

# THE GHOSTS IN THE CLOCK WALK AGAIN

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SECRET OF CAPTAIN MOONSHINE

John liked the book about the old house so much that his Dad made a set of photocopies of it, all in colour, which came out very well. They were all bound up into a little booklet by his Grandad when John took the old book back to him and showed him the copies. The only problem was that John was worried that the copies would not be any good in the Clock and that the ghosts would not be able to use them to visit the old house - though of course he couldn't tell his Dad that.

He decided to find out that night and as usual he crept down very late with the copy of the book in his dressing-gown pocket. He opened the door of the clock and peered in to find Jellicoe playing patience on the ledge. The old clock maker looked up and waved and John rapidly shrank, finding himself on the ledge beside Jellicoe, who gathered his cards together.

"Good to see you, young John," he said, shaking him by the hand. "All recovered from the last adventure and looking forward to another?"

"Yes, please," said John. "But there might be a problem. I've only got a photocopy of the book this time." He showed it to Jellicoe.

"It's pretty good!" said Jellicoe. "Marvellous what your modern machines can do. But I think that it will work. Come on, let's show the others - they are all in the seaside picture tonight."

They floated up to the clock face and walked along to the picture of the ship at sea with the beach and the rocks. Even before they went in John could hear the sound of the seagulls and the splash of waves and he followed Jellicoe in to feel the warm sand under his feet and see the waves breaking on the shore.

The ghosts were all there; Bunsen and Leticia were making a sand castle while Abbot Baldwin and Sir Percy were playing ducks and drakes, seeing who could make flat stones skip the most over the calm sea. Lady Matilda was collecting shells. They all turned to wave at John.

"Hello, young man," said Sir Percy. "Are you any good at this? The Abbot certainly is. He keeps beating me."

"I've tried," said John, "but I'm no good. Can you teach me?" he asked Abbot Baldwin, who grinned.

"Anyone would think I'd led a wasted life," he said. "There I was, a monk in an Abbey. I should have been attending to my prayers and I used to practice skipping stones over the Abbey ponds! Terrible!"

He showed John how to hold the stone and how to throw it so it kept flat side down and skipped along the surface of the water. The Abbot certainly was very good and could make a stone skip six or more times. Sir Percy had problems; if he bent down and flicked his arm hard, his head had a tendency to topple off into the sand, but if he held his head on with his other hand, it upset his balance.

Lady Matilda rounded them all up but not before John had the opportunity to admire Bunsen and Leticia's sandcastle, a wonderful affair of turrets and towers all made with the help of a couple of flowerpots instead of the proper buckets and spades.

"Do you know I never saw the sea when I was alive?" said Bunsen. "Not many people did until the railways arrived and by then I was too busy."

"And I never saw it until I moved into the Clock," said Leticia. "No one would dream of having a seaside holiday when I was alive."

"I love the seaside," said John. "But the weather's not been good enough for a visit this year so far."

"Our wonderful English climate!" said Jellicoe. "Oh well, you can always come here. We don't have to go to the house tonight. We can stay here."

"I'd like to see the house," said John. "If everyone else wants to go."

"We certainly do," said Leticia. "If only because we all think that there is something going on and we want to get to the bottom of it."

"Yes, and I would like to see the house I knew again," said Jellicoe. "It was a nice place and burned down shortly before I became a ghost."

"What caused the fire?" asked John.

"Nobody knew," replied Jellicoe. "Houses were always catching fire. With candles and oil lamps and very inflammable curtains and lots of wood, it's a wonder that more of them didn't go up in flames."

"Which house are we going into?" asked the Abbot.

John showed him the book and turned to the picture of the house that came after Sir Percy's.

"Oh yes," said the Abbot. "I remember that one. Very elegant but not terribly comfortable. By the way how's your history coming on at school?"

"I got top marks," said John.

"I wonder why," laughed the Abbot.

"The teacher did wonder how it was that I knew so much about the past," said John. "I couldn't really tell her."

"Might be a bit difficult to believe," chuckled Jellicoe.

"Right, everyone ready," said Lady Matilda. "Concentrate on the picture. Now!"

They all closed their eyes and thought hard. Then they walked through the clock face and into a great room, with a row of big windows on one side all with wooden shutters over them so hardly any light filtered in. The room had a

wonderful ceiling of painted plaster and a fine marble fireplace but all the furniture was covered in white sheets.

“I think we’re in the dining room,” said Sir Percy, “Looks like it’s all closed up. My successor must be abroad again.” He turned to John, “Not one of the better members of my family,” he went on. “He gambled away all the family money and had to go abroad to avoid being sent to prison for not paying his debts. The house was rented out at times but it looks as though it’s just all shut up at the moment.”

The Abbot opened up the shutters and John saw that the windows looked on to a big expanse of grass and trees with a lake in the distance and by the side of the lake was what looked like a Greek or Roman temple.

“Whatever happened to the garden?” he asked.

“It was all swept away,” said Sir Percy. “The kind of garden that I planted became old fashioned. Pity really.”

“A man called Brown was brought in,” said Lady Matilda. “He turned it all over to grass, planted clumps of trees and even arranged a few hills.”

“But where did the lake come from?” said John. “It’s quite a size.”

“All dug by the workmen when this was laid out,” said Sir Percy. “The river further down feeds it by a series of locks and sluices. The temple is a sort of summer house for eating in and having parties; it overlooks the lake. Nice in summer but damp in winter.”

“Very useful, though,” said Jellicoe. “I’ll show you a secret, shall I?”

He wouldn’t say anything else but led them all down a lot of passages to the great kitchen, not so different to the way it was in Sir Percy’s day, and then down some steps and through cellars under the house and eventually past storerooms full of a lot of barrels and piles of wood and coal.

“Brandy or wine?” asked Leticia of Bunsen as they passed the storeroom with the barrels.

“Neither,” said Bunsen, after a professional sniff. “It’s lamp oil. We needed a lot of it in those days,” he said to John. “The wood and coal too - all for fires and the kitchen range. Mind you,” he said, sniffing the air again, “I can smell something else. And the wine cellar isn’t this way - it’s the other side, I’m sure.”

Jellicoe chuckled. “Can’t fool the nose of a butler,” he said. “Not much further. Here we are.”

Jellicoe snapped his fingers and a lantern appeared.

“Nice to know you can wish things up,” said John.

“Yes, I’ve got all those charms safely under lock and key in the clock,” said Lady Matilda. “I would like to destroy them but it’s a bit difficult.”

“You’re an expert in that sort of thing,” said the Abbot, “or at least you’re always saying you are. Just follow the instructions in your books. What’s the problem?”

“If you’re so clever, you try finding a bucket of lava from Mount Etna,” said Lady Matilda, a touch impatiently.

“Don’t your spells usually give alternatives?” asked the Abbot. “If you need any other special ingredients, we could get John to go to the shops in his world.”

“Oh yes - but I think he might find problems obtaining a left-footed elephant to tread on some charms!” pointed out Lady Matilda. “Not the sort of thing shops have a lot of.”

John agreed - he didn’t think his local supermarket was likely to stock either left-footed elephants or buckets of lava.

They had arrived at what seemed to be a blank wall at the end of a big vaulted cellar all filled with wood and old empty barrels. They were surprised when Jellicoe pulled at a pile of wood and it opened like a door. Inside was a black space.

“Oh dear, damp dark secret passages again,” sighed Sir Percy.

“Follow me,” Jellicoe said mysteriously and led them through the doorway.

Inside they found themselves in a familiar-looking vaulted space. It was piled high with barrels and barrels.

“Oh no! Not gunpowder again!” said Leticia.

However Bunsen’s eyes were popping out of his head and his nose was twitching uncontrollably.

“Not gunpowder, brandy!” he gasped. “The finest French brandy! I’ve never seen so much of it!”

“Neither have I,” said Sir Percy. “Whatever is it all doing here, Jellicoe? What’s going on?”

“Enough to supply three counties with duty free spirits,” said Jellicoe. “Bunsen’s nose is right as always. It’s the finest French brandy and I should know. I brought it here!”

“Where is here?” asked Sir Percy. “It all looks familiar somehow.”

“It’s the old undercroft of the Abbey,” said the Abbot. “You know, the old cellar under the church. It’s lasted well.”

“Why did you bring all this stuff here?” asked Leticia of Jellicoe.

“I think I know,” said Sir Percy. “You were a smuggler weren’t you?”

“I certainly was,” replied Jellicoe. “I was known as Captain Moonshine. Times were hard for lot of people then. The clock trade was not going too well so I decided to earn some money another way.”

“But we’re miles from the sea,” said John. “How did you smuggle all this in?”

“By river,” replied Jellicoe. “The brandy came in to the coast and then was carried inland to various places where it was stored before being sold. We

used the river to move it from the coast and then it was kept here before we sold it.”

“I assume the owner didn’t know anything about it,” said Abbot Baldwin.

“Oh, he was never here,” replied Jellicoe. “Too busy gambling away the family fortune or fleeing abroad to avoid paying his debts.”

“So you could come and go as you pleased,” said Bunsen. “And smuggle in all this lovely brandy! I bet you were popular!”

“We were,” said Jellicoe, “but it was dangerous and we had to have help. The steward of the house was in on it. Eventually it became too difficult; the navy stationed ships offshore to stop the big boats coming in and the revenue men began to patrol in greater numbers. The clock trade picked up so I stopped smuggling about a year before the house burned down.”

“But you can’t have brought it all through the house,” said Lady Matilda. “Someone might have noticed.”

“Us, for a start,” said Leticia. “I certainly never realised smuggling was going on. I know we were up in the attics most of the time, but occasionally we fancied a good haunt to keep our reputations up and I certainly never noticed a thing.”

“No, quite right. I’ll show you how it was done,” said Jellicoe.

He led them along the cellar, past row after row of barrels, Bunsen’s nose now twitching uncontrollably as he smelt the finest French brandy he had ever smelt; finally they came to a set of wooden steps at the end that led up to a stone trapdoor.

“Not the same stone trapdoor as in my summerhouse!” said Lady Matilda. “It’s certainly come in useful over the years!”

“Not quite,” grunted Jellicoe as he put his shoulder to it and pushed. “All this end was altered by some friends of mine when ....ah! That’s it!” and he pushed the door up and climbed out, turning to help the others. “As I was saying, it was all altered when this was built. Come and see.”

They all climbed out and found themselves in a stone room, quite large, with windows over which were shutters. Dim shapes could be seen in the room but it was not until Jellicoe, assisted by the Abbot, opened up the shutters a little that they realised what a splendid place it was. Above them was a fine plaster ceiling, with a big painting in the middle of nymphs and satyrs feasting. There was a great urn on a plinth at one end of the room and a fireplace of marble at the other and in the middle was a fine table and a set of carved chairs, all very dusty. Jellicoe opened the big wooden door in the middle of one of the walls and led them outside. They found that the room was the central bit of a big stone temple with columns all round holding up a wide roof. On three sides the steps went down to the grass that had replaced the garden of the old house and on the fourth the steps went straight into the waters of the lake. Not far away over the

grass was the house. It was similar to the house that Sir Percy had lived in but it had had bits added to it so that it looked like a much bigger version of a Greek or Roman building than the temple that they were standing in, with lots of columns along the front.

“The lake was very useful to us,” chuckled Jellicoe. “The brandy came down the river and was unloaded onto small boats on the lake and at night we rowed across and unloaded the barrels here and put them in the cellar.”

“Who did you say were looking out for you?” asked John.

“The revenue men? Oh, they were there to stop us; they used to patrol the countryside on horseback, with soldiers.”

“Speaking of men on horseback,” said Sir Percy, who was shading his eyes and looking out over the countryside, “there’s a party coming this way,”

Jellicoe wished up a telescope and Sir Percy did the same, but wished up two and handed one to John, a good brass telescope which John put to his eye and found was quite powerful. He pointed it in the direction of the party of riders in the far distance and found he could now make them out quite well. They were led by a man in a blue uniform with gold buttons who was wearing a cocked hat. The men behind him were all in blue and red.

“Revenue men!” said Jellicoe. “Led by Matthew Wheeler, too. Quick, let’s get John below. We can become invisible.”

“I’ll go with John,” said Leticia, “to keep him company.”

“I’ll go too,” said Lady Matilda and the three of them climbed back down the steps as Sir Percy let the trapdoor down. Just as they were going down John noticed that Jellicoe was gathering up handfuls of dust and once the trapdoor was shut John heard the sound of what seemed like a brush swishing about over the trapdoor.

“Jellicoe’s an old hand at this sort of thing,” said Lady Matilda. “He’s hiding all trace of footsteps or any disturbance,”

Leticia snapped her fingers and a lantern appeared in her hand. Lady Matilda did the same and two glass tumblers appeared; she handed one to John, keeping a finger against her lips to indicate that he should be quiet and put the open mouth of the tumbler to the stone above her and pressed her ear to the other end. John did the same and found that he could make out something of what was happening above.

There was a chinking of spurs and a grating of boots on stone as people climbed up the steps and entered the stone room. Chairs scraped as they sat down. There was subdued murmur of voices which John could only just make out without really being able to distinguish what they were saying. Then the chairs scraped again and the boots and chinking of spurs could be heard as the men went back down the steps. There was the dull thump of hooves as the men rode away and then the trapdoor opened up and John saw the smiling face of Jellicoe looking down at them.

John, Leticia and Lady Matilda climbed out, blinking, into the light.

“Matthew Wheeler said he knew the smugglers were somewhere round here,” chuckled Jellicoe. “He didn’t know how close he was to one of them! He left some of these,” he continued, showing John some pieces of paper.

John picked one up; on it was printed “Wanted, Information on a Notorious Smuggler Known as Captain Moonshine. 50 Guineas Reward for Information Leading to his Capture. Interested Persons should apply to Lieutenant Matthew Wheeler, of the Excise Service, care of the Ship Inn, Bowthorpe-on-Sea.”

Jellicoe frowned, “He’ll be back later. He also said that there is another party of strangers in the area who look suspicious.”

“Led by a man in black with a black beard,” put in Bunsen.

“Asking questions about smuggling,” added Sir Percy.

“He said that the last thing they need is another smuggling gang,” said Jellicoe. “It sounds suspicious to me.”

“And me,” said Sir Percy. “We ought to keep a look out.”

“Just what I was thinking,” said Lady Matilda.

“We’ll go back to the house,” said Jellicoe. “As it’s locked up we’ll have to make our way back into it through the cellars. We can go through the walls but poor old John can’t so we’ll go back that way.”

“Past all that lovely brandy,” sighed Bunsen, “Brandy, brandy everywhere and not a drop to drink!”

“Poor Bunsen,” said Leticia. “But you know what happens when you start drinking it.”

“Yes, a tendency to fall down deep holes,” said Bunsen. “You’re right, of course, I’ll stick to tea and lemonade, but it’s not easy.”

“Actually, we ought to have someone on the roof looking around,” said Sir Percy. “While the rest of us explore the house.”

“I’ll go,” said Leticia. “I like roofs.”

“I’ll join you,” said Bunsen. “Get the smell of the brandy out my nose.”

“Good idea,” said Lady Matilda, “You and Leticia go over the meadow to the house and we’ll go back through the cellars and take a good look around.”

Leticia and Bunsen floated off over the meadow. The rest of the ghosts and John filed through the trapdoor and down the steps while Jellicoe carefully closed the trapdoor behind them. They returned through the secret passage and the cellars to the dining room. Lady Matilda pulled some of the sheets back from the furniture to have a look at it. Some of it was beautifully inlaid in different woods with brass bits applied here and there.

“Very nice,” said Jellicoe. “Fine bit of craftsmanship, that.”

“Bit too ornate for me,” said Lady Matilda.

They walked on through some of the other rooms, looking at the furniture, and the Abbot lifted some of the sheets that covered the pictures on the walls.

“Don’t think much of these,” he said. “Where are all the others?” and he indicated the walls. John saw that there were big rectangular patches on the walls where the wallpaper was a slightly different colour and Sir Percy told him that the pictures that had hung there had been sold.

“All the best stuff has gone,” he said. “My successor needed the money to pay his bills. This is the library,” he went on as they entered a long room entirely filled with bookcases, everyone of them empty.

“He’s even sold all the books!” gasped the Abbot.

A breathless Leticia rushed in.

“There’s some men riding towards us,” she said. “One of them has a big black beard. They’re making for the temple - Bunsen’s gone to keep an eye on them.”

“Making for the temple?” said Jellicoe. “I wonder if they know our secret.”

“The house is all shut up,” said the Abbot. “If they want to get in, that will be the best way if they know all about the passage.”

“Just what I was thinking,” nodded Jellicoe. “Come on, we better find out what they’re up to. Down to the cellars!”

They all dashed back through the great rooms of the house and down the corridors that led to the cellars and the secret passage. Just as they reached the end of the secret passage lined with barrels they met Bunsen who shushed them.

“They know about the secret passage,” he whispered. “They’ll be down in a minute. If we go behind this pile of barrels we can overhear them.”

He led them over to a space between the wall and the barrels and they crouched down to listen.

The trapdoor at the end of the passage creaked open and there was the sound of boots and spurs as several men came down the steps and into the cellar. There was the chink of metal that indicated that they were carrying weapons too.

“Right,” rasped a rough, deep voice. “This is their store right enough. Now the revenue men will be back before long. You lay in wait - you know what to do, shoot Wheeler and let his men get away. We’ll spread the word that it was that clockmaker and his gang. They’ll be hung or transported and we’ll have the field to ourselves. Now, you two stay with me, the rest of you, off to work.”

There was the sound of several men grunting and mumbling as they went back up the steps to the temple. Jellicoe and the others looked at each

other horrified. They became even more worried as they heard the rest of the plan.

“We’re going to destroy a clock,” said the man, “That clock has the clockmakers name on it. Destroy it and leave the bits in here, and there’ll be evidence enough to connect him with the murder of Wheeler. We’ll kill three birds with one stone - wreck the clock, silence the revenue man and hang the clockmaker. Now remember what I told you, ignore all apparitions, everything that you see. They can’t hurt you. Stuff your ears with this cotton wool so you can’t hear anything. That clock is somewhere in this house. Never mind why,” he shouted at one man who seemed to be objecting. “I’m telling you what to do and if you let me down you’ll answer to me! Now wait here while I go and check on the others.”

The ghosts and John silently filed out from behind the pile of barrels and made their way to the door; the Abbot shut it quietly and jammed it with more wood while Sir Percy pushed a big barrel up to it to block it further.

“It won’t hold them long,” he said. “What are we going to do?”

“If Matthew Wheeler is shot and I get the blame,” said Jellicoe, “I’ll be hung or transported before I can make the clock and before I become a ghost by being hit on the head by the town clock striking one! It’ll change history and we’ll be stuck here. But not only that, I really can’t have Matthew shot - he’s not a bad man even if he is a revenue officer.”

“And what about those men out to destroy the clock?” said Sir Percy. “If we can’t scare them off, we’ll be in real trouble.”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said John. “If Lady Matilda can make me invisible, then I can help to delay them and perhaps scare them enough so they run away. Can you make me up some potion?” he asked Lady Matilda.

“Oh, I think so,” came the confident reply but Jellicoe looked very dubious.

“Too dangerous,” he said, shaking his head. “You could get it all wrong again and heaven knows what will happen to John. Even if it does work we’ll be up against three very dangerous armed men.”

“You’ll be here to help me,” said John,

“We don’t have a lot of options,” said the Abbot. “What else can we do?”

“That’s right,” said Bunsen. “We’re in a bit of a fix.”

“We’ll need to warn Matthew Wheeler,” said Leticia. “He’ll be back soon.”

“I’ll take care of that,” said Bunsen. “I’ll fly off and write a message on a bit of paper, one of those reward posters will do. I’ll wrap it round a stone and lob it at one of them and warn them of an ambush.”

“Good idea,” said Sir Percy and Bunsen vanished on his errand. A bit later he told them what happened. He wrapped his message round a half brick

and as Matthew Wheeler and his men rode past some trees, Bunsen threw it - harder than he intended. It hit Matthew on the head and knocked him off his horse. As he lay on the ground, tended by one of his men, another of them opened the message.

“It reads ‘From a friend, you are riding into a trap,’” said the soldier.

“Friend!” said Matthew groggily. “I hate to think what he’d do if he was an enemy. Come on, help me up.....”

He mounted his horse and shook his head to clear it; he looked at the message again.

“Right,” he said. “Two of you ride that way, you two ride the other way. Spread out - we’ll take them from three sides. If you see something, yell. Keep your eyes open.”

They rode off and Bunsen was pleased to see that the men the bearded figure had stationed in ambush were taken completely by surprise as the soldiers rode towards the temple from three different directions. The men didn’t have time to fire a shot and surrendered straight away. By then, however, the ghosts were fully occupied with events below ground.

Meanwhile Lady Matilda had been concentrating hard. A mug of something green appeared on the table, foaming rather a lot.

“If it starts eating its way through the woodwork I’d leave it alone,” said the Abbot dubiously.

“Looks like something you clean drains with,” said Sir Percy.

Lady Matilda frowned at them.

“Good wholesome potion,” she said. “Not a frog or toad anywhere near it. Only the best natural ingredients.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said John and he gingerly took a sniff at the tankard. It smelt of raspberries and toffee and he sipped at it. It really tasted rather good, a sort of peppermint flavour with an aftertaste of aniseed and toffee ice cream. He drank it down.

“Well, if he goes off bang in a cloud of purple smoke and joins us on a permanent basis, we’ll have a bit of explaining to do to his parents,” said the Abbot. “But I think it’s working.”

It was; John gradually vanished, starting with his toes. It was not a moment too soon as the door to the secret passage shook with heavy blows rained on it from the other side. The Abbot, an old hand at haunting, took charge and whispered his plans to the ghosts and John and they all ran off to take up their positions.

“Don’t forget,” hissed Lady Matilda to the invisible form of John, “the potion will wear off in about twenty minutes.”

The door to the cellars gave way and the black-bearded man and his two companions shouted with triumph and then fell over the barrel Sir Percy had put in front of it as they came through the door. Grumbling and cursing, they picked

themselves up, rubbing sore bits, and made for the house. Suddenly the Abbot appeared, rising up from the floor in front of them, doing his act with the rattling chains and groaning, looking absolutely ghastly in the gloom of the cellars as he was bathed in a green light that shone up into his face. The men yelled and hesitated but their black-bearded leader pushed and shoved at them, roaring that it was just an apparition and could do no harm. They stuffed yet more cotton wool into their ears so as to drown out the clanking and groaning and summoning up their courage they rushed at the Abbott, who vanished. They shouted in triumph again and then fell over something that tripped them up. It was John who was enjoying himself; the men all fell into a tangled heap of arms and legs, roaring and groaning louder than the Abbot had. It was some time before they sorted themselves out.

They set off again and this time came across Sir Percy, all lit up in a lurid red glow, in full armour. He walked slowly towards them and removed his head and the men gibbered in fear but once again the leader kicked and pushed them and they walked on, hiding their eyes. Sir Percy vanished and they all breathed a sigh of relief only to yell out in fear as a barrel suddenly tipped itself on its side and rolled at them fast - it was the invisible John again and he knocked the three of them down like skittles with his barrel.

Again they picked themselves up and now reached the great kitchen up the steps from the cellars. Here they ran into Lady Matilda doing the haunting honours, screaming like a banshee and having no effect on the cotton-wool-stuffed men. But her appearance stopped them dead in their tracks, as she stood enveloped in purple smoke, six feet up in the air and without a face. She was pretty spectacular and once again the men hesitated and tried to turn back, wondering just what they had taken on. They were wondering which they were more frightened of - the terrible apparitions or their leader. He kicked and hit them with the club he was carrying and they ran on as Lady Matilda vanished. Relieved, they then yelled out again in fear as a cascade of copper pots and pans was hurled at them, bouncing off them and forcing them to try and shield their heads from the blows. They fell over, picked themselves up and staggered on, now making for the passage that led to the dining room. The ghosts had been saving the best apparition for last and the terrible figure of Leticia now appeared, at her very best, all in white, her head a skull with eyes of flame, blue hair streaming in some ghostly wind, looking absolutely awful and wailing like a thousand tornadoes, enjoying herself immensely. The noise didn't affect the men but the sight of her did. They stopped dead again and closed their eyes as their leader belaboured them with his club and made them go on. With eyes tight shut they ran through Leticia to the great open doorway into the dining room. They should have kept their eyes open; just as they reached the doorway John and Jellicoe slammed the doors shut straight into their faces. That was it, they were both laid out for the count.

The leader ranted and roared - and then caught sight of John as he began to become visible. Forgetting the clock, the man bellowed with rage and made for the boy who dodged into the dining room and under the table and then made for the passage outside as the man turned and ran after him. They ran through the passages and corridors, through the great kitchen, down the steps and into the cellars, the man close behind. Then John ran into the secret passage - and was trapped. He turned with his back to a pile of barrels with a lantern on top that the black-bearded figure had put there earlier when he was explaining his plan. The leader of the gang went straight for John, club upraised, and John shut his eyes - and then felt himself lifted up into the air as the invisible forms of Jellicoe and the Abbot took an arm each and floated upwards. The man in black couldn't stop himself by then and as he swung his club he overbalanced and fell against the barrels. One of them toppled off the top, bringing the lantern down with it. The barrel narrowly missed the bellowing figure now lying on the floor and smashed, brandy cascading all over the place.

Now, as you may be aware, if you pour brandy over a Christmas pudding and set fire to it, it burns very well. The lantern was still alight and the candle inside was just above the growing lake of brandy which the black-bearded man was now sitting in. With a whoosh the brandy caught fire and the man suddenly realised what had happened and got up rather quickly, the seat of his trousers blazing. All round him the brandy was now on fire. He ran out the cellar bellowing even louder, intent on finding the kitchen so he could sit down in some water. He ran right past John, now peering out from behind the door of the cellar. The lake of flaming brandy was now spreading and had caught the other barrels, one of which exploded into a ball of flame and set off some others. John found himself caught up in the air again as the ghosts carried him away from the inferno now raging in the cellar as more barrels exploded and a tide of flaming brandy ran out and flames began to lick round the wood and coal store and set off the barrels of lamp oil too. They flew through the kitchen to see the man with the black beard now sitting in a sink full of water, and smoke began to billow through the house

"I think we know how the fire started," shouted Jellicoe, above the sound of exploding barrels and crackling wood. The bearded man realised what was happening and made for a window, smashing it and jumping out, his trousers still smouldering.

"Make for the clock everyone," shouted the Abbot, over the noise of the fire. They swooped through the air into the dining room, smoke now coming up through the floor boards and into the room, making them all cough. John, Jellicoe, the Abbot, Leticia, Sir Percy, Lady Matilda and Bunsen were all hurtling through the air towards the clock at the same time as the first tongues of flame burst through the floor from the cellars beneath. They all shrank and stood on the ledge in the doorway of the clock, as the smoke-filled room grew