

ALWAYS AT THE TOP OF THE TREE FOR SCHOOL STORIES!

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“ALL THROUGH BAGGY!” & “THE GREAT RAG AT KATIE’S!”



BAGGY'S UNSPORTSMANLIKE ACTION CAUSES A SPILL!

(An Astonishing Incident in this week's Grand School Story.)

DO YOU GET A HALF-CROWN THIS WEEK?

My Readers' Own Corner
A Page of Interesting Paragraphs
Contributed by "GEM" Readers. Conducted by *Your Editor.*

NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

THE BOTANIC GARDENS, BELFAST.

This park, which was formerly called the Royal Botanical Gardens, comprises seventeen acres. The grounds, which are situated in the south-western part of the city, are on the northern bank of the River Lagan, contiguous to the Queen's University.

They were opened in 1820, and afford a delightful resort for residents of the city. They were instituted for the purpose of promoting a taste for horticulture, and were the only self-supporting Botanic Gardens in Ireland. The conservatory is furnished with palms, tree ferns, cacti, camellias, etc., and throughout the year a succession of bloom is kept in the greenhouse. Several new nursery houses have been built. An entrance lodge and handsome gates were erected in 1876. A splendid fernery forms one of the greatest attractions of this park.—George Lytle, 19, Agra Street, Ormeau Road, Belfast.

OLD LANCASHIRE.

Lancashire is one of the most productive and foremost of our counties. It possesses the second greatest seaport in the world, namely, Liverpool, where the well-known Princess Landing Stage is found. St. Helens, the greatest glass town in the world, is in the county. Widnes is famed for chemicals, Wigan and district supply coal, and there are shipyards at Barrow. Then comes Manchester, Bolton, and Oldham, with their cotton-mills. The lads and lasses of Lancashire need no praise here, but everybody knows of the good work and the sympathy found in Lancashire. The 55th Division showed what Lancashire could do in the World War. I think there are more readers of the Companion Papers in Lancashire than in any other county.—William P. Lomax, 19, Fleet Lane, Parr, St. Helens, Lancs.

THERE'S MANY A SLIP.

The saying comes from an old Greek proverb. Anceus, an ancient King of Samos, was fond of gardening, and planted some vines. But a soothsayer told him that he would never taste wine from them. Time went on. The grapes were gathered, and the wine was made, and the king was lifting a cup of the

new vintage to his lips when the words of the soothsayer occurred to him. He turned to the man, and asked the prophet mockingly where his prophecy was now. "There are many things between the cup and the lip," replied the prophet. Just then there was a wild disturbance without. A savage boar had broken into the palace. Anceus set the cup down, and dashed off to join the hunt, and was killed.—Keith Morrison, 47, Crown Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

THE GARDEN SPIDER.

One morning in summer-time I saw a spider constructing a web. It first made a frame, swinging itself like the pendulum of a clock. Then it swung a thread from the top of the frame to the bottom. Beginning from the centre of the thread, it made a number of stays like those of an umbrella. Then it drew a thread from one of the top stays, linking it with the next, and so on. The spider has an egg-shaped body, possessing eight legs covered with tiny hairs. The body is speckled—white spots on a yellowish white.—H. Cole, 3, Sutton View, Lorraine Street, Stoneferry, Hull, Yorks.

A LONG SENTENCE.

The longest sentence in the English language is said to be the following: "Marmaduke's natural abilities and magnificent memory enabled him not only to master with ease all that labyrinth maze of English orthography which so frequently perplexes and bewilders the aspiring student, but also to answer successfully and fluently interminable series of arguments levelled at him by litigious pettifoggers inebriated by the exuberance of their own verbosity."—Reginald Watts, 26, Hamilton Avenue, Chapelton Road, Leeds.

A WEATHER-GLASS.

You can make this at home. Take an empty jam-jar and salad-oil bottle. The bottle must be inverted and placed inside the jar. Enough water must be poured into the jar to cover the mouth of the bottle. In fine weather the water will rise up in the bottle, but when bad weather is expected the water will fall back into its original position.—Cyril Wass, 153, Pitsmoor Road, Sheffield.

THE RESTAURANT.

The origin of the term "restaurant" is not generally known. Restaurants sprang into existence in the eighteenth century in France. One of the most popular soups of that period was known as the "Restorer." It was very expensive, and was made of the remains of fowls and chickens, boiled down, and mixed with currants and dried roses. Only rich persons could afford to buy it. A doctor named Gaillard, however, invented a cheaper substitute, which he called by the same name. A great number of eating-houses were opened, and did a roaring trade with the Gaillard imitation, and these establishments were called restaurants. The first was started by a man named Boulange in 1765.—Harry Miller, 63, Great Cheetham Street, Manchester.

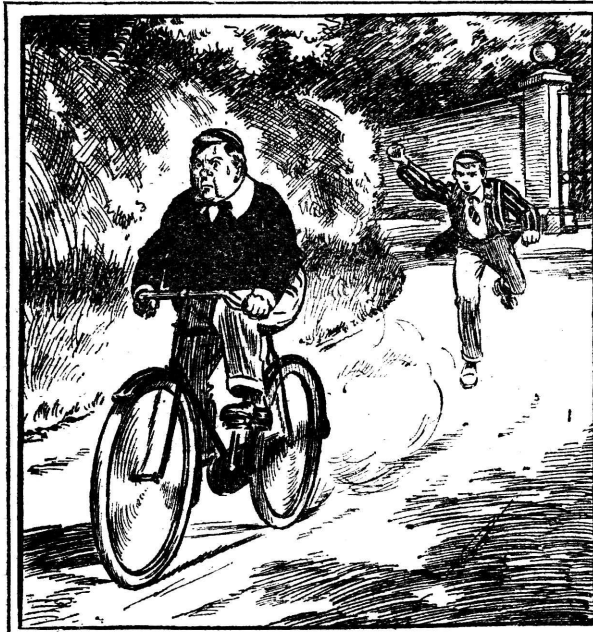
A LONG DOG.

This is the old name for a greyhound. In past ages great ladies of the Court favoured the type. The wife of Robert Bruce, when a prisoner of Edward the First, had three greyhounds. Later on, in the reign of Henry the Eighth, the long dog was reckoned among the "king's beasts." According to an old British saying, "a gentleman is known by his horse, hawk, and his greyhound."—Miss M. Gordon, 56, Sciennes, Edinburgh.

THE DIARY.

The ten-year-old daughter of a portly lady seemed overjoyed when her mother promised to take her to a concert the following evening, and, rushing off to her little writing-desk, made an entry in her diary. "I should like to see what she has written. It is sure to be something charming," said the mother, after the little girl had gone to bed. "Well, why not look?" said the husband. The stout lady inspected the neat little diary, though with some qualms of conscience. This is what she read: "Tuesday; I am going to the concert to-morrow with mother. Wish I could leave half of her at home. It is so uncomfortable to sit on the edge of a chair all night."—E. Taylor, Millbroke, George Street, Nailsworth, Glos.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "Gem" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."



ALL THROUGH BAGGY!

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Tale, dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I. Wanted—A Bike!

"HALLO! What's the giddy row?"

Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther, of the Shell at St. Jim's, halted as Tom Merry asked the question. Though dinner had been over barely five minutes, the three juniors were already changed into flannels and on their way out of doors. That afternoon School House were playing New House, and Tom Merry & Co. were hoping to get in an hour's batting practice before the match commenced.

It was the sight of a group of fellows congregated round the green baize letter-rack, and the sound of voices raised in anger, that had arrested the Terrible Three's attention as they were passing through the Hall.

"Sounds like the Trimble brothers!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Giving another public exhibition of brotherly love, I expect!"

Tom Merry grinned as he pushed his way through the crowd. The family squabbles of Trimble major and Trimble minor were always entertaining—to outsiders. Baggy Trimble, the elder, was as ill-natured and unpopular as he was fat and flabby. Teddy, his minor, however, was as good-natured and popular as he was plump and plucky. So that it was perhaps no wonder there was little love lost between the two.

"What's the trouble, Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

Jack Blake of the Fourth, who was hovering on the fringe of the crowd with his chums, Digby and Herries, grinned and looked round.

"Only Baggy and Teddy—at it again," he replied, with a chuckle. "There was a letter in the rack for one of 'em, and both claim it. They're now having a tug-of-war with it, and I suppose the winner will get the pieces."

"I say, Tom Merry," shouted Baggy Trimble, suddenly catching sight of the captain of the Shell, "make Teddy gimme my letter!"

"Tain't your letter, you rotter!" shouted Teddy Trimble, blinking furiously at his major. "Will you leggo?"

"Why, you fat thief——" hooted Baggy.

"Why, you fat fibber——" roared Teddy.

There followed a moment's desperate tug-of-war, then came the zip-zip of tearing paper as the envelope parted, and the two brothers sat down with one simultaneous bump that fairly shook the Hall.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The onlookers roared with laughter as the brothers staggered to their feet wrathfully.

"You—you ass! Now look what you've done!" yelled Teddy Trimble. "Look well, if——"

"What you've done, you mean!" snorted Baggy angrily. "If there're any banknotes or Treasury-notes——"

"There ain't either!" snapped Teddy, as he examined his half of the letter. "Let's have a squint at your half, Baggy, you ass!"

Baggy sniffed with disgust as he drew out a half-sheet of torn notepaper and handed it to his minor; and a moment later the two halves were put together, and the brothers were reading it with eager curiosity.

"Why, it's from Uncle George!" gasped Teddy. "He's passing through Wayland Junction on his way up to town. He wants us both to meet the blessed train at three o'clock. My hat!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Baggy, brightening up a little. "He's not stingy, is Uncle George. I expect it'll mean a thumping good tip. I'm going! You'll have to lend me your bike, Teddy."

"I—I'll what?" gasped Teddy wrathfully. "Well, I like that! Will I thump! I'll lend you a thick ear, you cheeky frog! What about me?"

"Oh, but we can't both go, Teddy!" exclaimed Baggy loftily. "And as the elder brother I claim the right. That bike of yours really belongs to me by rights, and I'm not jolly well going to sit down——"

"Yes, you are!" grinned Teddy Trimble.

And he gave his major a sudden push that sent the fat Fourth-Former staggering back, to collapse, with a breathless grunt, on the linoleum.

"Ta-ta, Baggy, old scout!" chuckled Teddy Trimble, taking his cap from his pocket and jamming it on a mop of tousled hair. "I'll remember you to nunky!"

And before the wrathful Baggy could scramble to his feet, Trimble of the Third had rolled out through the School House doorway, en route for the cycle-shed.

"Yow! The—the cheeky brat!" gasped Baggy Trimble, scrambling to his feet and glaring at the grinning onlookers. "Where is the rotter? I—I'm going to smash him! I'll—I'll——"

"That's the spirit, Baggy!" grinned Lowther. "I'll hold your jacket. He's only gone to the cycle-shed. Come on—after him!"

"I—I mean, some other time!" stammered Baggy hastily. "I—I think I'll let him off for the present. But I say, you chaps, I've simply got to get to Wayland by three, you know. I say, Tom Merry, lend me your old crock. It's only fit for the scrap-heap, but I don't mind risking it!"

"But I do, though!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "I wouldn't trust you on a blessed mangle belonging to me!"

"What about your new jigger, Talbot?"

"Nothing doing, Baggy!" laughed Talbot, turning away.

"I say, Clive——"

But Clive had followed Talbot. The entertainment seemed to be over, and none of the fellows wanted to listen to Baggy—nor to lend him a bike, apparently.

"Selfish beasts!" grunted Baggy Trimble. "As if I'd harm their blessed jiggers! Hallo! There's that beast Grundy! I'll try him."

And Baggy ambled over to where George Alfred Grundy was discussing cricket matters with Tom Merry. It was a somewhat unlucky moment to ask favours of Grundy just then. Grundy had just inquired of Tom Merry when he was going to give him—Grundy—a chance in the School House Eleven. And as Tom Merry had told him that if he could arrange a fixture with Wayland Home for Incubables, he would perhaps

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give him his chance then, Grundy was naturally a little wrathful.

"I—I say Grundy, old fellow—" began Baggy.

"Well?" snorted Grundy.

"Ahem! It's—it's like this," murmured Baggy, a little nervously. "I'm in rather a fix, Grundy. I've got to get to Wayland by three, but I haven't a bike. I wonder if you could help me out by—"

"Yes, I can!" snapped Grundy grimly. "I'll help you out quickly enough, you fat frog! Out you go!"

And the hefty George Alfred grasped Baggy in a grip of iron and whirled him through the open doorway. Then he shot out a heavy boot. It caught the unlucky Baggy full and sure, and lifted him to the top of the steps, where he collapsed, and rolled to the bottom, yelling lustily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The onlookers roared as Baggy tottered to his feet and shook a fat fist at Grundy. "Yah! You beastly bully, Grundy!" he hooted. "Yah! Minging rotters! Keep your rotten bone-shakers! Yah! And—"

Baggy broke off suddenly as Grundy started down the steps—whether to help Baggy out further the latter did not stay to discover. He scuttled away as fast as his fat legs would take him.

"Poor old Baggy!" laughed Tom Merry. "Grundy helped him out, and no mistake! But I'm afraid he won't reach Wayland by three, for all that. But what about the match, you chaps? You're not changed. And where's Gussy, Blake?"

"Just going to change now, O captin!" replied Blake. "And Gussy's gone to Rylcombe—"

"T-to Rylcombe?" hooted Tom Merry. "But what about the match? What the thump have you let him go there for, Blake?"

"He's gone to get a couple of dozen more neckties, I believe," grinned Blake. "That new stock he bought yesterday are out of fashion now, he says. But he promised, on his honour as a gentleman, that he'd be back in time for the match. We let him go then, of course."

Tom Merry snorted.

"If the silly dummy isn't back in time," he breathed in measured accents, "I'll give him neckties. I'll make him eat 'em!"

And, frowning darkly, the junior captain of the School House started down the steps, followed by his grinning henchmen, Lowther and Manners, while Blake, Digby, and Herries went indoors to change for the match.

CHAPTER 2.

Baggy Bones Blake's Bike!

BEASTS! Mean beasts! But I'm not going to be done out of seeing Uncle George through the selfishness of those rotters!"

Thus Baggy Trimble as he wended his way disconsolately to the cycle-shed. Though disconsolate, Baggy was by no means cast down, however. He had given up hopes of borrowing a bike with the owner's permission, but he had great hopes of "borrowing" one by dispensing with that—to him—quite unnecessary formality. In short, he was determined to "bone" one.

But on reaching the shed Baggy gave a sniff of disgust. For Bernard Glyn of the Shell was within, tinkering with the brakes of his machine.

"What rotten luck!" grunted Baggy. "I expect the rotter's going home, though, so he won't be long."

For quite five minutes Baggy hovered impatiently round the shed, until Glyn at last wheeled his machine out of the

shed and vanished through the gates. And then he entered cautiously. His eyes gleamed as they roved over the rows of glittering bikes. But time was precious, and he didn't stop to choose. He grabbed the nearest—which happened to be Jack Blake's—and hauled it outside.

After eyeing it somewhat dubiously for a moment, he climbed awkwardly into the saddle and started off. The saddle was much too high, and his short, fat legs scarcely reached the pedals. But he managed to drive them round, though his efforts to steer a straight course were more amusing than elegant.

Scarcely had Baggy reached half-way across the quad when three juniors, arrayed in spotless cricket-flannels, came down the School House steps.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Baggy, in alarm. "There's Blake—the rotter! Supposing he spots me on his bike? Oh crumbs!"

Blake & Co. had reached the bottom of the steps before spotting Baggy. But when they saw the unhappy fat youth steering his decidedly wobbly and erratic course across the sun-lit quad they doubled up with laughter.

"Oh, my hat!" roared Jack Blake. "Look at him! The fat rotter's pinched some poor beggar's bike. If he gets through the gates safely he'll be lucky."

"That poor old jigger's doomed in any case!" chuckled Digby. "Wonder whose it is?"

"Not our business," grinned Blake. "I'm sorry for the owner, though. If he only knew—Here, what the—"

Blake broke off with a sudden yell of wrath as the cyclist came nearer.

"My bike!" he howled furiously. "The fat thief's boned my bike! I—I'll smash him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries. "It's not your business, though, Blake!"

But apparently it was. With a snort of fury Jack Blake slipped the cricket-ball he carried into the pocket of his blazer, and set off after the retreating cyclist as hard as he could peddle.

Baggy Trimble plugged away at the pedals with desperate energy. Missing one gate-post by a matter of inches, he wobbled out, and was soon careering up Rylcombe Lane amid a cloud of dust.

"Stop, you thieving rascal!" howled Blake. "Come back, you fat sneak!"

But Baggy had no intention of stopping—if he could help it. He plugged away, gasping like old bellows and streaming with perspiration. But he quickly came to grief. Already nervous on his strange steed, and rendered still more nervous by Blake thudding behind, he began to swerve and wobble in a truly alarming manner.

And then quite suddenly his front wheel struck a stone with an unexpected jolt, and Baggy lost his head, let go of the handlebars, and went over.

Crash! Clatter! Bump! Yarooogh!

Baggy howled fiendishly as he struck the earth and rolled over on the dusty lane. And at that moment Blake arrived. He came scudding along like a sprinter on the cinder-path. Before he could pull up, he tripped and sprawled headlong over the bike and Baggy.

Baggy was the first to pass any intelligible remarks.

"Yow! Ow, help!" he wailed, sitting up and blinking dazedly around. "Oh, crumbs! I'm killed, I believe! Wow! I'm hurt!"

"You—you gibbering maniac!" spluttered Blake, staggering painfully to his feet. "I'll hurt you. I'll give you the walloping of your life for this!"

And, snatching the pump from his overturned bike, Blake began to lay it about the unhappy Baggy with a right good will.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

The bicycle-pump rose and fell, and the fat youth's howls of pain did likewise. Blake paused breathless at last, and, slipping back the pump, he picked up his machine.

"There, you cheeky frog!" he panted, hauling his bike round. "That will teach you not to bone other people's bikes perhaps!"

Baggy did not reply for the moment. He was nearly weeping with pain and rage. The tumble from the bike had hurt the clumsy and ungainly fat junior considerably, and the "walloping" was the last straw. As a rule, Baggy Trimble took a ragging without any attempt at retaliation. But even a worm will turn; and Baggy turned just then. He jumped to his feet in an unusual burst of rage.

"You—you beastly cad, Blake!" he hissed. "I'll—I'll—"

The fat junior pounced suddenly on a round object on the ground. It was the cricket-ball that had fallen unnoticed from the pocket of Blake's blazer. Without stopping to think, he hurled it towards Blake, who was just mounting his machine.

To do Baggy justice, he had not aimed it at Blake, but at his bicycle. As things happened, it hit neither.

It missed the bike and Blake by a couple of yards, and crashed its erratic course through the thick hedge bordering the lane. But it caused no end of trouble for Blake nevertheless.

Sensing the missile coming, Blake dodged desperately, and as he had only that moment reached the saddle the result was disastrous.

The bike tottered a brief moment, and then it toppled over and deposited its rider in the dust of the lane.

And Baggy wisely decided to make himself scarce then. He scuttled at top speed towards St. Jim's, and before Blake had recovered his scattered senses and regained his feet, the fat junior had disappeared round a bend in the lane.

"The—the murderous villain!" gasped Blake. "I'll wallop his hide again for that! Of all the silly-ass tricks—"

And Blake glared around in search of Baggy Trimble. But he glared in vain. The only individual in sight was a solitary cyclist riding from the direction of Rylcombe. And, with scarcely a second glance at him, Blake leaped into the saddle, and pedalled furiously back, hoping to catch Trimble up.

But in this he was disappointed. On turning the bend he saw the fat Fourth-Former rolling along ahead sure enough. But, glancing round at that moment, Baggy dived through a hole in the hedge like a frightened rabbit.

"Blow it!" growled Blake, as he watched his quarry ambling across the fields. "Never mind. He's dodged me now, but it can wait."

And, feeling sore both in mind and body, Jack Blake returned to St. Jim's, and, after housing his bike, he joined his chums at the gates.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Herries, gazing at his chum's dusty and dishevelled appearance. "What on earth have you been playing at, Blake—being a road-brush?"

"No; but I'll thumpin' well use Baggy Trimble as a road-brush when I catch him!" snorted Blake. "The burbling idiot pitched a blessed great stone or something at me!"

And he wrathfully related his encounter with the cheeky Baggy Trimble.

"Well, the silly chump!" exclaimed Herries warmly. "I thought even that fat ass would draw the line at stone-throwing!"



"Give me my letter, Teddy!" hooted Baggie. There followed a desperate tug-of-war, then came the zip-zip of tearing paper as the envelope parted, and the two brothers sat down simultaneously with a resounding bump on the floor. (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 3.

The Surprising Gussy!

"Oh, I don't think the silly ass meant to hit me!" grunted Blake. "But, all the same, it was a silly trick. Look at my hands! How the dickens am I to hold a cricket-bat with them? B-r-r-r! I'll bust him for this!"

"Then I should postpone it until after the match," grinned Digby, "or Tom Merry will be busting you! It's about three minutes to kicking-off time."

"My hat, that reminds me!" ejaculated Blake, glancing suddenly along Rylcombe Lane. "Where on earth has that chump Gussy got to? Did he pass you chaps when I was taking my bike in?"

"He certainly didn't," said Digby. "Why?"

"That's jolly rummy!" exclaimed Blake, staring in a puzzled way up the lane. "I'm certain I saw the dummy coming along on his bike when I mounted mine to chase Trimble! Anyway, come along now. If he doesn't turn up there'll be trouble in the camp. Old Tommy will rave."

"My hat, yes!"

And, feeling not a little uneasy about the absent Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the three juniors set off at a trot for the cricket-field.

"LICKED, by Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in disgust. "Licked by four blessed runs! This is all that tailor's dummy Gussy's fault, Blake!"

"No doubt about that," agreed Blake, with a frown. "We'll give the dummy neckties! He's let us down fairly!"

The School House cricketers were returning from the match in a disconsolate crowd. Figgins and his stalwarts of the New House had won the match by the narrow margin of four runs. And it was all Gussy's fault, everyone agreed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with all his faults, was an exceedingly able man with a cricket-bat. He had failed to turn up after all, and Tom Merry had been forced to play Cardew.

Cardew was quite a decent all-round man—when he chose to exert himself. But though he played up manfully on this occasion, he lacked D'Arcy's abilities with a bat, and even the lanky Figgins reluctantly admitted that if D'Arcy had played the match might have ended differently.

And, naturally, Tom Merry & Co. were feeling exceedingly sore about it.

"I suppose," snorted Tom Merry,

"that we shall find him trying on neckties in Study No. 6! You were a silly ass to let the chap go, Blake!"

"No need to rub it in, Tommy," grunted Blake. "I feel every bit as sore about it as you chaps. But he's bound to be back now, and if you'll come along we'll get an explanation from the burbling ass!"

In a very grumpy mood Blake led the way indoors to Study No. 6.

But, contrary to expectations, Arthur Augustus was not there, nor was anything known of his whereabouts on the Fourth Form passage.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at each other in astonishment.

"Where's the silly owl got to?" asked Blake. "He can't be selecting neckties still, surely!"

"Oh, blow the silly chump!" grunted Herries. "What about tea?"

"Right-ho; we'll have tea!" remarked Blake. "I suppose you fellows will join us, Tommy?"

"What-ho!" grinned Tom Merry, somewhat mollified. "Our cupboard's as bare as Mother Hubbard's. As a matter of fact, we were hoping you'd do the decent thing and invite us. We'll stay!"

And very soon the six juniors were sitting round the table, busily discussing sardines, pineapple-chunks, cake, and the afternoon's match. They were still discussing these, when the door opened, and the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy arrived.

There was an agitated expression on Gussy's aristocratic features, and a curious gleam in his noble eye that would have startled the juniors had they seen it. But they failed to notice it. With one accord the tea-party surrounded the swell of the Fourth, amid a chorus of indignant inquiries.

"Oh, here you are, Gussy, you chump!"

"Where the dickens have you been, you ass?"

"What about the match, you burbling jabberwock?"

"You've let us down, you dummy!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stepped back, and fairly blinked at the wrathful faces around him.

"Explain, you tailor's dummy!" hooted Blake. "Where the thump have you been, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Blake, and subjected him to a cold, steady stare that fairly startled that youth.

"Pway westwain yourself, Jack Blake!" he exclaimed coldly. "I have told you befoah that I uttably wefuse to be chawactahised as a tailor's dummy! And I wish you all to cleahly undahstand that I wefuse to discuss my movements this aftahnoon!"

And Arthur Augustus was about to stride haughtily from the room, when Blake grabbed the back of his Eton jacket and hauled him back.

"Not so fast, old scout!" he said grimly. "We want your explanation first. And what about your tea, dummy?"

"Pway welcase my jacket, Jack Blake!" requested Arthur Augustus icily. "You are wumplin' it! I have no desiah whatevah for tea this aftahnoon. I am too wovvied to dream of gwub. I request you to gwant me a pivate intahview aftah tea, Blake, as I have a vevy gwave mattah I desiah to discuss with you!"

"M-my hat!" gasped Blake, staring in astonishment at his chum. "What the thump—"

"Pway wemove your hand fwom my jacket—"

"No jolly fear! Not until you've explained why you let us down this afternoon, Gussy!"

"Kindly welcase my jacket, Jack Blake. I wepeat," said Arthur Augustus with frigid politeness. "You are wumplin' it!"

"When you've explained—"

"I wefuse to explain anythin'—"

"Then you'll be bumped until you do!" snapped Blake warmly. "Collar the image!"

"Bai Jove! You dare— Yooop! Leggo, you wottahs!"

"Bump!"

"Yaroooh!"

Arthur Augustus sat down violently in the angry grasp of three pairs of hands. Tom Merry & Co. looked on with grins. As guests in Study No. 6 they did not feel called upon to take an active part in the proceedings, though they would have liked to. Six times the noble Gussy was lowered to the hard, unsympathetic carpet, and then Blake called a halt.

"Now, will you explain, you burbling chump?" he said.

Arthur Augustus sat up gasping, and speechless for the moment with wrath and outraged dignity.

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"You—you wottahs!" he spluttered, at last. "You unpwincipled wuffians! I will administah a feahful thwashing all wound for this outwage! Welcase me, bai Jove!"

"Will you tell us where you've been?" roared Herries.

"And why you cut the match?" added Blake warmly.

"No, I will not, bai Jove!" said Gussy frigidly, glaring up at his study leader.

"Then we'll—"

Blake paused suddenly as his eyes met those of D'Arcy. Besides an exceedingly wrathful look there, he saw something else—something that Blake had never before seen in his chum's eyes when looking at him. It was a curious mixture of doubt and contempt. It quite startled Blake, and he released his hold on D'Arcy on the instant.

"Here, hold the silly ass, Blake!" shouted Digby. "The image hasn't explained yet!"

"Oh, blow the idiot and his blessed explanations!" said Blake crossly. "If the silly ass wants to ride the high horse, let him!"

And, with a somewhat uneasy glance at Arthur Augustus, Blake sat down at the table again, while Digby and Herries did likewise.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet, dusty and dishevelled. He fumbled for his eyeglass, and jammed it in his eye. Then he fixed a glare of haughty dignity upon his three study-mates.

"You—you wottahs of the first watah!" he gasped. "Aftah this wuffianly tweatment, I can no longah wegard you as fwends—or even as casual acquaintances—"

"Fathead!"

"Pway do not address me, Jack Blake. I have no desiah to speak to you again!" replied D'Arcy haughtily. "Nor do I wish you to speak to me. Aftah you have concluded your tea, howevah, I desiah to discuss a vevy gwave mattah with you in strict pivate—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"How are you going to discuss it if neither of you speaks—by the deaf-and-dumb language?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared in contempt at the laughing assembly.

"I uttably fail to see anythin' to laugh at!"

"Go hon!"

"I considah this unseemly mewwiment in vevy bad taste!"

"Bow-wow!"

"And as I no longah wegard you as fwends, I wefuse to wemain any longah in your company!"

"Oh, good!"

"Oh, wats—I wepeat, wats!"

And with that last brilliant shaft the swell of the Fourth strode out, and there was a chorus of chuckles within the study as the door slammed behind him.

"Well, I'm blessed! Old Gussy's fairly riding the high horse this time, and no mistake!" grinned Tom Merry. "The image seems to have a bee in his bonnet!" growled Blake. "He's never quite like this. Wonder what's bitten him?"

"Pr'aps the bee in his bonnet," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Fathead!" said Blake. "But there's something wrong, you chaps. The ass glared at me as if he thought I'd sandbagged his blessed grandmother! And it wasn't because we bumped him, either."

"Oh, blow him!" remarked Herries, with a sniff. "It's not the first time he's crossed us off the list of his acquaintances—not by a long way; and he's usually forgotten all about it an hour later. He'll come round soon."

But George Herries was quite wrong there. As it turned out, quite a lot was to happen before Gussy did come round.

CHAPTER 4.

A Rift in the Lute!

BLAKE, Herries, and Digby had commenced prep by the time D'Arcy entered Study No. 6 again. But, as yet, they had done very little work. Since Tom Merry & Co.'s departure they had been too busy discussing D'Arcy's strange conduct to settle to anything.

The family squabbles of the occupants of Study No. 6 were many and oft, and, like the proverbial donkey's gallop, they were short and sweet. Blake's fretwork, D'Arcy's elegant clobber and his tenor solos, Herries' bulldog, Towser, and his cornet, were bones of contention, and causes of endless discord in the study.

But it was good-humoured discord, for all that, and—in D'Arcy's case, at least—a humble apology quickly restored harmony. And as the noble Gussy definitely crossed the others off his list of acquaintances on an average of about three times a week, his patient and long-suffering pals never took that drastic course to heart—quite the reverse, in fact.

But, somehow, this seemed different.

Though D'Arcy had really said very little to occasion any alarm, they all felt instinctively that something was wrong. Without a doubt, Gussy had a bee in his bonnet, though what the trouble was, none of the three had the faintest idea.

They looked up from their prep, and eyed the swell of the Fourth searchingly.

"Ah, here you are, old fellow!" said Digby quite cheerily.

"Feeling any better, old top?" asked Herries.

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He screwed his celebrated monocle into his eye and surveyed his erstwhile chums in a state of great doubt and uncertainty.

The wrath had vanished from his noble eye, but there was indignation there, and his face was pale and worried. He was obviously labouring under great distress of mind.

Blake moved his books, and cleared a space on the table.

"Better start your prep, Gussy," he advised casually. "Getting late."

Then Arthur Augustus spoke.

"Before I begin pwep or anythin' else," he observed gravely, "I have a vevy gwave mattah to discuss with Jack Blake. I must wequest you, Hewwies and Dig, to wetiah fwom this study for a bwief peiwiod."

Herries shook his head.

"Can't be did, old sport," he said gravely. "As we are no longer friends of yours, Gussy, we do not feel inclined to grant any favours—eh, Dig?"

"Impossible!" said Digby.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "But—but, weally, upon weflection, deah boys, I—I have decided to withdwaw my decision, and to ovahlook your diswepsectful conduct this aftahnoon—"

"Oh, good!"

"What a relief!" gasped Digby fervently.

"But in wegard to my formah fwend, Jack Blake, I must wewerve my decision until I have weceived what I weally do twust will be a satisfactwory explanation of his wemarkable conduct this aftahnoon. Unless he can do this, it will be uttably imposs for me to wewsume formah fwendly welations, or even acquaintanceship."

"Ass!" snorted Jack Blake. "Dolt! Duffer! What on earth's biting you, Gussy? It's you who should explain to

us. What about the match? You let us down—"

"That is a twifing mattah compawed with the howwible affair I wish to discuss with you, as you know full well, Jack Blake!"

"I jolly well haven't the foggist notion what you're raving about!" howled Blake, in exasperation. "What the thump—"

D'Arcy's eyes gleamed. "You know perfectly well to what I am wefewwing, Jack Blake," he said quietly. "I am vewy, vewy sowwy to see you attempting to bluff the mattah out in this bwazen—"

"Why, you—you—"

"One moment, Blake! I am determined that none other than our two selves shall evah heah your tewwible secwet. Before anythin' more is said, I must wequest Hewwies and Digby to wetiah."

"They jolly well won't!" snapped Blake warmly. "There have never been any secrets in this study, and there're not going to be any! What the thump have I done? Out with it, you burbling ass!"

"That's the spirit!" exclaimed Herries. "Out with it! Let's have the horrible secret, Gussy!"

D'Arcy hesitated, with a troubled brow.

"Vewy well, Blake," he said sadly, after a pause. "But I would much wathah Hewwies and Dig nevah learned the twuth, for your own sake. I twust, howevah—I wepeat, I weally twust—that you are in a position to defend your conduct with honah. But if you persist in bluffing the mattah out, then I can only conclude you have no defence, to offah. In that case, my contempt and disgust at your cowardly and wascally action will be increased!"

"Wha-a-a-t!"

"Great Scott!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby gaped, as if mesmerised, at D'Arcy. There was so much genuine distress on his face that nobody could doubt he was in earnest. For quite a minute there was silence. Then Blake set his lips hard.

"Look here, Gussy," he said quietly, holding himself in with an effort. "We've been pals for a long time now, and it would take a great deal to make me quarrel with you. But you're going beyond the limit, you know. If you start saying things like that to me there's going to be trouble. For goodness' sake, tell us what's the matter!"

"Yes, rather!" muttered Herries uneasily. "For goodness' sake, stop playing the giddy goat, Gussy!"

D'Arcy looked genuinely upset, and there was more than a trace of huskiness in his voice as he turned to Blake.

"Welly, Blake, deah boy," he said appealingly, "how can you pwetend ignorance of the wotten affair? Confess all about it, I entweat you. I'm suah Dig and Hewwies and myself will twy to put the best possible constwuction on your actions."

"Oh, you—you burbling jabberwock!" hooted Blake, exasperated beyond measure. "What on earth are you jabbering about?"

"I wepeat," went on Gussy earnestly, "that bluffin' will not help you, Jack Blake. Dwp it! I assuah you that nobody would dream of suggestin' that it was anythin' but an accident. But your cowardly and dishonourable action in wunnin' away aftahwards requires some explainin'."

Jack Blake took a deep, deep breath. "For the last time, D'Arcy," he said, with admirable patience, "will you tell us what you are talking about? You've already said more than I'd take from any

other fellow at St. Jim's. But I warn you that there's a limit."

"Then you still persist in this bwazen attitude?" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

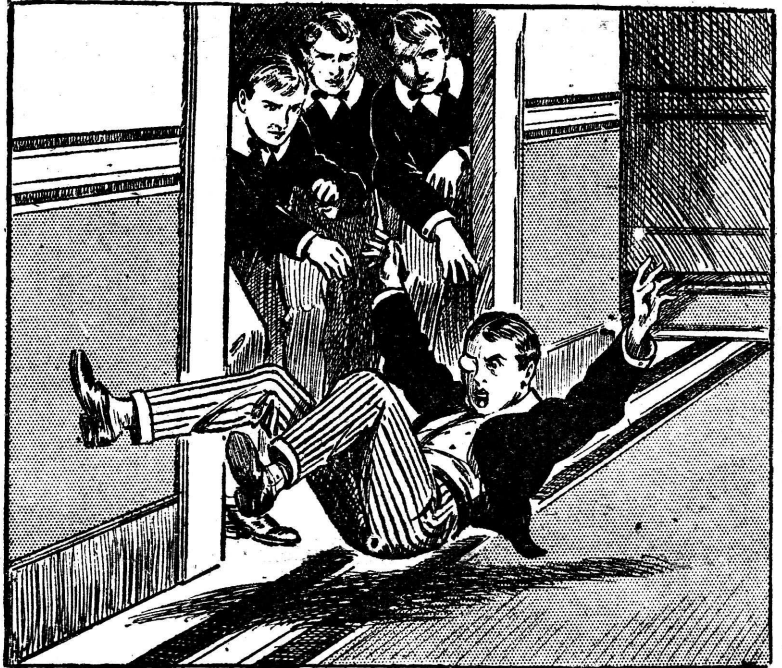
"I tell you," said Blake fiercely, "that I don't know from Adam what you are talking about!"

"Of course you do!" said D'Arcy hotly. "I suppose you will deny that this cwicket-ball belongs to you?"

And, taking a cwicket-ball from his pocket, D'Arcy laid it on the table. Blake

But Blake, Herries, and Digby had passed their limit. They gripped their late chum in a by no means gentle grip, and the next moment a wild and whirling struggle was in progress. No blows were struck, nor did it last long. In the grasp of three pairs of hands, D'Arcy's struggles were hopeless. He was whirled to the door and flung out, to drop in the passage outside like a sack of coke.

"There, you've asked for it, and got it, you burbling idiot!" snorted Blake angrily. "You can come back when



In the grasp of three pairs of hands, D'Arcy was whirled out of the study, and dropped in the passage outside like a sack of coke. (See Chapter 4.)

blinked at it. It was the cwicket-ball—though Blake did not know it then—that Baggy Trimble had flung at him that afternoon.

"What the thump! Why, that's mine, certainly!" he said. "I lost the blessed thing somewhere this afternoon. But I—"

"Then how can you deny it now?" ejaculated D'Arcy. "I know what I saw this aftahnoon, and this cwicket-ball marked with your initials pwoves it. Do you still deny knowledge of the affair?"

"I tell you I don't understand!" shouted Blake, losing patience at last.

D'Arcy gave him a glance of contempt.

"Then I will say no moah! I will nevah wefer to the mattah again, Jack Blake, nor can I evah speak to you again!" he said scornfully. "I wegwet that I cannot accept your word when—"

"What!" howled Blake, losing his temper. "You call me a liar? If you say another word, D'Arcy, I'll pitch you neck and crop out of this study!"

"And we'll help you, Jack!" said Herries hotly. "You've said a jolly sight more than I would stand, D'Arcy!"

"Your threats do not fwighten me!" said D'Arcy disdainfully. "I will say what I intend to say, and then I've finished. Your conduct this aftahnoon has shocked and disgusted me, Jack Blake. Unless you have a vewy good explanation, you have pwoved yourself a cowardly and dishonourable wottah of the first watah, and— Bai Jove! Welease me—"

you've come to your senses, you silly ass!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tottered painfully to his feet.

"I will nevah come back, Jack Blake!" he panted. "Our fwiefndship is ovah and done with. Fwom this time onward I do not know you!"

And, with a last haughty glare at his old chums in the doorway, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strode away with all the lofty dignity his bedraggled and dishevelled condition would allow.

Blake, Herries, and Digby re-entered the study and closed the door. Then they looked at each other blankly.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Blake, aghast. "What on earth can be the matter? I've never known old Gussy to be like this. Is it possible that he's serious?"

"He's serious enough, without a doubt," grunted Herries. "There's some rotten misunderstanding somewhere. All the same, it's too thick for him to talk to you like he did, Blake. Why couldn't the silly ass make his charge—whatever it is—instead of hinting and fingering rotten names about?"

"Oh, but that's just like Gussy!" put in Digby, with a faint grin. "He always puts the cart before the moke, you know!"

"That's no excuse. He ought to know Blake better. I feel I don't care if he doesn't come back!" snorted Herries heatedly.

"Well, I do," answered Digby

quietly. "I feel as wild with the silly ass as you do. But I can't help feeling that he would never have called Blake names if he hadn't been too upset to think what he said. It's a great pity we lost our tempers and pitched him out."

"He jolly well asked for it, and deserved it!"

"Granted. But we know what a footling ass he is sometimes. He makes a muck of nearly everything he meddles with. We ought to have humoured the silly chump until we found out what was biting him. After all, we're his keepers, you know!"

Both Blake and Herries laughed at that. But Digby's words were true enough. D'Arcy was an ass—several sorts of an ass, in fact. But his intentions were always of the best. He was one of the best-hearted chaps at St. Jim's, and it must have been some strong emotion or deep-seated sense of wrong that had made him adopt such an attitude to his best chum.

"Old Dig's quite right," muttered Blake, after a silence. "It isn't like old Gussy to do this sort of thing without good reason. And I vote we buzz off after him and drag my guilty secret—whatever it is—out of him."

"I'm more than willing," grunted Herries. "I'm jolly sure I don't want to quarrel with old Gussy!"

"Then come on!" said Blake grimly. "And the three chums of Study No. 6 hurried out, determined to worm the truth out of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—if they could!"

CHAPTER 5.

Trouble-makers and Peacemakers!

BY gad! Did you chaps see that?"

Aubrey Racke of the Shell was the speaker, and he was standing in the Fourth Form passage, with his dingy pals, Brooke and Mellish. And all three wore upon their ill-favoured countenances looks of great astonishment and joy.

They had been walking along the passage when, without any warning, the door of Study No. 6 had been thrown open, and the bedragged form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy whirled out and collapsed upon the linoleum.

More than a little startled, they watched the swell of the Fourth stagger to his feet. But when they saw his white and furious face, and heard Blake's angry remarks, and finally D'Arcy's farewell retort, their astonishment had given place to unholy joy.

"What do you chaps make of it?" asked Aubrey Racke gleefully. "Looks like trouble in the family—what?"

"Looks as if that cad D'Arcy's been chucked out!" grinned Gerald Crooke. "And from what the tailor's dummy said, he ain't going back, either. But then, we've seen this sort of thing happen before, and it's come to nothing."

"Don't you believe it!" chuckled Racke. "This is no ordinary rag, my infants. They've had a terrific bust-up. Did you notice D'Arcy's chirvy? D'Arcy said he wasn't going back to his dear old pals, and, if I'm not mistaken, he means it this time."

"He, he, he!" cackled Percy Mellish. "I'm jolly glad!"

"A dashed rift in the giddy lute!" commented Crooke. "Wonder how long it will—Shush!"

The door of Study No. 6 opened at that moment, and Blake, Herries, and Digby emerged. All three were looking unusually serious, and they barely glanced at Racke & Co. as they hurried away.

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Racke stared after them for a moment, and then his eyes gleamed wickedly.

"Oh, good!" he murmured, with a chuckle. "I say, I've got an idea, you chaps—a corker! Now's our chance to do our good turn for the day like good little Boy Scouts. We'll help Gussy to move."

"Eh? What do you mean?" asked Crooke.

"Simply this. D'Arcy's leaving Study No. 6, and he's bound to want his clobber and things moved out. That's where we help him. We're going to do the dashed moving biz for him! Quick's the word!"

"But—but it's jolly risky!" gasped Mellish.

"Rats! You're a funk, Percy Mellish!" grinned Racke. "All the chaps are busy with prep. The only thing is we shall have to look slippy, in case those cads come back."

"Jolly good wheeze!" chuckled Crooke. "Well, I'm on, anyway! Old Gussy will think his pals have done it."

"No doubt about that!" grinned Racke. "Mellish, you rotten funk, you'd better keep cave by the door! Come along, Crookey! But you mustn't expect D'Arcy to thank us for this. He'll thank his former pals, or I'm mistaken."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, laughing at the thought of this, Racke and Crooke entered Study No. 6 and started their self-imposed task of helping Gussy to move.

Meanwhile, while searching for Arthur Augustus, Blake & Co. had stumbled across Tom Merry & Co. in the Shell passage, and to them had gloomily unfolded the woeful tale, and all three looked deeply concerned as they heard it.

"Well, my hat!" muttered Tom Merry, aghast. "That's not like old Gussy at all. He's evidently got some silly notion that you've done something rotten, Blake!"

"Sure you haven't murdered anybody this afternoon, Blake?" asked Lowther.

"I've done nothing out of the ordinary that I can think of—unless it's walloping Baggie Trimble with a bicycle-pump!" growled Blake. "But he seems to think I have, and the sooner we find out what it is the better. The worst of it is, though, the silly ass won't listen to us, after this."

"I'm afraid so!" exclaimed Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Look here, suppose I tackle him? I'd be careful not to tread on his noble corns."

"You could," said Blake doubtfully. "In any case, it could do no harm, and he thinks a lot of you, Tommy!"

"Right-ho! I'll trot along now. You chaps can wait here or in Study No. 10 until I come back and report."

And a moment later Tom Merry was hurrying away in search of D'Arcy. After a fruitless search in the Common-room and several Shell studies, he ran his quarry to earth in the School House doorway.

The swell of the Fourth was standing leaning against the doorpost gloomily, contemplating the deserted quad. Tom Merry eyed him thoughtfully for a moment. Then he smiled and approached the dejected-looking Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, there you are!" he exclaimed solemnly. "Just looking for you, Gussy!"

"Well, heah I am, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy, with frigid politeness. "Pway what do you want with me?"

"It's about this matter of Blake, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "I know you are a sportsman and can play the game, and—"

"Weally—"

"I know you are too much of a gentleman, and too fair-minded, to treat a pal unjustly, to make vague charges against

a fellow without giving him a chance to defend those charges—"

"Bai Jove, I twust—"

"And I think I can rely upon you as a fellow of tact and judgment to do the right thing in a case of emergency—"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And, therefore, I'm blessed if I can understand you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, shaking his head sadly. "I must say I'm surprised at you, Gussy. You have made grave though vague charges against your best pal without stating the nature of the charges—without giving Blake a chance to defend himself."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," cried D'Arcy indignantly. "I have given Blake ewvy chance to explain—"

"If he was guilty, and knew what you were talking about—yes! But if he happened not to know, I'm afraid not. And now," proceeded Tom Merry sorrowfully, "everybody is looking askance at Blake, and wondering whether he's committed bigamy or murdered Cornelius, Mrs. Minn's cat. I put it to you, Gussy—is it cricket to put a chap in an awkward position like that?" asked Tom Merry solemnly.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Bai Jove! Weally, you know, I nevah thought of that!" he gasped, looking greatly distressed.

"I know you didn't. And it's now up to you to put matters right without delay by stating the nature of the charge, and giving the poor chap a chance to defend himself."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass in nervous agitation. "You—you are quite wight, Tom Mewwy. But—but the twouble is, deah boy, Blake and I are no lougha twiends. He has tweated me—"

"Then if you can't put it to him as friend to friend, you must put it to him as man to man, or as one gentleman to another," said Tom Merry gravely. "I happen to know where Blake is, and if you'll trot along to Study No. 6 I'll send him to you."

D'Arcy blinked at the would-be peacemaker hesitatingly.

"Wevy well, Tom Mewwy," he said at last, with dignity. "I twust I am the fellow to do the wight thing on all occasions. And I twust that Blake will wendah a satisfactory defence, so that we can wesume our formah twiendly welations."

And, jamming his monocle firmly into place, Arthur Augustus turned on his heel, and went with the full intention of doing the right thing, while Tom Merry hurried away to Study No. 10, looking greatly relieved.

CHAPTER 6.

More Trouble!

WELL, any luck?" Blake asked the question anxiously as Tom Merry entered Study No. 10 in the Shell passage.

"All serene!" answered Tom Merry, smiling. "I talked to him like a Dutch uncle. He's waiting for you in Study No. 6, Blake. But you'll have to handle him carefully. He's still on his dignity!"

"Oh, good!" said Blake, brightening up a little. "I'll humour him this time, never fear. You chaps had better wait outside, though."

And, feeling hopeful of a peaceful settlement, the six juniors wended their way cheerfully towards Study No. 6. But as they entered the Fourth Form passage they got a surprise—and an unpleasant one.

For stacked in the passage outside the door of Study No. 6 was a pile of miscellaneous articles—obviously the property of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There

were, to start with, a couple of shiny toppers—but with the crowns bashed in. There were three gorgeous fancy waistcoats—bespattered with ink and gum. And trampled and strewn about the passage were at least a score of strikingly coloured ties, a boating-blazer, a pair of tennis-shoes, a pair of footer-boots, a cricket-bat, a pair of fencing-foils, and a pile of books liberally sprinkled with red and black ink-stains.

And standing amidst this scene of havoc and ruin was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. In his hands were a couple of photo-frames, the glass of each broken and the photos defaced. And as the latter were of D'Arcy's cousin Ethel, and his father, Lord Eastwood, it was no wonder that D'Arcy was gazing at them in horrified indignation.

"M-m-m-my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What on earth does this mean, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus turned and surveyed the astonished juniors with glittering eyes. His aristocratic features were red with rage and mortification. Seldom had his chums seen the usually serene and dignified Gussy so upset. He seemed to be struggling for speech.

"You—you feahful, howwible wot-tahs! Oh, you frightful cad, Blake!" he choked at last. "I would nevah have believed that any persons who had been fwiends of mine could have tweated me with such bwutality as—"

"But—but look here, Gussy—"

"If you were so anxious to get wid of me, you might have given me an opportunity of wemovin' my belongings safely, without hewing my feelin's in this—this wotten way!"

"But I say, Gussy—"

"I could even have forgiven the wuin-in' of my clobber," muttered D'Arcy huskily. "But to insult me and my relatives in this bahbawous manner—"

"For goodness' sake listen, Gussy—"

"I wufuse to listen, Tom Mewwy! I undahstand now why you wished me to visit Study No. 6; it was to see the work of your wascally fwiends. But it is no joke to me, Tom Mewwy. Henceforth we are stwangers. I wufuse to wetain as fwiend a fellow who en-courages twicks of this descwription. I—"

As if he could not trust himself to speak further, Arthur Augustus gave one half-contemptuous, half-reproachful glance at his old chums, and, with the two broken photo-frames gripped in his hand, he strode away along the corridor.

"Well, I'm dashed!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "That's fairly put the lid and the tin hat on it, and no mistake! Who on earth could have done this rotten trick?"

Blake's face darkened.

"If I ever find out," he said savagely, "I'll—I'll give him the hiding of his life!"

"And I'll thumping well help you!" snapped Herries.

There was a silence.

"No good tackling Gussy again tonight after this," growled Blake at length. "Let's get these things out of the way, for goodness' sake, before a crowd gathers."

And the six juniors set to work replacing D'Arcy's damaged belongings in Study No. 6 in gloomy silence.

But that unlucky day's store of unpleasant surprises was not yet exhausted. Scarcely had their task ended when the door was flung open and George Alfred Grundy strode in. The great man of the Shell was looking unusually grave and not a little indignant. Behind him were his study-mates, Wilkins and Gunn, and they not only looked grave, but extremely uncomfortable.

"Is that silly goat D'Arcy here?" asked Grundy sternly.

"No, he isn't!" snapped Jack Blake irritably. "You'll find him somewhere the other side of the door, Grundy."

Grundy snorted.

"I'll go when I've said what I'm going to say," he said bluntly. "And as you chaps are D'Arcy's pals I'll say it to you. I think it's only right that you chaps should know what's going on behind your backs, especially as I've just heard he let you down over the match this afternoon."

"Eh? What on earth are you gassing about, Grundy?" asked Digby, eyeing the burly Shell fellow curiously. "Out with it! We're not in the mood for your silly gas! What silly yarn have you got hold of now?"

"You'll know in a minute!" boomed Grundy indignantly. "And I'm sorry to say it's true, too. I'm sorry to see a decent chap going the pace like those fools Racke and his pals."

"Oh, cut the cackle and get to the horses!" snapped Tom Merry uneasily. "What's D'Arcy been doing, Grundy?"

"I don't know what he's been doing, but I know we spotted the silly ass coming out of the stable-yard of the Green Man Inn this afternoon!" said Grundy warmly.

"Wha-a-t?"

"And if he isn't playing the giddy goat what was he doing there?" asked Grundy.

"You—you silly chump!" howled Blake. "You must be potty! Old Gussy wouldn't go to a place like the Green Man to save his life!"

"Rather not!" exclaimed Digby warmly. "You've made another bloomer, Grundy!"

"I tell you we saw him!" snorted Grundy. "Didn't we, you chaps?"

Wilkins and Gunn nodded.

"We saw the silly ass right enough," said Wilkins quietly. "At least, we saw him come up that little entry between the pub and that row of cottages, and get on to the towpath. But what he was up to I'm blessed if I know!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry and his chums looked at each other queerly.

"What time about was this?" asked Blake at last.

"About four o'clock. We'd been for a pull up the river, and were just coming back when we spotted him. And the queer thing is that when we shouted to him, and pulled the boat towards the bank, intending to give him a lift down the river, the silly ass bolted!"

"My hat! That's jolly suspicious, anyway!" gasped Tom Merry. "So that explains where the silly ass was this afternoon. He cut the match to visit a low-down pub! But, look here, Grundy, I hope you mentioned this to nobody?"

"No fear; we're keeping it dark! I'm telling you because you're his pals, and it's up to you to look after the silly goat! And I tell you," added Grundy darkly, "that if you don't take him in hand then I will!"

And with that last dark threat George Alfred quitted the study with his chums.

As they emerged they were not a little surprised to see the fat figure of Baggy Trimble scuttling down the passage. But even then they did not guess that the Paul Pry of the School House had been listening at the keyhole, or they would have known that the assurance they had given to Tom Merry & Co. to keep the matter dark was futile.

But Baggy Trimble had, as they found out later. Before bed-time that evening all the Lower School was buzzing with the news, not only that the hitherto inseparable chums of Study No. 6 had

fallen out, but that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been spotted in following the way of the transgressor.

And as the School House were already sore with Arthur Augustus over the House match, this last bit of news did not please them, to say the least of it.

CHAPTER 7.

Still More Mystery!

THE next day Arthur Augustus D'Arcy found himself the object of a great deal of interest and curiosity in the School House.

The news that there had been a split in that select circle known as Blake & Co. was astonishing enough. But the fact that the noble and aristocratic Gussy, of all people, had been seen leaving a disreputable inn quite overshadowed even that bit of interesting news.

But to all attempts at obtaining an explanation D'Arcy turned a deaf ear. He seemed to be as blissfully unconscious of the questioning looks and hostile glares he met with as he appeared to be of the very existence of his erstwhile chums. To Tom Merry & Co. and his chums of Study No. 6 he gave the "marble eye" most emphatically. Several times during that day various members of the two Co.'s had approached Arthur Augustus, but he had met every friendly advance with a cold stare, and walked quickly away.

And Blake & Co., especially, were more than a little worried, and very disappointed. It was a very rare thing for the good-natured Gussy to allow the sun to go down on his wrath. But evidently he was more deeply hurt over the wanton damage to his property than they had dreamed.

As for Grundy's bombshell, they simply did not know what to think about that. It seemed impossible to suspect the noble swell of the Fourth of indulging in such practices as Racke & Co. seemed to take pleasure in. And yet it seemed equally impossible that Wilkins and Gunn, in addition to Grundy, could have been mistaken the previous evening.

"The whole business beats me altogether," said Blake gloomily as they were discussing the matter in the quad after tea. "It's piling mystery on mystery. First there's the question of what Gussy has up against me; then there's that blessed yarn of Grundy's, and then the question of who played that dirty trick on Gussy's clobber and stuff last night."

"And that is the most aggravating part of all," remarked Tom Merry, frowning. "If that hadn't happened I'm certain we'd have brought poor old Gussy round last night. But who did it? It's the sort of trick Racke & Co. might do. But, of course, they didn't know about the rumpus, so— What's the matter, Blake?"

"Matter?" shouted Blake, stopping suddenly in his walk. "But Racke and his beastly pals did know. I remember seeing the rotters standing in the passage when we pitched Gussy out."

"That's right," said Herries grimly. "The cads were grinning all over their ugly chivvies, and I nearly stopped to punch their heads!"

"Pity you didn't," said Tom Merry. "But we can't charge 'em without proof, though."

"Proof?" snorted Blake. "There's no proof needed. We know they're the only chaps who could have known anything about the row. I'll settle with the rotters for this!"

"Then now's our chance," said Manners, pointing to the School House.

steps. "There's Racke and his pals just coming out!"

But Blake was already making a bee-line for Racke & Co. at top speed, and the others followed a moment later.

"Here, what's the dashed game?" asked Racke in alarm, as the six juniors surrounded him. "What the deuce—"

"We want you to answer a question, Racke," said Blake through his teeth. "Was it you who mucked up D'Arcy's clobber and things last night?"

Aubrey Racke glanced round uneasily at the six wrathful faces hemming him in.

"Clobber?" he ejaculated. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Yes, you do!" shouted Blake. "Own up, you rotters. If you don't, we'll punch your heads until you do!"

"If you touch me, you cads, I'll call Kildare—"

"I've a jolly good mind to call him myself," cried Blake, "and let him deal with you!"

"Go on—do!" sneered Racke. "And I'll tell him why we did it, then—"

"So you own up you did it, you howling cad?"

"If you want to know, yes!" said Racke carelessly. "We did it because D'Arcy had earned it by letting the House down in the match to spend the afternoon at the Green Man—"

"You lying hypocrite!" shouted Blake fiercely. "What do you care about House matches? It was your rotten spite—"

"P'raps it was," grinned Racke. "But we don't intend to tell that to Kildare, of course. Anyway, he'll be jolly interested to hear that the goody-goody Gussy visits the Green—"

"Why, you go there yourself—"

"Can you prove it?" asked Racke smoothly. "There're Grundy and his pals to prove your noble pal Gussy did, though."

"You—you—you—"

Blake clenched his fists, and took a step towards the sneering Racke, but Tom Merry grasped him.

"Let the rotter go," he whispered warningly. "Only make things worse for old Gussy, you know."

"Oh, all right; it can wait," said Blake through his teeth. "But we'll make you sit up for this later on, Racke!"

Aubrey Racke strolled away with his grinning chums, and Blake gritted his teeth helplessly as a chuckle floated back to them.

"Never mind," said Tom Merry quietly. "We can settle with the rotters when the clouds roll by. And we know now who did it, and can prove it to Gussy!"

"If he'll listen to us," said Digby doubtfully.

"That's the trouble," muttered Tom Merry. "I don't think he will listen to you three, but if I can only get in a word edgeways I fancy I can work the cradle. And, if I'm not mistaken, there he is now, going out on his bike. Looks as if he's cutting cricket practice, the dummy! Stay here, you chaps!"

And Tom Merry trotted away to intercept Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was at that moment cycling through the gates.

"Just a minute, Gussy!"

D'Arcy glared icily at the captain of the Shell, but as the latter stood full in his path he was forced to dismount.

"Pway allow me to pass!" he demanded loftily.

"I want a word with you, Gussy—"

"I have already told you, Tom Mewwy, that I do not wish to speak to you again, as I no longah know you—"

"Ahem! Yes, but it's about cricket matters, Gussy. I wish to address you,

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D'Arcy, not as a friend, or even as an acquaintance, but in my official capacity as captain of junior cricket at St. Jim's, D'Arcy."

"Oh! Ah! Then—then under the circe I will listen to what you have to say, Mewwy," said D'Arcy coldly.

"Good! I see you're going out, Gussy?"

"Yaas, I am goin' out."

"Where?"

"That is my business, Tom Mewwy."

"And it's my business, too, Gussy," said Tom Merry warmly. "What about cricket practice? You jolly well let us down—"

"I have sewious and important matters to think about at pwsent, Tom Mewwy. I have an appointment to keep in Wylcombe—"

"In the locality of the Green Man, I suppose?"

The words were snapped out thoughtlessly. Tom Merry had been unable to resist the thrust, but he realised his mistake in a flash as he noted the effect on D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy," he gasped, giving a violent start, "how—how did you know that?"

"Then—then you really are going there?" stammered Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to answer that question. It is no concern—"

"But, you mad ass, you'll be sacked if you're not careful. Do you know what the fellows are already saying, Gussy? They say you are playing the giddy goat like Racke and Knox of the Sixth—"

"Wubbish!"

"Then what does it mean—"

"I utahly decline to answer that question. I decline to continue the conversation—"

"But, look here—"

"I wefuse to look heah—"

And before Tom Merry had grasped the fact, the swell of the Fourth had jumped into the saddle and was riding through the gates. Tom Merry stared after him, feeling like kicking himself. He had intended to lead skilfully the conversation on from cricket matters to more intimate matters, and he had thrown the chance away by his own impetuosity.

"Well, what happened?" asked Blake hopefully, as Tom returned to them.

"Any luck?"

"None at all," said Tom Merry gloomily. "I mucked the thing up. But I say, you chaps, the silly ass is going to the Green Man again—he as good as admitted it!"

"Wha-a-a-a?"

"Then we're going after him, or the silly ass will be getting nabbed!" snapped Blake. "Come on!"

"But what about cricket practice—"

"Blow cricket practice! Come on, Tommy, you ass!"

And Blake dashed away for the cycle-shed.

"My hat, he's right!" said Tom Merry, after a moment's reflection.

"We ought to go after the dummy and bring him back, whether he wants to come or not."

And a couple of minutes later bikes were hauled out and the juniors were scorching along Rylcombe Lane on the trail of Arthur Augustus. But the latter was going all out, too, and not until the outskirts of the little village came into view did they begin to overtake the swell of the Fourth.

And then, when about a couple of hundred yards behind, they saw the cyclist ahead draw up suddenly and dismount.

"Some fellow's stopped him," panted Blake. "Can you see— Well, my hat! See who it is?"

Blake asked the question in an alarmed tone, as he recognised the individual D'Arcy had stopped to speak to. He was only a youth, but though the juniors could not see his features, they easily recognised him by his decidedly horsey appearance.

"M-m-my hat!" ejaculated Manners. "It's that blessed stable-boy from the Green Man! Look—Gussy's handing him money!"

As if mesmerised, the juniors watched D'Arcy take from his pocket-wallet some slips of paper—obviously notes. And then, as the horsey-looking youth touched his cap and turned away, Blake gave a warning hiss.

"Quick—out of sight, you fellows! He'll never forgive us if he catches us spying on him!"

With frantic haste the six juniors dragged their machines into the thickets bordering the lane, and next moment D'Arcy rode up. But fortunately he had seen nothing, for he rode past and disappeared in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Well, that puts the wooden lid and the tin hat on it all!" said Tom Merry gravely. "There seems no doubt about Grundy's yarn now."

Blake nodded without speaking, and it was in gloomy silence that the little party rode homewards. Any hopes they had cherished that Grundy & Co. had been mistaken were now dispelled. It seemed only too clear that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was indeed playing the "giddy goat."

CHAPTER 8.

A Capture for Knox!

THE game's gone on long enough!

Jack Blake made that remark emphatically, and he emphasised it still more by a bang on the table with his clenched fist that made the tea-cups dance.

It was the following day, and tea was just over in Study No. 6. Of the four owners of that study, however, only Blake, Herries, and Digby were present. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the shining light of the Fourth, and the other member of the Co., was conspicuous by his absence.

For Arthur Augustus was still giving his old pals the "marble eye." Since his eviction from Study No. 6 he had not once entered the portals of that celebrated apartment. He had his tea in Hall, and did his prep in the Common-room. And his time out of classes he spent mooning about lonely—and, from his appearance, decidedly miserable.

"What game?" asked Digby, in reply to Blake's remark. "I suppose you mean this Gussy business?"

"Of course!" snapped Blake. "The ass will be getting himself into serious trouble if this goes on. And it's up to us, as that fathead Grundy says, to take the reckless ass in hand and put a stop to his little game. He's told Tom Merry again he won't be turning out at cricket practice to-night, and that means he's going out again—probably to that beastly place in Rylcombe."

"Looks like it, I must say," agreed Herries.

"And if he goes out," said Jack Blake, rising from the table, "I jolly well suggest we go after him—whether it looks like spying or not. We'll keep an eye on the fool, and if he does go there we'll yank him out and bring him home if we have to frog-march him!"

"I certainly think we ought to chip in," agreed Digby. "We know he isn't capable of taking care of himself, and it's up to us to do it for him."

"Only thing to do," said Herries.



Monty Lowther found himself in a small, clean kitchen. Seated by the window was an old man, wearing a white bandage round his head. The disguised junior recognised him instantly. "Mornin', young sir!" was the old fellow's greeting. (See Chapter 10.)

"Then come on. We'll try the cycle-shed first, though. Pr'aps he's already gone out."

The three chums got their caps and proceeded at once to the cycle-shed. And there they found that Blake's surmise was correct. The stand that should have held D'Arcy's bike was empty.

"That settles it!" snapped Blake grimly. "Bikes out!"

And without losing a moment bikes were hauled from their stands, and the juniors were soon speeding along Rylcombe Lane.

"Better search the village first," suggested Herries, as they reached the outskirts of the little village. "If he's nowhere to be seen we can go on to the Green Man and scout round."

"All serene!"

The three Fourth-Formers dismounted and strolled along the old High Street, keeping a sharp look-out for their quarry. They had proceeded barely half-way along the street when Blake stopped suddenly, with a warning hiss, as a well-known figure emerged from a grocer's shop half a dozen yards ahead of them.

"Quick!" hissed Blake. "Don't let him spot us."

But it was too late. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—for it was he—had already ob-

served his old chums. He gave them one long, contemptuous glare, and strode away with his head in the air.

"He's spotted we're dogging him, I expect!" exclaimed Herries. "But what on earth is he doing—getting in provisions for a siege?"

"Looks jolly queer," commented Blake. "But never mind that now. Let's leave our jiggers at the bunshop, and follow the image."

The chums easily obtained permission to leave their bikes at the bunshop, and they came out again into the street just in time to see the elegant form of D'Arcy vanish down a narrow opening near the towpath of the river. And here Arthur Augustus turned up the opening between the cottages and the rear premises of the dingy-looking riverside inn. But there Blake & Co. paused irresolute.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Herries. "What a thumping nerve he's got! Who'd have thought it of old Gussy? But what's the next move, Jack?"

Jack Blake glanced around him with a worried frown. To be seen entering such a place by anyone in authority would mean a public flogging, if not expulsion. But they had vowed to take Gussy in hand, and Blake, for one, had no intention of drawing back.

"Our next move," he said grimly, "is

to get old Gussy out of this beastly hole, and if he won't come quietly we're going to haul the mad idiot out by the scruff of the neck."

So saying, Blake led the way boldly up the opening, and, unlatching the little gate at the end, they passed through and found themselves in a large stable-yard adjoining the inn on the right, and running along the rear of the cottages on the left.

Then Blake's eyes fell upon a side-door to the inn, and he was moving towards it, when he stopped suddenly as if turned to stone. From the doorway a tall youth had emerged—a youth wearing a St. Jim's cap. But it was not D'Arcy. It was Gerald Knox of the Sixth.

As his eyes fell upon the juniors standing there he stopped dead, and his face flushed guiltily. And then, just as swiftly, a cunning grin spread over his ill-favoured features.

"So I've caught you, you young scoundrels!" he rapped out, with malicious satisfaction. "I've suspected something of this sort for some time. You'll come with me, my beauties—at once!"

"What do you mean, Knox?" demanded Blake angrily. "If you jolly well think—"

"It doesn't need thinking—it's plain

enough!" sneered Knox. "I've fairly caught you red—"

"What about yourself? What are you doing in there—a prefect?" shouted Herries hotly.

"I happened to see you juniors enter the place," smiled Knox. "And in my capacity as prefect I came to haul you out."

"Why, you rotter—"

"That's enough!" snapped Knox harshly. "I came after you youngsters, and I fancy you'll find it difficult to convince the Head otherwise. Are you coming quietly or not?"

Blake & Co. stared furiously at the sneering prefect. But there was no help for it. They had been caught red-handed in the precincts of a disreputable inn, and they knew it would only make matters worse to resist authority. But where was D'Arcy? That was the question they were asking themselves. How had Knox failed to stumble over that junior?

"Very well," muttered Blake at last. "We'll come, Knox. But what about our bikes—they're in the village?"

"Never mind your bikes; you can get those later—though I fancy you won't need them much longer at St. Jim's. Now get a move on, my merry blades!"

And the prefect led the way through the little gate and on to the towpath.

The walk back to St. Jim's was a miserable and humiliating experience for the three captives. The knowledge that Knox himself, who they felt certain had visited the inn for his own shady ends, was the person to charge them, was galling in the extreme.

"I suppose you're taking us straight to the Head, Knox?" asked Blake grimly. "If so—"

"Unfortunately, no," said Knox. "The Head has been called to London, and won't be back until to-morrow evening. He went up by the six-thirty from Rylcombe." Then, as the prefect noted the looks of relief on the juniors' faces, he went on with a sneer: "But if you imagine that Railton will let you off, you're making a bloomer, my infants! The crime's too jolly serious for him to deal with. You'll be shoved in the detention-room until the Head's return if I'm not mistaken."

Blake did not reply to that. Their position was serious, he knew, especially as they could not defend themselves without giving D'Arcy away; and none of them had the slightest intention of doing that, of course. And it was in no happy frame of mind that the unlucky juniors waited in the passage a few minutes later as Knox knocked on the door of Mr. Railton's study.

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy Chips In!

"COME in!"

Mr. Railton, the kindly Housemaster of the School House, looked up from his desk as the prefect ushered his victims into the study.

"Well, Knox, what is the matter?" he queried, eyeing the invaders impatiently.

"It is my duty, sir, to bring these boys before you on a very serious charge."

Mr. Railton frowned. His opinion of Knox's sense of duty was not nearly as high as his opinion of the three culprits' characters.

"What is the nature of the charge, Knox?" he demanded sharply.

"They were found by me less than an hour ago," said Knox, "in the act of entering a disreputable inn on the outskirts of Rylcombe, sir."

Mr. Railton started, and eyed Blake & Co. in astonishment.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Is this correct, Blake?"

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Blake, flushing a little. "Knox certainly did catch us in the stable-yard of the Green Man Inn. But—but we were there for no dishonourable purpose, I can assure you, sir."

"It is plain to me, sir," said Knox, with a sneer, "that the young scamps visited that disreputable place in order to smoke and gamble. But I suppose they'll say they went there to ask the time, or some—"

"Pray be silent, Knox!" rapped Mr. Railton tartly. "I have no desire to hear your suppositions, sir! And might I inquire what you yourself were doing there, Knox?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the prefect smoothly. "I happened to be strolling along the towpath, when I was astonished and horrified to see these juniors entering the place in question. Believing it my duty, I at once hurried round to the front of the inn, and passing through the bar, I caught them red-handed on the point of entering by the side-door. I ordered them to return immediately with me to the school."

Knox glanced covertly at the Housemaster as he finished. As a matter of fact, the rascally prefect had not had the faintest idea when he emerged from the side-door of the inn that Blake & Co. were within a couple of miles of the place. But it would hardly do to tell Mr. Railton that. And it would certainly never do to tell the master that he had been having a quiet game of billiards in the billiard-room.

To the prefect's relief, however, Mr. Railton accepted the explanation, though with evident reluctance. Mr. Railton had his own views of Knox's character and habits. He looked curiously at the juniors. Though somewhat dejected, they looked anything but guilty wrongdoers brought to book.

"Now, boys," he said quietly, "I await your explanations. You have been found on the premises of a disreputable hostelry—a serious offence against the rules of this school. I am quite ready to believe—in fact, I am quite sure that you did not go there with a disgraceful object in view. But I insist upon knowing that object."

Blake, Herries, and Digby were silent. They could not defend themselves without dragging D'Arcy's name into the business. And Mr. Railton's brow contracted as he noted their obvious confusion.

"I am waiting, Blake!" he exclaimed sternly.

Jack Blake pulled himself together. "I—I'm sorry, sir," he muttered desperately. "We cannot tell you that. But we beg you to believe that we have done nothing we are ashamed of."

There was a silence within the room.

"I am afraid I cannot accept your assurance on that point, my boy," Mr. Railton said quietly. "It seems obvious that had you a worthy motive you would not be afraid to tell me what it was. I am sorry to have to take this view, as hitherto I have considered you incapable of conduct such as this. The matter, however, is much too serious for me to deal with. You will be taken to the punishment-room, and remain there until Dr. Holmes returns to-morrow night—"

Mr. Railton paused as a firm knock sounded at the door, and, in response to his irritable "Come in!" a junior entered the study.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of the Fourth was flushed and breathless, but his face was set and determined.

"Well, D'Arcy?" demanded the master. "I am very busy—"

"It is of the greatest importance, sir," gasped D'Arcy, with a scornful and indignant glance at his former chums. "Am I wight in pwesumin' that Knox has weported these wott—I mean, Blake, Hewvies, and Digby for visiting a certain hostelwy in Wylcombe called the Gween Man, sir?"

"You are quite right, sir!" snapped Mr. Railton. "But, really—"

"Then I beg of you, sir, to listen to my remarks!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus earnestly. "Although Blake, Hewvies, and Digby are no longah fwends of mine, I cannot allow them to be unjustly accused, bai Jove! And I—"

"Dry up, Gussy, you ass!" hissed Blake stealthily. "What's the good—"

"I uttably wefuse to dwy up, Blake, and I must wequest you to wefwain fwom addressin' me, as I no longah know you—"

"D'Arcy," thundered Mr. Railton, "what are you talking about? Explain yourself at once, boy!"

"Yaas, sir. I desiah to assuah you, Mr. Wailton, that Blake, Hewvies, and Digby visited that howwible place meahly to look for me; their visit was entirely innocent of any questionable motive, bai Jove!"

"Bless my soul! Do you mean to suggest, my boy, that these juniors followed you there, D'Arcy?"

"Exactly!" assented D'Arcy serenely. "For what reason?" demanded the bewildered master.

"The feahful wottahs were doggin' me—that is, twackin' me! And they must have seen me entah the stable-yard, and followed me, as I stwongly suspect, to dwag me out by force. Fortunately for the wottahs, howevah, I saw that wott—ahem!—I saw Knox appwehend them, and I returned huwvedly in ordah to put the mattah wight. I twust, sir—"

"This—is this—is a put-up yarn!" snorted Knox fiercely. "They've concocted this story—"

"Kindly be silent, Knox!" said Mr. Railton quickly. "Blake, can you assure me that D'Arcy's statements are correct?"

Blake hesitated. But he realised it was useless to attempt to screen Arthur Augustus now.

"Yes, sir!" he exclaimed slowly. "We went after Gus—I mean, D'Arcy. But—but I hope you don't think he's been up to anything wrong! He's rather an ass, you know—"

"Yes, that's it, sir!" gasped Herries eagerly. "He can't help doing these—"

"Bai Jove, you feahful wottahs—"

"Silence!" stormed Mr. Railton angrily. "This nonsense must cease, D'Arcy! You do not appear to realise the seriousness of your position! I demand to know at once why you entered that place?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his eyeglass firmly into place.

"I wegwet, sir," he replied quietly, "that it is uttably impos for me to enlighten you upon that point. With all respect—"

"You refuse to tell me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir. I am afwaid it is impos. But I will give you my word of honour that my visits to that locality are above wepwoach, so that will be quite all wight, sir!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "But it will not be all right, D'Arcy—far from it, indeed! Unless you can give me a satisfactory explanation of you visits there, my boy, you will find yourself in a very serious position! As I have already told Blake, the matter

is much too serious for me to deal with further. You will be placed under detention until Dr. Holmes returns, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"
"But I advise you, for your own sake, my boy," went on Mr. Raitlon kindly, "to decide to abandon this obstinate attitude before that time comes. Knox, you will kindly conduct D'Arcy to the detention-room, and see that his wants are attended to."

Knox beckoned to the alarmed Arthur Augustus with ill-concealed satisfaction, and almost before Blake & Co. had realised the fact the door had closed upon both of them.

Then Mr. Raitlon turned gravely to Blake, Herries, and Digby, and eyed them steadily.

"I am inclined to think," he exclaimed at last, "that there is more behind this affair than appears on the surface. And, though I am satisfied that you three boys visited that undesirable place for your friend's sake, you have broken one of the most stringent rules, and I can hold out no hope that you will escape punishment! You may go now, but you will doubtless be required to go before Dr. Holmes to-morrow evening when he investigates the matter. Meanwhile, you must not leave the precincts of the school."

The three juniors quitted the study. Out in the passage they exchanged startled looks.

"Poor old Gussy!" muttered Blake huskily. "This means the sack, or a public flogging at least. Why doesn't the silly ass explain? I'm convinced now, if I wasn't before, that he hasn't been up to anything shady. There's something jolly queer behind all this!"

"No doubt about that," agreed Digby. "It gets more and more of a puzzle. But we must hope for the best. A lot might happen before to-morrow night."

But though Digby spoke hopefully, neither he nor his chums looked very hopeful as they bent their steps towards Study No. 6.

Gussy could be as obstinate as a mule when he chose to be. And if there was a secret he was hiding that his dignity or code of honour prevented him from divulging, they knew he would suffer even expulsion rather than save himself by speaking.

But what was the secret? Rack their brains as they might, not one of the three could find an answer to the question.

But an answer was to be forthcoming—before very long, did they but know it. And it was an answer that surprised all concerned very much—and especially Jack Blake—when it did come.

CHAPTER 10.

Daylight at Last!

"I'VE got an idea, you chaps!"
Monty Lowther made that announcement the following day after dinner as he came into Study No. 10. The humorist of the Shell was looking quite serious for once. There were very few fellows in the Lower School at St. Jim's, in fact, who were not looking serious that morning.

For the grievous trouble that had befallen the popular chums of Study No. 6 was felt by all and sundry, with the possible exception of Aubrey Raake & Co. But to the others—the decent chaps—the thought that old Gussy, the ornament of the Fourth, was in danger of expulsion was not to be endured for a moment.

"Oh, have you?" snapped Tom Merry, in reply to Lowther. "Then, if it's of a humorous nature, you can keep it to yourself! We don't want any silly jokes now, I can tell you, Lowther!"

"I'm not feeling funny myself just now," said Lowther quietly. "I think

you said a minute ago, Tommy, that you'd give anything to get to the bottom of this D'Arcy business?"

"Yes, I did; and I mean it!"
"Then, give me your ears, and I'll deliver the goods!" said Lowther. "I think we're all pretty well agreed that D'Arcy's quarrel with Blake and the silly goat's visits to the Green Man are connected in some mysterious way or other?"

Tom Merry nodded without speaking.
"Well," said Lowther slowly, "the only thing to do, in my opinion, is to do a bit of detective work round the Green Man—or, better still, get hold of that strable-boy chap, and pump him—"

"Well, of all the rotten, piffing ideas ever—"

"Wait!" interposed Monty Lowther. "I know what you're going to say—that the chap would refuse to be pumped. I've no doubt he would—unless he thought he was speaking to Gussy himself."

"What do you mean, ass?"
"I mean that if one of us—I'll tackle the job myself—got himself up as Gussy, with eyeglass and waistcoat complete, he'd stand a jolly good chance of learning something if he used his wits."

"Oh!"
Tom Merry and Manners stared blankly at their chum.

"Sounds all right!" muttered Tom Merry doubtfully. "But—but it's hardly playing the game, is it?"

"I don't see it. I think we'd be quite justified, under the circumstances. Blake and his pals are gated, so it's up to us to do something. We could get some of Gussy's clothes, and a spare eyeglass from Blake, who, I bet, will jump at the idea. And weally, you know, deah boys, I've taken Gussy off befoah, bai Jove!"

"Jolly good wheeze, I think!" commented Manners. "Not as if we wanted to spy on Gussy to do him harm."

"H'm! Might do some good," said Tom Merry dubiously. "Anyway, we'll think it over and—"

"No time for thinking it over, Tommy," said Lowther warmly. "It's got to be done this afternoon if we're to save Gussy. Let's go and put it to Blake at once."

Tom Merry did not feel very hopeful; but anything was better than inaction.

And without further ado the Terrible Three proceeded to Study No. 6. And, as Monty Lowther had surmised, Blake took up the idea with enthusiasm. They were only too glad to fall in with anything that promised a solution of the mystery.

And less than ten minutes later the three Shell fellows had left St. Jim's, and were hurrying along the towpath by the shining Ryll. When a hundred yards from the Green Man they halted, and Lowther took from a parcel he carried a gorgeous fancy waistcoat, a striking tie, some patent-leather boots, and a pair of spats.

There was nobody in sight, and Monty Lowther quickly made the change. Then he jammed his hat down over his forehead, and, screwing a monocle into his eye, posed for inspection and criticism.

"How do I look, deah boys?" he inquired, with a chuckle. "Weally, it's a toppin' affahnoon, bai Jove!"

"Perfectly priceless!" commented Manners.

"Gussy to the life!" agreed Tom Merry, laughing. "You wouldn't take any of our fellows in, of course; but you would an outsider. But you must take jolly good care nobody spots you entering that beastly place, Lowther."

"Twust me, bai Jove!"

But as it happened, fortunately, it was not necessary for Lowther to enter the doors of the Green Man at all. For even as Tom Merry spoke a youth emerged

from the opening ahead and came towards the juniors, with hands jammed deep into the pockets of his riding-breeches.

"What ripping luck!" murmured Lowther quickly. "Here's that blessed stable-boy chap! Keep out of sight, you fellows!"

And Lowther hurried to meet him. As he came up to him the horsey-looking youth touched his cap respectfully.

"Mornin', Master D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "G'sin' to see the old man agen?"

"The—the old man?" said Lowther blankly. "What— Oh, yes, of course, bai Jove!"

"Then I'll see you along there," said the youth. "You'll be glad to 'ear, mebbe, 'e's much better to-day. The doctor's bin, and 'e sez the old chap will be fit to work agen in about a week."

"You—you don't say?" gasped Lowther, in astonishment. Then, remembering himself, he said: "Weally, you know, I'm extremly welieved to heah that, bai Jove!"

"E's sittin' up this morning in the kitchen," explained the youth further, as he led the way into the stable-yard.

But Lowther was too astonished to answer. He had imagined that by the "old man" the youth had meant old Jolliffe, the landlord of the Green Man Inn. But next moment he got a bigger surprise. Instead of leading the way to the side-door of the inn, his guide turned to the left, and, stopping at the back door of one of the cottages that abutted upon the stable-yard, he lifted the latch.

"Come right inside, sir, and sit down," invited the youth. "Ere's Master D'Arcy to see you agen, granddad."

As if in a dream, Monty Lowther accepted the invitation, and found himself in a small, ill-furnished, but scrupulously clean kitchen. Seated by the tiny window was an old man, wearing a white bandage round his head. And the junior recognised him at once as an old fellow known locally as Old Joe, who did odd jobs for local farmers.

"Mornin', young sir!" was the old fellow's greeting. "Very kind of you to come and see me agen so soon."

"N-n-not at all!" gasped Monty Lowther. "I'm glad to hear you are much better, bai Jove!"

"Beg your pardon, sir!"

"E's a bit deaf is the old chap," explained the youth cheerfully. "You'll have to speak up, sir."

Lowther gasped, and repeated his remark a little louder.

"Thanks to what you've done, I am," said old Joe earnestly. "It were a tidy old bang from that cricket-ball, but it's—"

"Cricket-ball!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "What cricket-ball?"

"The cricket-ball what 'it me," said old Joe, eyeing the junior in surprise. "The cricket-ball that skoolfeller of yours 'it me with, of course. 'Ave you forgotten it, Master D'Arcy?"

Monty Lowther stared at the old man for a moment. Then a glimmering of the truth flashed into his mind, and his eyes gleamed.

"The cricket-ball what 'it me," said quickly. "But—but the fact is, I'm not quite clear on one or two points. I wonder if you'd mind telling me all about it again, if it wouldn't worry you too much?"

"That it wouldn't," was the surprised answer. "But you knows more about it than me, Master D'Arcy. All I knows about it is that I was hoeing 'taters in a field near the skool when that cricket-ball crashes through the 'edge and 'its me on the 'ead; and a tidy jar it was—fairly knocked me silly. Then you comes along and 'ears me groan, and brings

me home in a trap—like the kind young gentleman you are.”

“M-m-m-m-my ha— Ahem! And—and you don’t even know who threw the ball?” asked Lowther hastily.

“Didn’t even hear anybody—me being a bit deaf. All I knows is what you said afterwards, that he was just rushing away on his bike when you comes along, and, ‘im being a friend of yours, you asked us to keep it secret—which it being plainly an accident ‘ave done, not even tellin’ the doctor how it happened.”

“And very generous of you; not to do so!” exclaimed Lowther, rising to his feet. “Well, I—I think I’ll be trotting now, bai Jove! Is there anything I can do for you—anything you’re short of, by the way?”

“Thank you, sir, nothing,” said the old fellow gratefully. “That stuff you brought last night will last us weeks. And the money you’ve given young Alf will pay the doctor an’ see us through till I gets to work agen. You’re a gentleman, and no mistake, young sir—the best-hearted gentleman I ever met. If you ‘adn’t come to the rescue with money and provisions like you did, it would ‘ave meant the workhouse infirmary for me and nothing else, and I tell ‘ee I’m more than grateful.”

“That—that’s all right,” stammered Monty Lowther feebly.

And, hurriedly bidding the old man and his grandson good-bye, Lowther left the cottage, his brain in a whirl. Out in the lane he took a deep, deep breath.

“Well, I’m blessed!” he ejaculated. “This—this business beats the band, takes the cake, and prances off with the whole giddy biscuit-factory!”

And that also was the opinion of Tom Merry and Manners when Monty Lowther related the astonishing story to them a few minutes later.

“It—it’s amazing!” breathed Tom Merry. “So that’s the secret of it all! It’s all through that fat rascal Baggy Trimble. Why, it’s plain enough what happened. Don’t you chaps remember Blake telling us how Baggy had pinched his bike that afternoon, and how, after walloping him with his bicycle-pump, that silly fool Baggy had pitched a stone or something after him? It must have been a cricket-ball, not a stone, and it crashed through the hedge and hit that poor old chap.”

“Great Scott, yes!”
“You’ve hit it, Tommy,” said Manners quietly. “And old Gussy evidently came along just in time to see Blake running away, and naturally thought Blake had done it, and was too afraid to stop and see the thing out. No wonder Gussy was upset with Blake; I should have been myself.”

Tom Merry nodded, and then his face brightened.

“Why, this is simply ripping, you chaps!” he said joyfully. “We can now clear Blake and we can clear D’Arcy—in fact, everybody and everything. Of course, we’ll have to explain everything to Railton, though we’d better keep Baggy’s name out of it if possible. After all, it was an accident. And now everything in the garden’s lovely once more. Come on; let us hence!”

And the three triumphant investigators returned cheerfully to St. Jim’s to clear the matter up.

An hour later seven juniors emerged from Mr. Railton’s study. They were Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., and their faces were radiant. Out in the passage six of them surrounded the bewildered-looking Arthur Augustus.

“Now, Gussy, you old ass—”
“Gussy, you dummy—”

“Bai Jove!” D’Arcy gasped and surveyed his chums penitently. “Bai Jove, deah boys, I am quite flustered, you know! I am bewildered, bai Jove! What does it all mean?”

“It means that everything’s all serene!” chuckled Tom Merry. “You heard what Railton said—that you’ve been a silly ass but a good ass, that you’ve been over-secretive, but have acted in a noble and unselfish manner, and that he was proud of you; and so say all of us!”

D’Arcy blushed, and turned humbly to Jack Blake.

“Blake, deah boy,” he faltered, “I wondah if you’ll evah forgive me—”

“On one condition,” said Blake, “that you replace our names on your list of friends.”

“Yaas, wathah! I will gladly do that, bai Jove!”

“And now, what about tea?” asked Herries.

“That is a vevy good suggestion, Hewwies. I considah, deah boys, that this occasion requires an extva special tea, and I shall be vevy pleased— Oh, bai Jove, I forgot, though,” added D’Arcy hastily. “All my tin has gone to—to—”

“Yes, you old ass, we know where it’s gone!” said Tom Merry, linking his arm affectionately in D’Arcy’s. “But it’s my treat. Come along—”

“Half a mo!” said Blake grimly. “There’s a little matter to be settled before tea. Look here, Cussy, you thought we had mucked up your clobber and things, didn’t you?”

“Yaas, I’m afraid so. But, weally, I—”

“Then now you can come and lend a hand in bumping the dirty rotters who did do it,” said Blake. “Come along, avengers!”

And a few minutes later sounds of strife and wails of woe were floating from the study occupied by Aubrey Racke of the Shell.

Messrs. Racke & Co. were finding out that the way of the transgressor is hard—and sometimes bumpy!

(Another grand long story of Tom Merry and Co. next week, entitled: “SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!” by Martin Clifford. Make a point of ordering your copy EARLY.)



The Hidden House

By the Author of “DRIVEN FROM HOME.”

This dramatic and enthralling mystery story will thrill you as no story has ever thrilled you before. Startling surprises and exciting incidents by the score. Do not miss the superb, long opening instalment in TO-DAY’S issue of

The Butterfly

The Celebrated Weekly Comic.

The Editor’s Chat.

Note:—Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Address: Editor, The “Gem,” The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Next Wednesday’s Attractions.

The two school stories which are due to appear in next week’s number I can safely say equal the best that have ever been published.

The first is a magnificent, long, complete tale of the famous chums of St. Jim’s, entitled:

“SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!”

By Martin Clifford,

which deals, in a most exciting and fascinating manner, with a great sensation which arises within that famous seat of learning.

The first thing which starts the sensation is the news of the discovery of several clues concerning a certain ancient treasure belonging to the school, which is supposed to be hidden in the vaults.

Following this, happenings both amusing and astonishing spring up, and the juniors soon find themselves in a perfect maze of them.

Appreciation is never lacking from my loyal readers, and I am sure you will all be pleased with

“SPOOFING THE SCHOOL!”

There is another splendid long tale of St. Katie’s School on the programme, under the title of

“BLIND JUSTICE!”

By Michael Poole.

Smithy of the Shell takes a very prominent part as an amateur detective in one of the most perplexing little problems which has ever occurred at St. Katie’s. In this fine story Michael Poole quite excels himself, and I advise my chums not to miss

“BLIND JUSTICE!”

Another long instalment of the strange adventures of

“A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!”

By “Cooes,”

and

“MY READERS’ OWN CORNER!”

a page wholly devoted to breezy contributions sent in by keen Gemites, who receive for every par published a prize of half-a-crown, will complete next week’s fine number.

CROWDED OUT!

The further adventures of the “New Chum in Australia” have been unavoidably held over for this week, but a further instalment will appear next week.

Your Editor

DO NOT MISS READING THIS GRAND LONG SCHOOL STORY.

THE GREAT RAG AT KATIE'S



A Splendid Long Tale of the Boys
of St. Katie's School.

By MICHAEL POOLE.

CHAPTER 1.

Sad Days Ahead.

THE head boy of the Transitus Form was Richard Dexter.

Second on the list of merit was James Curtis, late of Australia.

Fifth on the Transitus Form list was William Strong. J. A. Dobbins was seventh, three marks only behind Strong.

This isn't a dream or a fairy story; it's just a plain and simple record of hard facts. There were the lists, properly signed by the Head, and the Beak wasn't the sort of man to indulge in practical jokes!

The Head himself had set the examination. More, the Fifth had done exactly the same papers—and the Fifth had been most decidedly and decisively left! Richard Dexter was head of the two Forms; Curtis was third, Strong was seventh, and Dobbie was bracketed with a Fifth man for the tenth place in the combined list.

The day after the lists were out was a pleasant day for the Transitus. Jolly Roger beamed upon them; he spent most of the morning in jawing to them about the tremendous advantage of having a first-class intellect and of the pride he felt in the work of the Form.

The Transitus didn't quite know where they were, especially when the Beak himself walked in and put the gilt edging on all that Roger had said. In particular he complimented Dexter and Curtis on the uniform excellence of their papers, and he looked forward to the day when they would add to their laurels by winning honours for the school.

You might think that Roger bragged about it in the masters' Common-room? He didn't! He told them quite frankly that he had been coaching Dexter, Curtis, and Duff very strenuously for a fortnight or more, and it just proved his theories and the soundness of his judgment. That was all!

But everybody agreed that in dragging

Duff away from the bottom of the list Roger had achieved a wonderful performance. Altogether, Mr. Blunt's reputation stood tremendously high after the business.

It's difficult to say what Study No. 10 thought about it all. They didn't say very much for a day or two because it was rather a shock to them to find that they were really good boys who brought joy to their kind headmaster and gladness to the heart of Jolly Roger.

The Kid tasted the first bitterness of goodness when he met Stanhope and Whitehouse of the Fifth. In days gone by they had helped the Kid in one or two of his most successful stunts.

"Who's that?" Whitehouse asked of Stanhope, and they both stood and looked at the Kid as though he were some queer freak.

"That?" Stanhope said cheerfully. "That's the very latest specimen of the Swottums Pi-Pi. It's a very gentle and sweet little animal, quite tame, and lives on dictionaries and grammars, and it weeps all night if its master says an unkind word. Diddums, little one!"

And Stanhope patted the Kid on the head—but dodged just in time to avoid Dexter's right arm, which shot swiftly out.

"Nasty at times!" said Whitehouse. "You mustn't do that, little boy! Run away and get on with your swotting, else I'll tell Roger that his little pet is naughty-naughty! The prize swot of the Trans! Look at it! Oh, my hat!"

Again they both jumped swiftly, and at the correct moment. From a safe distance Stanhope and Whitehouse called again to the Kid.

"Frightfully boring, aren't they, Sammy, these precocious children? And that's the thing Sammy says we must try to emulate!"

Whitehouse called out an equally feeble gibe, and the Kid passed on with a wave of his hand, which was meant to

indicate the fact that a kennel was the proper place for such microbes.

He really didn't feel capable of crushing them. Somehow, he hadn't quite got used to the importance of his new position.

In the course of the next two or three days the Kid got the same sort of feeling that a reformed burglar would have on taking up a bobby's job. He felt his neck growing stiff and was afraid to smile, and he began to think of the dear, glad days that were gone.

Then, about a week after the examination, Curtis and Strong were sent for by the Head. They went in wonder, because their careers of late had been high-class models of goodness.

They came back in about ten minutes, and sank into chairs quietly and sadly. The Kid, looking up from the book he was reading, perceived that they had had a shock.

"What's wrong, Bill?" he asked. "The Beak's not been jawing you? What for?"

"Tell 'em, Kangy!" said Bill weakly. "It's rotten! We can't help it, Kid!"

"It's not good enough!" Curtis jerked out. "I don't think Roger likes it, either. It's upsetting everything! And, anyhow, why should they drop on us two? It isn't playing the game! In Australia they took the whole bunch, or else— Anyway, they never played about with the thing in this way!"

"But what's it all about?" Dobbie demanded.

Curtis looked at Strong, and Bill looked at Curtis.

"Tell 'em, Kangy!" urged Bill; and you could see that whatever the news was it had cut Bill to the quick.

"For the love of Mike, tell us what it is!" cried the Kid, as Curtis shook his head dolefully. "Get it out—quick!"

Curtis took in a deep breath and faced the Kid bravely.

"We—Bill and I—are going into the Fifth! Just the two of us! End of this week probably. We're going to have the study next to Smithy, and Gore's coming in here. That's all!"

"We—Dobbin and I—stay on in the Trans? And Gore—he'll be third man in here?"

The Kid spoke in a queer, strained sort of voice, but no one noticed it very much, because they were all feeling pretty feeble and wanted time to think about things.

Somehow, they managed to talk about it presently. The Beak hadn't said very much, and Jolly Roger had said even less. All it amounted to was that the Head was pleased with the way they had both conducted themselves of late, both in their work and in recreation, and that they were both old enough for the Fifth, so that in all probability they would be transferred to that Form at the end of the week.

He had apparently given them a little hint that for the next few days they were on trial, so to speak, but he had every confidence—and so on. They really weren't quite sure what he jayed about, because they were stunned with the news.

Roger had added the information regarding the change of study, and the fact that Gore would be transferred to Study No. 10.

"Gors! In here!" the Kid gasped. "I loathe the beast!"

"My hat!" said Dobbie. "The good old days are fairly knocked back now, aren't they? Why did they choose you two? Because you're big fellows, I suppose? The Kid is good enough for the Fifth. He's Head of the Form now, and beat all their pots. S'pose they think it isn't safe to let him out of Jolly Roger's sight. And me—I'm good enough for the Fifth! Why couldn't they move us all together?"

"I don't know. I don't want to go into the Fifth," was all that Bill Strong could answer. "We told the Beak so, but he didn't take any notice—just went on jawing."

The Kid rose and strolled to the door. The last remark he heard was from Jimmy Curtis.

"I don't want to go in the Fifth. They are no better, if as good, as we are, and it means breaking up the happy home!"

Have you ever had that funny sort of feeling, when you've done your best and tried your hardest, and somebody turns round on you, and says: "I've caught you! I knew you could do it. You've given yourself away this time, my lad!" and you feel you want to hit them good and hard, and then smash a lot of things after that, only you don't quite know what to smash, and, anyway, you daren't hit back?

The Kid had that feeling as he strolled along the corridor. He never heard the sound of footsteps behind him as he wandered down the stairs, and it came as a bit of a shock when a firm hand descended on his shoulder, and someone said in a cheerful voice:

"Ah, Dexter! I want to speak to you for a moment!"

It was Jolly Roger, and he took command of the Kid just as a big fisherman takes command of a worm, and led him into his own room.

"I've just been speaking to the head-master about the Transitus," Roger said cheerfully. "We are probably making a certain number of moves during the next few weeks. Curtis and Strong are going to the Fifth—if all goes well. You will remain in the Transitus, but the Head thinks that in the course of a few weeks you might be good enough for the Civil Service Fifth. You would like that, I

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think, and with your capacity you ought to do well. I thought I would just tell you. Keep up your good record during the next few weeks. I shall be sorry to lose you, but— We shall see!"

"Yes, sir," said the Kid. "Thank you, sir!"

Once more the Kid wandered forth. The sinking feeling had grown worse. He really felt that he was going to be ill, and rather hoped it. The C.S. Fifth! The Form where all the prize swots were trained! Where they regularly spent their afternoons in swotting, and had special lectures, and lived with that little toad Hartopp! The Kid tried to picture himself as one of that crowd—and wanted to weep!

"Cheer-ho, Kid!" someone called gently to him in the court; and, looking, the Kid observed Duffy gently heaving stones after each other. He looked different to-day. His smile was feeble, and the calm, contented look had gone from his eyes.

He walked over to Dexter, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Heard the latest trouble, Kid?" he asked gently. "I knew it would come. I'm fairly in the soup! Been up before the Beak. Jolly Roger was there, too."

"What for?" the Kid asked, for even in his own sorrow he could spare a tear for others. "Did they put you through the hoop?"

"Not exactly," sighed the Duffer. "They were pretty decent in a way—let me down lightly, you know. The Beak said he quite understood that my mind was bent on practical affairs, and book-learning didn't appeal; but it just had to be, and he thought that the scientific side would attract me more, and—well, if I'm a good little lad I'm going to be chucked into the Science Fifth! Me' among the Mugs!"

From among those outside the scientists their Form was known as the Mugs. The Transitus regarded it as a blot upon the earth.

"It's Jolly Roger, of course," Duffy went on. "He said he'd reform us, didn't he? He's done it, laddie! I gathered a lot while the Beak was doing the lecture act on me. You'll be going, Kid, very soon, and they'll put you among the high-brow merchants in the Civvies! The Transitus is reformed and cured, and has reached a very high standard. The Beak said it himself; and he's going to parcel 'em out gradually. Oh, they've got the whole scheme mapped out," Jolly Roger has won—hands down!"

The Kid stared at Duff as though he had made some amazing and extraordinary statement, then nodded his head abruptly.

"Expect you're right, Duffy!" he said jerkily, and turned away.

Somehow, Duff felt that the Kid wanted to be alone, and he didn't worry him any further.

The last he saw of him was when the Kid turned into the wood just beyond the playing-fields, and for a couple of hours after that no one saw Richard Dexter at all. He wanted to think about things all by himself.

CHAPTER 2.

The Wreckers at Work!

THE news about coming changes in the Transitus spread swiftly. There were others beside Curtis and Strong who had been warned that promotion was about to fall upon him.

In most cases they were just about as pleased as Bill Strong and the Kangaroo. It wants a lot of explaining to make it quite clear just why nobody wanted the

removal business to take place at this particular juncture.

For one thing, the Transitus had had it firmly fixed in their minds for a long time past that they were quite as good as the Fifth. Of course, there would have to be removals and changes one bright day, but when the time came for that sort of thing it was up to the Head to make a decent job of it, and not start tinkering round and breaking up little sets.

When the correct and proper time came the Head ought to move practically the whole of Transitus, instead of moving about four into the Fifth, one or two into the Civvies, and two or three into the Mugs. It wasn't—well, it wasn't the thing!

The Fifth didn't like it, either. They wanted a decent chance of wiping the earth with the Transitus in various departments; but there wasn't going to be any fun in the job if Strong and Curtis, who were the best men in the Transitus sporting department, were on the Fifth side.

Nor were the Fifth and the Transitus the only people who weren't quite happy about the whole business. Jolly Roger felt that he had rather overdone the reform business, and wanted to persuade the Head that things weren't quite so bright as they appeared. But the Beak insisted on the fact that he was tremendously pleased and delighted, and, very regretfully, Roger had to fall in with his wishes.

During the next twelve or eighteen hours after the news had been made semi-public Roger's eagle eyes and hawk-like ears saw and heard many things that he wasn't supposed to know. He noted, for instance, that Richard Dexter was apparently stunned that afternoon when he was informed of his own possible remove.

He further observed that Dexter was almost sullen in preparation school that night. You could see that he was depressed and miserable, and that he had something on his mind.

Yet in morning school on the following day the master of the Transitus observed that the head boy of the Form was cheerfully bright and alert, and that his big blue eyes were shining with that wistful sort of radiance which made Richard look like one of the cherubs on a calendar. Roger had noted that sweetly innocent gaze before, and had learned to get ready for trouble.

But he couldn't see how anything could occur at present. To Mr. Steed he mentioned the fact that he thought the proposed removes were not exactly popular, but Sammy merely shrugged his shoulders.

"They may not be popular," said the master of the Fifth. "I don't know that I agree with them myself. But I am quite convinced that neither you nor I, and certainly no boys, will change the Head's decision. Nothing short of an earthquake would do that."

"An earthquake?" mused Roger, quite seriously. "Yes; you are right, Steed. And I don't think even my pet youths in the Transitus can arrange an earthquake."

And Roger laughed at his own forebodings, especially when he saw Dexter setting off for Dulchester with Curtis. Quite a number of fellows saw the two go, but an even greater number had been informed that Curtis and Dexter were going to have an afternoon on their own in the town. They were fed-up with cricket and amusements of that sort.

Of course, there wasn't anything in two fellows going to Dulchester, and it wouldn't have been mentioned in this history if it weren't for the fact that

they hadn't the slightest intention of going into Dulchester.

Quite early that morning the Kid had approached Curtis, and, being assured that they were alone and could discuss secrets, he spoke to him frankly.

"Do you really want to go into the Fifth, Jimmy?" Dexter asked.

"I do not!" said Curtis emphatically. "Not yet, anyway! If you and Dobbie and old Duffy and the Busy Bees were coming it wouldn't be so bad, but even then— No, I don't want to go to the Fifth yet!"

"You wouldn't mind a giddy little ramp if you thought it would put the tin hat on the Fifth business?" suggested the Kid gently.

Just for a few seconds Jimmy Curtis looked at the Kid, and he perceived the gleam of excitement in Dexter's eyes. Wherefore, he put his hand on the Kid's shoulder firmly and heavily.

"It's a jolly funny thing, Kid," he said, "but my mind seems to run just the same way as yours! Ever since the Beak mentioned the matter, and gave a sort of hint that we were to be on our best behaviour, I've been wondering—and old Bill's feeling a bit the same, I know. Only, we can't go on the giddy ramp without the Beak getting the idea. You see what I mean? He'd spot Bill and me, and guess we'd done it to miss going into the Fifth. And he'd just dump us in the next day to show that he wasn't the sort to stand any nonsense!"

Dexter smiled gladly and joyously. "Come and talk with me, Kangy! Hearken to my words, little one! It's your Uncle Richard you want to look after you when there's something to be done. It's a deep, deep plot, Jimmy, and maybe you won't see the beauty of it right away. But I'll explain. You trust your uncle when it comes to knowing what the Beak really wants. And I've got it for him!"

In a dark, secluded corner, away from Roger's eagle eyes, the Kid explained and gave full details.

Just at first Curtis didn't see that it was going to help one little bit, but the Kid explained more fully, pointing out how the Beak's mind really would work, and how everything would happen just as he, Richard Dexter, had foretold.

And that was why they let everybody know they were going to Dulchester, and left the school just about the time most of the fellows were strolling out for cricket.

Half-way down the drive they stopped and surveyed the scene behind them. No one was in sight, and they made a swift bolt for cover. Thereafter they took things gently, crawling round by devious ways until they came to one of the doors that was not frequently used.

They took quite a long time over this part of the job. Just about an hour after they left Study No 10, with the avowed intention of visiting Dulchester, they were creeping cautiously into the same room again.

You want to grasp the idea that everything they did, from the moment they stopped in the drive until quite late in the afternoon, was done with a terrific amount of secrecy. They tiptoed along the Transitus corridor, listening and peering for the slightest sign that anyone was knocking around.

But at this hour every Transitus man was away engaged in the job of amusing himself according to his bent, and until tea-time, or even prep, they would be scattered all over the place.

In Study No. 10 the Kid and Curtis began to perform in the manner of ex-

pert furniture-removers. They turned the table upside-down, took all the pictures from the walls, swept the mantel-shelf clear, gathered up books and bats and chairs, and stowed as many as they could inside the upturned table.

Everything was done quietly and systematically, you understand. Even the tearing up of a few odd sheets of foolscap was done with care, though you wouldn't have got that impression if you'd seen the mess it made when it was scattered all over the room!

By the time they had really satisfied themselves, Study No. 10 looked as though several kinds of whirlwinds had been paying afternoon calls. Curtis and Dexter scarcely spoke a word until the business was finished, and then together they surveyed their handiwork admiringly.

"Looks a genuine wreck!" Curtis said, with the air of an expert. "Shove the ticket on, Kid, and then we'll get on to the next!"

From his pocket Dickie Dexter took out a sheet of paper, on which was crudely drawn, in rough characters, the inscription—

"We Don't Want YOU.—The Secret Five."

This was pinned to one of the table-legs, so that there wouldn't be any chance of its being missed even in the first few moments of excitement.

A last look round, and the pair crept cautiously from the room and into the study next door. Bunting had been warned that he might be proceeding to the Science Fifth in the course of a few weeks. In about fifteen minutes the study of the three Busy Bees presented an even more hopeless appearance than Study No. 10.

Again a ticket was produced, and pinned to the upturned table. It bore the legend—

"The Mugs Will Be Glad!"

Less time was taken in the next two studies. They were content to upset as many things as they could in the shortest possible time, and without creating any row, and no ticket was left behind here.

But why go on with the full story? By the time a full hour had elapsed some six or seven studies had been pretty thoroughly ragged, and two or three had been pleasantly upset. In three the roughly-inscribed notices had been pinned, and each was signed, "The Secret Five."

At ten minutes to four Dexter and Curtis crept cautiously away. They did not go out by the usual entrance, but hopped from pillar to post, so to speak, until they managed to reach the drive again, where they did the Indian scouting act, and crawled gently away.

For a time they lay hidden in the long grass, and talked quietly together of the future. They felt quite sure that in the next few hours there would be a certain amount of liveliness knocking round St. Katie's!

"We'll wander along now," the Kid suggested at four twenty-five. "I'm nice and clean, aren't I, Kangy? No signs of the furniture-removing business about me? Let's look over you."

They examined each other carefully and observantly. The Kid wasn't the sort of fellow to go and spoil a little stunt of this kind by some silly detail!

The main court was fairly crowded as they walked lazily across it. Big fellows and little fellows were returning from the playing-fields, or from the river, or from a gentle stroll, and wandering into the school.

In the light of what happened afterwards, you might think it was a coincidence that Bill Strong should come from the cricket-field with Bunting, and fall across Smithy of the Fifth with his pal Harlock, coming up from the river, where they'd been having a gentle turn with the sculls. Actually, of course, it was the most natural thing in the world; just as it was perfectly natural for Smithy to begin pulling Bill's leg about the prospects of seeing him in the Fifth.

"Of course, it will be a frightful knock for the old Form!" Smithy remarked genially to Bill. "We've been such a classy lot just lately that it's bound to lower the tone when we get tainted by the Transitus. They're such common fellows, don't you think, Harlock?"

"It won't be our fault if they come!" said Harlock. "We don't want them! Still, we'll put 'em in their place when they do come! They'll have to behave properly and toe the line. But we'll attend to that!"

Bill made a suitable retort. Bunting added a humorous remark. The four passed into the school together, parting when they reached a certain point, for the Fifth studies lay in a slightly different direction from the Trans.

For a few seconds Bill paused at the end of the corridor, for Dobbie was climbing the stairs behind him. As the two passed Study No. 9 they were just in time to see the spectacle which greeted Bunting.

"My giddy aunt!" said Bill, and surveyed the scene. "That's a pretty picture! You've copped it, Bunty! Who's been—"

"Bill!" Dobbie's voice wailed from the next door. "Look!"

Strong forgot Bunting's troubles for a moment, and went to Study No. 10. In his time Bill had wrecked and been wrecked, but he realised that an expert had been on the job here!

He didn't say anything. With old Dobbie by his side, he just stood and stared and blinked. Then his eyes caught sight of the sheet pinned to the table-leg, and he looked at it dazedly and perplexedly.

"We Don't Want YOU.—The Secret Five."

"Gr-h!" said Bill, in a choky sort of way. "G-ah! Fifth! It's the Fifth, Dobbie! Gr-h! It's that lot! My hat! We'll—we'll make 'em sorry for this! My giddy aunt! We—we'll pulverise 'em!"

CHAPTER 3.

What the Head Said.

A LOT of things happened in the next five minutes along the Transitus corridor.

Other fellows discovered the fact that their studies had been wrecked. In the midst of all the excitement Bill Strong moved quietly, observing and noting, and making the briefest of remarks.

Curtis and Dexter turned up, and their indignation blazed. Everybody was blazing—except Bill Strong. When it came to jobs of this sort there was something fascinating about Bill; he was the strong, silent man in the act, and what he said was right to the point.

Of course, there wasn't any discussion about who had done it, because it was pretty obvious that the Fifth had fixed the whole thing. It was their way of showing the Transitus just what they thought of them! Right!

It was nearly twelve months since the
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last real rag had taken place at Katie's, and on that occasion it had been the *Transitus* and the Fifth. The Head had kicked up such a row after that affair that the *Transitus* had never had a decent chance to get straight with the Fifth. But to-day—

Fellows were saying just what they were going to do, whether anyone else came or not. Others were asserting that this wasn't the time to stand any nonsense, and once and for all the Fifth would have to be taught. There was a sort of confused council going on, with arguments and discussion, and swift visits to observe how one's pals had suffered, and yet there wasn't a great deal of row.

Bill Strong was great! If the people up at the War Office could only have seen Bill just then, they would have made him a general right away. There wasn't any fuss and nonsense about him, and he wasn't making rash statements, but without any argument he had assumed command and was giving his orders.

"Curtis, you'll be with me! Bunt, you follow me! Duff, you keep with the Worm, and just sling anyone out of the way if they try to interfere! Are we all here? Right! You know the business? The Fifth are going to be sorry for this!"

Smithy and Harlock were having a quiet little tea together when their study door was flung open, and about ten of the *Transitus* tumbled into the room.

"Good-morning!" said Smithy. "May I ask—"

"You may not!" said Bill Strong.

And the next moment the table and the cups and saucers and the cakes and everything else were all mixed up in a race to bump the floor first. At the same time about half a dozen odd books were flying through the air, and someone adroitly stopped Smithy's swift move forward by a well-aimed chair.

You might say that was the beginning of the excitement. It's a great pity that there wasn't a really expert war correspondent and football reporter present to get a complete record of just what did happen after the kick-off, because the business developed swiftly.

At the end of twenty seconds Smithy's study was a sad sight, and both Smithy and Harlock weren't really helping matters, because they were slinging things about themselves, and were yelling for reinforcements.

Some of the Trans men outside in the corridor anticipated this, however, and had already begun on the next door. At the end of sixty seconds four studies were in a beautifully chaotic state, and the *Transitus* were tasting the sweets of victory.

Other study doors flew open, their occupants alarmed by the row. And now the battle-cries sounded loud and fierce, and things really did begin to get a trifle confused.

"Fifth! Rescue, Fifth! Fifth—Fifth—Fifth! Oh-h-h-h, Fifth!"

"*Transitus*! Stick it, Trans! Good old Trans! We'll show 'em! *Transitus*! Again!"

And with a sudden rush a small raiding-party burst into another study. Bill Strong was everywhere. There were no half measures about Bill, and he wasn't worrying about the row or anything else, but just the job in hand.

Duff, too, was a great man that day. He did a lot of useful work by spreading the area of the struggle. One or two studies tried to avoid being dragged into

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the fight, and locked their doors; but Duffy showed them very quickly that the *Transitus* didn't believe in that sort of thing.

Curtis had quite a good time; but there isn't any great record of what Dexter performed, owing to the aforementioned absence of any official reporter. From what he said afterwards, however, there is no doubt but what he had a very enjoyable time.

The row became terrific. Down in the masters' room where three or four of them were having a quiet little chat together, it sounded at first like a young thunderstorm, and they tried to pretend that it was no concern of theirs. But when the battle-cries pierced even to their sanctuary they realised that something had got to be done.

Crash! Bang! Crash!

Upstairs Duff was trying to clear a study with a table, and the noise sounded like only one thing on earth.

Jolly Roger was on his feet, and he looked at Sammy Steed.

"Seems to me that the earthquake has come, Steed!" he said quickly. "We'd better go!"

They chased off upstairs in the direction of the row, and landed in the Fifth corridor in good time to get a first-class view of the performance. Some of the Sixth fellows had also come chasing up, and one or two masters from other parts of the school were also in time to get a decent impression of the biggest rag ever known at Katie's.

Roger and Sammy Steed were shouting out at the top of their voices, but they might just as well have whistled "Annie Laurie" for all the good it did. Then Roger took the bull by the horns, and one of the most thrilling incidents of the fight was to see him plunging into the mass and sweeping man after man aside, and all the time yelling out "Stop! Stop!"

Big Hallam had come up, and he weighed in after Roger. They didn't take any notice of *Transitus* or Fifth, but just heaved everybody aside and shouted out their commands.

It was a fine performance. Big Hallam said afterwards that he really enjoyed it, but, of course, he didn't say that to the Head. Other Sixth fellows also took a hand, while odd masters darted round on the outskirts of the mob and sternly commanded them to stand quietly by the wall.

The end came abruptly. Quite suddenly everybody seemed to stop and to stand just where he was very quietly and limply. Bill Strong resigned his position as general, and Smithy sank back against the wall.

Jolly Roger took over complete command instantly. Even in the dimly-lighted corridor you could see his eyes flashing, and everybody began to get the feeling that there was going to be another and more serious row on the top of this.

"What is the meaning of this?" blazed Roger.

About twenty fellows wanted to tell him the plain, bald facts. It wasn't a question of sneaking or justifying their conduct; it was just a question of letting Roger know right away that they had done the right and proper thing.

"Please, sir, they've ragged all the *Transitus* studies while we've been out!"

"They came and tried to wreck our study, sir, and we just had to clear them out!"

Both Fifth and *Transitus* spoke together. Jolly Roger blazed again.

"Silence!" he hissed, just like an escape of steam. "Silence! Smith! Harlock! Strong! Duff!"

He rapped the names out sharply and fiercely. They were the four biggest fellows who caught his eyes, and two were from the Fifth and two from the *Transitus*.

"You will come with me!" Roger snapped. "The rest—get to your studies! Put everything straight! Hallam, will you take charge of this corridor, please? Send another prefect with the *Transitus*! Mr. Steed!"

He turned to consult Sammy. Two other masters joined in, and there was a brief discussion. It ended with the *Transitus* marching slowly away under the eyes of a master and two prefects, while the Fifth slowly slunk into their studies again.

The four chosen ones followed Mr. Blunt and the other masters down to the Fifth Form-room where Roger demanded explanations—not excuses!

Of course, when you think of it, there wasn't really much to explain, and, anyhow, all the four were still glowing with the fire of battle. They weren't in the mood to start apologising and regretting just yet.

"They wrecked our studies, and we went and wrecked theirs, sir," said Bill Strong. "We didn't begin it, but we tried to teach them a lesson, sir!"

Bill didn't say it defiantly, because it was just what he felt; but Roger promptly told him to be quiet.

"I don't know what happened, sir," said Smithy, "except that the *Transitus* came into our study and began to throw their weight about. We did our best to put a stop to that game, sir!"

"We cleared the whole lot out, and we were just clearing the corridor when you came, sir," Harlock added.

"They've upset everything in my study while I was out, sir," Duff explained. "The *Transitus* made up a deputation to protest to the Fifth, sir!"

Smithy didn't know anything about the business in the *Transitus* studies, and just at present he wasn't prepared to listen to anything, either. He stuck up for his Form, and Bill Strong stuck up for the *Transitus*, and it was obvious that there wasn't any love lost between them.

Jolly Roger didn't give them much opportunity for indulging in compliments to each other, and even Sammy Steed chipped in at this stage by asking Smith point-blank if he had taken a hand in ragging the *Transitus* studies.

"No, sir!" said Smithy, in his well-known emphatic manner. "I do not believe that any harm has been done to a single *Transitus* study, and certainly not by the Fifth Form, sir! I do not think that any member of the Fifth would demean himself by—"

"Silence!" said Roger. "We will investigate!"

There was quite a lot more confusion after that. After all, Sammy Steed was a good man, and he wasn't going to have his Form run down, and, moreover, he was a senior master at Katie's. He announced quite definitely that the whole matter would be reported to the Head.

Investigation by several masters proved the fact that the *Transitus* had certainly suffered. The Head was informed, and he expressed his utter amazement and astonishment. He instructed Mr. Porter of the Upper Fourth to inquire into certain aspects of the matter

for him, and in the fullness of time Mr. Porter informed the Head that there was undoubtedly a great deal of rivalry between the Fifth and the Transitus.

"Very well!" said the Head late that night. "I shall take the necessary action to-morrow. Mr. Steed, you had better inquire in the Fifth Form; and we will find the boys who began the whole trouble! I will deal with them first!"

Sammy spoke sternly to his Form on the following morning, but no one admitted that they had had a hand in wrecking the Transitus studies. They insisted that they were the injured party in this business, and Sammy took their side.

Now, Mr. Bird wasn't the man to start getting mixed up in rivalries between different Forms. He promptly objected to Mr. Steed's attitude in defending the Fifth. They had been guilty of disgraceful conduct, and when Mr. Steed suggested that it was quite possible some of the Transitus boys had ragged their own studies, Jolly Roger felt called upon to protest, because he had already made inquiry and discovered that Strong's study was wrecked quite as badly as anyone's.

It was pretty obvious that the rivalry which existed between the two Forms had been brought to a head. So that both Sammy Steed and Jolly Roger felt in a way that they had warned the Head, and—well, there you are!

The Beak strode into the Fifth room about eleven that morning. He started

off at once, and spoke for just five minutes, and at the end of that time nobody of the Fifth was thinking of anything, least of all of any excuses for their conduct.

He said that they ought to have set an example to the Transitus. He spoke of the pain and the grief and the anguish which he had suffered, and— You can imagine how he never touched on the real point of the business, but harped on the idea that fellows in the Fifth should just have let their studies be wrecked, and then report the whole matter to their Form-master, having taken down the names of their aggressors in a notebook! And a lot of stuff like that.

Anyhow, the Fifth Form would not wander outside the school grounds for a week, nor would they spend their afternoons in joyous recreation. They would work! And any boy who did transgress during the next week, or broke any rule, would be very sorry for his weakness!

Then the Head went on to Transitus and delivered a similar lecture there.

So they weren't in any mood to look pained or pleased when he informed them that for one week they would be without any halves, and that everywhere but the school grounds was out of bounds to them.

"Further," the Beak went on, "I have altered my mind regarding certain romances which it was intended to make. The pleasure which I expressed on the occasion of my last visit to this Form-

room has been completely obliterated by your recent disgraceful conduct. There will be no romances from this Form for many weeks to come! That is all!"

Jolly Roger, standing just behind the Head like a petrified statue, never moved a muscle, but his eyes saw everything. He saw the sadness lift slowly from Strong's face; he saw Curtis raise his eyes from the desk and glance along towards Dexter, and he perceived the faint, elusive wink which, just for a mere fraction of a second, touched one of Richard Dexter's eyes.

He saw, too, that Dexter faced the Head quite bravely after that, and that the worried look had gone from his face, and his eyes were sweetly innocent and brightly radiant again. That was all, but Roger felt that somehow the Head-master's punishment was missing fire, and that his stern words would be swiftly forgotten; and—Jolly Roger wondered!

But the Kid gave no further sign. The Head went out, and Roger himself indulged in a little hot air on the same subject. He undertook to make the next week a time of trial and suffering for every youth in his Form. He said it sternly, but it didn't dim the brightness in Richard Dexter's eyes.

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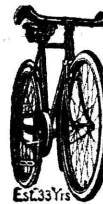
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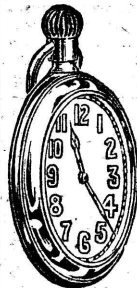
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