a short straw in the matrimonial stakes. (Not that the straw he had drawn was actually short. Sloggo, the new Duchess, towered over her chubby hus-

band, and had limbs of such length that people suspected they had to be wound round something overnight, like a garden hose.) But Loofah – or to give him his proper name, Rupert Lyminster, Duke of Tawcester – had had no choice. The ducal line had to be continued and, much though he would have preferred to do it by some different method – *any* different method – there was no way of producing heirs that didn't involve marriage.

Of course Loofah hadn't had much of a say in his choice of bride. His mother had taken that on, as she did so many tasks at Tawcester Towers. And the Dowager Duchess knew that the purity of her daughter-in-law's breeding was much more important than such trifles as a pleasant personality or physical attractiveness. So she had selected Sloggo – known to readers of Debrett's as Lady Winifred Coules-Quick, eldest daughter of the Duke of Pargetshire – and a high society wedding was decreed.

The reports of that event in the Court Circular were appropriately decorous. Nowhere in their descriptions of the bride were the words 'maypole', 'clothesprop' or 'stick insect' used. Neither did anyone mention the Duke's nickname – not so exotic as 'Black Rupert' or 'Rupert the Fiend', but at least accurate – of 'Rupert the Fat'. Nor were the couple referred to in the press – as they had been by their less generous friends – as 'the bat and ball'.

Their union had proved to be efficient, in that it had so far produced two children. Both girls, though. This was a source of considerable aggravation to Loofah, because the continuing lack of a male heir meant he had to do it all over again.

'Anyway, Blotto me old gumdrop, don't let's talk about brides. Mummy'll sort one of those out for you when she thinks the time is right. Let's talk about something more interesting.'

'Anything's more interesting than marriage.'

'Yes, and this is really interesting. Another "M". Not "marriage", but "murder".'

Her brother looked blank for a moment, before recollection came to him. 'You mean the foreign pineapple in the library?'

'I certainly do.'

'Well, old Trumbull's come and had a shufti at him, so I suppose things are proceeding in their own sweet way.'

'What absolute guff! You know Trumbull's useless. He needs help to lick the butter off a crumpet. There's not a dabchick's chance in a foxhole that he's going to solve this crime. No, as usual, you and I are going to have to do it, Blotto.'

'Oh. But where do we start? The body's not even on the premises any more.'

'I know. But before Trumbull and his boneheaded assistant arrived, remember you got me my camera . . .?'

'Oh yes, so I did.'

'And I undertook a very quick but thorough examination of the scene of crime.'

Blotto was impressed. If his sister had focused the beam of her massive intellect on it, then the case was as good as solved. 'So who did it, Twinks?'

'I'm not quite there yet, old trouser button. But I did pick up a couple of pointers.'

'Like what?'

'Well, for a start, the late lamented wasn't murdered in the library.'

'Ah, you mean it was suicide . . . or some sort of ghastly accident gone wrong?'

'No,' Twinks replied patiently. 'I mean that he wasn't murdered *in the library*.'

Clouds gathered on Blotto's brow. Then miraculously they cleared. Sunshine broke through in a large beam. 'You mean he was stubbed out somewhere else and then his mortals were *moved into* the library?'

'Exactly that.'

'But how do you know?'

'Simple. I'd show you on a photograph, but it's still developing in that walk-in wardrobe I use as a darkroom.'

But what it shows is that Captain Schtoltz's dinner jacket had been pulled up high around his neck, suggesting someone had lifted him under the armpits. Then, though there was still some warmth in the body, there was none on the area of library carpet on which it lay, which would imply he had been moved into that position quite recently. There were also scuff-marks on the carpet where his heels had dragged on the floor. Having taken a measurement of his shoes and estimated his body weight, I'm pretty sure from the angle of those indentations that Captain Schtoltz was placed in position by someone of well over average height.'

'Crikey, Twinks. I can never work out how all that brain fits into your dainty little cranium.'

She shrugged. 'Just a matter of logic. Keep your eyes wide open, Blotto, and eventually you'll see the relevant information.'

He sighed. He knew he could keep his eyes open as wide as they went and still not see the relevant information until it bit him on the leg. 'So what do we do – look for the tallest man in the ex-King's entourage and get Trumbull to arrest him?'

'It may not be quite that simple, Blotto. But looking for a tall man could be a good starting-point.'

'Righty-ho then.' Blotto was silent for a moment, then a modest gleam of energy flickered in his eye.

Twinks recognized the symptoms. Her brother had just had an idea. 'What is it?'

'I was just thinking . . .' he began slowly.

'Yes?'

'Most of the house guests will be asleep by now . . .'

'Undoubtedly.'

' . . . so it might be the perfect time to find our tall man.'

'Sorry. Not with you, Blotto?'

'Well, while they're asleep, they won't notice me creeping into their bedrooms . . .' He glowed with enthusiasm, as he always did when spelling out one of his ideas. 'And

then when I'm in the bedrooms . . . I can look out and see which ones' feet stick out over the end of the bed . . .'

'Ye-es.'

' . . . so we'll know which ones are tall.'

Her brother looked so pleased at having reached this logical conclusion that Twinks didn't want to puncture his confidence. 'Good idea,' she said, and he glowed like a four-bar electric fire. 'But,' she continued gently, 'don't you think it might be simpler to wait till tomorrow morning, when all the house guests will be standing up?'

'What would be the advantage of that?' asked Blotto, confused.

'Well, when they're standing up, we'll be able to see which ones are tall.'

He didn't enjoy having his good idea rejected. 'That would be another way of doing it,' he conceded. 'Why, what are they all going to be doing tomorrow?'

'Hunting.'

'Ah.' The customary smile was reinstated on Blotto's handsome features. Now they were talking about something he understood.