

**THE NEW HOUSE REBELLION!**

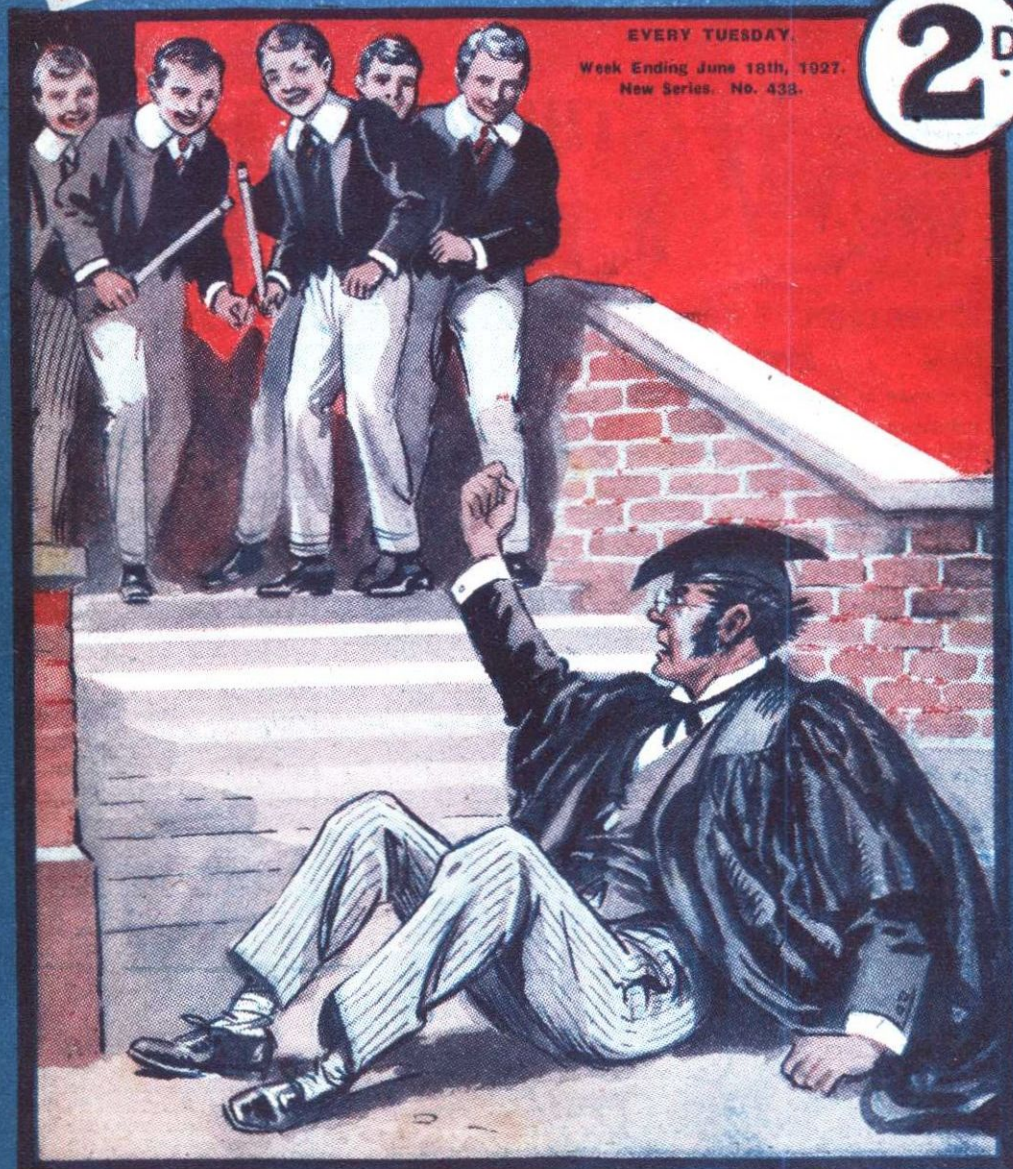
THIS WEEK'S SPECIAL SCHOOL STORY

# The POPULAR

EVERY TUESDAY

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**The Fallen Tyrant!**



**AGAINST THE TYRANT MASTER!** The amazing situation at St. Jim's reaches a climax when rank rebellion breaks out in the New House against the tyrant, Mr. Ratcliff!



## THE NEW HOUSE REBELLION!

A DRAMATIC, LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AND GEORGE FIGGINS & CO., OF ST. JIM'S.  
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

(Author of the well-known St. Jim's tales appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday.)

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

#### Figgins' Reply!

"**P**OOOR old Figgins!"  
"It's rotten!"  
"Yaas, wathah!"  
Tom, Merry & Co., of the School House at St. Jim's, were looking, and feeling, quite concerned.

As a rule, they were "up against" Figgins & Co., of the New House—their ancient rivals and foes.

But on this especial morning the chums of the School House were feeling very concerned for Figgins, and very sympathetic towards him.

They all agreed that it was "rotten." Indeed, Arthur Augustus averred that it was remarkably wotten!

"Flogging at nine!" said Monty Lowther. "About time we rambled into Hall, you fellows, if we're going to see it."

"Blessed if I want to see it!" growled Manners.

"Wathah not!" said D'Arcy of the Fourth. "In fact, deah boys, I am thinkin' vevy seriously of wefusin' to see it."

"Can't be done!" said Blake. "We're ordered into Hall to witness a public flogging. The prefects will round us up if we don't turn in."

"I should wefuse to be wounded up by the pwefects, Blake."

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here, what about staying out?" asked Levison of the Fourth. "If Ratty is going to flog Figgy and Kerr and Wynn, he can do it without our assistance. He wouldn't dare to play the tyrant like this if the Head was here—"

"While the cat's away the wats will play!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry reflected.  
The scene that was going to take

place in Big Hall that morning was certainly a most unpleasant one.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was going to enjoy himself in his own peculiar way; but it was safe to say that nobody else at St. Jim's would be pleased.

The Head, being absent on the sick list, Mr. Ratcliff, as senior Housemaster, was temporarily Head of St. Jim's.

Mr. Railton, of the School House, was, to some extent, under his authority; though he had sharply declined to tolerate any interference from "Ratty" in the affairs of his House.

If Mr. Ratcliff had undertaken to flog any School House fellow, Mr. Railton certainly would have intervened.

But Figgins & Co. belonged to the New House, and in that House there was no one to say Mr. Ratcliff nay.

The whole school had been commanded to assemble for the flogging, which was to be a very impressive scene. But there were few, if any, who were willing to be present.

The School House juniors looked at one another as Levison of the Fourth made his suggestion. Cardew and Clive, Levison's chums, nodded assent at once.

"Let's chance it," said Clive. "It will be one in the eye for Ratty if he doesn't get a crowd."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"I'm stayin' out, for one," said Cardew.

"Let's clear."

"But Mr. Wailton has ordahed us into Hall!" said Arthur Augustus doubtfully. "I was thinkin' of wefusin' to attend, but—"

"Railton shouldn't toe the line to that extent," said Cardew. "But if he does, we won't! I'm off!"

Kildare of the Sixth looked out of the School House doorway.

"Time for Hall, you kids!" he called out.

"Are we bound to turn up, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, of course!"

"But, I say—"

"Housemaster's orders!" said Kildare, and he turned away.

"Housemaster be blowed!" said Cardew cheerfully. "I'm off!" And Ralph Reckness Cardew shoved his hands into his trousers-pockets and strolled away, whistling.

"Same here!" said Levison.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Let's risk it!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm willin' to wisk it."

"Come on!" said Blake.

The crowd of School House juniors moved off. Other fellows were crowding into the House. But a good many of them joined Tom Merry, and moved off with him, catching on to the idea at once.

The juniors were very much down on Mr. Horace Ratcliff and his tyrannical ways, and the idea of boycotting the flogging caught on at once.

Big Hall gradually filled.

Mr. Railton, the School House master was there, his face very grave. The other masters were present. All of them wore serious looks. None approved of Mr. Ratcliff's methods; but they felt that they were bound to support his authority in the absence of the Head.

The Sixth Form were all in their places, likewise the Fifth. None of the seniors had thought of "boycotting" the affair.

But less than half the Shell and the Fourth turned up, though the Third were all there.

And it was noticeable that the New House portion of the Shell and the Fourth were represented only by half

a dozen fellows—Clampe and Chowle and two or three more.

Figgins & Co., the prospective victims, were not there—Redfern and Owen were not there—a crowd of others were not there.

There was a slight buzz in Hall, as the tall, angular figure of Mr. Ratcliff entered.

The New House master glanced round him sourly. He came across to where Mr. Railton was standing.

"It is nine o'clock!" he said sharply.

"I am aware of it, Mr. Ratcliff."

"The school has not assembled."

"No doubt the boys are coming in."

"I shall see that the boys of my House attend, Mr. Railton. You will kindly see to the boys of your House."

Mr. Railton seemed to swallow something with difficulty. But he nodded his head.

"I will see to it!" he said. He glanced round at Kildare of the Sixth.

"Kildare, will you kindly see that all members of the School House take their places?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The St. Jim's captain left the Hall.

It was some little time before he returned. The truants were scattered about the school, and apparently did not want to be found. The prefect had to hunt them far and wide.

"But they were rounded up at last. The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, and Manners, and Lowther of the Shell—came in, looking rather grim. Their idea of boycotting the affair had been nipped in the bud. They had to obey the orders of their head prefect.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, came in next, looking very ruffled. Levison and Clive and Cardew followed.

Then the others came in, and Kildare brought up the rear, looking considerably annoyed. The truants had given him a good deal of trouble.

The School House fellows were all in their places at last. But the New House places were not filled.

Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, had been despatched to round them up. He was long in returning and Mr. Ratcliff discerned a new slight to his authority, and it incensed him. He picked up the birch, which was to be used on Figgins & Co. Taggles, the porter, who had come in to "hoist" the culprits, stood waiting with a stolid face.

Still the absentees of the New House did not come.

Monteith came at last, and he came alone.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed an angry, glittering eye upon him.

"Where are the boys, Monteith? Why have you not sent them in?"

Monteith coughed.

"They refused to come, sir."

"What?"

"They refuse—"

"Nonsense!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

"They said—"

"What?"

"They said— I—I hardly care to tell you, sir—"

"Tell me at once, Monteith! I command you!"

"Very well!" Monteith's eyes glimmered. "Figgins said that you could go and eat-coke, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in an echoing roar from the crowd in Hall.

"Silence!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

There was silence then. Mr. Rat-

cliff gave a furious look round the crowded Hall.

"The school will remain assembled while I deal with this matter!" he snapped out.

And then Mr. Ratcliff whisked out of Big Hall with a thunderous brow to deal with the rebels of the New House himself.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Rank Rebellion!

"WE'VE done it now!"

Fatty Wynn made that remark.

"We have—" said Kerr.

"No doubt about that!" said George Figgins. "And I'm jolly glad! The giddy die is cast, my infants!"

"Jacta est alea!" said Kerr, with a grin.

"And now for trouble!" remarked Pratt of the Fourth. "Ratty will come for us himself."

"Let him come!"

"But I say—" murmured Digges doubtfully.

"Don't say anything, old bean," said Redfern of the Fourth. "We're all standing by Figgins—and that's enough!"

"Shoulder to shoulder!" said Owen.

"Hear, hear!"

There were a score or more of New House juniors grouped about the doorway of the New House.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—the famous Co.—were the leaders in the revolt, and they had plenty of supporters.

During the few days that the Head had been absent Mr. Ratcliff had made himself obnoxious enough to the School House fellows, but in the New House he had fairly made life not worth living.

The sentence of a flogging for Figgins & Co. had been the limit. That sentence the famous Co. were determined not to submit to, and the flame of revolt spread far and wide as soon as it started.

Certainly, it was a risky proceeding, a revolt in the House. If the Head had been at home the fellows would never have dreamed of it. But, as Figgins pointed out, if the Head had been at home there would have been no occasion for it.

It was because the Head was away and Mr. Ratcliff's petty tyranny was unrestrained that the revolt had come about.

Figgins & Co. were in a determined mood; but their hearts were beating rather fast as they waited for the rejoinder to the message they had sent their Housemaster through Monteith of the Sixth.

They were determined to resist; but it was no light matter to resist a Housemaster, even in the absence of the Head.

From the doorway they watched the quadrangle in the clear sunlight of the morning.

"Here he comes!" murmured Kerr.

"Here comes Ratty!"

"Stand up to him!" said Figgins.

"Yes, rather!"

The angular figure of the New House master came across the quad with quick, jerky strides. His face was dark with passion as he came. The juniors watched him grimly as he jerked across the quad and jerked up the steps of the New House. He came jerking in.

"Boys, go into Hall at once!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

No answer.

"You hear me, Figgins?"

"I hear you, sir," said George Figgins quietly.

"Then obey me!"

Silence.

"Figgins, Kerr, Wynn! You are the ringleaders in this!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff in a choking voice.

"Certainly, sir!" said Kerr.

"I shall send you home as soon as your punishment has been administered," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I doubt whether you will be allowed to return to this school. Now, go to Hall at once!"

"Rats!"

Mr. Ratcliff stood and panted.

Rebellion—rank rebellion—had come, and now that he had provoked it, now that it had come, Horace Ratcliff did not know how to deal with it. Like most weak natures, Mr. Ratcliff had a strong leaning to tyranny—he delighted in taking what he considered a strong line. His idea of upholding authority was to nag and bully and crush. But when he had provoked resistance he was quite at a loss.

He stood and blinked at the rebellious juniors.

"Do—do—do I hear you aright?" he gasped at last.

"That depends, sir," said Figgins coolly. "If you heard me say 'Rats!' you heard me aright."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Figgins! You insolent young scoundrel—"

"Oh, can it!" said Figgins.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Can it!"

Mr. Ratcliff spluttered. He had never been told before to "can" his remarks; perhaps he did not think they were worthy of being canned.

There was a loud chortle from the New House crowd.

"Figgins! You—you—you—"

"Buzz away, little fly!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Eh?"

"Go home, Ratty!" roared a dozen voices.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff pulled himself together. He did not quite know what to do, but it was clear that something had to be done.

He made a jump at Figgins, and grasped him by the collar.

Perhaps he hoped that if he dragged off the ringleader by main force the rest would follow.

But if that was Mr. Ratcliff's hope, he was disappointed. Figgins did not submit tamely. He struggled.

"Back up, you fellows!" he shouted, as Mr. Ratcliff tore him towards the doorway.

"Play up, you fellows!" roared Kerr.

There was a rush. A leg was hooked in Mr. Ratcliff's as a dozen hands grasped his gown.

Greatly to his surprise, Mr. Ratcliff found himself rolled over on the floor. He rolled and roared.

"Down with Ratty!" yelled Redfern.

"Kick him out!"

Many hands were laid on Horace Ratcliff, and many hands made light work. Mr. Ratcliff was rolled out of the doorway, and rolled down the steps. He landed in the quadrangle with a bump.

"Pelt him!" yelled Owen.

"Oh dear! Oh! Ah! Oh! Oooop!"

Two or three missiles came whizzing from the House. Mr. Ratcliff picked himself up, spluttering. He had been kicked out of his own House—kicked out by rebellious juniors! It was incredible, but it was true! He lay panting and palpitating, glaring fur-

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ously at the crowd of excited faces in the doorway.

"You—you—you—" he spluttered. "You—you—Ooooooh!" An apple smote Mr. Ratcliff on his prominent nose. "Yaroooooh!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned and fled.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. In Garrison!

**T**OM MERRY & CO., over in the School House, went in to lessons that morning in a state of great excitement.

There was rebellion at St. Jim's—rank rebellion—though it was fortunately confined to the New House.

In the School House all was orderly. But there was tremendous excitement. All the sympathy of the juniors was with the rebels; and probably the seniors agreed with them more or less, though they did not say so.

There were many vacant places in the Shell and the Fourth that morning; the New House portion of those Forms did not turn up to lessons. The New House Third were in their places; Figgins had refused to allow the fags to take part in the risky proceedings, though many of them had been willing. And the New House Fifth and Sixth-Formers, of course, being seniors, could not think of such a disorderly proceeding as joining in a revolt. But nearly all the New House Shell and Fourth were in it; they had locked the big door of the New House, and bidden defiance to the universe generally.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, made no remark on the vacant places in his Form; neither did Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. It was Mr. Ratcliff's business to attend to the rebels.

Mr. Railton, who was taking the Sixth, found his Form complete; so did Mr. Ratcliff, who was master of the Fifth. Mr. Ratcliff was very late in taking the Fifth Form that morning, however. And the Fifth found him in one of his most savage and ratty tempers.

Lessons went on in the Form-room; but there was an intense excitement that the Form masters could scarcely suppress.

In the New House the state of affairs was strange enough.

The Form-rooms being all in the School House, the New House was generally deserted during lessons. Now it was buzzing with animation. More than a score of fellows were backing up Figgins & Co.; and so far, at least, they were all united and determined. Only a few weak-kneed characters like Chowle and Clampe refused to take part in the revolt.

Figgins proved himself a good general.

After the "booting out" of Mr. Ratcliff, Figgy slammed the big door of the New House, locked and bolted it, and put the chain on. He anticipated that Mr. Ratcliff might return with the New House seniors to support him; and in that case a hand-to-hand combat was very likely to go against the juniors. Figgins was prompt in taking precautions.

"Get round and lock and bar all the doors," he directed, "and all the downstairs windows! Sharp!"

And his orders were promptly obeyed. "It's a barring-out!" Figgins explained to his enthusiastic followers. "We can't let Ratty spring the prefects on us—and he might get the School House prefects to back him up, too. We're going to bar him out of the House."

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"Hear, hear!" roared the rebels.

"If he chooses to come to terms, well and good," said Figgins. "If he does not, we bar him out till the Head comes home."

"Bravo!"

"I—I say, Figgy—"

"Well, Fatty?"

"What about grub?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"Bother grub—"

"But, I say, we can't hold the House without grub!" said the fat Fourth-Former. "We shall have to have meals, you know."

"There's most likely grub enough for a week in the House," said Figgins. "We shall have to see about provisions, of course. Let's go and see Mrs. Kenwigg now."

Figgins & Co. proceeded to interview the House dame.

They found Mrs. Kenwigg in her room, in a state of great flurry and excitement at the unprecedented events that were going on around her.

"You—you dreadful boys!" was Mrs. Kenwigg's greeting.

"Not at all, ma'am," said Figgins politely. "It's all Ratty's fault—"

"You must not speak of your House-master like that, Figgins," said Mrs. Kenwigg severely.

Figgins laughed.

"Never mind Ratty, ma'am," he said. "We're taking control of the House now. There will most likely be a lot of scrapping later on, and you had better get across to the School House, ma'am. Mrs. Mimms will take you in. Hand me your keys before you go."

"Master Figgins!"

"I'm taking charge of the tommy," explained Figgins. "The garrison will be put on rations."

"Oh, I say, Figgy—" began Fatty Wynn.

The prospect of rations did not seem to please the fat Fourth-Former.

"Shut up, Fatty! Now, Mrs. Kenwigg—"

"Master Figgins—"

"Better clear off before the enemy attacks," said Figgins. "There may be windows broken, and things flying about. Take the servants away with you. Only the garrison is to remain in the House."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mrs. Kenwigg.

But the good dame saw the wisdom of complying with Figgy's suggestion. A door was unbarred for the exit of Mrs. Kenwigg and her astonished staff and barred again behind them.

Then George Figgins made a careful inventory of the provisions in the house, and established a system of rationing—with deadly threats to Fatty Wynn should he be found exceeding the limit.

After that a football was produced, and the rebels of the New House played footer up and down the passage, which they regarded as a distinct improvement on lessons as an occupation for the morning.

Dinner, in the dining-room of the New House, was a much more free-and-easy meal than was customary.

Without Mr. Ratcliff's grim face, or the presence of the prefects, the New House juniors found themselves decidedly more at their ease. They were quite enjoying themselves, when there was a loud knock at the door.

"Ratty again!"

"Line up!" shouted Figgins.

And the rebels crowded to the Hall window, most of them with cricket-stumps or prefects' ashplants in their hands, ready to resist an attack if the attack came.

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

#### The Attack on the New House!

**M**R. RATCLIFF came up the steps of the New House, and knocked at the locked door.

Morning lessons were over, and the quadrangle was crowded with School House fellows. Most of them had drawn near the New House, to observe the rebels' stronghold. Every fellow at St. Jim's was keenly interested in Figgins & Co.'s revolt.

Mr. Ratcliff was calm now—with a deadly calmness. Only the glitter in his eyes told of the rage within.

At the big window beside the door Figgins & Co. crowded, looking through the glass at their Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his hand with a commanding gesture.

"Open the door, Figgins!" he called out.

"We're keeping it locked, sir."

"I command you to return to obedience at once!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Only on our own terms," said Figgins. "We want a clear understanding. No floggings, no canings, and no punishment of any kind for what's happened this morning. On those terms we'll chuck it. But they'll have to be written down, and signed by Mr. Railton as a witness. It's your own fault if we don't trust you, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff choked.

"Figgins, I make no terms with disobedient young rascals! I shall punish you all severely for this outrageous conduct! You three will be flogged and sent home, the rest severely caned—"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Figgins contemptuously.

"Go home, Ratty!" roared the rebels. "Go and chop chips!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped. There was a loud laugh from the School House crowd standing at a little distance. They were enjoying the scene.

"Unless you admit me to the House at once, I shall order the prefects to deal with you by force!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Go ahead! If the prefects take a hand, I dare say we can give them as good as they give us," said Figgins.

"For the last time, Figgins—"

"Rats!"

Mr. Ratcliff turned to a group of New House seniors who had followed him across the quad. Monteith and Baker and Gray of the Sixth, all prefects, were there, and some of the New House Fifth. They were looking very troubled and undecided. They wanted their dinner—which was in the New House. But they did not particularly want trouble with the rebels. Indeed, they were very much down on Ratty and his methods in their own minds, though they did not venture to say so.

"Monteith," rapped out Mr. Ratcliff, "you and the other prefects will effect an entrance into the House, and reduce those young rascals to obedience!"

"Oh!" said Monteith.

"I give you free leave to use any amount of force that may be necessary."

"That's all very well, sir," said Baker; "but—"

"You will not argue with me, Baker; you will do as I direct you!" snapped the Housemaster.

Baker bit his lip.

"Kindly lose no time," added Mr. Ratcliff.

"There will be some damage done, sir, if they refuse to open the door," said Monteith. "We shall have to break in a window."

"Do so."

"Very well, sir."

Monteith of the Sixth walked away, and returned with a hammer, borrowed



from Taggles, the porter. He came up the steps of the New House, hammer in hand, with Baker and Gray at his heels, and two or three Fifth-Formers.

Having been given leave by his Housemaster to do as much damage as was necessary, Monteith wasted no further time. He was hungry, and he wanted his dinner, and that spurred him on much more than devotion to Mr. Ratcliff.

Crash!

A pane of glass flew out, and scattered into fragments in the Hall within.

Crash, crash, crash!

The juniors crowded back from the splintering glass.

Some of them were looking very grave

ferocious now. He gripped the hammer, and crashed blows upon the window-sashes. Under that hefty attack the sashes were knocked out in a very short time, and the way was open to the assailants.

"Now, stand back, you young scoundrels!" exclaimed Monteith. "If you dare to lay a finger on me while I'm getting in, I'll skin you!"

"You'll get something more than a finger laid on you if you butt in here!" said Redfern.

Headless of that, Monteith drove his head and shoulders through the window-frame, and began to clamber in. His comrades backed him up.

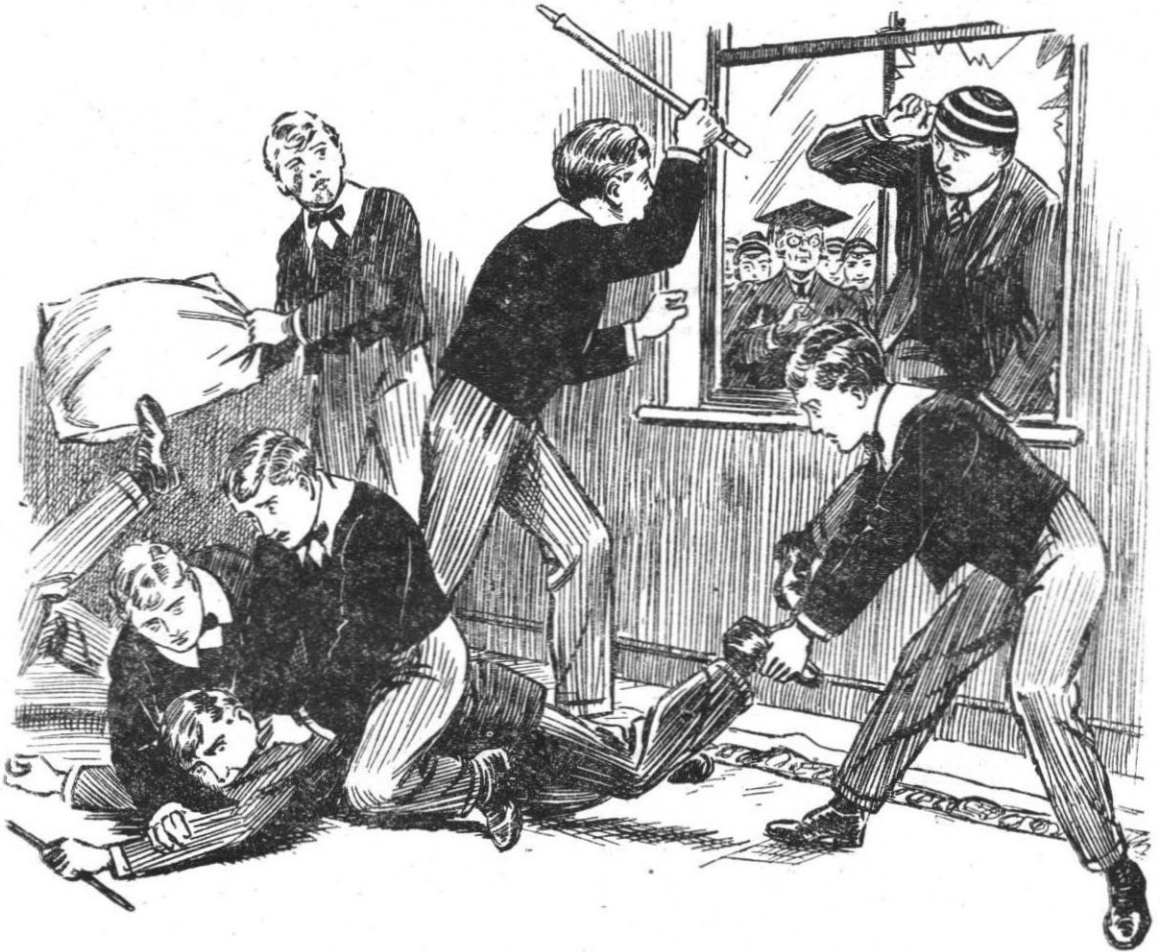
Figgins gripped his stump; but he

still he came on, and dropped inside the window.

"Collar him!"

Baker went down on the floor in the grasp of five or six juniors. He was rolled over, and sat upon, and pinned securely. Gray was in the window now, and Figgins, feelings that the crisis was too pressing for ceremony now, swiped at him with his stump. Gray of the Sixth yelled and jumped back. Monteith came on again, and a cricket-bat jammed on his chest, and he reeled away. The rebels were in deadly earnest now.

Monteith & Co. hung back from the window. If the rebels defended it resolutely in this way they knew that they



**HOLDING THE FORT!** Baker went down on the floor in the grasp of five or six juniors. He was rolled over and sat upon, and pinned securely. Gray was at the window now, and Figgins, feeling that the crisis was too pressing for ceremony, swiped at him with the cricket stump. (See Chapter 4.)

now. Matters were taking a decidedly serious turn, and they realised it.

When the glass was knocked out Monteith put his hand through to feel for the window-fastening.

Crack!

A cricket stump caught him across the wrist, and the prefect jerked out his hand, with a howl of pain.

"Sorry!" said Figgins politely. "But you've got to keep your paws to yourself, Monteith!"

"You young rascal!" roared the Sixth-Former.

"If you're backing up Ratty, you must look out for trouble, Monteith. You're not coming in here!"

Monteith rubbed his aching wrist and glared at the juniors. His temper was never very sweet, and it was positively

hesitated to bring it down on James Monteith's unprotected head. But Redfern, who had brought a pillow from the dormitory, rushed forward.

He delivered a terrific swipe, and the pillow smote Monteith full in the face, and swept him back out of the window again. Monteith stumbled over Baker and Gray, spluttering breathlessly.

"Well hit, Reddy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Ah! Ow! I-I-I'll—Groogh! I'H—"

"Keep out, Baker!" shouted Figgins, as Baker of the Sixth thrust himself in at the window.

Baker came on valiantly, heedless of two or three painful lunges from the business ends of cricket-stumps. Redfern swiped him with the pillow, but

could not get in—and there was no doubt any longer about Figgins' resolution.

"Go in at once!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, who, like a prudent general, was surveying the proceedings from the rear. In his military tactics Mr. Ratcliff resembled the celebrated Duke of Plaza Toro, who led his regiment from behind because he found it less exciting. "Monteith! Gray! I command you to enter at once—"

"We can't!" howled Monteith.

"I order you—"

"Can't you see that we can't?" yelled Monteith. He was bruised in several places rather severely, and his temper failed him.

"Monteith, how dare you—"

"Oh, rot!"

With that disrespectful rejoinder, James Monteith stalked away, openly and evidently giving up the matter as a bad job.

Baker of the Sixth, inside the fortress, suddenly appeared to view at the window—in the grasp of many hands. He was rolled out, and he rolled over on the steps, yelling.

The broken window was crammed with victorious juniors, yelling and cat-calling.

Mr. Ratcliff spluttered. His prefects were stalking away, only too plainly fed up with the affair, and deaf to his commanding voice. There was nothing for Mr. Ratcliff to do but to stalk away in their wake. Which he did, after shaking a furious fist at the yelling rebels.

The School House crowd yelled with laughter as he retreated. Tom Merry & Co. had enjoyed the scene immensely.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Ratty's Last Resource!

"BAI JOVE!"

As soon as the assailants were gone, Tom Merry & Co. crowded up on the broad steps of the New House and looked in at the smashed Hall window. But they did not come as enemies, and they were greeted cheerfully by the garrison.

"Bai Jove! Goin' stwong—what?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, grinning.

"Looks like it!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"How the thump is this going to end?" asked Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know! Ratty will have to give in!"

"If he doesn't, we're keeping it up until the Head comes home, anyhow!" said Kerr.

"More power to your elbow!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But look out for Ratty. He was mumbling something about the police as he passed us in the quad."

"Yaas, watah!"

Figgins whistled.

"The police! My hat! He couldn't call in the police to deal with a school row! They haven't any authority here."

"Let him call them!" said Redfern recklessly. "They jolly well won't make us give in!"

"No fear!"

"Sorry to shut off your view, you School House bounders," said Figgins politely. "But we've got to barricade this window. Yank Ratty's desk out of his study, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the rebels to Mr. Ratcliff's study. A dozen fellows trundled out the big desk.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "I wonder what Ratty would think of that? It won't do his giddy desk much good!"

"Watah not!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

The New House rebels apparently were not worrying about doing Mr. Ratcliff's desk much good. They trundled and rolled and banged it along the hall. Several drawers fell out, and papers were scattered and trampled underfoot. The desk crashed up against the window, pretty effectively barring it against further attack. A number of chairs were dragged from studies, and a form or two from the dining-room added to the barricade. Interstices in the barrier were filled

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with large volumes brought from Mr. Ratcliff's bookshelves.

Tom Merry & Co. strolled away and left the rebels to their work. The dinner-bell was ringing in the School House.

In the School House dining-room that day there were a number of guests. Dinner in the New House was an impossibility for anyone outside the ranks of the rebels, so Mr. Ratcliff had had to arrange for it in the other House. The tables were rather crowded, as all the New House seniors were present, as well as the Third Form fags and a few juniors. Mr. Railton had raised no objection—indeed, he could scarcely do so in the peculiar circumstances. But his face was very grim at the Sixth Form table. Mr. Ratcliff also lunched at that table, with a face like a basilisk. He did not utter a word during the meal; he was too furious to speak. He was keenly conscious, too, of the ridicule of his position.

He had "started in" to govern St. Jim's with a strong hand, and the result was that he was turned out of his own House, and that his quarters were in the possession of a gang of rebels—junior schoolboys who ought to have trembled at his frown—but wouldn't and didn't! It was a very painful and humiliating position for any Housemaster, and the knowledge that he had brought it upon himself was no solace.

After the School House dinner Mr. Ratcliff followed Mr. Railton to his study.

It was as much as he could do to assume an outward aspect of civility towards the School House master.

"Pray sit down, Ratcliff," said the School House master politely.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down.

"This is a very unfortunate state of affairs, Mr. Railton," he began.

"Very unfortunate!" agreed the School House master dryly.

"I cannot help thinking that these rebellious young rascals have been encouraged by your attitude, Mr. Railton.

"Really, sir—"

"Your conduct towards me, sir—"

Mr. Railton raised his hand.

"I have declined to allow you to interfere in my House," he said. "I am bound to hold to that. If there has been trouble, it was you that sought it, not I, Mr. Ratcliff. But I hardly think that that incident has affected the boys of your House. They have revolted against what they consider injustice."

"And what you also consider injustice, no doubt!" sneered the New House master.

"I will express no opinion on that point."

"In such a state of affairs," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I imagine that I am at least entitled to the support of my colleague."

"Quite so!"

"I intend to bring these young rascals to reason. Force is the only remedy. The prefects of my house cannot deal with them unaided. I require the assistance of the School House prefects. I shall, therefore, order them to support Monteith and the rest in dealing with the rebels."

"I fear, Mr. Ratcliff, that I cannot permit it. Kindly do not give such an order to my prefects. I shall be obliged to countermand it."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"You refuse me your support, then?"

"In that respect, yes. This is not a matter, in my opinion, to be dealt with by violence."

"You would advise me to give way to

a set of insolent and rebellious school-boys!" sneered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I would advise you to deal with them justly. It is unfortunate that the affair has gone so far, but it is not beyond remedy yet. You intended to flog Figgins and his friends for an offence already forgiven by the Head. I am not surprised that they have rebelled. There is still time to—"

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet, with a bitter look on his thin face.

"I am aware that you are only too glad to see my authority defied, and the school in a state of turmoil, Railton," he said.

"You have no right whatever to say so; I deplore the present state of affairs quite as much as you do," rejoined Mr. Railton tartly. "But I repeat that force and violence cannot possibly settle the matter, and that they will only drive the affair from bad to worse. Rescind your sentence upon Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, and—"

"That is enough! As you refuse me your support, I shall give no orders to the School House prefects, being well aware that you would incite them to disobedience. I shall have recourse to the police."

Mr. Railton started.

"The police!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly. That is my only resource now."

"You cannot intend to disgrace the school, Mr. Ratcliff, by calling in the police to deal with the boys!" exclaimed the School House master.

"The responsibility rests upon you, sir, for refusing me your aid!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a sour smile. "I am now about to proceed to the police-station in Rylcombe."

And Mr. Ratcliff stalked out of the study, and nearly fell over Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, who was suspiciously near the door. He paused a moment to box Trimble's ears, and strode on.

"Ow! Rotter!" gasped Trimble.

The fat junior rolled away in search of Tom Merry & Co. with startling news. He came up to the chums of the School House in the quadrangle, rubbing his fat ear.

"Ratty's gone for the peelers!" he gasped.

"Bai Jove!"

"How do you know, Trimble?" demanded Blake.

"I heard him—"

"Bai Jove! You have been listenin' again, Twimble, you wottah!"

"Nothing of the sort," said Baggy warmly. "That beast Ratty thought I was listening, and biffed me as he came out! But I wasn't! I just happened to hear the old hunks say—"

"Wats!"

"The bobbies!" said Jack Blake, with a deep breath. "My hat! We're going to have a giddy afternoon! How jolly lucky it's a half-holiday!"

"Yaas, watah!"

Tom Merry cut across to the New House, and rapped on the barricade at the broken window.

"Figg!"

"Hallo!"

"Ratty's gone for the peelers!"

"Thanks, old infant! Let 'em all come!"

Tom Merry rejoined his chums. It was, as Blake had remarked, lucky that it was a half-holiday. It was likely to be the most exciting half-holiday that had ever been experienced at St. Jim's.

THE END.

("Holding the Fort!" is the title of next week's topping long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., and the New House Barring-out!)



**A PIGEON WORTH PLUCKING!** Knowing that the wealthy Lord Mauleverer has been invited to stay with the Cads of Highcliffe, Harry Wharton & Co., fearing a "plant," decide to remain within call. As things turn out, it is fortunate that they do!



# Caravanners To The Rescue!

A Topping, Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, on Holiday.  
**By FRANK RICHARDS.**  
*Author of the Famous Greyfriars Tales appearing in the "Magnit" every Monday.*

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

**The Uninvited Guest!**

**"G**LORIOUS!" said Bob Cherry.  
"Top-hole!" exclaimed Nugent.  
"Spiffing!" said Johnny Bull.  
And Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh smiled and nodded in agreement.

The Famous Five were on holiday. Their camp was pitched just outside Stacliffe, and the old horse that had leisurely pulled their caravan was now browsing the grass a few yards away, quite contented with such considerate masters.

Five of the Greyfriars caravanners, at least, were enjoying themselves at the camp by the bright blue sea.

Tramping over the downs, swimming in the sea, and climbing the cliffs, were quite enough to keep the Famous Five busy and cheerful. Those occupations did not appeal to Billy Bunter, the sixth member of the caravan party; he was in rather a grouching mood that day.

"Rather rot, this caravanning," he remarked, when the caravanners gathered to tea.

"Tired of it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes!" grunted Bunter.

"You can get a train home from near Stacliffe."

Bunter did not seem to hear that remark. It was not a train home from Stacliffe that he wanted, evidently.

"There's no fun," he said.

"Rot!"

"We'll trot into the town this evening and go to the cinema, if you like, Bunter," said Harry Wharton tolerantly.

"Who wants to go to a blessed cinema?"

"Well, I rather like the idea," said Bob Cherry. "We can see a few pictures, and get home early to bed."

"Who wants to go early to bed?"

grunted Bunter, still in his pessimistic vein.

"We all do, I think," said Nugent.

"So would you, if you didn't loaf about all day doing nothing."

"Still, Bunter can stay and mind the

camp, if he likes," grinned Johnny Bull. "We oughtn't to leave the camp unguarded in the evening. Some tramp might come along and pinch the horse."

Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove in a rather curious, sidelong way.

"Well, I don't mind," he said. "Anything to look after. I'll stay and look after the camp."

"Well, if you'd really rather," said Wharton, puzzled.

"The fact is, I'm tired," said Bunter, with dignity. "I do practically all the work of this outfit. Too tired to go gadding about. That's how it is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I don't see anything to cackle at!" snapped Bunter.

So when the evening drew on, as Bunter definitely volunteered to remain in the camp on guard, the Famous Five brushed their clothes and started for Stacliffe. A stroll through the holiday town and a visit to the cinema made a pleasant variation.

Billy Bunter watched them go, and grinned as they disappeared down the road in the sunset.

"Silly asses!" he commented.

The fat junior went into the van and opened all the bags belonging to the party and made a careful selection of the clothes therein. From one he selected a waistcoat, from another a collar, from another a tie. Harry Wharton & Co. had not brought much in the way of clothes with them, owing to considerations of space; but by "pooling" the whole outfit, as it were, Bunter had plenty to choose from.

He was soon arrayed.

Bunter surveyed himself as well as he could in the rather tiny looking-glass and was satisfied with the result. Certainly he looked much neater and cleaner than usual; and he had no doubt that he looked quite a nut.

He felt fairly well satisfied as he stepped out of the caravan. Bunter was supposed to be guarding the camp; but he did not even think of that as he started off.

His object had been to get the Famous

Five out of sight; feeling that they would have objected to the little scheme he had in mind—as well as to the raid upon their wardrobe.

For it was Bunter's intention to "drop in" on Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe, who had rented a bungalow called the Firs, and who were, Bunter felt quite convinced, having a really "goey" time. Ponsonby & Co. were near neighbours of the Greyfriars juniors, but they were hardly friendly neighbours. Ponsonby & Co., in actual fact, being shady young rascals with whom no decent fellows consorted.

Thus when Lord Mauleverer of the Greyfriars Remove had fallen in with the caravanners and announced his intention of staying with the Highcliffe juniors at the Firs, Wharton & Co. had been surprised. Mauly was a wealthy, easy-going individual, but he had no vices of the sort that appealed to Ponsonby & Co.

Mauly had explained that he had been invited to the bungalow, and as it was easier to say "Yaas" rather than "No," he had accepted the invitation. That he didn't anticipate a "rorty" time with Ponsonby & Co. was evident, for even the languid schoolboy earl would have refused to participate in any petty blackguardism.

But Billy Bunter had his own ideas on the subject. He flattered himself that he knew the things that would go on amongst the holiday crowd from Highcliffe. There would be smokes, a flutter now and again with the cards, and doubtless an unlimited quantity of "fizz." That programme suited Bunter down to the ground. He saw no reason why a fellow shouldn't kick over the traces a bit when he was on holiday. With Lord Mauleverer already a guest of Ponsonby & Co., Bunter foresaw no difficulty in wedging into the merry party at the bungalow.

He chuckled to himself as he started for the bungalows along the shore.

It did not take him long to find the Firs.

He opened the gate coolly, and went

up the path towards the lighted house. But he hesitated to approach the door.

From the open french windows on his left came a blaze of light and the murmur of voices. Ponsonby & Co., evidently, were there.

Bunter crept into the veranda and approached the window and peered in. Three or four fellows, all in evening clothes and smoking cigarettes, were in sight there—among them Lord Mauleverer, only Mauly was not smoking. Gadsby's voice came to Bunter's ears.

"Have one, Mauly?"

"Thanks, no."

"My dear old bean, put on a smoke—just a little one!"

"I'd rather not, thanks."

"Chuck it, Gaddy!" came Monson's voice, with a sneer in it. "Don't you know Mauleverer's settin' us a shinin' example?"

"Begad!"

"Hallo! Is that Pon?" said Vavasour, with a glance towards the window.

Bunter backed quickly out of sight.

There was a scent of cigarette-smoke in the shadowy veranda, and the sound of footsteps.

Billy Bunter crouched into the shadow of a tub of palms on the veranda and almost held his breath. Two dim figures stopped in the veranda near him, and he heard low voices. Ponsonby and Drury were standing smoking and looking out over the gardens towards the sea. Their muttering voices came to Bunter.

"We'd better get goin'," Drury said. "After all, that's what we've got Mauleverer for."

"I know."

"We cut it out last night," said Drury.

"But, dash it all, Pon—"

Ponsonby blew out a cloud of smoke.

"He's a dashed strait-laced nunny, and the dickens knows how he will take it!" he said.

"But that's why you brought him here!"

"Oh, I know that!"

"He's got lots of tin," said Drury.

"He wouldn't be here if he hadn't."

Drury chuckled softly over his cigarette.

Ponsonby smoked his cigarette through with knitted brows. Behind the tub of palms Bunter was grinning.

If he had not guessed already, he knew now why Lord Mauleverer was a guest in Pon's bungalow, though evidently the schoolboy earl himself did not know.

"Well?" said Drury, breaking the silence again.

"We'll try it on," said Ponsonby, throwing away the stump of his cigarette. "Come on!"

They moved on past Bunter, and entered the lighted room.

"Waitin' for you, Pon!" said Monson.

"Well, I'm here."

The french window closed, and a curtain fell into place. The light was almost shut off. Bunter crept out from behind the palm tub and flattened his fat little nose against the glass. But he could see nothing. He listened with all his ears, but there was no sound from the room. He concluded at last that the nutty party had moved into another room. He ventured to push open the french window at last. It was not locked, and he put his head through the curtain. The room was empty.

Bunter drew a deep breath and stepped in.

The electric light still blazed, though the nuts had quitted the room. On the tables were ashtrays, crowded with cigarette-ends and ash. A tumbler with the dregs of wine in it stood on the

mantelpiece. Bunter stood and listened, his heart beating. Then he rolled cautiously to the wide, lighted hall.

A half-open door gave him a glimpse of a dining-room, unlighted. Farther along was another door, from under which a light gleamed, and from that room came a murmur of voices.

Evidently Ponsonby & Co. were there, and in that room they were "getting goin'," as Drury had called it.

Bunter crept to the door and stopped there, longing to enter, and afraid to make the venture. And as he stood in painful doubt and indecision, a voice came from within the room, and the words he heard made the fat junior jump.

"Make your game!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Play or Pay!

"NO end amusin'!" said Ponsonby.

Lord Mauleverer glanced at him and nodded.

"Yaas," he said.

"Of course," said Ponsonby. "It's only a game—only a bit of fun, you know."

"Yaas."

"Merely to pass the time, of course."

"Yaas."

"Won't you have a cig, Mauly?"

"Yaas—I mean no."

"Well, about this game," said Ponsonby. "We're all goin' to take a hand, and you may as well. It's really no end amusin'. Isn't it, Gaddy major?"

Captain Gadsby, who was sitting on a corner of the table, smoking a strong cheroot, nodded. The worthy captain's face was flushed, and his eyes had a rather uncertain look. The "fiz" flowed freely at the bungalow, and Captain Gadsby had punished the champagne at dinner.

"Oh, yes!" said the captain. "Same game as they play at old Monte, you know, kid."

"Monte Carlo?" asked Mauleverer.

"That's it! You've been there," said Ponsonby.

Lord Mauleverer nodded.

"Yaas, I've been to the place," he said.

"Didn't you take a squint into the show?" asked Monson, with interest.

"Yaas."

"And played?"

"No."

"Why on earth not? You've got plenty of money."

Mauly looked at him.

"You see, gamblin's rather rotten an' blackguardly, isn't it? Not the thing, you know."

Some of the Highcliffe nuts coughed. As Mauleverer had been brought here specially to gamble, and to lose his money, his straightforward opinion was not exactly what they wanted to hear.

But Cecil Ponsonby knew how to play his fish with skill.

"Quite so!" he assented. "But a little game for fun isn't gamblin'. A chap doesn't want to be self-righteous."

"Oh, no!" said Mauleverer at once.

"Trot out the roulette, Gaddy!"

Gadsby "trotted out" the roulette. Lord Mauleverer glanced at it with interest. It was a circular bowl, of which the bottom formed a wheel, revolving on a central pivot. The wheels were numbered 0 to 36, and under each number was a slot, into which the ivory ball was to fall when spun.

It was a replica of the roulette at Monte Carlo, but, of course, on a much smaller scale. At "Monte" the roulette is built into an enormous table. Cap-

tain Gadsby's machine was made to stand on a table, and was not more than eighteen inches in diameter.

Gadsby placed the roulette on the table, and Monson unrolled a green cloth marked with yellow numbers.

A slight uneasiness was visible in Lord Mauleverer's countenance.

"Who's goin' to take the bank?" asked Drury.

"Oh, Gaddy major!"

"I don't mind!" yawned the captain.

Captain Gadsby had "taken the bank" on many an occasion—and more than once he had been taking the bank in some shady resort when the police had dropped in. But that was in London; there was no such danger here. Pon's bungalow was not a gambling-club; though that was what he was using it for. Mauleverer was not the first gilded youth that had been invited to that cheery bungalow for a stay, and had paid pretty dearly for his sojourn there.

Ponsonby handed out a stack of counters to each member of the party, and the captain took a larger stack to keep the bank.

"Make your game!"

The captain spoke, as if from habit, in the droning voice of the practised croupier.

Ponsonby & Co. began raining counters on the green cloth.

When they were by themselves, the Highcliffe nuts did not play for counters—the latter were only produced for Lord Mauleverer's benefit. The pigeon had to be tempted very warily into the trap.

A game for counters was a terrible bore to Ponsonby & Co., and their looks showed that they were not enjoying it. But Lord Mauleverer found it amusing.

He knew little or nothing about the game; but he threw on his counters cheerily, and, to his surprise, he began to win heavily. It did not even cross his mind that the gallant captain was manipulating the wheel specially to let him win.

"By gad, you've cleared a hundred quids, Mauly!" said Ponsonby presently.

Mauleverer laughed good-humouredly.

"Lucky for the captain I'm not playin' for money!" he remarked.

"Oh, I could stand it!" said the captain.

"Why not have a little money on, to make a variety?" suggested Gadsby. "Only shillin's, of course—much the same as playin' for counters."

"Just the same," said Monson.

"Good idea!"

"Yes, go it!"

"I'll stick to counters," remarked Mauleverer.

Ponsonby set his lips. But he still hoped that winning, and the sight of money on the table, would tempt the gilded youth's cupidity. The Highcliffe juniors started with shillings and half-crowns, and Captain Gadsby paid out his losses in coin of the Realm.

Lord Mauleverer continued to play with counters. There was soon currency-notes on the green cloth, and then banknotes. But Ponsonby, whenever his searching eyes turned on Mauly's face, failed to read any sign of greed or cupidity there.

Ponsonby had taken a great deal of trouble with Mauleverer, and he had let that simple youth bore him dreadfully for a whole day. He was quite determined that the pigeon was going to be plucked somehow.

A sign passed between Ponsonby and



the captain, and Captain Gadsby's manipulation of the wheel changed. Mauleverer began to lose steadily now. Whatever numbers he backed failed to come up. If he played on even numbers, odd came up; if he backed red, it was sure to be black.

Mauleverer did not mind in the least. The game had amused him at first, but he was growing tired of it; and, indeed, roulette without the excitement of gambling is rather a childish game. Lord Mauleverer was quite content to see his stack of counters diminishing.

The other fellows left off playing. They understood that Ponsonby was driven to his last resource now, and that an unpleasant surprise was to be sprung on Lord Mauleverer when all his counters were gone.

Maully had started with counters to the nominal value of thirty pounds, according to the figures marked on them. In the ordinary way of a gambling club he would have bought the counters for cash, paying for them, and redeeming them at the end of the game for cash, if any were left. A few more turns of the wheel and all Maully's thirty pounds were gone, and the schoolboy earl rose from the table suppressing a yawn.

"Stony?" asked Ponsonby, with a smile.

"They're all gone, dear boy," said Mauleverer. "Begad, it's about time to think of bed!"

"Oh, have some more, and try your luck again!"

"Thanks, I think I've had enough!"

"All serene! Settle up with Captain Gadsby, then," said Ponsonby carelessly.

Mauly looked at him.

"Settle up?" he repeated.

"Yes—for the chips, you know."

"I don't know," said Mauleverer.

"I don't understand you, Ponsonby."

Ponsonby smiled.

"You didn't pay for your chips when you started," he explained calmly.

"It's usual, but between friends it doesn't matter. Settle up now."

"Still I don't understand," said Lord Mauleverer calmly. "You don't mean to be sayin' that we've been playin' for money, do you?"

Ponsonby raised his eyebrows.

"The counters are marked with their value," he said tartly.

"But I understand—"

"I suppose you understand that we don't spend an evenin' here playin' a kid's game like marbles?" said Ponsonby contemptuously. "Of course the counters represent money!"

"Of course!" said Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" murmured Vavasour.

A flush crept into Lord Mauleverer's cheeks.

"You don't mean to say that you want thirty pounds out of me?" he asked very quietly.

"I?" said Ponsonby. "I've got nothin' to do with it. Captain Gadsby took the bank, and he stood to lose if you won. You've got to settle up with him!"

"That's that!" assented the captain, lighting a fresh cigar. "But never mind; if you're short of tin, Mauleverer, I'll take your I O U."

"You won't take my I O U," said Mauleverer. "And I'm not short of tin. But I never gamble; and Ponsonby stated distinctly that this game was only

in fun. And I shall not pay anybody a single penny!"

There was a buzz in the room, and Captain Gadsby's brow grew dark and his jaw seemed to project. At that moment the gallant captain looked just what he really was—a gaming-house bully. Lord Mauleverer looked round calmly. He understool now—fully.

"I fancy I know why you asked me here now, Ponsonby," he said, "and I'm sorry I came. I've got landed in a dashed gamblin'-den, begad! I'm goin' to my room now to pack my bags. I'm not stayin' here another night!"

And Lord Mauleverer walked to the door and threw it open. There was a sudden gasp, and his lordship started back as a fat figure tumbled into the room.

"By gad! Bunter!"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Fallen Amongst Thieves!

"O W!" Billy Bunter gave a startled gasp as he rolled in, taken by surprise by the sudden opening of the door.

The Owl of the Remove had not dared to venture in. He had stood outside the card-room listening like a very podgy Peri at the gate of Paradise.

There was a shout of surprise from Ponsonby & Co. at the sight of the fat junior.



**DRASTIC MEASURES!** "These cads are gettin' in!" yelled Monson. "Lock the door!" shouted Ponsonby, pinning Mauleverer down. Gadsby ran to jerk the key out of the lock, when through the shattered windows, Harry Wharton & Co. came pouring. (See Chapter 5.)

"Bunter—here!" yelled Ponsonby.  
 "You fat cad—"  
 "Kick him out!"  
 "Oh dear!" Bunter scrambled up, and blinked round the room through his big spectacles. "I say, you fellows, it's all right! I—I've come in for a little game, you know! Count me in!"  
 "You fat fool—"  
 "Kick the fat cad out!" shouted Ponsonby savagely.  
 "Oh crumbs!"  
 Monson and Gadsby rushed at Bunter, and the fat junior dodged out into the hall with great celerity.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer. "Let Bunter alone!"  
 Mauly had a strong personal repugnance towards William George, but he was prepared to do his best for him. But Mauly's star was not in the ascendant now. His words were unheeded. Gadsby and Monson pursued Bunter into the hall, and there were immediate sounds of woe.

Bunter yelled as they seized him and thumped him, and, with a desperate effort he broke loose, squirmed across the hall into the room he had first entered, and slammed the door in the Highcliffian's faces.

With great presence of mind—Bunter had plenty of that when his fat skin was in danger—he turned the key in the lock before Monson and Gadsby could get the door open. Then he stood palpitating, all his dreams of being a "goey" sportsman vanishing, to be replaced by a deadly fear of what Ponsonby & Co. would do when they got at him.

Monson and Gadsby returned to the card-room, whence angry voices could be heard.

"That fat brute gone?" asked Ponsonby savagely.

"He's locked himself in the smoke-room."

"Never mind. We'll get at him presently. We've got to settle with Mauleverer now!"

"I'll say good-bye, if you don't mind," murmured Mauleverer.

"Not till you've paid!" said Ponsonby, with a leer.

The thin veneer of dandyism had fallen from Cecil Ponsonby now. His face was flushed with anger and malice and champagne; his eyes glittered threateningly. The other nuts gathered round. Lord Mauleverer looked at them calmly. He was not in the least afraid, and he was as firm as a rock. Ponsonby & Co. were showing themselves in their true colours at last, but their black looks did not disturb the calmness of the schoolboy earl.

"You owe the bank thirty pounds, Mauleverer!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth.

"I owe the bank nothin'," said Mauleverer tranquilly, "and I decline to pay the bank a shillin'! It's not the money, either, but the principle of the thing! I'm not a gambler."

"You've played and lost—"

"I decline to argue the matter with you, Ponsonby. If you'll get out of the doorway, Monson. I'll go to my room and pack my bags!" said Mauleverer.  
 Monson looked at Ponsonby.

"Stand where you are!" said the latter. "Mauleverer isn't goin' till this is settled!"

"I'm not stayin' another night under this roof!" said Lord Mauleverer calmly.

"How will you help it?" sneered Ponsonby. "Do you know what you're askin' for? A thunderin' good lickin'!"

"Which you'll jolly well get, if you

don't do the decent thing!" said Monson.

Lord Mauleverer shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll stay in this room!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth. "I'll give you till midnight to think it over. If you don't decide to pay your debt by then, we'll—"

"I owe no debts, dear man!"

"If you don't pay up by then," hissed Ponsonby, "we'll give you such a raggin' as you've never heard of, and turn you out at midnight with nothin' but your shirt and trousers, and your face blacked and your hair shaved! How will you like that?"

"Oh gad!"

"You can think it over!" said Ponsonby. "Come on, you fellows! We'll have bridge in the smoke-room till he makes up his mind!"

Lord Mauleverer made a step to the door. The Highcliffians hustled him back, and he staggered towards the table. The nuts crowded out, and Ponsonby closed the door, and locked it after him. Lord Mauleverer stared at the locked door, and ejaculated:

"Begad!"

Then he returned to the table and sat on the corner of it, and ejaculated again: "Begad!" The situation was too much for Mauly. He was in the unfortunate position of the gentleman in the parable who fell among thieves. And how he was going to get out of the scrape Lord Mauleverer hadn't the faintest idea.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### To the Rescue!

**B**ILLY BUNTER quaked.

He was locked in the smoke-room, and safe for the moment.

The french windows offered a way of escape, but the loud voices from the card-room across the hall reached his ears and chained him to the spot. Bunter wanted to know what was happening, and, as he listened, he was rather glad that he had not been admitted to the precious "game," after all.

As the nuts crowded into the hall, and the door of the card-room was locked, Bunter quaked, curiosity giving place to concern for himself. The nuts seemed to have forgotten him for the moment, however. They were talking angrily in the hall, and seemed to be indulging in recriminations. Ponsonby's proceedings were, apparently, a little too "thick" even for his faithful followers.

"Fat lot of good bringin' the fool here!" Bunter heard Drury growling.

"Makes us look a lot of sharpers!"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Ponsonby.

"Well, lockin' a chap in a room till he squares—"

"He's not goin' till he's paid!" hissed Ponsonby.

"Don't row!" said Captain Gadsby.

"Let's have a drink!"

Bunter jumped as the door-handle was turned.

"This dashed door's locked—"

"I forgot; Bunter's in there! Reut that fat cad out!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"We'll take it out of him. Some of you cut round to the french windows!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

He rolled across to the french windows. Fortunately, the key was in the lock.

Bunter turned it back hastily, and dragged the window open. Already the front door of the bungalow had opened, and light was streaming out into the veranda and the garden.

Billy Bunter scudded across the

veranda, rolled over the low balustrade, and dropped into a bed of flowers. There was a yell from the doorway.

"There he goes!"

"Oh crumbs!" spluttered Bunter.

The fat junior was on his feet in a twinkling and scudding away. He trampled recklessly through shrubberies and over flower-beds. Behind him were footsteps and voices, and he knew only too well what to expect if Ponsonby & Co. caught him in their present exasperated mood. The fat junior blundered on wildly in the gloom, and found himself at the gate. Drury was sprinting down the path towards the gate, and he shouted as he sighted Bunter again.

Billy Bunter tore open the gate desperately and rushed out.

He dashed away down the path at top speed, lost his footing on the slope, and rolled over, yelled, and scrambled up again, and fled as if he were fleeing for his life.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

He came up to the caravan camp at last, and found five juniors sitting round the camp-fire, discussing cocoa and buns, and the absence of the Owl of the Remove.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

"Bunter—"

"You fat villain—"

"Lick him!"

Undoubtedly Billy Bunter deserved a licking, but the story he had to tell saved him. Harry Wharton & Co. listened, amazed, as the Owl of the Remove described what had taken place at the bungalow.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, when the fat junior had finished. "The swindling rotters!"

"This is where we chip in!" said Wharton grimly.

"Rather!"

"The chipfulness is the proper caper."

"How many are there at the bungalow?" asked Wharton briskly.

"Seven!" gasped Bunter. "Pon & Co. and Captain Gadsby."

"Seven!" said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "We'd better take some cricket stumps with us, you chaps!"

"You bet!"

Bunter stared.

"You're not going to the bung!" he gasped.

"We are, fathead!"

"They'll rag you!"

"We'll chance that," said Wharton.

"Chuck the cricket stumps out of the van, Bob! It'll be odds against us, but that crowd aren't much in the fighting line!"

"I'm not coming," said Bunter. "I'll stay and look after the—the camp. If any tramps come along, you can rely on me!"

"You can go and eat coke!"

Harry Wharton & Co. lost no time in starting. It was a good walk to the bungalow, and midnight was near at hand.

Boom!

It was the first stroke of midnight, from somewhere in the town, as Harry Wharton & Co. reached the gate of the Firs Bungalow.

"Just in time!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The justfulness is terrific!"

The five juniors crowded up the gravel path. That the occupants of the bungalow were still up at that late hour was obvious; from two or three windows light gleamed through the curtains.

There was no other light to be seen along the shore nearer than the distant twinkling lights of Staciffe. Silence lay over the scene, broken only by the faint



murmur of the sea on the shelving sand.

The juniors gripped their cricket stumps as they moved on quietly to the house. Mauleverer was there, and whatever reception they might get, they were going to see Mauleverer, and see him clear.

The Famous Five stopped at the green-painted door. From within the bungalow came the sounds of movement and a sound of voices, faint through the door. The last stroke of twelve had died away. Loudly and sharply the voice of Cecil Ponsonby was heard in the house.

"There goes twelve! Now for that cad Mauleverer!"

"Just in time!" murmured Bob again, gripping his stump a little harder. "Mauly would be glad to know we're here, I fancy!"

"Better knock," said Nugent.

"If they don't open the door—"

"We'll burst it in!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "But knock first."

Harry Wharton raised his hand to the knocker, and gave a loud, ringing rattle-tat.

There was a buzz at once inside the bungalow.

"What the thump—"

"Who the dickens, at this time of night—"

"Better see. Keep the chain on."

The door opened a couple of inches, with a clink of the chain, and a bar of light streamed into the veranda outside. Cecil Ponsonby peered out.

"Who's there?" he snapped. "What's wanted? Why, my hat, it's that Greyfriars crowd?"

He had recognised Wharton.

"Shut the door!" called Gadsby.

Bob Cherry's big foot was already in the way. But the door was on the chain, and, though Ponsonby could not shut it, it opened no farther.

"What do you want?" snarled Ponsonby. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of night?"

"We want to see Mauleverer."

"This isn't the time to pay visits," said Ponsonby, more civilly. "You can come in the mornin', if you like."

"The morning won't do," said Harry quietly. "You see, Bunter's told us a lot. We're not looking for trouble, but we want Mauly!"

"The wantfulness is terrific, my esteemed and rotten Ponsonby!"

"Well, you're not comin' in!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth. "And if you kick up a row, I'll telephone for the police!"

"Good: they'll be interested to see the roulette, when they come!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Pon, let them have their dashed Mauly, and don't have a row," murmured Drury.

"Shut up, Drury! Cherry, take your boot away—"

"Not half!" smiled Bob.

"Give me a pin, somebody! I'll soon make him shift it!" said Ponsonby savagely.

"Oh, my hat!"

A finger and thumb appeared, with a pin between them. Bob Cherry shoved the business end of his stump in, and the pin dropped from Ponsonby's hand, and there was a loud yell.

"Hurt, old dear?" asked Bob cheerily. "You mustn't stick pins in my fattest calf, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove on the door, the lot of you!" hissed Ponsonby. "Line up there! Captain Gadsby, lend a hand!"

There was a heavy pressure on the door from within. Harry Wharton & Co. shoved on it from without. But

the pressure of seven was heavier than that of five, and the door squeezed shut. Bob Cherry gave a howl as his foot was jammed between door and post, and he just managed to extricate it. The door shut, and the lock snapped.

There was a mocking laugh from Ponsonby within.

"Now for Mauleverer!" he shouted. "We'll rag the cad here, and they can hear him yell!"

"Give him a chance to pay—"

"Of course, idiot! Come on!"

Harry Wharton panted.

"Come on, you fellows! They're going for Mauly now, and we're not going to stand on ceremony."

He ran along the veranda to the french windows.

"I—I say—" gasped Nugent.

But Wharton did not hesitate. He raised his cricket-stump, and brought it down with a crash, and there was a smashing of glass that rang through the bungalow.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### A Fight at Close Quarters!

**L**ORD MAULEVERER was sitting at ease in an armchair, nodding a little, for he was sleepy, when Ponsonby unlocked the door of the card-room, and strode in, with the nuts at his heels.

Mauly looked up sleepily.

"Now, you welshin' rotter—"

began Ponsonby.

The schoolboy earl rose quietly to his feet. His look of cold scorn brought a slight flush even to Cecil Ponsonby's hardened face.

"Are you goin' to pay up?" snarled Gadsby.

Mauleverer shook his head.

"I'm not payin' a shillin'!" he answered calmly. "Matter of principle, you know."

"For the last time!" shouted Ponsonby furiously.

"Any number of times you like, dear man!" said Lord Mauleverer urbanely.

That was enough for Ponsonby.

He rushed at Mauleverer, and the rest of the nuts rushed with him. Drury and Vavasour hung back a little; but Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Merton grasped the schoolboy earl.

Lord Mauleverer hit out.

He was not a fighting-man, as a rule; but being handled by the gang of young sharpers was more than enough to rouse his noble blood to fighting-heat.

And, to the surprise of the Highcliffe nuts, the schoolboy earl put up a stout fight.

They struggled and swayed, and went out into the hall in a fighting crowd. Captain Gadsby, who had been sampling the champagne again not wisely but too well, stood and looked on, with a cigar in his loose mouth, rather unsteady on his pins.

In the din and excitement of the struggle, the Highcliffe fellows hardly noticed the crash of glass from the smoke-room.

Lord Mauleverer was fighting gamely, and Monson had backed out of the struggle, nursing a streaming nose.

But the odds were too great, and, with a crash, the schoolboy earl went to the floor, with three or four Highcliffians sprawling over him.

Crash came the glass again.

"Those cads are gettin' in!" yelled Monson.

"Lock the door between!" panted Ponsonby, pinning Mauleverer down with a knee on his chest.

Gadsby ran into the smoke-room, to

jerk the key from the inside of the door. But through the shattered french windows Harry Wharton & Co. were pouring.

Wharton was the first in, and he ran straight at Gadsby.

Gadsby jerked out the key, and whipped into the hall again, striving frantically to jerk the key in on the outside of the lock. But he had no time.

Harry Wharton's grasp was on the door-handle, and he tore the door open, leaving Gadsby with the key still in his hand.

"Back up!" yelled Gadsby.

"Oh, begad! Rescue, you fellows!" panted Lord Mauleverer, realising now that the chums of Greyfriars were at hand.

"We're coming, Mauly!" roared Bob Cherry. "Up guards and at 'em! There's one for your nob, Gaddy!"

"Yaroooh!"

The fight was fast and furious while it lasted. But Ponsonby and Monson were both at close quarters and held, and Bob Cherry was doing great execution with his stump.

Vavasour was the first to flee. He fled into the kitchen at the back, and locked the door after him. And Drury was the next, bolting into a bedroom. Merton dodged into the card-room and slammed the table against the door.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gadsby, backing into a corner, finding himself hard pressed. "Chuck it! Hands off, you fellows! I chuck up!"

"Back up!" yelled Ponsonby, still struggling with Wharton.

"The game's up!" growled Gadsby. "Chuck it, for goodness' sake! All your fault, Pon, turnin' the place into a bally tap-room!"

"Oh, don't chuck it yet!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I'm just getting my hand in. Won't you have another round, Gaddy?"

"Sheer off, you mad fool!" roared Gadsby. "Keep that stump away, confound you!"

"Our win!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"The winfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

Captain Gadsby, who had soon collapsed after joining in the fray, sat up dizzily.

"What—what—wharrer—" he mumbled.

"Oh, you go to sleep, old top!" said Bob Cherry, and he gave the gallant captain a shove with his boot, and he rolled over again, gasping.

Wharton rose, leaving Ponsonby gasping on the floor. Monson had escaped from Mauleverer and fled into regions unknown. Ponsonby scrambled up, and was promptly knocked down again by Bob Cherry. Then he decided to remain on the floor.

"Looks to me as if we've got the best of this little rumpus," remarked Bob. "Going to get up again, Pon?"

Ponsonby's only reply was a look of savage hatred.

"Begad! Awfully good of you to look in for me, old beans!" said Lord Mauleverer breathlessly. "How did you know?"

"We heard it all from Bunter," said Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "Even Bunter has his uses on rare occasions."

"Begad! I think we may as well be movin', dear men. I wonder if I can get put up in the town to-night—"

"You're coming along to the caravan," said Harry. "Come on, you fellows! I don't think Pon & Co. want any more."

Wharton threw open the door, and

(Continued on page 22.)

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**JIMMY'S HELPING HAND!** Jimmy Silver plays an important part in turning the tables on Mr. Sampson Smith, the ruthless enemy of Skitter Dick, the cowpuncher!

# The Captive Cowpuncher!



A THRILLING LONG COMPLETE TALE DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. IN THE WILD WEST.

BY  
**OWEN CONQUEST.**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### A Comrade in Peril!

**T**HERE'S going to be trouble!" Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark, and Jimmy Silver nodded gloomily.

It did not need a very keen eye to see that there was trouble in the air at the Windy River Ranch.

Outside the bunkhouse the Windy River outfit were gathered in a crowd, talking in low tones, with grim and expressive looks. Even Baldy, the cook, who ought to have been washing up pots and pans in the cookhouse, had forgotten his duties, and was standing in the cookhouse doorway, with a frying-pan in his hand, and an excited look on his fat face.

The Windy River outfit were not thinking of the usual business of the day that morning, it was clear.

Jimmy Silver & Co. loafed by the porch of the ranch-house, looking thoughtful and troubled. Boss Smedley was seen, once or twice, glancing from a window—evidently aware that there was trouble coming.

Every man in the crowd glanced now and then across the sunlit prairie, in the direction of the distant stockman's hut at Lone Pine, five miles from the ranch. From that direction, evidently, something was expected to happen.

"The cowpunchers are getting excited," went on Lovell. "If they bring Skitter Dick back a prisoner, there'll be trouble. His pals won't let him be taken away."

"Good for them!" said Raby.

"But it means jolly bad trouble if they start scrapping with the Mounted Police!" said Jimmy Silver glumly.

"They're coming this way!" muttered Newcome.

Pete Peters, the burly foreman of the ranch, had been addressing the cowpunchers. The Rookwood chums were too far off to hear what he said, but they noted its effect on the cowboys. All of

a sudden the whole crowd started towards the ranch-house.

"Better tell Mr. Smedley!" murmured Lovell.

Jimmy Silver nodded and stepped into the ranch-house. But Mr. Hudson Smedley was already coming out.

The big Canadian rancher stood before the porch waiting for the outfit to come up. The cowpunchers seemed to hesitate as they came under his clear, steady eyes. They halted and looked at him, and looked at one another and shifted uncomfortably. Jimmy Silver noted that several of them had revolvers in their belts—a very unusual circumstance on the Alberta ranch.

"Wade in, Pete," said Spike Thompson. "It's you for the chinwag."

"Go it, Pete!"

The burly foreman "went it."

"Mr. Smedley, sir, the boys want to know—" he began.

"Well?" rapped out the rancher.

"It's about Skitter Dick, sir, up there at Lone Pine."

"Well?"

"We all know the Skitter, boss," said Pete Peters. "He's a square man. He's been one of this outfit a long time, and we all know him down to the ground. We hear there's an American detective arter him, and he's brought the Mounted Police. Waal, boss, the boys say that Skitter Dick is going to have a square deal."

"That's it!" said Red Alf.

"Jest that!" chimed in Spike.

And there was a murmur of approval from a dozen burly fellows.

"Skitter Dick's lit out from Lone Pine with the Mounted arter him," went on Pete Peters. "I saw him ride away for the foothills. But the M.P.'s ain't the sort to let him get clear if they can help. I guess it's the odds on Dick being roped in!"

"I fancy so!" assented Hudson Smedley.

"The boys say that they ain't taking him away if so be they rope him in," said Pete Peters.

"Not by a jugful!" said Spike emphatically.

And he dropped a brown hand on the butt of a six-shooter in his belt.

"He's one of us, and we're seeing him through, boss," said Pete Peters. "We figger it out that it's a frame-up agin him. We know the Skitter's all right."

Hudson Smedley's brows contracted.

All his sympathy was with Skitter Dick, the handsome cowpuncher who was a general favourite at Windy River. But the law was the law, and a warrant in the hands of a sergeant of the Canadian Mounted Police was not to be gainsaid by all the cowpunchers in Alberta.

"We want you to stand in with us, boss," said the foreman.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on silently.

They fully believed, with the cowpunchers, that the charge against Dick Lee was a "frame-up." But the law was the law.

"Can't be done!" said Hudson Smedley abruptly. "I tell you how it stands. The American, Sampson Smith, is a detective from California, with a charge against Dick for something that happened at Sacramento two or three years ago. He's accused of shooting a Mexican named Pablo Xenas. Sergeant Kerr and his men have a warrant to take him to Calgary, and if the authorities are satisfied, he will be sent to the States. They'll give him a fair show at Calgary. Canadian law is all right."

"We ain't bucking agin Canadian law," said Pete Peters. "But we ain't letting Skitter Dick be taken over the Line. They ain't pertickler in the States, that I know of. It's a frame-up agin Dick, and how's a cowpuncher to stand up agin a crowd of lawyers and argufy? Dick ain't going, boss!"

"Not by long chalks!" said Red Alf.

"This won't do, men," said the rancher quietly. "If it was Sampson Smith alone, I'd chuck him into the river before he should touch a man of



my outfit! But the Mounted Police stand for the law of Canada, and that's that!"

Pete Peters shook his head slowly. "Then you ain't with us, boss?" "No." "Can't be helped," said the foreman. "You can fire the whole outfit if you like, boss, though we'll be sorry to go. But if they bring Dick back here a prisoner, we're taking a hand in the game, Mounted Police or no Mounted Police!"

The Rancher smiled slightly. "Is that all, Pete?" "That's all, boss." "Then get about business!" said the rancher. "They won't come back here. If Sergeant Kerr gets his man, he will light out for Red Deer across the plains, and Windy River won't see hide nor hair of him."

"Oh!" ejaculated Pete. There was a deep murmur from the cowpunchers. That was a new view of the matter to them, and it looked as if the affair was right out of the hands of the Windy River crowd.

"Saddle up!" shouted Spike Thompson. "Let's get out and look for the boys!"

"Stand where you are!" rapped out Hudson Smedley.

"Look hyer, boss——" There was a sudden yell from Baldy, the cook. He jumped out of the doorway of the cookhouse, brandishing his frying-pan in his excitement.

"They're coming!" yelled Baldy. He pointed across the plain with the frying-pan. Every eye turned in that direction.

From the Lone Pine trail came a bunch of horsemen. The morning sunlight glimmered on the uniforms of the Canadian Mounted Police. And in the midst of the cavalcade, bound to his horse, rode Skitter Dick, a prisoner!

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Prisoner!

**R**ANCHER SMEDLEY gritted his teeth.

He had hoped that the last had been seen of the party of M.P.'s at Windy River. They had their prisoner; and common prudence dictated that the captive should be taken away as quickly as possible, without coming near the ranch, where he had determined and reckless friends. Why, in the name of wonder, had they brought him back to the ranch, where the cowpunchers were ready for trouble?

Skitter Dick rode quietly, with down-cast eyes, in the midst of his captors. Evidently his flight from Lone Pine had failed, and the troopers had roped him in before he could get clear away to the foothills of the Rockies. Ahead of the party, with the sergeant, rode Mr. Sampson Smith, the hard-faced detective from California. Three troopers rode round Skitter Dick, watchful for an attempt to escape.

The horsemen rode up to the ranch, amid a deep murmur from the cowpunchers.

Skitter Dick raised his eyes, and the colour flooded into his handsome face at the sight of his comrades. He felt deeply the humiliation of his position.

"We're standing by you, Dick!" shouted Red Alf.

The party halted at a word from the sergeant, and the troopers closed up round the prisoner, with their carbines handy. Their looks were quiet and cool, not in the slightest degree threatening; but there was no mistaking their

determination. Any attempt at rescue would have led at once to shooting.

That consideration did not trouble the Windy River outfit. They gathered in an excited crowd round the bunch of horsemen.

Sampson Smith looked at them, and his greenish eyes glinted.

"Mr. Smedley!" he rapped out.

"Well?"

"Better keep your crowd in hand. You don't want shooting here?"

"Why have you come back?" snapped Hudson Smedley. "You've got your man. Hadn't you hoss-sense enough to keep clear? Didn't you know enough to go in when it rains?"

"I guess I've got the man, but I ain't got all I want," said the detective.

"I've come back for it."

"What do you want?"

The Californian gritted his teeth.

"I've searched him," he said. "He ain't got it on him. I reckon it will be among his things here. He shot a man in Sacramento to get hold of a gold nugget. I'm after the gold brick, as well as the man. And I guess I ain't going without it."

Jimmy Silver's eyes met Skitter Dick's for a second. The cowpuncher smiled slightly.

Jimmy compressed his lips.

The gold brick that Mr. Sampson Smith was so keen to possess, reposed at that moment in Jimmy's hip-pocket. Skitter Dick had trusted him to take care of it; and Jimmy had no intention of betraying the trust. Not for a moment did he believe the hard-faced man's statement; his faith in his cowboy pal was too strong for that. Not even Jimmy's chums knew that the gold brick was in his possession—it was a secret between him and the Skitter.

Certainly, Sampson Smith was not likely to guess that the gold brick was in the keeping of the schoolboy. His belief was that Skitter Dick had hidden it somewhere in his quarters at the ranch.

Rancher Smedley hesitated a moment or two.

"I guess I'm not dealing with you, Mr. Smith," he said, at last. "American law and American detectives cut no ice on this side of the border. The sergeant for me. What do you say, Mr. Kerr?"

"I guess it's Mr. Smith's deal," said the sergeant, with obvious reluctance. "I'm placed under his orders for this job, Mr. Smedley. We've got his man, and we're bound to see him through in searching for what he wants."

"That plain enough?" sneered Sampson Smith.

"You'll never make me believe that Skitter Dick's laid hands on anything that isn't his," said the rancher quietly. "But you're welcome to search, if you choose. Dick had his quarters in the bunkhouse here—he's got a bunk, and a bed, and a grip or two there—and you can look into them."

"That's good enough," said Sampson Smith. "I reckoned he'd have the gold brick in his clothes, but he ain't, and so I guess it's hidden here somewhere. I ain't going without it!"

"I guess you're booked for a long stay in Alberta, then, Mr. Smith!" said Skitter Dick.

The detective gave the bound man a savage look.

"Where's the gold brick, you pesky varmint!" he snarled.

"Find it!"

"You won't let on?"

"Nope!"

Sampson Smith pushed his horse

closer to Skitter Dick, his hand clenched, his eyes glinting.

"You hound! Tell me where it's hidden, or——"

His clenched hand was raised.

A moment more, and there would have been a rush of the cowpunchers. But Sergeant Kerr interposed, shoving the detective back so violently that he rolled from his horse, and came to the ground with a crash.

"None of that, I guess!" said Sergeant Kerr.

Sampson Smith scrambled to his feet, red with rage.

"What do you mean by that?" he yelled. "You're under my orders, Sergeant Kerr."

"Only for duty!" said the sergeant.

"Lay a finger on that man, and I'll give you my riding-whip next, Mr. Smith!"

"Hear, hear!" chirruped Lovell.

Mr. Sampson Smith scowled round at the grinning cowpunchers. But he did not continue the dispute with the sergeant.

"Where's the man's bunk?" he snarled.

"Jimmy, show him Dick's quarters, will you?" said Mr. Smedley.

"Certainly! This way, Mr. Smith," said Jimmy Silver politely.

The detective followed him.

Jimmy Silver led the way into the bunkhouse, which was vacant. He pointed out Skitter Dick's bunk.

The bunk, and a bag or two, and a few odds and ends, were all the goods that belonged to Skitter Dick at the Windy River Ranch. A cowpuncher's worldly possessions were generally limited to the amount that could be carried on a horse.

Mr. Smith proceeded to search.

Jimmy Silver stood by, watching him, with a cheery smile on his face. It was rather entertaining to watch Mr. Smith searching for the article that was, at that moment, reposing in Jimmy's pocket.

The Californian detective's search was thorough enough.

Had the gold brick been hidden there, indubitably Mr. Smith would have unearthed it. But it was not hidden there; and the Californian had his trouble for his pains.

He ceased at last, with a savage scowling brow.

"I guess he's put it somewhere safe," he muttered.

"Very likely!" assented Jimmy.

"Finished here, Mr. Smith?"

"Yep!"

The detective strode out of the bunkhouse.

The group still stood before the ranch, Skitter Dick in the midst of his captors.

The handsome cowpuncher grinned as Sampson Smith came scowling up, followed by Jimmy Silver.

"Any luck?" he asked.

Sampson Smith did not reply to that question.

"We're ready, Mr. Smith!" the sergeant grunted. "We've got a long trail to cover."

There was a murmur from the cowpunchers, and they closed round the riders. Three or four revolvers were in full view now, and the troopers handled their carbines.

"Stand back, men!" shouted Hudson Smedley.

"They ain't taking Dick away!" answered Pete Peters. "Sorry, boss; but if they try to take him, there's goin' to be bad trouble."

Sergeant Kerr gave the ranch foreman a grim look.

"We're doing our duty, Mr. Peters," he said. "Any man raising a hand to stop us from taking away our prisoner is breaking the law. We shall shoot!"

There was a derisive laugh from the cowpunchers.

"Shoot, and be durned!" said Spike Thompson. "I guess we know how to pull triggers, too, at Windy River!"

"Hold on, boys!" broke out Skitter Dick anxiously. "No shooting on my account. Let up, old pards!"

"They ain't taking you, Dick!" "I guess I've got to go," said the cowboy. "Don't make matters worse all round. You can't buck agin the law."

"Are you ready, Mr. Smith?" said the sergeant grimly.

Sampson Smith ground his teeth. "Not yet! Hold on!"

He stepped up beside the bound cowpuncher, and fixed his eyes savagely on Skitter Dick's face.

"Where's the gold brick?" he muttered, sinking his voice.

"Where you'll never find it—you or your gang!" answered Skitter Dick coolly.

"Hand it over, and go free!" whispered the detective.

Skitter Dick looked at him.

"Free?" he repeated.

"Free! You know I don't want you. It's the gold brick I'm after, and the clue to the mine!" growled Sampson Smith. "Make it a deal," he whispered so that only the cowboy could hear him. "Hand over the gold brick, and you're a free man, and I'll see you clear of this charge, too!"

The cowpuncher's lip curled.

"You own it's a frame-up?" he said.

"I'll own up anything you like, I guess, with the gold brick in my hands!" muttered the detective.

Skitter Dick laughed aloud.

"Nothing doing!" he said.

"You won't hand it over to save your neck?"

"No!"

Sampson Smith gave him a malignant glance.

"I'm ready, sergeant!" he growled.

"Get a move on, and let's get back to Mosquito!"

The horsemen closed up. In their path grouped the cowpunchers, with grim, menacing looks, weapons in hand.

"Halt!" snapped Pete Peters.

"Clear the way!" shouted the sergeant.

"Stop us, and we fire!"

"I guess we'll shoot, too, durn your hide! Stand up to them, boys!"

"You bet!"

"Hold on!" Skitter Dick's voice broke out. "Boys, stand back! You know I'm innocent of this charge. I'll get clear. Don't shoot! Stand back and let them pass. It's the last thing I ask."

"Look here, Dick—"

"Boys, you don't want me to go knowing I've left black trouble behind for my friends! Stand clear, for my sake!"

There was a murmur among the cowpunchers, and hesitation. But the earnest appeal of the prisoner had its effect. Slowly the crowd of cowpunchers parted, leaving a path free for the horsemen.

"You're a durn fool, Dick!" said Pete Peters. "You won't get a fair deal. Say the word, and we'll—"

"Good-bye, old pards!"

The Mounted Police moved on, surrounding their prisoner. Grim and angry looks watched them go. But

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Skitter Dick had had his way; and no hand was raised, no shot was fired. Over the rolling prairie the cavalcade went at a trot, and they vanished from the angry eyes of the Windy River outfit.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver on the Trail!

"BLAZER!"

Jimmy Silver called to his horse, and Blazer trotted up.

At the gate of the corral Jimmy saddled him.

"Whither bound?" asked Lovell, coming up to the corral.

Arthur Edward's face was glum, as was every face at the ranch since Skitter Dick had been taken away by the troopers.

Jimmy glanced round.

"I'm going after them!" he muttered.

"They're at Mosquito before now," said Lovell.

WITH THE ROOKWOOD  
CHUMS  
IN  
CANADA!



"LOVELL,  
The  
LOVE-LORN!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

Next Week.

"They won't stay at Mosquito long, only to feed, and feed the horses," said Jimmy. "They'll be heading for Red Deer, to get on the cars for Calgary."

"That's so. But—"

Lovell eyed his chum very doubtfully.

"What can you do?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Jimmy Silver frankly. "But—but I want to see the last of poor old Skitter Dick."

"They'll be a good many miles ahead," said Lovell.

"Blazer can beat any horse in that outfit."

"But—"

"Anyhow, better be riding than worrying," said Jimmy Silver, and he jumped on his horse, waved his hand to Lovell, and rode away.

Arthur Edward-Lovell stood looking after him rather dubiously. He wondered whether Jimmy had some reckless scheme in his head for helping Skitter Dick to escape from his captors.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy had no formed plan in his mind at all. He was

anxious about Skitter Dick, and wanted

to help him if he could. And the gold brick in his pocket weighed on his mind, too. He knew that that was what had brought Sampson Smith to Canada.

The arrest of the Skitter was only a pretext for seizing the gold brick. With that, the cowpuncher could have ransomed himself, had he chosen. Sampson Smith was acting under cover of the law; but he was only using the law for his own ends, as Jimmy was well aware.

Once away from the ranch, booked for a foreign country, and a trail for his life, it seemed to Jimmy likely enough that Skitter Dick would regret that he had not taken his chance and ransomed his freedom. That chance, at least, Jimmy could give him if he overtook the party on the prairie trail.

What the value of the gold brick was, Jimmy did not know. It was worth, perhaps, fifty pounds as metal; but it was not for its intrinsic value that Sampson Smith had followed the long trail from California in search of it. Jimmy wondered whether the markings on the gold brick gave it its value, forming a clue, perhaps, to the mine where it had been found. He had not looked at it since placing it in his pocket—the secret of it was not his. But he had seen it once, and he remembered that it was graven with lines and words.

Jimmy Silver did not head for the Mosquito township. He knew that the troopers had probably left that spot by this time—it was now late in the afternoon. They were somewhere on the boundless plains, heading for Red Deer, and that night, it was certain, they would camp out on the prairie. Jimmy was riding for the Red Deer trail, a dozen miles south of Mosquito.

The sun was setting when he came on the well-worn trail—worn by countless hoofs of horses and cattle.

He halted on the trail, and surveyed the plain, here and there dotted by clumps of trees or thickets.

There was no one in sight, and he could not be certain whether the troopers had passed that point on the trail yet. Jimmy was learning to read "signs," but he was not yet skilled enough to pick out a late trail from the crowded tracks before him.

He sat Blazer, thinking, uncertain. The sound of hoof-beats from the direction of Mosquito startled him.

He looked up quickly.

Three riders came in sight, and he recognised Sampson Smith and a trooper, with Skitter Dick riding between, bound to his horse.

Sergeant Kerr and the other two troopers were not to be seen.

Jimmy sat his horse in the trail, waiting for the trio to come up. Sampson Smith scowled at him, and the trooper, who was Jimmy's old acquaintance, Mr. Bright, nodded and smiled. Skitter Dick looked at him in surprise.

"You here, Jimmy!" he exclaimed, as he came within hearing.

"Here I am," said Jimmy. "Fancy meeting you again!"

"Keep away from that prisoner, boy!" said Sampson Smith harshly.

"You're not wanted here!"

Jimmy did not heed him.

"I can speak to Skitter Dick, Mr. Bright?" he asked.

"No harm in it that I know of," answered the trooper. "Mind, no monkey tricks, kid!"

"Of course not!"

"You're under my orders, my man!" snapped Sampson Smith. "That boy isn't joining us!"

Trooper Bright looked at him.

"I've got my sergeant's orders to take





**JIMMY TO THE RESCUE!** "I guess you've got me, Smith," said Dick, playing for time, as he saw Jimmy Silver draw nearer. "It's your game!" "Coming to your senses, what?" grinned Sampson Smith. "Now tell me where the nugget is?" The junior was close behind the rascal now, and his clubbed whip was ready to strike. (See Chapter 5.)

Skitter Dick safe to Red Deer," he answered. "That's enough for me! Your orders cut no ice, Mr. Smith! The kid shall please himself whether he rides with us! The trail's free to every man in Canada!"

Sampson Smith gritted his teeth, but made no rejoinder. But it was evident that, for some reason, he was extremely unwilling for the addition to be made to the party.

Jimmy rode beside the cowpuncher. "I'd like a last word with you, Skitter," he said.

"Glad to see you again, Jimmy, if it's for the last time!" said the cowpuncher, with a faint smile.

"I can't hold you, old chap—"

"I don't want you to, Jimmy—nobody's going to get on the wrong side of the law on my account," said Skitter Dick.

Jimmy nodded.

"The sergeant's stopped behind?" he asked.

"Yes; at Mosquito. Other business up-country as well as roping me."

"Bootleggers!" said Trooper Bright, glancing round. "Sergeant Kerr's after the bootleggers, who're selling fire-water to the half-breeds. One man's enough to take a prisoner to Red Deer,

Jimmy. I guess you ain't going to hook him out of my hands—what?"

And the big trooper laughed.

"No!" said Jimmy, smiling.

"Good man!"

"Dick," said Jimmy, sinking his voice, "it's pretty clear what that man Smith is after. He would loose his hold on you if you let him have what he wants. Isn't it worth while?"

"So that's why you came along, kid?"

"Yes. I thought—"

Skitter Dick shook his head.

"I've been thinking it over pretty hard, I guess," he said. "But I ain't handing anything over. I had that brick, Jimmy, from a man who was killed on the Sacramento road three years ago—a white man and a Canadian, he was. It's the clue to a mine in British Columbia. They'd laid for him—Pablo Xenas and his gang, I guess, and let him have it—I came up in time, and they's scuttled. He gave it to me, Jimmy—it's a dead man's property, and I can't give it away. He's got people somewhere, and if ever I find them, it's for them. Savvy?"

"I—I see!" said Jimmy slowly.

"He gave me his name," went on Skitter Dick, "nearly with his last breath. He gave me the gold brick to keep. Next day Pablo Xenas and

his gang cornered me, they knew I had it—or they guessed. I shot Xenas to save my own life. But his friends worked it that I shot him in a row, and I reckoned I'd clear—and that's how the detective Sampson Smith got put after me. It was just a case for him, at first—he got hold of me in Sacramento; and then Pablo's friends took him into the secret, and when he knew what was at stake, he joined them after the gold brick. I'd hidden it safe before he roped me in—and I got away again, Jimmy, and after that I got hold of the gold brick, and lit out at once for Canada. That's a long step from Sacramento, and I reckoned I was clear of the whole crowd of them."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

The strange story was clearer to him now.

"I never blamed myself for winging Xenas," went on Skitter Dick. "He was at me with a knife, with two or three more, when I pulled trigger. But there's a charge of murder waiting for me in Sacramento, and I reckon my vamoosing would tell against me at the trial. But I wasn't going to take the risk, with three or four rascals ready to swear my life away. It wouldn't be the first time a frame-up had cost a man

his life in the Western States. I never reckoned I'd see any of them so far north as Alberta. I guess I got a shock when Sampson Smith blew in the other day."

Jimmy Silver was silent.

It was a dead man's trust that the cowpuncher was keeping, and Jimmy could not urge him to give the hard-faced detective the plunder he was seeking; it was not Dick Lee's to give.

He rode on in silence, with a troubled face.

Skitter Dick was troubled, too; but his determination was unshaken. Whether life or death waited for him over the line, the gold brick should not pass into the hands of his enemies.

After a long silence Skitter Dick glanced at Sampson Smith, and then spoke to Jimmy in a whisper that the hard-faced man could not hear.

"But I reckon, Jimmy, there suthing more afoot. I figure it out that that galoot don't intend to take me to Calgary for extradition."

"But—" said Jimmy.

Skitter Dick shook his head.

"He's used the law to get me into his hands," he muttered. "Here I am bound to do as he likes with. I guess I've got doubts whether I shall get as far as Red Deer, let alone Calgary."

"But the trooper—"

"I guess Sampson Smith wouldn't stick at much if the trooper was in his way," said the Skitter coolly.

Jimmy shuddered.

"But—surely—"

"You saw he didn't want you to join up, Jimmy," whispered the Skitter. "Old son, I reckon, now I've figured it out, that you can come in on this deal if you like. I'm a bound prisoner, and the trooper doesn't suspect an American detective of trying to double-cross him."

"I'll stick to you all the way to Red Deer."

"Not by a jugful. Clear off, as if you was going back to the ranch—and follow the trail," whispered Skitter Dick. "I guess I don't want Smith to drill you, if he means treachery. He's got a shooter, and he's quick on the shoot. You ain't throwing your life away on my account, Jimmy. But if you foller on without being seen you may be able to help me when I need it bad—pesky bad."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"But if you think that—if you suspect Smith—you must warn Trooper Bright!" he whispered.

"I guess I've given him the griffin, and he grinned," said Skitter Dick. "He don't take any stock in it. Sampson Smith's got his credentials all O.K., and Trooper Bright's told off to guard him and his prisoner. That's enough for him."

"You couldn't do more than warn him," muttered Jimmy.

"I've done that!"

They rode on in silence. Sampson Smith cast evil looks at the schoolboy, and his looks seemed, to Jimmy, to bear out the black suspicion that Skitter Dick had whispered. Why else should Jimmy's presence irritate the hard-faced man so keenly? If there was no treachery in his mind, Jimmy's presence made no difference to him one way or the other. Certainly he could not have supposed that Jimmy could attempt to rescue the Skitter from Trooper Bright.

The trooper slacked down in speed, looking about him. The sun was low in the west; it was close on time for camp. Jimmy caught Skitter Dick's eyes fixed on him.

He gave a slight nod.

THE POPULAR.—No. 438.

"Time I was off, I think," he said to Mr. Bright.

"More than time, I guess," said the trooper, with a smile. "You won't be back at the ranch this side midnight."

Sampson Smith, who rode a little ahead, looked round quickly. His sudden look showed plainly enough that he was glad that Jimmy was going.

"Good-bye, Dick!"

"Good-bye, kid!"

"And good-night to you, Mr. Bright!"

Jimmy turned his horse from the trail.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### The Whip-Hand!

A RED glow of flame glimmered out on the plains under the dark, velvety sky of Alberta.

Where the Red Deer trail ran by a ford over a sluggish stream an old cabin stood—used as a rest-house by travellers on that lonely trail. It was the roughest and rudest of shelters; a roof of pinewood, fastened on pine uprights, with wattled walls that had a dozen openings in them, the largest of which served as a door, the others, perhaps, as windows. The three horses were tethered in the grass outside the rude shelter; inside, under the slanting pine roof, the blankets were thrown for three men to sleep.

A camp-fire glowed before the hut, and Trooper Bright prepared his supper and the prisoner's supper. Mr. Sampson Smith looked after himself. There was nothing in common between him and the trooper, and they exchanged hardly a word. The burly, good-natured Canadian trooper hardly troubled to conceal his repugnance for the hard-faced, sly-eyed man from the States. He had his duty to do, and that duty was to bring his prisoner safe to Calgary with the Californian detective; and nothing would have turned Trooper Bright from his duty—not all the guns of the whole Windy River outfit, had they been there. But, apart from his duty, all his feelings were with the handsome cowpuncher whom he was guarding, and he kept the hard-faced man at more than arm's length.

Skitter Dick's hands were freed while he ate his supper, Trooper Bright keeping watch on him, revolver in hand. He liked the frank, handsome cowboy, personally, but he would have shot him dead without the slightest scruple had that been the only means to prevent an escape. Alive or dead, Trooper Bright was going to bring his prisoner to Calgary.

After supper, and when the party prepared to turn into their blankets, Dick Lee's hands were secured again—not in a way to cause him discomfort, if it could be helped, but in such a way that he had not the remotest chance of getting loose. And the trooper, ere he lay down to rest, fastened a cord from the prisoner's arm to his own. Any movement on Skitter Dick's part was bound to awaken him.

"Sorry, old pard," he said. "Duty's duty. I hope you'll get clear of this business; but I've got to land you at Calgary."

The cowpuncher nodded.

"I guess I ain't blaming you, sonny," he said. "You're going to sleep?"

"You'd better, too."

"I've given you the griffin about that lantern-jawed 'tec."

Mr. Bright grinned.

"Forget it, old pard!" he said.

And he rolled himself in his blanket, with his feet to the fire, to sleep.

Skitter Dick shrugged his shoulders, and lay down also. He had warned the trooper of his own vague suspicion, and he could do no more.

It was natural enough that Mr. Bright should not heed the warning. He put it down to Dick's natural dislike of the detective who had tracked him all the way from the Sacramento valley.

Dick did not intend to sleep; but he was weary. From his blanket he watched for a time Sampson Smith, stretched on the other side of the rest-hut.

The Californian was seemingly in slumber; he did not move. Skitter Dick wondered whether his suspicion had been unfounded.

Skitter Dick dozed at last. He started out of a half-slumber at the sound of a low, hissing voice.

"You're for it if you stir a finger!"

It was the voice of Sampson Smith.

Dick's eyes opened wide.

Trooper Bright's eyes were wide open, too; his hand was on his carbine. But kneeling over the trooper, clear in the glow of the fire, was the hard-faced man from California, and a revolver in his hand was jammed fairly into the trooper's startled face.

Bright did not stir. He knew when he was helpless, and he read savage determination in the face above him.

But his cool voice did not falter as he spoke:

"What's this game, Mr. Smith?"

"Are you taking it easy?"

"Sure!"

The man from Sacramento grinned.

"You'd better!" he said. "A bullet through the brain would keep you quiet enough, I guess; but I'd rather not spill your juice if I can help it. But I ain't taking chances. Stir, and you're a dead man!"

"Your game!" said the trooper tersely.

His glance fell for a moment on Skitter Dick. But the bound prisoner could not help him. He could only stare on the scene in the dancing red light of the camp-fire, helpless, expectant.

"Loose that carbine!"

Trooper Bright released his weapon.

"You've got handcuffs on you?"

"Sure."

"Hook them out!"

With stolid self-control, Trooper Bright hooked out the handcuffs. The revolver-muzzle almost touching his eyes enforced obedience. It was futile to ask for sudden and merciless death; and it was clear that it was only concern for his own neck that was holding back Sampson Smith's finger, now on the trigger. But at the slightest sign of resistance he would have fired ruthlessly.

"Put your paws together!"

Click!

The trooper's own handcuffs fastened on his own wrists. Sampson Smith grinned and rose to his feet.

"Neat, I guess!" he remarked.

Trooper Bright nodded.

"You've done me," he said quietly.

"I don't blame myself; I was put under your orders by my superiors; it's their funeral, not mine. Let me get a chance, and I'll muzzle you fast enough!"

Sampson Smith did not even trouble to answer. He turned to Skitter Dick, and his eyes fixed on the bound cowpuncher with a deadly look.

"I guess it's me for the gold brick!" he said.



## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

## For Life or Death!

SKITTER DICK drew a deep breath. His eyes were fixed on the ruffian before him, at whose mercy he now was, and from whom he expected little mercy.

"You're my mutton, Dick Lee!" grinned the man from Sacramento.

"Looks sure like it!" agreed Skitter Dick. "You ain't banking on taking me back to Sacramento, then?"

Sampson Smith laughed.

"Not in your life-time!" he said. "I reckon I've got the warrant for you fair and square—it was the only way to rope you in. The Mounted Police have done that for me. I've done with the law now, Dick Lee—and now I'm for the gold brick. Where is it?"

"Where you'll never find it!"

"I guess I shall make you talk! Give me the gold brick, and go free—with-out a stain on your name, either! I can fix that charge at Sacramento. I can tell you something that you'd give ten years' pay on the ranch to know! Is it a trade?"

"No."

"Think it over," said Sampson Smith, lighting a cigar, standing and looking down at the bound man as he did so. "I'll put all my cards on the table, Lee. I can make it worth your while to hand out the nugget. I ain't taking you back over the Line. I don't care a Continental red cent what becomes of you, so long as I handle the clue to the old mine in British Columbia. What would you give to know that Pablo Xenas is alive still—that I can prove it and clear you?"

Skitter Dick gave a violent start.

"Alive!" he muttered.

"I guess I can produce the man!" said Sampson Smith. "If you hadn't been a gold-darned mug you'd have guessed that your bullet only laid him out for the time. He kept out of sight after that, while the frame-up was worked on you. Savvy? Plenty of witnesses to prove that you shot him and you know where you put the body. But what if I could produce the man alive and well?"

He watched the cowpuncher's face.

Skitter Dick drew a sharp breath of relief.

"I guess I'm glad that I never finished for keeps even a greaser scum like Pablo Xenas," he said. "And if he's living he'll be found if I come to trial at Sacramento."

"You won't come within a thousand miles of Sacramento! You're a free man, with Pablo Xenas to prove that you never killed him, if you hand over the gold brick. He's in this game with me, I guess. Is it a trade?"

"No."

"You're not telling?"

"No."

Sampson Smith's eyes glittered.

"What's the good of the gold brick to you, Lee? You've never used it as a clue to the mine."

"It belongs to a dead man, and you ain't touching it, nor I either," said Skitter Dick steadily.

"I guess we shall see about that."

Sampson Smith bent and grasped the bound cowpuncher and dragged him out of the hut. It was useless for Skitter Dick to struggle; Mr. Bright had done his work with the cords only too well.

Trooper Bright's glance followed them bitterly. But he was powerless to intervene.

"You're not talking yet, Dick?" asked Sampson Smith.

"Nope."

"Then I guess your feet are going into the fire, pard. Call out when you've had enough."

Skitter Dick's handsome face was white, and great beads of perspiration were on his brow.

There was no ruth or mercy in the hard face of the man who had come north seeking, not a fugitive from justice, but a clue to a fortune. He stood over the helpless cowpuncher, grim and menacing.

"You villain!" came from Trooper Bright. "You durned villain! If my hands were loose—"

Sampson Smith did not even glance towards him.

"I give you till I've finished this cigar, Dick Lee," he said. "Then I guess you're talking one way or another."

"Not a word!" said Skitter Dick between his teeth.

The man from California shrugged his shoulders. He sat on a log facing the prisoner, puffing slowly at the cigar. The handcuffed trooper looked on in tense, savage silence.

Skitter Dick lay on his elbow, looking past the man who was sitting on the log, looking past him into the night.

He knew that the Californian's threat was no idle one; he knew that his life was to pay for the gold brick. His only hope was in Jimmy Silver, and that hope was faint.

"Another minute, I guess!" said Sampson Smith, breaking the silence.

He blew out a cloud of smoke.

A sudden gleam shot into Skitter Dick's eyes. From the darkness outside the radius of the camp-fire a shadow moved for a moment—directly behind the Californian sitting on the log.

The cowpuncher felt his heart throb.

If Sampson Smith should look over his shoulder? But he did not. Not for an instant did a suspicion cross his mind that there was anyone else at hand. Not a sound came from the darkness of the plains.

Trooper Bright saw the shadow that moved, but his bronzed face expressed nothing.

Skitter Dick broke into sudden talk, to keep the Californian's attention riveted on himself, to keep him from the chance of looking behind him. For it was an unarmed schoolboy with whom he would have had to deal had he discovered his danger.

"I guess you've got me, Smith," said the cowpuncher. "It's your game, and I may as well pass in my chips."

"Coming to your senses, what?" grinned Sampson Smith. "I reckoned you'd talk when you found I meant business. Where's the nugget?"

The shadow was close behind the Californian now.

Jimmy Silver, silent, tense, his face hard-set, his whip clubbed in his hand, was almost within hitting distance. Well he knew that if he failed to take the rascal by surprise he would have no time for a second blow. One ring from the Californian's revolver, and Jimmy Silver's intervention would have been ended.

Sampson Smith threw away the stump of his cigar.

"Time's up, Dick!" he said. "I guess I want to know where the nugget is. I reckon I— Ah!"

Crash!

Right on the head of the rascal came the heavy metal butt of the riding-whip with all the strength of Jimmy Silver's arm in the blow.

Sampson Smith gave a gurgling cry and fell sideways from the log.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

## Turning the Tables!

JIMMY SILVER sprang forward. His weapon whirled up for a second blow.

The hard-faced man from the Sacramento, half stunned, rolled on the ground, but his hand was gripping his revolver.

Crack!

The bullet flew wide—a yard from the Rookwood junior. Sampson Smith had no time for a second shot.

Crash!

Down came the riding-whip, and the man from California sank back in the grass. The second blow had stunned him.

Jimmy Silver panted.

He bent over the senseless man and jerked away his revolver. Then he turned to Skitter Dick.

"I was in time," he panted.

"I guess so, Jimmy. You've saved my life!"

"I've been watching the camp for hours," muttered Jimmy breathlessly. "I was hanging on, Dick, before you'd finished your supper. I've been watching, waiting, and I saw him drag you out of the hut. I got near enough to hear him speaking. But I had to be careful; he would have shot me if he had seen me, and that wouldn't have helped you."

"Nope, for sure!" grinned Skitter Dick. "You're the real goods, Jimmy, the real white article! I guess you can let me out of these ropes, if Mr. Bright ain't no objection to make."

Trooper Bright held up his manacled hands.

"I guess I can't raise objections," he said. "I never was so glad to see anybody as to see you this time, young Silver! Let me loose, and I'll make sure of that skunk."

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy.

But he released Skitter Dick first. After what had happened, Jimmy did not know what the trooper's intentions might be; but he intended to make Skitter Dick master of his own actions.

The cowpuncher was freed, and he picked up the revolver taken from the senseless Californian.



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"I guess I can talk to you now, Mr. Bright!" he said, with a grin.  
 The trooper shrugged his shoulders.  
 "You're not my prisoner now," he said. "I guess I'm a prisoner myself, and I want your help. Are you letting me loose and taking the chance?"  
 "Sure!"

Without hesitation the Skitter bent over him, found the spring of the handcuffs, and released him.

Trooper Bright rubbed his wrists and took the handcuffs. He fastened them on the wrists of Sampson Smith, who was now stirring with returning consciousness.

The Californian sat up dazedly on the grass. His wild glance went from one to another, and rested on Jimmy Silver.

"You here!" he muttered thickly. "It was you who—who—"  
 "Little me!" smiled Jimmy Silver.

The man struggled with the handcuffs.  
 "Who's put these on me? Take them off!"

"I guess not," said Trooper Bright grimly. "You're coming with me to Calgary, Mr. Smith, a prisoner!"

The Californian muttered a savage exclamation.

"I guess I know the whole story now," continued Trooper Bright grimly. "I kinder guess Dick Lee won't be extradited now, Mr. Smith—not in your lifetime. I guess there'll be galoots looking for Pablo Xenas, your confederate, and finding him, too; he won't be far away, I reckon. I guess I'm a witness for Skitter Dick, and that you've come to Canada, Mr. Smith to put in some long years in the penitentiary. You'll find it's a pretty serious matter to hold up the Mounted Police with a revolver."

The wretched man gave a groan.  
 "Let me loose," he muttered. "I can make it worth your while, Lee. I can tell you where to put your finger on Pablo Xenas."

"You mean that he's in Canada," grinned Skitter Dick. "I guess he wouldn't trust you far out of his sight with the gold brick at the end of the trail. Waiting for you at Red Deer,

perhaps. I guess I can leave it to the M.P.'s to find him—and I'm going on to Red Deer with Mr. Bright to help him keep you safe and sound."

"You'll come with me a free man," said the trooper.

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. He left the camp to seek Blazer, whom he had tethered at a safe distance. While he was gone Sampson Smith pleaded and pressed his handcuffed hands to his aching head. But pleading availed him nothing. When Jimmy Silver came back, leading Blazer, Sampson Smith was lying in his blanket again, with his legs tied for additional security.

Jimmy Silver camped at the old hut by the ford for the remainder of that night. He was in great spirits, and thankful, from the bottom of his heart, that he had followed Skitter Dick from the ranch.

After breakfast in the morning Trooper Bright and Skitter Dick started on the Red Deer trail, with Sampson Smith riding between them, a bound prisoner. The positions had changed now in that party of three.

"Tell the boyees at the ranch!" Skitter Dick called out joyfully, as he started.

"You bet!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. And he rode merrily on the long trail to Windy River, while the trooper and Skitter Dick and the prisoner disappeared southward.

It was high noon when Jimmy Silver arrived at the Windy River Ranch. His chums came hurriedly to meet him, and Rancher Smedley gave him a stern look as he rode up. But the rancher's expression altered when Jimmy told him what had happened that wild night on the prairie.

"Hurrah!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell, tossing his Stetson hat high in the air, careless whether it ever came down again.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" yelled Raby and Newcome.

Pete Peters hurried over from the bunkhouse.

"Any news of the Skitter?" he asked eagerly.

Jimmy Silver told the news.  
 "By gum!" ejaculated Pete. "By gum! And you a kid tenderfoot!" He gripped Jimmy Silver's hand. "Put it there, kid!"

"Ow!" ejaculated Jimmy.  
 The cowboy foreman's grip was hard. Leaving Jimmy with numb fingers, Pete Peters rushed across to the cookhouse with the news.

"Skitter Dick's cleared, and he's coming back when he's got through at Calgary!" roared the ranch foreman.

And then there was a roar from the Windy River outfit that rolled back in echoes like thunder from the prairie.

Skitter Dick's return to Windy River was delayed, but before the Skitter came there came news of him. As the cowpuncher had guessed, Pablo Xenas had not trusted his confederate far out of his sight, and the Canadian Mounted Police, once on the track, did not fail. The Mexican was found in Red Deer, waiting there, under an assumed name, for news of his associate's progress, and the first news the rascal received came in the form of a burly Canadian trooper's hand on his shoulder.

With Pablo Xenas alive and well and a prisoner, it was clear enough that the case against Skitter Dick was a "frame up." Both the plotting rascals went to prison after their trial. Mr. Sampson Smith, with the additional prospect before him of being extradited, when his term was up, to be dealt with by his own authorities for betraying his trust. And Skitter Dick came back in triumph to Windy River.

It was a great day at Windy River when the cowpuncher returned. The whole outfit turned out, with cracking whips and cracking revolvers, to welcome him home, and Dick rode up to the ranch in the midst of a roaring crowd. There was a jamboree at Windy River that day, in which Hudson Smedley cheerily joined, and the Rookwood juniors still more merrily.

After the celebration Jimmy Silver stopped Skitter Dick on his way to the bunkhouse, and slipped the gold brick into his hand.

"I kept it safe, you see," he said, with a smile.

"And I guess I'm going to keep it safe till the man it belongs to comes along," said Skitter Dick. "There's a fortune in it, Jimmy—a big fortune for the galoot that's got a right to it. But that's neither you nor me, and so it's a secret."

And a secret it remained, almost forgotten as the days passed, though Jimmy Silver wondered sometimes whether anything would ever be known of the lost mine in the mountains of British Columbia, to which the clue was graven on the gold brick.

THE END.

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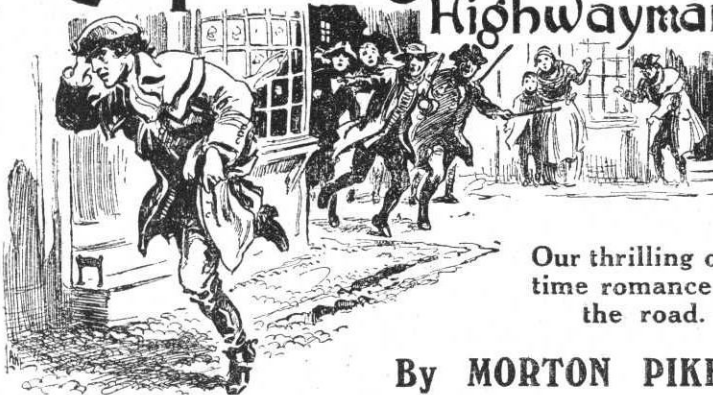
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**THE EMERALD!** A strange jewel is the Emerald of Good Fortune, for it brings to Lance Somerset a run of bad luck!

# Captain Jack— Highwayman!



Our thrilling old-time romance of the road.

By MORTON PIKE.

## HOW THE ADVENTURE STARTED.

Lieut. Lance Somerset, a young officer in the army of King George I, inherits a fortune from his uncle, the late Sir Gregory, of Somerset Hall. In strange circumstances Lance makes the acquaintance of a daring highwayman named Captain Jack Anchovy. It is a peculiar fact that these two are alike as two peas, a likeness which has brought trouble several times to the new squire of Somerset Hall. A friendship grows up between the two, which is not popular with Mr. Thimbleby, the lawyer of the estates.

The "Sinful Seven" is a band of notorious housebreakers known to Anchovy. One day, to a tavern near Somerset Hall, comes the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin, on the look out for fresh worlds to conquer. Here he meets three foreign-looking men, Indians, he learns, who are on their way to the Hall to pay their compliments to Lance. Dick Turpin, noticing their display of jewels, forms in his mind a plan to relieve the three of their trinkets on their return.

(Now read on.)

## The Theft!

"CONFOUND the rain!" said Lancelot Somerset. "But for that I was minded to take a tramp through the turnips. The partridges must rest in peace. And, egad, now I think of it, 'twill be a good opportunity to explore Sir Gregory's cabinet. I have kept putting it off and off, but no one is likely to disturb me on a day like this, so here goes."

The young squire filled his pipe from a great brass jar of ripe Virginia on the mantelshelf, and pulled a long bell rope, smiling as he looked round the room as he thought into what pleasant places his lines had fallen by the unexpected will of the dead kinsman he had never seen.

The room in which he stood had been called the Bombay Parlour in Sir Gregory's time, and Lancelot had chosen it for his own sanctum. It was octagonal in shape, with a tall window overlooking the park, and above the fireplace was a full-length portrait of the old Bombay merchant standing under a palm-tree, with a view of the European settlement behind him. Wherever one looked one saw evidences of residence in the Far East. A wonderfully carved ivory chair upholstered in bright blue silk had often held the merchant's portly form; the rugs on the polished floor were Oriental, and the big cabinet between the fireplace and the window was a marvel of Indian workmanship.

Round the neck of an ugly idol in one corner the young squire had hung his game-bag and powder-horn, and in

another corner stood his gun. Otherwise the Bombay Parlour was just as Sir Gregory had left it, and it was the same white-wigged, sedate old butler who had served the old man so faithfully who now opened the door in response to his young master's summons.

"Light the candles, Parker," said Master Lancelot. "I shall not go out again, and you needn't close the shutters yet awhile; I like to see those red sunsets through the pine-trees."

Parker obeyed, and as he returned with a pair of massive silver sticks he found the young squire seated in front of the Indian cabinet, examining an article which he had taken from one of the inner drawers.

"Tell me something about this, Parker," said Lieutenant Lancelot, of the King's Regiment of Foot. "Did Sir Gregory ever wear this ring?"

"No, sir. By rights there should be a paper with it, but I can tell you that Sir Gregory valued that ring above everything. He called it the Emerald of Good Fortune, and I have heard him say that if ever it passed out of the family's possession, the luck of Somerset Hall would go with it."

"Gads life, that is superstition with a vengeance, Parker!" laughed the young squire. "But what a marvellous thing it is, though somewhat too garish for English taste." And he held it up to one of the candles which the butler had just placed on the cabinet beside him.

The great stone, large as a shilling piece, flashed out long rays of light, and the heavy gold ring which held it tight in a circle of mimic tiger's claws was beautifully chased by some Oriental craftsman, with an intricate pattern of birds and animals.

"Your honour will find its history on the paper," said Parker; "which I see is writ by Sir Gregory's own hand."

As the pair bent their heads over the strip of parchment, another pair of eyes was riveted on the ring from the window behind them, and the giant stone seemed to bring an answering gleam of green light into the orbs of the man in the claret-coloured coat. For a moment he grasped the sill as though he would have sprung in through the casement, and there was something catlike in the grin of delight that wreathed his yellow visage as he suddenly wrenched himself away and glided through the bushes.

"This ring I had from the temple of

Sattara, and I charge my descendants to treasure it," Sir Gregory had written. "At first I scoffed at all such things as luck and chance, but when I came to reflect upon the marvellous turn which did come to all my fortunes from the moment this ring passed into my possession, and the many attempts the natives have made to recover it from my hands, I have come to see that there are things and forces not yet properly understood. The day the ring left its original custodian the whole community was wiped out by a sudden plague, while I, its happy possessor, made eight lacs of rupees betwixt sunrise and sunset, and that was only the beginning, but 'twas enough for me."

Lancelot looked up as he came to the end of the writing.

"How now, Parker; that was the bell surely?" he said. And as the old man left the room Lance Somerset slipped the ring on his finger and closed the cabinet, which snapped with a secret lock.

At the end of a few moments the old butler returned, looking more disturbed than the young squire had ever seen him.

"'Tis very strange, sir," said Parker in a voice that quivered a little. "The visitors are three gentlemen from Bombay, who, being in the neighbourhood, have come to pay their respects to Sir Gregory, not knowing him to be dead. They were for going away again had I not taken the liberty of suggesting that perhaps your honour would see them."

"Certainly—by all means," said Lancelot gravely, taking the visiting-card which Parker handed to him, and on which was written, "Mr. Appoo Lal, merchant, Bombay."

Almost immediately Parker ushered in the trio, who bowed until their hands nearly touched the ground, and when they had straightened themselves and their eyes caught the picture over the mantelpiece they bowed again, crying something in Hindustani, which might have been a lamentation or a prayer for aught Lancelot could make of it.

"Illustrious one," said Mr. Appoo Lal, "your consideration to your unworthy servants makes us your slaves for ever. Unhappily my friends speak no English, but, like I, they well know lie who is now dead." And Appoo Lal salaamed again before Sir Gregory Somerset's portrait.

"Most happy to meet you, I'm sure, Mr. Appoo Lal," said Lancelot, preserving his gravity with difficulty, for the spectacle of the three Orientals bowing and scraping had filled him with an almost irresistible desire to laugh.

"This," said the interpreter, "is Sevajee, who, twenty years ago, was Sir Gregory's chief clerk; this is Afzool, once head of the illustrious one's household."

The young squire went through the formality of shaking hands with the two Hindus.

"You are very welcome," he said. "Pray be seated. Parker, bring wine, and have some coffee made without delay," he added, having a confused idea that all East Indians drank coffee when they were not eating mangoe chutnee, several jars of which had come down to him with his inheritance.

"Sahib," said Appoo Lal as the door closed, "to gaze upon that portrait is to speak once more with a dead master and a dear friend. See this white building"—and he pointed to the landscape beyond the palm-tree—"this is the factory Sir Gregory built, and this red

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roof peeping through the green trees was his bungalow."

Lancelot walked up to the fireplace and followed the pointing finger with some interest, but his lesson in the topography of Bombay at the beginning of the 18th Century came to an abrupt termination, for the fat man, who rejoiced in the name of Savajee, had produced a short length of bamboo cane filled with lead, and with one swift blow behind the ear the young squire sank senseless upon the hearthrug.

As he fell Appoo Lal and Afzool gripped him by the arms lest he should have pitched forward into the fireplace and caused a clatter, and so cleverly had their plans been laid beforehand, with true Oriental cunning, that Afzool had turned the key in the door, Sevajee had raised the window sash, and Appoo Lal possessed himself of the great gold ring all at one and the same moment.

Three pairs of shining white teeth revealed themselves in a silent grin of triumph; three pairs of almond-shaped eyes flashed in the light of the red sunset behind the pines; then each man stepped up to the portrait of Sir Gregory Somerset, spat upon it, and climbed noiselessly out of the low window.

#### Dick Turpin's Prize!

**D**ICK TURPIN knocked the ashes out of his pipe after a glance at the eight-day clock in the corner.

"Time's up, Reuben," he said gaily. "Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-nego will be here before I have tightened the mare's girth. Take a lamp to the top attic. I can see the window from the bend in the road by the ash-trees. Douse the glim twice if the yellow faces ride Yarmouth way, as I suspect they will, and once if they go the London road."

He lifted the latch of the outer door and strode down the inn yard, humming a tune, a low whinny of welcome greeting him as he opened the door of a stable at the far end.

"What, tired of waiting, Bess lass?" he said soothingly, as the swiftest mare in all England rubbed her shapely black head against his shoulder, and when he had slipped his pistols into the holsters and adjusted the saddle to his liking he swung up into his seat and walked the mare out into the flaming sunset.

No one saw him take the gate that led into the innkeeper's orchard, nor the low hedge at the other side, and he cantered away across the grassland with a smile on his lips.

The September evening was fresh and sweet after the close reek of the tap-room he had just left, and when he reached the ash clump and looked back the outline of the Crossways Inn was strongly silhouetted against the western glow.

"Steady, lass, steady!" he said as the mare resented being brought to a stand. "There's a five-mile stretch before us if Reuben gives the signal I'm looking for, and— Sink me, but there it is!"

From the dark square of the inn roof there had suddenly gleamed a light, and the highwayman watched it intently, his lips tightening as the lamp vanished.

"Was I wrong, then?" he muttered. "No; there it shows again. They are coming this way, Bess; and now, my beauty, show what you're made of."

Making scarce more sound than the

bats that flitted past in the gloaming, Bess stretched out in a hand gallop along the grassy margin that fringed the way, and at every twist and turn as her rider looked back his smile broadened to see the road behind him empty of travellers.

He had planned that the thing he was about to do should happen as far as possible from the scene of to-morrow's exploits, but at the end of five miles he pulled the mare into a trot and laughed aloud.

"That is start enough and to spare, Bess," he said. "We shall have to wait as it is, and neither you nor I want a chill."

The road led across the level marshland straight as an arrow, with a broad dyke on either side and a row of grey-green willows. Between the trees Turpin could see the marshes dotted with grazing cattle, and here and there the red roof of a lonely cottage in a clump of elder-trees.

At the end of the straight stretch the way turned sharply to the right hand, and in the distance across the flat Acle Bridge stood out a landmark in the monotonous level.

"Stand, girl," said the highwayman; "this is the spot for me." And obedient to his voice and the squeeze of his knees, Black Bess turned aside into a clump of well-grown willows.

The road towards the bridge showed nothing moving on its white surface, and drawing out his pistols he renewed the priming. This done, he broke off some of the twigs, and, leaning forward along the mare's neck, focussed his eyes on the straight stretch they had just travelled.

The marsh was growing gloomy now, and the wind whispered loudly in the willows overhead. One long, broad belt of orange light lay parallel to the western horizon, and the watcher, seeing the mare's ears begin to move backwards and forwards, lifted his laced hat and let fall a strip of black crepe that was stitched to the lining.

Three dark dots were now visible at the far end of the road, and Turpin grinned.

"I'll lay a wager they haven't four horseshoes left among the three of them," he murmured. "And, egad, I'm right, too—the brown horse is dead lame and the piebald's hobbling like a Chelsea pensioner. Make ready, Bess, for here they are! But why in the name of patience are they paying such heed to the road behind them?"

As the three East Indians reached the bend the piebald horse which Afzool was riding gave a plunge and came to a dead stop, and, with a clamour of shrill voices, Afzool's companions began to belabour the poor brute unmercifully with their whips; but what they were saying was Greek to the man in the willows.

"Enough, fools!" cried Appoo Lal impatiently. "The jade is spent, and there is little light enough as it is for us to thread this pestilent marsh. Get you up behind me, Afzool; already that bald-head at the inn will have put them upon our track!"

Afzool obeyed, and climbed up on to the croup of Appoo Lal's mount; but fat Sevajee raised an imploring protest.

"One little moment!" he urged, his face writhing with pain as he fidgeted in his seat. "The saddle is red hot!" he cried. "I stick to it!"

"Faint heart!" sneered Appoo Lal. "I ever said thou wert too fat a man to come upon a quest such as ours. What is the loss of a little skin com-

pared to the thing we have gained—eh, Sevajee?"

A mocking laugh that seemed to come from nowhere silenced Sevajee's querulous plaint in an instant, and his fat face turned green as Black Bess stepped daintily out of the willows and barred the way.

"If you gentlemen would conduct your quarrels in a Christian tongue, I might be able to pour oil on the troubled waters," said Dick Turpin, the lingering light of the after-glow shining on the polished pistol-barrels with which he covered the group. "As it is, you will ride all the lighter when I have eased you of some of the weight you carry, so hand over your purses and we'll part friends."

The white teeth in little Afzool's face chattered audibly, and fat Sevajee quivered like a jelly. Appoo Lal alone seemed to have his wits about him, although his face was grey with terror; but though he cast a quick glance over his shoulder along the willow-lined road, he made no attempt to turn his horse's head, and Turpin was not slow of comprehension.

"Your purses, gentlemen," he laughed, "and no nonsense!"

"We are poor men, illustrious one!" said Appoo Lal, with a cringing gesture.

"So much the better," replied the highwayman, as Bess, obedient to the touch of his knee, sidled closer to them, crab fashion. "The poor are the friends of the poor, and all my world wealth is the change out of half a guinea. Do not think because I speak you fair that I shall be put off with excuses. Dub up, and the road is clear for you, or I must hold you here until your pursuers yonder arrive."

Appoo Lal started, and again he looked back.

"The all-highest will let us go, then?" he said, reluctantly drawing out the purse Dick had seen at the Crossways Inn.

As Dick touched it, Afzool dropped to the ground and drew a wicked-looking knife; but Turpin was too quick for him. A pistol-shot, followed by a howl of pain, sent the green plover wheeling over the marsh, and Afzool rolling on the road with a bullet in his shoulder.

"You force me to be rough with you," said the highwayman sternly. "Hand me that fob of yours and the brooch from your neckcloth. That's better!" he added, as an afterthought. "Do you wear any rings?"

Appoo Lal's right hand closed over the fingers of his left, and he uttered a wild cry.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the robber grimly. "A riding-glove may often hide more than a dirty paw. Off with it, man; my patience is at an end!" And tucking the empty pistol between his thigh and the saddle-leather, he seized Appoo Lal's wrist in an iron grip and pressed him backwards.

Quick as thought, his dark face blazing with fiendish passion, the Indian's hand sought the breast of his coat, but before he could draw his weapon Turpin possessed himself of the empty pistol again and dealt him a heavy blow with the brass butt.

A curved dagger dropped from the nerveless hand as the Indian's arm fell powerless to his side, and as Turpin wrenched off Appoo Lal's glove he gave a loud whistle.

A huge gold ring with an enormous green stone in it left Appoo Lal's middle finger and found a resting-place in the pocket of his assailant's vest, and the Indian's throat was sore for days as



Turpin seized him by the gullet and shook him like a rat.

"Thank your stars I leave the life in your yellow carcase!" he growled angrily, tossing the man out of his saddle. "And tell that fat fool this is no time to say his prayers, for yonder come those you have been listening for."

The unmistakable sound of galloping hoofs was audible in the approaching gloom, and leaving Appoo Lal to pick himself up as best he might, with Sevajee grovelling on his knees in the roadway, and Afzool holding his wounded shoulder a yard or two away, Dick Turpin put the black mare at the dyke, cleared it like a bird, and was lost to view in the rising mist that was wreathing like a gauzy veil over the flat pastures.

a purse with eighty mugs in it, and this brooch set with small diamonds. This was my prize last night." And he exhibited the huge gold ring in which shone the Emerald of Good Fortune.

The stout, red-faced man whom his confederates styled "the Parson" took the ring with a grimace of surprise as he felt the weight of it, and the others bent over the table, each impatient to examine it for himself.

"'Tis mighty massive," said Peter Palfrey.

"'Tis too massive," said the Parson. "Where on earth did you light on this, Dick? 'Tis of foreign make, surely?"

"I took it from three yellow-visaged fellows who hailed from the East Indies," said Dick. "Didst ever see finer chasing than those figures on the

as Peggy replenished the mugs at the expense of the fortunate highwayman. "How come you to know them?"

"Why, easy enough," said the landlord. "They have had a lodging in the alley, for the matter of a month, some doors from this house."

"Egad, then I had best make myself scant in this neighbourhood for a while," laughed Dick Turpin. "And, in truth, I must be going, for the sooner I get rid of this ring to the highest bidder the better. Here's a health to our noble selves, and good-night to you, boys!"

He drained his glass and went out, and the Sinful Seven resumed their dice-throwing, and those of them that had been playing cards gathered up the greasy pack for a new deal.

Meanwhile, Turpin, his hat slouched over his eyes, set out for Soho, which



**THE FACE AT THE WINDOW!**  
"Your honour will find its history on the paper," said Parker. As the pair bent their heads over the parchment, another pair of eyes was riveted on the ring from the window behind them. (See page 19.)

"Come!" hissed Appoo Lal, pulling Sevajee roughly to his feet. "Our pursuers are close at hand; they will stop when they see the horses." And the trio ran for their lives.

There was the rattle of dice and the flip-flap of playing-cards mingling with the clatter of mugs and tankards in the inner room of the Hog in Pound when Turpin opened the door and strode in. The tippers and the gamblers round the gate-legged table looked up with one accord, for he had neglected to give the usual sign, but the moment they saw who it was a cry of "Welcome, Dick!" broke from every lip.

"Gads life, captain, thou art soon back again! Is aught amiss?" said Black Dan, the landlord.

"Naught amiss with me, nor the mare either, Dan," said Turpin, laughing. "I have met with the oddest luck in the world, unless my eyes have deceived me. Snuff that candle, Parson, and all of you tell me what you think of this. I say nothing," he continued, "of

ring? But what do you mean by 'too big'?"

"That speaks for itself, Dick," said the man, passing it to Two Thumbs. "If you wear it you will be laid by the heels, and who is going to buy it from you? 'Tis the largest emerald ever I saw, and must be worth nigh on a thousand pounds."

"Two thousand," said Two Thumbs.

"Three," chorused Buzzard. "There's only one man in Lunnon who would take the risk."

"And that is?"

"Old Solomon Isaac, of Soho. He sends most of his swag abroad," replied Buzzard, with the air of one who knows what he is talking about.

"I had him in my mind," said Turpin, as the ring passed from hand to hand and every one of those practised rogues voiced his astonishment and envy.

"What like were the niggers, Dick?" said Black Dan. "Was one a fat man and another a lean shrimp of a fellow with a face like a monkey, and the third slim and tall?"

"The very same!" exclaimed Turpin,

he reached without misadventure. It needed several tugs of the bell rope and much negotiation of that late visitor through a tiny spy-hole in the front door before Mr. Solomon Isaac deemed it safe to open his portal.

Then Dick found himself in the familiar, bare, poverty-stricken passage-way, for although the upper rooms were magnificently furnished there was nothing on the ground floor to indicate that the receiver of stolen goods was a man of great wealth.

"My tear friend, my tear friend," said the old Hebrew, rubbing his hands together and regarding Turpin with a look of mingled avarice and admiration. "vot have you brought me to-night?"

"Something that will make your black eyes sparkle, Isaac," said the highwayman. "You will want your scales."

The "fence" grinned delightedly, and led the way to an inner room, where a fire was burning, and several open ledgers on the table showed that

the old scoundrel had been disturbed at his accounts.

His face, with its long bent nose, was a study as he took the ring and examined it under a silver lamp.

"I cannot touch it," he said, corroborating "the Parson's" dictum. "It is wonderful! I have never seen anything like it, but it is too big. One has to be so careful these times. Look, now, if the stone had been one quarter the size I would have given you five hundred pounds for it. As it stands, it is really of no use to me, and the ring is only fit to be melted down."

He had touched it with acid while he spoke, and now placed it in a pair of beautifully balanced scales.

"Yes, the gold I will pay for by weight."

"What do you call weight? How much will you give me?" said Turpin in a disappointed tone.

"Twenty pounds," said the old man. "Twenty fiddlesticks, you ancient thief!"

"Thirty pounds, then," said the Jew. "Bah! Do you take me for a fool, Solomon Isaac?"

"I take you for a very gallant gentleman for whom it is always a pleasure to do business," said the old man. "As it is you, let us say forty pounds. I shall lose by the transaction."

"Give me the ring," said Turpin.

"Oh dear, oh dear, you will ruin me!" said Solomon Isaac. "Try somewhere else, and if you do not succeed, come back and I will give you fifty guineas, but not a penny more, so help me! I swear by my beard the stone is cracked in two places!"

"Hand them over then," said his visitor, after a pause, during which the old man was intently examining the emerald through a magnifying glass, and when he had counted out the coins one by one Dick Turpin swept them into his fob and took his departure with a derisive chuckle.

#### The Adventures of a Ring!

**S**OLOMON ISAAC adjusted the locks, bolts, and bars that secured his street door and shuffled back to the room where the silver lamp was burning.

There was a cunning grin on his face, and he had just weighed the ring again with great care when an inner door opened and in bounced a very beautiful young lady dressed in the height of

fashion. Her cheeks were big and lustrous, her rounded cheeks needed no aid from paint or cosmetic, but glowed with the rich crimson of the rose. Only her mouth slightly marred the face, for the full red lips were pouting with discontent and ill-humour, and closing his hand over the big ring Solomon Isaac looked inquiringly at his daughter.

"What do you want now, Zillah, my dear?" said the old man a little anxiously.

"A thousand things!" cried the beautiful young Jewess. "I am a perfect disgrace—I could die of very shame! All the other ladies of fashion are loaded with gold chains like a felon in Newgate prison."

Her father winced visibly.

"Their jewels outshine the very lamps, and yet here am I with nothing but a pair of plain earrings to my name and a beggarly brooch, the like of which one could buy from a cheap-jack."

"The brooch was your dead mother's, Zillah; I thought you valued it," said Solomon Isaac reprovingly.

"So I do," pouted the girl; "but—" And she shrugged her shoulders.

"But what?"

"There are other things I should value more, and I will have them, too!" And she stamped her little foot. "I am going to-night to the Ridotto at Marylebone; there is a masquerade, and it shall not be said that Solomon Isaac's daughter is the meanest dressed of all the fine ladies there when we unmask at midnight. Come, father, there is no time to waste, and you have chests and chests full of things in the house."

"Put out your hand, Zillah," said the old man. "I will give you something that not one of those fine ladies can approach—something fit for a queen to wear—there!" And, slipping the Emerald of Good Fortune upon the middle finger of her left hand, he removed his own and let the silver lamps play full upon the lustrous stone in its magnificent setting.

The garish glitter of the giant emerald seized her fancy in a moment, and, clapping her hands, the little minx took her doting parent by the beard and kissed him on both cheeks impulsively.

"If you bring that back safely to-night, it shall be yours," he said.

"Kindest and best of fathers," laughed

Zillah Isaac, "it is mine already! The chairmen are at the door!"

And, perfectly happy, like a child with a new toy, the spoiled beauty bounced out of the room again.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the old man. "That was a good stroke of business. Had I opened my chests there is no knowing what she had not chosen, but now I get off lightly at the price of fifty guineas. The ring was stolen in Norfolk last night, and no one would think to look for it at Marylebone Gardens so soon."

Then he sat down to his books again. Meanwhile, Mistress Zillah had got into the sedan chair with her hooped petticoat. The top had been duly lowered, and the two chairmen, placing themselves in the shafts, carried her away to the masquerade at a jog-trot.

It was not a great way from Soho to the celebrated Marylebone Gardens, yet half a dozen times during the journey did the Jew's daughter remove her long glove to gloat over the gorgeous jewel, and then she had a fancy to rest her hand on the lowered window of the sedan chair, partly that she might see the sunset flashing on the green stone, but, I think, chiefly that other people might see it, too, and a couple of men who had been jostled off the pavement in Newman Street stopped and clutched each other by the arm.

"Gads life, Two Thumbs, did you see it?" whispered Buzzard.

"Did I see it? I had been blind else!" exclaimed his companion. "Come along; the ring has changed hands quickly, and it shall change hands again to-night if we have any luck. Dick must have been in a generous mood and given it to some fair lady of his acquaintance. Who was she? Did you get a squint at her face by any chance?"

"Not I!" chuckled Buzzard. "I saw nothing but the green stone, which has not its equal in London."

At the entrance to the gardens the chairmen put down their burden, and it being a warm night they hid themselves to a neighbouring tavern, the two rogues following them closely and soon getting into conversation with them.

A few bottles of ale made their tongues wag, and Buzzard being in funds kept the ball rolling merrily until he had got just the information he wanted out of the pair, and had made the chairmen very mellow.

(Continued on next page.)

## "CARAVANNERS TO THE RESCUE!"

(Continued from Page 11.)

the Greyfriars party marched out with Lord Mauleverer. A loud curse from Ponsonby followed them, and then the door slammed.

"Nice boy!" murmured Bob Cherry.

The Greyfriars caravanners took their way back to camp cheerfully enough, though some of them had received pretty hard knocks in the conflict. Lord Mauleverer walked along with them in great spirits.

"By the way, your baggage is still there, Mauly," remarked Frank Nugent, as the camp-fire came in sight.

"I'll send a man for it in the mornin'," said Mauleverer. "I don't think even Pon will steal my pyjamas."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm awfully obliged to you chaps!" said his lordship. "I was goin' to have no end of a raggin'. Begad, I'm jolly glad to get clear of Ponsonby & Co.!"

"My young friend," said Bob Cherry, in his most solemn tones, "beware of bad company! Evil communications corrupt good manners. You can see that in any copy-book!"

"Yaas. Don't be a goat, old chap!" said Lord Mauleverer.

Lord Mauleverer slept in the tent with the Famous Five that night, and next morning he rose bright and early—as a direct result of a sponge filled with cold water which Bob Cherry generously sprinkled over him. He spent the day with the Greyfriars caravanners, but, as he explained in the evening, "caravanning was all very well, but it was deuced tirin' work." So when a private car came to a halt outside the camp next morning, and the chauffeur

asked for Lord Mauleverer, Harry Wharton & Co. were not surprised. The elegant Mauly had had enough of caravanning, and was going home.

Harry Wharton & Co., having waved him off, returned to camp and made preparations for departure. They broke camp an hour later, and moved on, without, however, seeing anything of the Highcliffe crowd.

And Billy Bunter wore a fat smile as he started, and his fat hand, in his pocket, caressed a pound-note, which he had surreptitiously borrowed of Lord Mauleverer while the Co. were not looking. And while Mauly rolled home luxuriously in his car, the Greyfriars caravanners tramped cheerily on with the van, up hill and down dale, in glorious summer sunshine and the best of spirits.

THE END.

(You will enjoy reading: "Bob Cherry's Brain-Wave!"—next Tuesday's topping long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., on holiday.)



"Never say no," laughed Two Thumbs, as Buzzard replenished the mugs again. "'Tis right good ale, and a tankard does not take long to slip inside one's waistcoat. When do you pick up her ladyship?"

"Half an hour after midnight," said one of the chairmen. "Nice hours for the little gadabout to keep! I don't know what's come to the ladies of London town; a masquerade seems to drive the whole of them out of their wits."

His companion, on whom the strong ale was telling visibly, laughed in a stupid fashion and began to hiccough.

"Steady, Joe; no more, no more!" said the other man. "Thank you kindly all the same, gentlemen. Luckily, 'tis a moonlight night, or my mate here would never be able to pick his steps as it is."

Two Thumbs and Buzzard laughed and rose to go.

"We'll leave the liquor for you to finish while Joe snores awhile," said Buzzard. "Good luck and good-night to you!"

And they left the tavern.

"What made you brush so early? It wants an hour of the time yet," said Two Thumbs when they were alone.

"I thought the bluffer saw us hocus that last mug of booze, that's why," replied his companion.

But he was wrong; the innkeeper had seen nothing, and the drug which Buzzard had dropped into the ale as he carried it to the table did its work so well that when the other chairman roused Joe with a punch in the ribs, both men were decidedly unsteady on their pins. They were sober enough, however, to pick up the young lady, and though the chair ever and anon swayed at a dangerous angle, thanks to the moonlight they accomplished more than half their return journey without misadventure.

Newman Street, with its fine doorways, still remains to give us a peep at what old London was like, but in those days its northern end-opened into the fields, and the two lurking figures, peeping round the angle of the last house, saw the chair approaching and stepped back into the black shadow.

"Be careful, Joe," called the rearmost man, as they passed out of the bright moonshine into the gloom of the narrow street. "'Tis dark as the mouth of a pit here."

The words had scarcely left his lips when a smashing blow across the eyes dropped him senseless between the shafts, and as another bludgeon, well wielded by Two Thumbs, who was an adept in such matters, felled Joe as a butcher fells an ox, the chair was suddenly deposited on the ground, and Mistress Zillah gave a piercing scream.

In an instant Buzzard had wrenched open the door, and as his fingers closed on her throat the beautiful Jewess fainted away, so that it was an easy matter for Two Thumbs to tear off her glove and the ring with it.

Buzzard relaxed his fingers as Two Thumbs' whistle told him they had secured their prize, and leaving their victims to be discovered by the next watchman who should come that way, the villains ran swiftly down the street, only slackening their pace as they came to the Oxford Road.

"How now?" said Buzzard.

"Why, Solomon Isaac's, you fool," said Two Thumbs. "He's not likely to curse us for bringing him out of bed when he sees what we have to sell him."

But the old "fence" was not in bed, and a certain well-known tap on the stout oak panels that meant "stolen goods for sale" brought him shambling quickly to the door.

(There will be another long instalment of this powerful serial in next week's bumper issue.)



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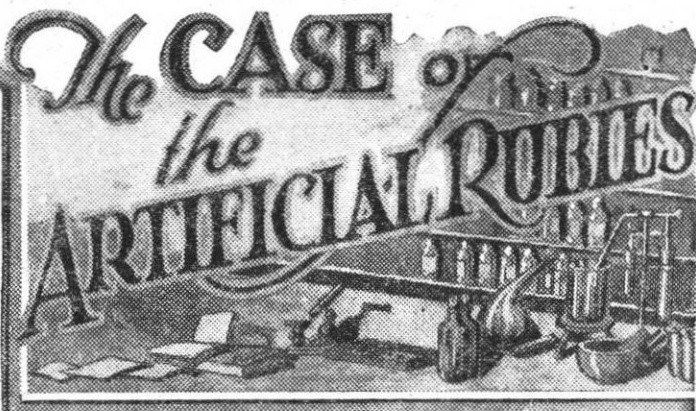
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**THE RUBY MAKER!** In the hollow of his hand Maxwell holds a glittering pile of rubies—his own—and yet he is starving! It is a strange adventure Sexton Blake finds himself involved in this week!



A Thrilling Story of  
**SEXTON BLAKE,**  
Detective.

**Y**OU can fill in that cheque for any figure you like up to five thousand pounds, Mr. Blake!"

Joseph Stanheim, the junior partner of the world-famous firm of Stanheim Brothers, jewel merchants, drew a strip of paper suggestively through his fat fingers.

"I'm rather busy this morning!" drawled Blake, ignoring the cheque. Joseph Stanheim gasped.

"But—but it's about that man Maxwell!" he blurted out. "Maxwell, who says he can make rubies."

"Can he?" asked Blake, showing a faint interest.

"That's what I want to find out," said Stanheim eagerly. "Here, Mr. Blake, look at these—"

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a small washleather bag, in which were two stones—one uncut, the other cut and polished, and both of a very fair size.

Sexton Blake looked at them, fingered them, and examined one by the light of the window.

"Both good stones of rather exceptional colour," he said, handing them back. "What about them?"

"Maxwell made those—made 'em with me standing over him. I'd stake my word there was no fake about it. None of your changing crucibles, resalting the mess put in 'em with the real articles beforehand. He just made 'em while I was standing by him, and tossed 'em across to me to keep as a souvenir of my visit. Those were his own words, confound his impertinence! And he chuckled 'em at me just the same as I might chuck a sixpence to a man for calling me a taxi. And, what's more, I know for a fact that the man was starving at the time—not worth a sovereign as he stood—yet he flings at me two stones worth every bit of sixty pounds."

Sexton Blake laughed gently to himself.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Stanheim, we both of us know that those two

stones are worth over double that, and so, as you have got a present of close on a hundred and fifty pounds, I really can't see why you should come and bother me about it."

"Blake, a joke's a joke. Can't you see that if this Maxwell can make stones like that our mines are ruined, and all the millions of capital lost? He told me he can turn out stones like that at an average cost of ten pounds apiece, and if he gets going on a big scale, that ten pounds will be reduced to a fraction. Man alive, it's ruination!"

"In that case Maxwell has made a fortune, and you've got to face the prospect of losing one. I fail to see where I am concerned in the matter," said Blake.

"I don't offer a cheque for four figures for nothing," said Stanheim. "I know rubies, and I know my business. I'm paying you to find out how the man makes his rubies—or at least to find out enough to give me a guarantee that the thing is genuine."

"But you say you've seen the actual process, and know that it's genuine. Why not buy the man out, or take him into partnership?"

"Buy him? I made the suggestion to him, and he only just laughed at me. Told me I'd had the chance once, and that I'd turned him out of the office. I'm not denying that I did, mind you; but when I offered him a price he just laughed, chuckled me these stones, and hinted that his time was valuable, and that I must take myself off."

"So is mine," said Blake lazily, looking at his watch. "You remind me that I have an appointment in five minutes."

Mr. Stanheim rapped fiercely on the cheque with his knuckles.

"But this is vital—can't you understand? The interests involved are enormous, and here is this piece of paper in consideration of which I am buying your services."

Blake shrugged his shoulders and rose.

"You can take your cheque or leave it," he drawled. "I may glance into

the matter, if I have time. Good-morning!"

Mr. Stanheim looked for a moment as if he would like to knock Blake down on his own Persian rug, but he needed him desperately, and so managed to control himself. He put on his extremely glossy hat with a thump, made a vicious grab for his umbrella, and went out, slamming the door.

Blake sat back in his chair and chuckled. Mr. Stanheim's obvious annoyance amused him, and he also happened to know Maxwell slightly, and had taken rather a fancy to him.

He found Maxwell's address without any difficulty, and wired him to come and dine with him that evening at a small restaurant in Soho.

Maxwell turned up punctually. He was a tall, lank man, with broad shoulders, and the muscles and sinews of him were like whipcords; clean-shaven, but otherwise distinctly careless about his appearance.

Blake surveyed him with a critical glance, and came to the conclusion that Stanheim had not exaggerated when he spoke of the man as half-starving. His quick eye noticed unnecessary hollows beneath the cheekbones and shadows under the deep-set eyes.

"Good-evening, Mr. Maxwell!" Blake said pleasantly. "I'm glad you managed to come. I've got a little business to talk over with you. However, we'll dine first and discuss things afterwards."

Maxwell, a man of few words, nodded, and set about his dinner in a businesslike fashion.

"Good heavens!" he said, with a sigh of satisfaction, stretching his long legs as the meal drew to a close. "You don't know what pleasure there is in eating really decent food again. For the last two months I have been doing my own cooking, over a Bunsen burner, and I should say I was the vilest cook ever born."

"Why on earth did you do it, then?" said Blake. "A man who can make rubies worth seventy or eighty pounds apiece can surely allow himself a few luxuries."

"Ah!" said Maxwell slowly. "I



imagined it was that you wanted to see me about. Yes; I can make rubies right enough; but I don't mind telling you, now that I've turned the corner, that I jolly nearly starved for weeks at a stretch before I found out the trick of the making. Funds ran clean out. Yet even when I proved that I could make the genuine article beyond all doubt, I couldn't get these fat fools in the City to put up, as much as a penny-piece on the evidence of their own senses.

"I was astounded—flabbergasted! I used up all my material in making the stones under their noses, and hadn't a cent to buy any more material, let alone any food to put under my belt.

"I tell you, Mr. Blake, for about forty-eight hours I was like a sick dog, with never a kick in me. Then I took up my belt a couple of holes, and went round to the metallurgists, begging, borrowing, and praying for this from one man, something else from another, and so on till I could start again.

"It wasn't nice, but I did it. I made some stones, sold them, and paid for more material, and now I'm on my feet and can do as I jolly well please!" He threw back his head with a sharp, hard laugh. "And one of the things that will please me best is to make the fat idiots who would not listen pay for their folly, and eringe and grovel! I've arranged to sell the first lot of my stones to-morrow."

"Look here," said Blake, "I am perfectly frank with you. I was offered a commission this morning to have a look into your affairs and this matter of the stones. I refused either to decline or accept it. I have reasons of my own for disliking the man who made the offer, and I wanted to have a chat with you first. From what you have said I have decided to decline to touch the matter.

"On the other hand, as you know, I am interested in scientific questions. I am convinced that the making of rubies is, after all, a comparatively simple

thing when once someone has discovered the secret. The question is, isn't it possible that your success may have been accidental?"

Maxwell glanced around him. That part of the restaurant was practically empty. He drew out a leather bag and poured the contents on to the tablecloth.

"Mr. Blake," he said slowly, "I've been many kinds of a fool, but I've never been a liar! I give you my word of honour that I made these—er—accidents, and that in the making of them I had only two failures, owing to insufficient heat supply. Kindly examine them!"

There were close on a hundred stones. Eighty or so were of fair size and practically of uniform weight; the remainder were nearly twice as big—all were uncut.

"I take back the word 'accident,'" he said quietly; "you've found the secret, sure enough. You've improved on Freny's method, I imagine. He melted alumina and oxide of chromium in an electric furnace and allowed the results to cool slowly, but he only got small stones, and the cost was too heavy."

Maxwell nodded.

"That's so. These are worth eight thousand three hundred pounds at present prices, and they cost me no more than the odd hundreds for the making. When I get going on a big scale, the cost will be reduced to a quarter of that, and there won't be nearly so much waste. As for cutting, look at that!"

From his waistcoat he produced a single large stone, superbly cut and polished.

"Isn't she a beauty?" he asked enthusiastically. "It's worth going through what I've been through for that. With a few thousands of them I can fight the whole combine and smash it—knock the bottom out of it!"

"That, to me, is the strongest proof of your success. Stanheim, for one, is getting frightened."

"Stanheim!" Maxwell stared. "Do you mean to say that he actually had the nerve to come to you? Why, the man ought to be hanged out of hand as a murderer! Look here, I've only given you an inkling of what's been going on. It was Stanheim and his gang who first tried to squeeze me out and starve me. They got the metallurgists to cut off my supplies. They tried to bring proceedings against me for fraud. But when they found all those methods a failure they tried more stringent measures."

He opened his coat and showed the dully gleaming butt of a revolver.

"I've had to carry that about for weeks and sleep with it under my pillow."

"I noticed it when you came in," Blake said.

"They found out where I used to get my provisions. A week later the shop changed hands—a creature of Stanheim's had been put in. I indulged in sugar in my tea in those days. I used two lumps out of the new packet, and was on my back for nearly a week—poisoned. The only other lump I used out of that packet was for analytical purposes.

"See this here?" He pointed to a livid white scar on his temple. "Stanheim again. When I was out one day they broke into my place. Couldn't find anything, because I carry all my information in my head and my rubies in my pocket; but they faked some of my mixing-clay with high explosives. and when I put the next crucible into the furnace I left the room in mid-air through a window. Why I wasn't killed I'm hanged if I know!"

He paused and gave a deep chuckle. "Look here, Blake," he said, "as you've washed your hands of friend Stanheim, why not accept me as a client, and see if between us we can't catch the gentleman tripping. I've told you that these various surprises are his handiwork, and they are. But I've no proof, and I've been too busy to look



**THE NIGHT ATTACK!** There was confusion instantly, as Sexton Blake and his companion burst upon the group. The man with the club raised it above his head to strike, but Blake was ready. "Drop that, I've got you covered!" he snapped, levelling his revolver. (See page 26.)



into things. You could, though, and we might be able to lay him by the heels."

Maxwell's eyes twinkled at the idea, and Blake gave a grim smile.

"I think, on the whole, that I will," he said slowly. "Without myself or someone else to help you, the chances are about ten to one against your being alive a week after those stones are put on the market. In fact, I strongly advise you not to dispose of them till you have seen our friend. Now, pay me my fee and I'm with you. My fee is that you let me see you make a ruby with my own eyes."

Maxwell sprang up.

"Good man! Come along down to my place, and I'll show you the whole bag of tricks, for I know that with you a secret is a secret. I'll give you the formula, and you shall make one yourself."

"Capital!" said Blake. "By the way, are you sure Stanheim knows that you intend to make a deal to-morrow?"

"Dead sure. He'll have known it at four o'clock this afternoon. I took pains that he should. I thought it was calculated to annoy, you see—"

"I see one thing," said Blake quietly. "You and I will travel separately, and you will go first. Tell your man as you get into your taxi that if he hears one loud whistle he is to stop dead. From what I know of Stanheim, he'll have lost his temper and his caution, and will try to act before you spread your story round the market. That means he will try to-night."

"Let's get a couple of taxis, then," said Maxwell, and left the restaurant.

Blake waited a few seconds, then followed him out.

Maxwell's taxi was just out of sight round the corner when Blake got into his and bade the man follow, and, with a space of fifty yards between them, the two drove swiftly westwards towards Notting Hill.

They were just passing the end of Marshfield Street when Blake leant suddenly forward. His quick eyes had distinctly seen the driver of the first taxi give a signal with his hand. An instant later a man who had been standing at the corner of the street strolled away, and as Blake's own motor dashed past he saw that the man had broken into a run as soon as he was clear of the lights of the main thoroughfare. That meant that Maxwell had been followed to the restaurant by one of Stanheim's men disguised as a taxi-driver.

Maxwell had hailed him outside the restaurant, and the man had driven him off, not realising that he was being followed.

Twice, farther down the road, and at long intervals, the man signalled again.

At Notting Hill a narrow, slummy, decayed-looking street leads upwards at a gentle slope, and there terminates abruptly in a larger tract of waste land cut in two by a railway line.

It is as dreary and squalid a place as any to be found so near a central part of London. At one time, probably so long ago as when the railway was building, worksheds had been set up here and there on the waste ground. It was one of the largest of these which Maxwell had turned into a dwelling, laboratory, and workshop in one.

Blake saw the cab in front of him slow down, and promptly stopped his own machine and got out.

"Here's ten shillings for you if you make yourself scarce before the other man sees you," he said.

"Right-ho, gov'nor, I'm off!"

THE POPULAR.—No. 438.

answered the driver, and was gone like a flash.

Blake sprang into the shadow of a doorway and waited for Maxwell's cabman to pass him on his return. When he did, the street lamp shone full on him for an instant, and Blake gave a low whistle of surprise.

"Samuels, by Jove!" he muttered. "This begins to look ugly!" Samuels was known to him of old as a man with two known but unproven murders to his credit. "I think Maxwell will be glad I came before the night's out."

He hurried on and caught up the latter, and side by side they passed down a muddy, broken cart-track.

It was a good distance from the nearest dwelling to Maxwell's shed, which was merely a timber affair with one brick wall. Maxwell ushered him in and lit a lamp.

"Now then," he said, "I'll show you a ruby in the making."

Blake glanced at his watch.

"You've a short half-hour to do it in," he said.

Maxwell turned round with a start.

"What the deuce do you mean?" he said.

"Exactly what I say. The man who drove you is one of Stanheim's. The latter has had a report by now that you returned home alone. It will take the man twenty minutes to reach Stanheim's house—not more. Stanheim will have his car waiting, and will be back in another ten with some of his ruffians. Then the fun will begin. You chose a nice, isolated spot when you chose this shed; but if you paid me I couldn't tell you a more unsafe one for a man in your position. Have you got such a thing as an auger? If so, lend it to me."

Maxwell looked at him quizzically.

"They're taking no end of trouble, aren't they?" he said pathetically. "Here's a brace and bit. Will that do?"

"Capitally!" said Blake, and, kneeling, he drilled a hole in the wooden wall some few feet from the door, and plugged it with paper. "Now then," he said, rising, "show me what you can do in half an hour."

Maxwell shook his head.

"I want twice as much as that even with everything prepared. But I'll have a shot. This stuff here is common blue clay, the sort stones are generally found in. Here are certain salts, the names of which I will give you; and on that bench are clean crucibles. Take a crucible and put in the stuff in proportions of five, one, and one. Now take this phial." He held up a small glass bottle containing an ounce or so of colourless liquid. "Add just ten drops of that, and close the crucible with one of those clamp lids."

Blake did as he was told.

"Now," said Maxwell, "you're satisfied that I've not played any monkey tricks?"

"Quite!" said Blake. "I'm a bit of a chemist myself, you know. What next?"

"Put the crucible in the oven and switch on the current."

Again Blake did as he was told and clanged to the door.

Suddenly he caught Maxwell's arm.

"Hush!" he said warningly. "I heard a step outside. Don't speak again till you're spoken to."

"I heard nothing," whispered Maxwell. "You must have the senses of a wild animal."

"I need to," said Blake dryly. "Keep your eye on me and do just what I motion you to do."

As he spoke he knelt down on one knee at the hole he had bored and put his eye to it.

For the first ten seconds he could distinguish nothing in the darkness outside. But as his sight got more accustomed to the gloom he managed to make out the figure of a man crouching down with something in one hand—what, he couldn't quite make out.

Then away to the left he saw a second figure and a third. The last was Samuels.

There was a faint glimmer of light through a crack in the door. The second man stepped across its track, and it glinted in his face.

For a second time, Blake gave a low whistle, and drew a revolver from his pocket.

The fellow was a man well known to him as "Tim the Butcher"—a notorious hooligan.

Blake smiled grimly to himself. Had either of those men known that he was inside the building wild horses wouldn't have dragged them within a mile of it. He slid his hand over the hole to prevent the light shining through, and beckoned to Maxwell.

The latter came and stood by him.

"Get your revolver ready," Blake whispered. "I don't know what their game is yet, but it'll be something sharp when it begins. Fire at once when I give the word, and don't miss your man."

Presently they heard footsteps, quick and unguarded—a stumble—and a very palpable oath.

Sexton Blake returned to his peep-hole and laughed softly.

Outside in the pouring rain, wrapped to the neck in a motoring macintosh with a high collar, stood Mr. Stanheim himself.

"Mr. Maxwell!" he bawled above the swish of the rain. "Mr. Maxwell! I've come to speak to you! I want to make terms!"

Getting no answer, he came up to the door and rapped on it hastily and leapt back.

Then at last Blake saw the game. On either side of the door, a yard or so away, crouched a man, with the end of a slack wire in one hand and a heavy club in the other. The third, Blake guessed, though he couldn't see him, was lying in wait by the door itself.

They hoped to lure Maxwell outside. Then the wire would tighten with a jerk, trip him, and the clubs would effectually do the rest.

Blake nodded to Maxwell, and the latter took his cue.

Maxwell put his hand on the latch and called out sharply:

"Who's there?"

"I—Stanheim! I've heard what you mean to do to-morrow, and I've come to offer terms."

"Oh, you've come to your senses!" said Maxwell. "I don't think your terms will suit me."

"At least, let us talk things over," said Stanheim. "Let me in—it's raining like the deuce!"

"As you please!" said Maxwell.

Sexton Blake rose softly to his feet.

"You take Stanheim," he whispered. "I'll attend to the others." And he picked up a piece of heavy iron piping in his left hand.

Maxwell opened the door and leapt back. Blake passed him in a flash. There came a dull thud and a groan. Blake's iron bar had caught the upraised arm of the man crouching close to the door and broken it at the elbow.

"Drop that line, Samuels—quick, or I fire!" he called sharply. "You, too, Tim—I've got you covered!"

Samuels, catching a glimpse of Sexton Blake's face, gave a hoarse cry,



and dropping the wire—flung up his hands.

Tim the Butcher raised an arm to fling his club, and the revolver spat venomously in the dark. The man gave a shriek, and dropped with a bullet through his shoulder.

Mr. Stanheim turned and fled, but Maxwell was after him, his long legs finishing the race in half a dozen strides. His heavy hand descended on the macintosh, and the financier was jerked off his feet.

"Take him inside," said Blake sternly. "You, too, Samuels—in with you, and bring that man Tim along, too! If you attempt any tricks, you'll get a bullet in you, too!"

The man, thoroughly cowed, obeyed. Sexton Blake shut the door and bolted it.

"Now, Samuels," he said sharply. "how much did Stanheim offer you for the job?"

"Fifty pounds apiece!" came the mumbled answer. "Another 'undred to split up if we outed 'im, and a free trip to the other side."

"When was the offer made?"

"Only to-day, gov'nor!"

Blake looked at Samuels and at Tim, who was moaning with pain, and at the man on the floor.

"I don't know your friend here," he said grimly. "But I sha'n't forget him."

He slipped his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out a blank cheque

which he tore across, and turned to Stanheim.

"I've known you for a swindler, a thief, and a fraud," he said slowly. "Now I find you've been dabbling in murder. Yet you had the insolence to come to me this morning and ask me to defraud a man of a fortune which he honestly earned. I refused to give you an answer then—I give it now!" and he flung the torn cheque in the man's face. "Now do exactly as I tell you. Here's pen and paper: Sit down and write a clear confession of your various attempts on Mr. Maxwell in full. If you don't, you and these men here will be inside a police cell within the hour.

"Now then, Maxwell, what are your ideas of terms? Do you want money or fame, or what?"

"Money!" said Maxwell laconically.

"You'll be satisfied with that?" asked Blake.

"Oh, yes! But that little beggar would never keep a bargain!"

"I fancy he will," said Blake. "Now, Stanheim, listen to me! Have you finished writing? Humph! Yes, that'll do. Sign it!"

The man signed meekly, and Sexton Blake pocketed the paper.

"These are the terms! The ring, which you control, will pay to Mr. Maxwell to-morrow at noon one hundred thousand pounds. This day month you will pay another hundred thousand!"

Stanheim gasped. "Or you will be convicted of attempted murder," said Blake sharply. "Your ring is worth several millions, yet Maxwell here could have ruined the lot of you. In addition to the two hundred thousand, you will pay him an annual sum of twenty thousand, in lieu of royalties on his patent, and on these conditions Mr. Maxwell will undertake to make no more stones except for experimental or personal purposes. You understand? At noon to-morrow Mr. Maxwell and I will call at your office. If you don't carry out your side of the bargain to the letter you know what will happen."

Mr. Stanheim gulped, swayed to and fro, and staggered blindly into the darkness without a word.

"Now what about my experiment?" said Blake.

Maxwell seized a pair of tongs and drew out the crucible from the furnace. There was a hissing crackle, a cloud of steam, and a loud report as he plunged it into a tank of water.

He groped about amongst the fragments, and fished out a large stone.

"It's the last I'll cook," he said, holding it in his hand.

Sexton Blake took it.

"I'll keep this as my fee," he said chuckling.

THE END.

(Look out for another thrilling Sexton Blake story, entitled: "The Mystery of the Forged Cheque!")

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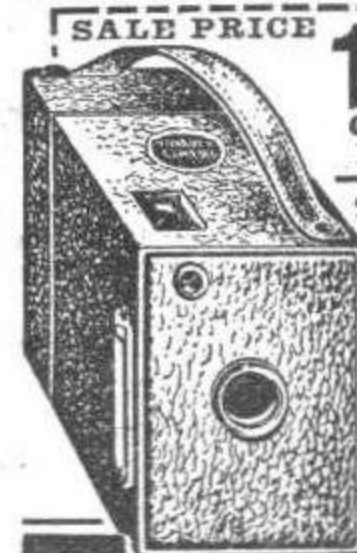
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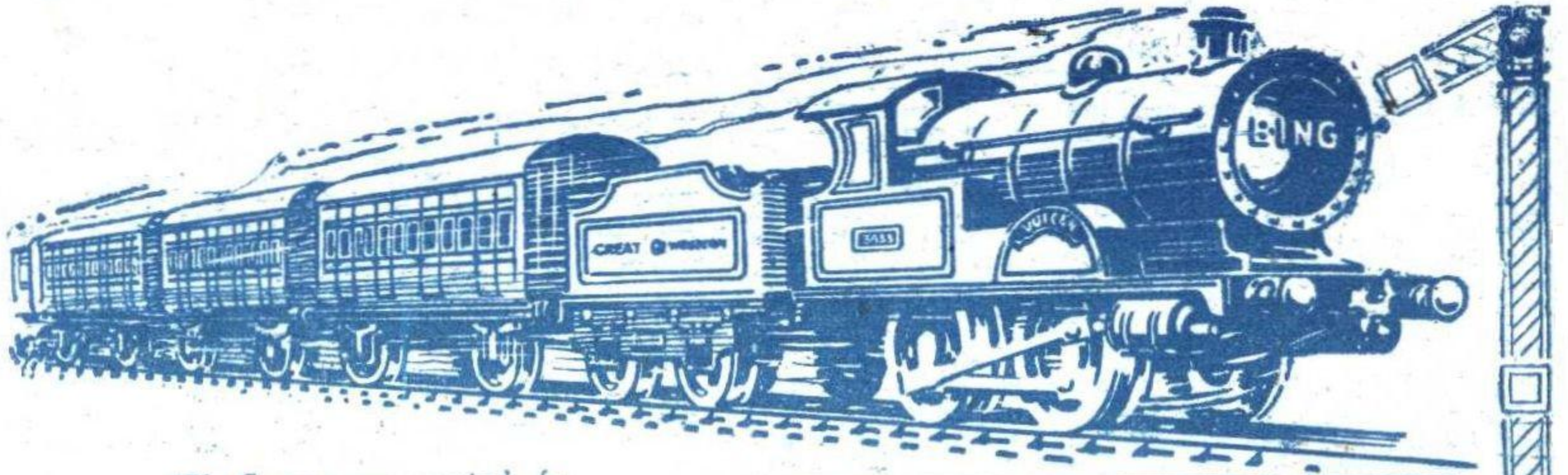
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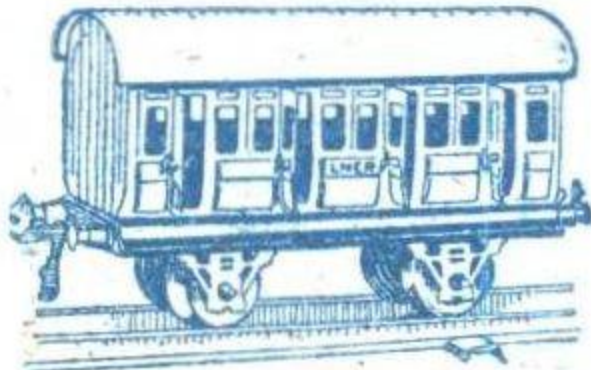




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