



THE VERY FAT CONKER




THE children were hunting for conkers under the big chestnut tree. It was a good conker year, and the tree had thrown down hundreds of its green, prickly cases, each with two, sometimes three, satiny-brown chestnuts inside. "Here's one with three!" shouted Jim.



"Well, they'll be small ones then," called back Lennie. "I like to find a case with one enormous one and two tiddlers. I don't care about the tiddlers, but I do like the great big ones! I got my fifty-three-er from a case with one big one and two little ones in it."

Lennie's fifty-three-er was a beautiful chestnut. It was very very big, very round and very smooth—and as hard as a brick! He had bored a hole in it very carefully indeed, threaded through some string, and knotted one end. Then he swung it to and fro—yes, it was a wonderful conker! It would smash everyone else's to bits!

And it did, too! No other conker could stand against Lennie's. Bang! The conker would be smashed to bits as Lennie's hit it, fair and square. Lennie had found it under this very tree ten days ago. Now everyone was hunting there again, for the wind had blown down many more, and perhaps someone would find another giant conker—one that would conquer even Lennie's fifty-three-er!



It was George who found the Very Fat Conker. He was shuffling about in the mass of prickly chestnut cases on the ground when his foot kicked an extra large case, set with enormous prickles. It hadn't even burst open when it had struck the ground.

D—E.B.A.



"Here's a jolly big case!" said George, picking it up. "Big as an orange—look, Lennie. I bet there are big chestnuts in this!"

He split the case, and there, lying snugly in a white woolly bed, were three conkers—one tiny one, not much bigger than a pea, one small one the size of a hazel nut—and one GIANT of a conker, big and fat and sturdy!

"Oh I say—look what George has got!" said Lennie.

"George, I'll swop my new pencil for that conker."

"No, thanks," said George. "I'm keeping it myself. I'll fight your fifty-three-er with it, Lennie. It will smash it like an egg-shell."

"It won't," said Lennie, though he secretly thought that it might. "Go on—take my new pencil—and I'll give you a rubber too, if you like. I bet my fifty-three-er would smash it, and then it will be gone. I'd just like to keep it for a second fighting-conker, in case my fifty-three-er gets cracked or smashed."

"No," said George, firmly. "I'm going to keep this conker for myself and fight yours with it."

And he did keep it, no matter how Lennie followed him about, offering him this and that for it. Then came the day when George challenged Lennie to fight with his conker against the Giant, as everyone called George's fat chestnut.

George had bored a hole through it very carefully. He had taken some strong string, threaded it through, and knotted it well. He had tried out his conker against several smaller ones and had conquered them all.

Hilda had held out her conker for George's to hit—and the Giant had smashed it to bits. John had held out his cleverer, a sturdy little conker that had already broken eleven others—and his had been broken in half. Then Fred challenged George with his, a fine big one but not very solid.

"Go on, hit it," said Fred. "I bet it will be strong enough to resist yours!" It was—but alas, when Fred hit George's conker in his turn he hadn't broken George's—his own had cracked all the way round instead, so that was the end of it.



And now George had challenged Lennie's great conker, the king of them all. The whole class, both boys and girls, gathered round to watch. They were in the playground of the school, down by the shrubbery, and they all watched the battle eagerly.

George held his conker up first, dangling on its string, so that Lennie could strike it with his great conker. Lennie took a careful look at it, and then swung his and brought it down hard on George's conker. Crash! Everyone blinked, expecting George's to fly into pieces. But it didn't. No, it swung backwards and forwards without a mark on it. It was certainly a wonderful conker!

"Now my turn!" said George. "Hold yours out, Lennie, while I think exactly where to hit it."

Lennie held it out, and it twisted a little at the end of its string. Then George swung his—and hit Lennie's with such a mighty blow that it flew into a hundred pieces and spattered everyone with tiny bits of brown skin and white nut.

"He's conquered Lennie's!" cried Fred. "What is your conker now, George?"

"A hundred-and-fiver," said George proudly. "Sorry to smash such a good conker as yours, Lennie, but . . ." Lennie stared at his bit of string, with just a tiny bit of conker left beside the knot. He was not a good loser, and he just *couldn't* say, "Jolly good, George. The best conker wins!" as most people said. His face went red, and he felt very very angry. He suddenly caught hold of George's conker and snatched it away from him, string and all.



He flung it violently into the air, and it went sailing away into the shrubbery.

"There! I hope it's lost for ever!" he said, and ran off at top speed, leaving everyone most amazed.

"Good gracious—what a temper!" said Hilda, shocked.

"Oh, George—quick, let's go and find your conker."

They all ran to look until the bell went for the end of break. But nobody found it—and that wasn't surprising because the string had caught on the branch of a laurel bush, and the conker hung down in the middle of the green leaves, quite hidden.

George was very upset.

"My hundred-and-fiver!" he said. "I'll never see it again. How disgusting of Lennie to behave like that!"

But George did see his conker again. He found it two years later, when he was helping to tidy up the school shrubbery, which had grown far too thick. The conker had fallen from the laurel bush to the damp ground, still wearing its long tail of string.

There it had put out a root, and then a shoot—and had grown into a tiny tree, and when George suddenly saw the fine little chestnut tree it was about two feet high and had three or four sets of fan-shaped leaves!

"I say—come and look—this must be the big fat conker I lost!" shouted George in delight. "Look, it's still got its string! My word—I do hope the Head will let it stay here!"

He did, because he was so interested in the tale of the Very Fat Conker when George told it to him. And now the little tree is eighteen years old, and a lovely one too—tall and green and shady.

Each autumn it throws down big fat conkers in prickly cases—and all the children, remembering the tale of the hundred-and-fiver, go hunting to find one just as good. And one day someone will!

