

The BOYS' FRIEND 1d

"FRANK RICHARDS' SCHOOLDAYS!" "THE BOYS OF THE 'BOMBAY CASTLE'!" "TALES OF THE DORMITORY!"

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ONE PENNY.

[Week Ending February 16th, 1918.]

THE FOURTH AGAINST THE HEAD!

A MAGNIFICENT NEW LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. AT ROOKWOOD SCHOOL.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

The 1st Chapter.

The Schoolboy Rebels.

"Hallo, 'Erbert!"

'Erbert—otherwise Mornington II. of the Second Form at Rookwood—came to a halt.

The fog was coming from the direction of the School House, with a letter in his hand, when Jimmy Silver hailed him.

It was a bright, clear, frosty morning.

Great numbers of boys at Rookwood were preparing for the day. The Form-rooms. But the Fourth Form was an exception.

The Fourth Form were gathered in the entrenched camp on the school allotments, where the flag of revolt was waving—metaphorically, of course.

Round the camp ran a deep trench, four-square, and deeply dug, with the excavated earth piled up on both sides of it.

The rebels of Rookwood had "dug themselves in" with great effect.

Jimmy Silver stood on the inner parapet and waved his hand to the fog, who stared at him.

"Oh, Master Silver!" ejaculated 'Erbert. Jimmy was still "Master Silver" to him, as in the days when 'Erbert had been a little wail.

"Top of the morning, 'Erbert!" smiled Jimmy Silver. "How's the Head?"

"The 'Ead was looking rather waxy when he went into the Sixth Form-room," said 'Erbert.

"I fancy he will be still more waxy by the time we get through," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell complacently.

"What-ho!" grinned Raby.

"Have you come to join up, kid?" asked Newcome, with a laugh. "No fags allowed in the ranks. You're not of military age yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, are you really barring out the 'Ead?" asked 'Erbert, evidently in a state of great astonishment.

"We are—we is!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said 'Erbert.

"Britons never shall be slaves!" remarked Conroy.

"Oh! Is Erroll there?" asked 'Erbert.

"Here I am!" answered Kit Erroll cheerily, jumping on the earthen parapet. "Anything wanted, 'Erbert?"

Mornington II. held up the letter.

"This 'ere's for you," he said.

"Oh, good!"

"It's from Master Morny," explained 'Erbert. "It was put in the rack this morning, and I saw it, and I think to myself I'll bring it to you. You wouldn't 'ave had it otherwise, you see. The 'Ead won't send the postman round 'ere."

"Ha, ha! I suppose not."

"Pitch it across, kid!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Look out—there's Carthew!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Look out, 'Erbert!"

Carthew of the Sixth was running from the direction of the house.

Evidently the Rookwood bully had espied the fog in communication with the rebels.

'Erbert looked round quickly.

He threw the letter hurriedly towards Erroll across the trench, but the wind caught it and whirled it back again almost to his feet.

The next moment Carthew reached him and caught him by the ear.

'Erbert gave a loud yell.

"You young rascal!" exclaimed the rebel.

"I didn't know! You do!"

"Well, you know now!" said Carthew grimly, twisting the fog's ear till the unfortunate 'Erbert yelled with pain.

Whiz!

A clod of damp clay came whizzing across the trench from Kit Erroll's hand.

It smote Carthew of the Sixth on the side of the head, and there was a terrific yell from Carthew.

The missile fairly bowled him over, and he released 'Erbert and sprawled on the ground.

There was a delighted roar from the camp of the Fourth.

"Well bowled!"

"Out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Carthew dazedly.

"Oh—ah—yah!"

'Erbert rubbed his ear and grinned.

Carthew sat up breathlessly, clawing clay away from his face.

"The letter, 'Erbert!" shouted Oswald.

'Erbert made a dive at the letter.

Carthew grasped him again as he did so, and held on to him.

"Give me that letter!" he panted.

"It's Master Erroll's!"

"Give it to me, you young hoodigan!"

"Quick!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

"The plank!"

The long plank, which was kept in readiness in the camp, was run out across the trench.

The moment it rested on the opposite parapet, Jimmy Silver ran lightly across.

He had a mop in his hand.

He came down the sloping parapet with a run, with the mop at the charge, like an old-time lancer.

Crash!

The mop caught Carthew on the chin, and he sat down again, much more quickly than he had arisen.

Erroll was after Jimmy Silver in a twinkling, and he took the letter from 'Erbert's hand.

"Cut!" he muttered.

'Erbert did not need telling twice.

He cut off in the direction of the school buildings, and vanished.

Carthew staggered up, with a face like a Hun.

He fairly hurled himself at Jimmy Silver.

But three or four more juniors had run along the plank, and Conroy met Carthew's rush with a garden-fork—and Carthew stopped.

There was no arguing with the prongs of the fork. The Australian



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junior grinned at him over the implement.

"Come on!" he said invitingly.

"Ha, ha! Come on, Carthew!"

"Chase him!" roared Lovell.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Clods and pellets of clay rained on the prefect.

He fairly took to his heels at last and ran.

A roar of laughter followed him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. returned triumphantly into the camp, and the plank was drawn in.

Carthew, from the distance, shook his fist and disappeared.

"This is where we smile!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Are we downhearted?"

"No!" roared the Rookwood rebels, with a terrific emphasis; and the roar reached the ears of the fellows going into the class-rooms in the School House.

And a good many of the Third, and the Shell, and perhaps even higher Forms, wished that they were in the rebel camp on the allotments rather than grunting in the Form-rooms.

There was risk—plenty of risk—in the attitude taken up by Jimmy Silver & Co., but there was no doubt that it had its compensations.

The 2nd Chapter.

Morny's Appeal.

"Any news from Morny?"

Kit Erroll was reading his letter, for the second time, with a clouded and thoughtful brow.

It was only the previous day that Valentine Mornington of the Fourth had left Rookwood with his guardian to be taken to a London specialist.

There was a faint hope that the unhappy junior's sight might yet be restored.

Mornington had gone reluctantly.

He had known the plans of Jimmy Silver & Co.—to declare a barring-out in the Fourth until Lattrey, whose cruel act had blinded Mornington, was expelled from the school.

Whatever motive the Head might have for allowing Lattrey to remain at Rookwood, the juniors did not profess to understand, but they understood that they were not going to stand it.

And the reckless scheme exactly appealed to Mornington's nature, always reckless, and none the less so because he had lost his sight.

He would gladly have joined the rebels.

"Morny must have written pretty soon after getting home," remarked Jimmy Silver, as Erroll looked up from the letter.

Erroll nodded.

"He wrote at once," he said. "He wants to come back."

"He can't have seen the specialist yet," said Jimmy.

"No. But he wants to be in the fun, as he puts it. He didn't want Sir Rupert Stacpoole to take him away yesterday."

"Well, I'm sorry he's not here, especially as the barring-out is all on his account," observed Jimmy Silver.

"Can't be helped, though."

"Morny thinks it can be helped," said Erroll, with a smile.

"Eh?"

"I'll read you the letter."

"Go ahead!"

The juniors gathered round curiously to hear the letter read.

It was written clearly enough, though the lines wandered on the page.

Here and there words ran over the margin.

Mornington had written without seeing what he wrote:

"Dear Kit,—I'm home now. But

I don't want to stick here and miss all the fun. I can't tell my guardian what's on; he wouldn't sympathise. But I want to come back. Come and fetch me, there's a good chap. I'm going to haunt the drive all day in case you come. I know you will. I can't come alone; you know why, hang it! But I must come back and take a hand.

"Your pal,
"MORNY."

"Phew!" said Jimmy Silver. "Poor old Morny!" said Lovell.

"I say, you can't do it, Erroll."

Erroll compressed his lips.

"Morny's asked me," he said.

That was evidently a sufficient reason for Kit Erroll.

Jimmy Silver looked very thoughtful.

He could well understand Mornington's desire to share the excitement and the risk of the barring-out.

But it was not so easy for his desire to be carried out.

"I—I suppose you could try, old scout?" said Jimmy Silver at last.

"But I'm afraid there's a watch being kept on us here. I fancy you won't be allowed to pass out."

"And if you get nailed they won't let you come back," remarked Lovell.

"You'll be put in the punishment-room, or perhaps taken home."

"Or flogged!" said Newcome.

"I know! But I'm going to try. Morny wants me to," said Erroll simply.

"Look here, if I bring him back, we'll hang about till after dark; I could never get him in in the daylight. You'll hear me give the scout-signal then. I think I can get clear now; the fellows are all at lessons."

"Just as you like," said Jimmy Silver.

(Continued on the next page.)



THE FOURTH AGAINST THE HEAD!

(Continued from the previous page.)

Erroll's preparations were soon made. The plank was pushed over the trench, and he crossed to terra firma. The juniors crowded the parapet to watch him go. He did not go towards the school buildings, beyond which lay the gates, but towards the wall which bounded the allotments on the other side of the camp. He passed through a belt of beeches and disappeared.

Jimmy Silver was still looking after him anxiously, when Erroll reappeared from the trees, running. "Stopped!" ejaculated Lovell. "The sergeant!"

Sergeant Kettle was after Erroll, who was speeding back towards the camp. The Rookwood rebels watched him anxiously.

The Head had been unable, so far, to deal with the rebellion of the Fourth, but, as Jimmy had guessed, he had resolved to isolate the mutineers.

The prefects had orders to see that none of the rest of Rookwood approached the trenches or communicated with the Fourth, and the sergeant, and probably others, kept watch to "nail" any stragglers from the camp.

"Let's get out and help him!" exclaimed Raby.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Can't risk getting cut off from our base," he answered. "Besides, I think Erroll can dodge him."

"He's slowing down."

"By gad! Old Kettle will have him!" exclaimed Townsend.

Erroll was losing speed, running as if with difficulty, and the sergeant was rapidly overhauling him.

The junior fell on his knees at last, as if quite exhausted. The next moment the sergeant's heavy hand was on his shoulder.

"Got you, by gum!" grinned Sergeant Kettle.

He dragged Erroll to his feet.

Erroll leaned on him, gasping.

"Now then, stand up!" grunted the sergeant. "Oh, crumble!"

One apparently exhausted junior had suddenly awakened to new life.

With a violent shove he sent the burly sergeant sprawling, and so sudden and unexpected was that shove that the sergeant reeled backwards and out down before he knew what was happening.

"Yooop! Yahl! Ow!" gasped the sergeant dazedly. "Oh, you young lub!"

Ow!

Erroll was speeding away again with the fleetness of a deer towards the beeches.

Jimmy Silver burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! Spoofed!"

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

Sergeant Kettle staggered to his feet, panting for breath.

The good old sergeant's brain worked slowly, but he realised that Erroll had fooled him, in order to take him by surprise and get clear.

He blinked round in search of the elusive junior; but Kit Erroll had already vanished through the beeches, and was climbing the further wall.

Far from the distance, sharp and clear, came a signal whistle from Erroll, and it reached the ears of the rebels, and told them that he was clear.

"Good man!" grinned Lovell. "He's gone! He'll be back to-night with Morny."

"Hallo, sergeant!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Let's see you do that again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The worthy sergeant did not let them see him sit down again. He was aching enough already. He shook a knuckly fist at the grinning juniors and stamped away.

The 3rd Chapter.

The Last Word.

There was much suppressed excitement in Rookwood School that morning.

All Forms but the Fourth had turned up to lessons, but they had not settled down to work with the usual steadiness.

The knowledge that the Fourth were holding a "barring-out" had its effect on the whole school, even on the great men of the Sixth.

What the end was going to be was a mystery, and all Rookwood wondered what the Head would do.

He could scarcely yield to the rebels' demands.

Certainly all the school considered that he ought to have expelled Lattrey in the first place.

But having refused to do so, he could scarcely rescind his decision at the dictation of a junior Form.

Yet it was pretty clear that the junior Form did not intend to give in until he did so.

Moreover, if the rebellion continued it was certain to lead to a general spirit of insubordination in the school, especially in the lower Forms.

The rebels had to be brought to heel somehow.

But how?

Was it the Head's intention to leave the rebels alone, for the rebellion to die a natural death?

His intention had been to leave them to be brought to their senses by hunger. But since then he had received the report of Sergeant Kettle, and knew that Jimmy Silver & Co. had raided the school shop overnight, and that the camp was well provisioned.

Whatever the Head might be thinking he showed no sign.

Mr. Bootles was rather at a loss that morning. Of all his Form, only Lattrey and Tubby Muffin remained in the School House.

The Fourth Form master did not feel disposed to hold a class of two, and he set the two juniors tasks in their studies, and left them alone.

The Fourth Form room remained empty and silent.

Mr. Bootles shook his head very seriously over the state of affairs.

It could not last, that was certain. But how it was to be brought to an end was a puzzle.

The Head had taken certain steps.

Sergeant Kettle was posted to keep an eye on the camp, to see that the rebels did not communicate with the rest of the school.

The rebellion was not to spread, if it could be helped. The sergeant also had orders to march in any straggler from the camp.

After morning lessons the Head retired to his study, and Mr. Bootles sought him there.

The Fourth Form master looked worried and flustered as he met the cold, steely glance of the headmaster.

"My Form have remained out this morning, sir!" said Mr. Bootles.

"I am aware of that."

"It is an unprecedented state of affairs, sir."

"Quite."

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"Well, sir, is this state of affairs to continue? Surely the Fourth Form cannot remain in a state of riot."

"I am about to take measures, Mr. Bootles," replied Dr. Chisholm coldly. "If the boys refuse to return to their duty, I shall take drastic means of enforcing their obedience."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Bootles retired, wondering what the "drastic means" were going to be.

A little later Dr. Chisholm left the school house, and made his way with stately dignity to the schoolboy camp.

A nervous crowd watched him go, and there were many suppressed chuckles.

The fags, at least, were enjoying the situation.

Jimmy Silver was a tremendous hero in the eyes of the fags.

Even Algy Silver, who was on rather bad terms with his Cousin Jimmy, was loud in his admiration of the captain of the Fourth for once.

Algy would willingly have joined the rebels.

Some of the more daring fags followed the Head at a distance to look on, ready to dodge if he should glance round.

Dr. Chisholm arrived at the camp, and found its occupants hard at work with spade and fork and pick.

They rested on their labours as the word passed round that the Head was there.

Jimmy took off his cap very respectfully to his headmaster.

Jimmy wanted it to be quite clear that the rebels were only standing up for right and justice, and that anything like "cheek" did not enter into the matter at all.

Impertinence to the Head was bad form, and Jimmy frowned upon it very severely.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes upon the ruddy face of the rebel leader.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir?" said Jimmy.

"I have given you time to think over this matter. Have you decided to return to your duty?"

"We are doing our duty here, sir."

The doctor's eyes glinted.

"We're ready to come back, sir, as soon as Lattrey is turned out of Rookwood!" chimed in Lovell.

"I am not here to discuss that matter, or any other matter, with you!" said the Head icily. "I am here to order you back to your duty!"

No answer.

"It appears," continued the Head, "that you have provided against losing your meals by robbing the school-shop overnight."

Jimmy Silver flushed.

"We have not robbed the shop!" he exclaimed hotly. "We have a list of all the sergeant's goods, and they will be paid for to the last penny!"

"The bill will be sent in to you, sir!" said Conroy.

"What!"

"We think you ought to pay it, sir," said Jimmy Silver; "but if you do not we shall. The sergeant will lose nothing."

The Head bit his lip.

"And you are using the provisions, I presume, in the most reckless way!" he exclaimed. "Yet you must be aware that it is an offence to exceed the Food Regulations."

"We are keeping well within the rations, sir," answered Jimmy calmly. "We are not food-hogs!"

"Oh!" said the Head, evidently taken aback.

"Every fellow is strictly allowed, sir," said Jimmy. "The only thing allowed ad lib. is potatoes. Those we grew ourselves last term, and have plenty of."

Dr. Chisholm was silent. It surprised him to find the rebel camp in a state of order and discipline.

He expected disorder and reckless riot to follow on the rejection of authority.

But evidently Jimmy Silver was able to keep up strict discipline among the mutineers.

There was a long silence.

The juniors waited for the Head to speak again.

It was a strange situation enough.

The Head, accustomed to seeing juniors tremble at his frown, could not get used to having his direct orders disregarded by those same juniors. It was because he had placed himself in the wrong, but he was not likely to admit that, even to himself.

The headmaster spoke again at last.

"You must be aware, Silver, that this state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue," he said.

"I hope you will do what we have asked, sir. We only want that ruffian Lattrey turned out of the school."

"Kindly refrain from impertinence, Silver. It is my duty to re-establish authority over this rebellious Form. Since you will need no argument but force, force will be used."

Jimmy Silver smiled involuntarily, remembering the ignominious defeat of the Sixth-Form prefects, the previous day.

Dr. Chisholm compressed his lips.

"You understand me, Silver? Force will be used, and I fear that some of your misguided dupes may be hurt. There is still time for you all to submit to just authority, and save me from this painful alternative."

"If you will agree, sir—"

"Enough!"

Dr. Chisholm turned and strode away, and there was a scattering of fags who had been staring on from a distance.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders. "The Head means bizney!" remarked Van Ryn.

"And so do we!" answered Jimmy.

"The rebels chimed in:

"Hear, hear!"

As both sides were equally determined, it was the old story of the irresistible force brought to bear upon the immovable object.

It was only a question which would "give."

The 4th Chapter. An Attack in Force.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

It was the dinner-bell in the rebel camp.

It was not exactly a bell, as the clanging was made by Tommy Dodd, tramping a frying-pan on the lid of a saucepan.

But it answered the purpose.

The dinner struck work, cheerily, at the sound of the clanging.

Five fellows had been laid off as cooks to the camp; the fellows who were not much use for more active exertions.

One was Clarence Cuffy, the duffer of Rookwood, who was very willing to oblige. The others were Townsend, Topnam, Peele, and Gower, the nuts of the Fourth.

Townsend & Co. were simply infuriated at being told off to cook, which they considered derogatory to their lofty dignity.

But they preferred it, on the whole, to wielding the pick and spade.

They had faired at cooking, at the old iron stove in the allotment shed, in the middle of the camp.

The meal was ample enough; what it lacked in quality being made up in quantity.

Potted meats from the sergeant's shop were rationed—and there were only a couple of biscuits each in lieu of bread. But there were plenty of potatoes.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had been very keen on allotments the previous terms, and the Rookwood potato crop had been a phenomenal one.

Naturally, the juniors felt themselves entitled to their own potatoes.

And what was lacking in the way of bread and meat was quite made up by the succulent "mushies."

The rebels sat down merrily to dinner, some on benches, some on the ground, some on the parapet.

Most of them looked very cheery; only the nuts of the Fourth being discontented.

Townsend was in a state of perpetual horror at the clay and mud on his clothes, and he was haunted by the fact that he had had to miss his bath that morning, and wash under a tap.

Lovell had asked him what he would do if he happened to be in the trenches in Flanders; a question to which Towny replied only with an angry snort.

Towny sincerely hoped that the war would be over before he was old enough to take his place in the trenches.

He was not afraid of the Germans, by any means, but he was sorely afraid of being dirty and uncomfortable.

Dirt and discomfort, however, were inseparable from trench warfare. The only thing was to keep smiling, and make the best of it.

But for the fact that the rebel camp was entrenched, the prefects would have routed the rebels already.

Towny's only comfort was that he had put on his oldest clothes. But the state they were in made him shudder.

And the stove was not cleanly. It had to be banked up with faggots and coal, to do the cooking. It smoked a little—and it was dirty. Towny's white hands now resembled those of a native of the Congo. In despair he scrubbed them under the tap. But even though he removed some of the dirt, he found that his fingers were roughened.

That was a calamity there was no warding off, and Towny had to struggle against despair.

Fortunately, most of the rebels could bear up with great equanimity against calamities of that kind. So they kept smiling.

Jimmy Silver allowed a brief rest after dinner. But it was brief.

He did not believe in keeping his men idle. Idleness meant boredom, followed by discontent. And digging was a healthy exercise. And there was plenty of digging to be done.

So the rebels were called to work again promptly.

Towny & Co. groaned at the call; Peele had to be prodded with a spade before he would move.

They blankly refused to dig, and they were set to cleaning up the shed and the stove, and stacking away the coal.

Pick and spade and fork rang merrily under the frosty sunshine.

The dug-out was growing deeper and deeper, and the mounds of displaced earth were growing higher.

Jimmy intended to have the dug-out finished that day, as a shelter for the garrison during the winter night.

But, while the work went on, two or three fellows paraded the walls, watching for the enemy.

The Head's threat was not taken idly. Jimmy knew that a move would come, sooner or later.

He expected it, too, while the school was at lessons; for the Head was certain to want to get the affair over as quietly as possible.

There was a sudden call, at last, from Dick Oswald, on sentry-duty.

"Cave!"

"Here they come!" shouted Jones minor.

"Line up!" rapped out Jimmy Silver.

The juniors came scrambling out of the dug-out, throwing down their implements, ready for the fray.

In a minute, or less, the parapet was lined with eager, excited rebels.

From the direction of the house, the Head was approaching, and he was not alone.

Following him, there came fifteen or sixteen burly labouring men.

Jimmy Silver & Co. eyed them keenly.

They knew some of the men by sight, having seen them at work in the fields around Coombe.

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"The Head's going it!"

The new contingent were all grinning, as they came towards the camp.

Sergeant Kettle was with them, and appeared to be in command.

The sergeant was solemn enough, and the Head was grave and dignified, but the new recruits seemed to be taking the matter humorously.

Most of them were burly fellows, and most looked ruddy and good-tempered men.

Evidently, the Head had gone to the village in search of help, and had enlisted agricultural gentlemen for the purpose of putting down the school rebellion by force.

Probably he expected that the sight of such a formidable array would be sufficient to reduce the rebels to obedience.

"Looks like bizney, at last," grinned Conroy. "This lot will be rather more trouble than the prefects yesterday!"

"Sure, ye're right!" said Tommy Doyle. "Faith, it's going to be a broth av a shindy. Hurroo!"

The Head stopped just outside the parapet, and his followers came to a somewhat disorderly stop.

"Halt!" rapped out the sergeant testily. "Oh, great pip! Can't you halt? You're not hanging washing out on a line! Steady!"

Sergeant Kettle seemed to be under the impression that old days had come back again, and that he was dealing with recruits on the parade-ground.

But the Coombe men were not recruits, and they proceeded to tell the sergeant so, plainly.

"You old your jaw, Mr. Kettle," said one of them, a stout old fellow in a smock. "Do you take us for conscripts?"

"You pug-faced son of a swash-bucket!" roared the sergeant, his old military language, long disused, coming back quite easily. "You're a disgrace to a respectable pigsty. Hold your tongue, confound you! Eyes front!"

"Silence, please!" rapped out the Head.

"Sir!" spluttered the sergeant.

"Kindly be silent!"

"Oh!"

The Coombe men grinned at the sergeant's discomfiture.

Dr. Chisholm did not even observe it. He was looking at the grinning rebels on the earthworks.

"Silver, come out of that place at once, with all the rest, and return to the School House!" he rapped.

"Sorry, sir."

"Will you obey me?"

"No, sir."

"You see these men," said the Head. "They are here to remove you by force, if you do not go. I hope, my boys, that you will make such a very unpleasant scene of violence unnecessary, by returning to your duty at once."

"Not unless you turn Lattrey out of the school, sir."

"Silence!"

"Well, that is our answer."

Dr. Chisholm turned round.

"Sergeant, with the assistance of these men, you will remove the juniors by force from this spot."

"Yes, sir!" grunted the sergeant.

"I leave the matter in your hands."

The Head retired, with a set face.

It was a very uncomfortable expedient he had adopted, and he did not like it, but there was nothing else to be done.

Force was the only argument that could now be used.

"Now, then—attention!" rapped out the sergeant, feeling more at ease when the Head was gone.

"Oh, cheese it!" said several voices.

"You—you—you swipes!" roared the sergeant.

"Swipes yourself, sargeint! You old Prooshian, you!"

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

"Give it to him, Hodgey!"

"Talk to me!" resumed Mr. Hodge indignantly. "Think I'm a conscript that you can talk to any'ow you like! For two pims, Sergeant Kettle, I'd give you a one on the jore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sergeant suppressed his feelings.

He was purple with wrath, but the independent Coombe labourers did not care twopenny for the wrath of any

"Leggo, young gents—leggo! I'll go quietly! Yow-ow-wooooo!"

Mr. Hodge did not go quietly; he went roaring, as the juniors whirled him over the parapet, and rolled him down into the trench.

He landed on the sergeant, who was picking himself up. Sergeant Kettle was flattened down again in wet mud, and Mr. Hodge sat dazed on his face.

"Yow-ow-wooooo!" moaned Mr. Hodge breathlessly.

"Grrrrrrrrrr!" came from beneath him, in muffled accents of fury.

"Oh, dear! Oh, crumbs! I'm 'urt!" gasped Mr. Hodge.

"Grr-r-r-r-r-r!"

"You're sitting on the sargeant, Hodge," said one of the gasping heroes.

"Blow the sargeant!"

"Grr-r-r-r-r!"

"Yaroooo!" shrieked Mr. Hodge, bounding to his feet suddenly, as if he had received an electric shock. "Yooooo! I'm bitten! Yaroooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly idiot!" panted the sergeant furiously. "A-sitting on a man's face—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You 'orrid old 'Un, bitin' a man like a mad dog!" yelled Mr. Hodge. "I'll fair spifficate you!"

He hurled himself on the sergeant, and they rolled in the bottom of the trench, clasped in a loving embrace.

The juniors yelled with laughter.

"Oh, this is too good!" gasped Lovell, wiping his eyes. "Hold on, Hodge! The Head didn't bring you here to kill the sergeant."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whiz, whiz, whiz!"

The rest of the party were scrambling frantically out of the trench.

They had had enough. And as clouds of earth rained on them, the sergeant and Mr. Hodge separated, with their battle unfinished, and clambered out, too.

Whizzing clouds followed them, and Mr. Hodge & Co. fairly fled. But the sergeant, disdaining to flee, marched off as if on parade, like a sulky British lion.

And the victorious juniors, respecting pluck, forbore to whizz any clouds after Mr. Kettle.

"This looks like a win for us!" chorled Lovell. "I wonder what the Head will think when he sees that crew?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There he is!" grinned Newcome.

In the distance the Head could be seen. He met the fleeing villagers as they came round the School House.

He looked at them, and he looked at the camp, and then he disappeared.

The Head of Rookwood was finding that his Fourth Form was a tougher proposition than he had ever dreamed.

The 6th Chapter. Caught!

"Here we are, Morny!"

It was Kit Erroll who spoke.

The winter dusk was thick upon Rookwood as the two juniors came along Coombe Lane towards the school.

Erroll had succeeded easily enough in his task.

He had found Mornington waiting for him on the drive at Sir Rupert Stacpoole's home, and a note had been left with the lodgekeeper for Morny's guardian, and they had departed together.

Mornington, blind as he was, was in great spirits.

He was looking forward keenly to joining in the barring-out.

"We shall have to be a bit careful in getting in," went on Erroll. "They may be on the look-out. I suppose they know that I got out this morning, and I may be looked for. This way."

"If they nail us, you cut and run," said Mornington, with a laugh. "They won't hurt me—poor, afflicted youth, you know. By gad, I'm lookin' forward to takin' a hand, though!"

"Come on, old chap!"

By devious ways the two juniors reached the old stone wall that bordered the school allotments.

Erroll climbed first, and gave his chum a hand, and drew him to the top.

He lowered Mornington down gently on the inside of the wall, and joined him.

He stood silent for a minute or two, gazing about him in the thick gloom.

"All serene?" asked Mornington.

"I think so."

"They moved on through the beeches, Erroll with his guiding hand on the blind junior's arm."

As they came out from the trees Morny suddenly halted.

"Somebody's comin'!" he whispered.

"I can't see."

"But I can hear!" Morny laughed softly. "I'm usin' my ears so much that I can hear a pin drop, Kit. Listen!"

Erroll bent his head to listen. But he could hear nothing, save the sough of the branches in the wind.

"I think you're mistaken this time, Morny."

"I'm not. Listen! There!"

"By Jove, you're right!"

Erroll could hear a footstep now. A light flashed out in the gloom.

"Collar them!" shouted a voice.

It was Carthew of the Sixth.

The sergeant was with him, and they made a rush together at the two juniors.

Erroll could have eluded them, but the blind junior was helpless to run.

He pushed Erroll away from him.

"Cut!" he whispered shrilly.

"I'm sticking to you, Morny," said Erroll quietly.

"Cut, you ass! You'll get flogged, and I sha'n't!"

"Got the young rascals!" exclaimed Carthew, as his grip fell on Morny's shoulder.

"Take the other, sergeant! Two of them, at least! Hallo, it's Mornington!"

"Come along, Master Erroll! 'Ead's orders!" said the sergeant, taking Kit Erroll by the shoulder.

Erroll set his teeth.

He had succeeded in conducting Mornington to Rookwood, and they were on the point of joining the rebels in the camp when this stroke of ill-luck fell.

Erroll understood that the Head was anxious to separate the rebels, if possible, and any straggler from the schoolboy camp would be prevented from returning to the fold.

The sergeant marched him away, taking good care that the junior did not escape him as he had escaped in the morning, and the prefect followed with Mornington.

In the darkness there was a faint glow from the shed in the camp on the allotments.

The stove was burning there, and candles and bike lamps were lighted.

There was a glimmer of light, too, from the lanterns where Jimmy Silver's followers were still at work on the dug-out.

The captured juniors were marched on, passing within a dozen yards of the camp, as they were taken across to the House.

At the nearest point Erroll suddenly uttered a sharp, clear whistle. It was the agreed signal with the mutineers.

The whistle was answered from the camp at once, and Jimmy Silver leaped on the parapet.

"Rescue!" shouted Erroll.

"Hallo!"

"That you, Erroll?"

"Come on, you young sweeps!" muttered Carthew angrily. "Hurry on, sergeant, or we shall have those young rascals round us like hornets!"

But the stolid sergeant did not hurry. He was not going to run from junior schoolboys, not if he knew it!

"Rescue!" shouted Erroll again.

"Morny's here! We're taken!"

"Rescue, the Fourth!" roared Mornington.

Carthew dragged him on.

"Shut up, you young cad! Oh!"

"Morny, old scout—"

"Where's Erroll?" exclaimed Raby.

"They've got him!" shouted Mornington. "Carthew and Knowles—they've got him! Oh, if a chap could only see—"

"He broke off with a gasp of rage. Jimmy set his teeth.

"We'll have him back! Get Morny into the camp some of you!"

"Never mind me—get on!" exclaimed Mornington impatiently. "Erroll will be flogged and stuck in the punishment-room if they get him to the House. Get a move on, for goodness' sake!"

But Jimmy Silver & Co. were already getting a move on. They dashed away in the dusk after Erroll and the two prefects.

Dick Oswald slipped his arm through Mornington's.

"This way, Morny," he said.

He led Mornington, chafing, to the parapet, and helped him over the plank laid across the trench.

A dozen juniors had followed Jimmy Silver to the rescue, the rest were on guard in the camp.

Mornington walked across the plank without hesitation, blind as he was.

He had a surer footing than many of the fellows who had the use of their eyes.

He remained on the inner parapet, waiting and listening anxiously.

His fears for Erroll were well-founded, for Kit Erroll was known to be one of the ringleaders of the barring-out, and it was only too probable that the wrath of the Head would fall heavily upon him.

He muttered angrily to himself as he waited, chafing savagely at his impotence to help.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver & Co. were hot in pursuit.

But Knowles and Carthew had a good start, and they had reached the School House, with Kit Erroll still in their grasp.

will be sent away again. Where is he now, Carthew?"

"With the rest of the Fourth, sir, I think," said Carthew.

"Oh!" said the Head. He paused a moment. "Erroll, I understand that you are one of the leaders of this outrageous outbreak of the Fourth Form."

"I am as much responsible as anyone, sir, certainly," replied Erroll. "We are all in it together, though."

"You will not be together much longer," said the Head grimly. "It is my intention to flog the ringleaders of this mutiny, and expel them from the school. You will be the first, and I trust that your punishment will be a warning to the rest."

Erroll did not answer. He had expected it, and he did not flinch.

The Head looked at his watch.

"There is time for a train this evening," he said coldly. "Carthew, may I request you to take charge of this junior and conduct him to his home? I cannot trust him to make the journey alone. I should take it as a favour, Carthew."

"Certainly, sir!" said Carthew at once.

Erroll's handsome face grew a shade paler.

He was thinking of his father. Captain Erroll, almost recovered now from the wound he had received early in the war, was making preparations to rejoin his old regiment.

What would he think when Erroll came suddenly home, without warning, and with such an explanation as the Head was likely to send?

Yet he could not feel sorry that he had answered Mornington's appeal, though it had brought him to this—condemned, alone, to disgraceful expulsion, far from the help of his comrades.

He cast a hopeless look round. Knowles and Carthew were at hand, watching him, and there was no chance to bolt.

From the staircase a fog was looking down at him, with a rather sarcastic grin. It was Algy Silver of the Third Form. Erroll glanced at him, but only for a moment.

He did not expect any sympathy from the young rascal of the Third.

Mr. Bootles bustled forward, his face very red.

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"Well, Mr. Bootles?" said the Head coldly.

"I feel bound to speak. Erroll is one of the best boys in my Form. It appears to me extremely unjust to punish him singly when all are equally to blame. Moreover, it was his best friend who was so cruelly injured by Lattrey."

"Kindly leave this matter in my hands, Mr. Bootles."

"Ahem!"

Poor Mr. Bootles retired, crushed. But perhaps his speech had not been without effect, for the Head said nothing more about flogging the junior.

"Wait here, Carthew, while I write a letter for you to take," he said. "See that that boy does not escape."

"Very well, sir."

And the Head rustled away to his study.

The 8th Chapter.

All Serene!

"Dished!" growled Jimmy Silver.

The rescuers halted at a little distance from the School House. The big door had closed, and Kit Erroll was on the inner side of that door.

Jimmy Silver's eyes were gleaming with wrath.

"They've got him!" muttered Tommy Dodd disconsolately.

"Poor old Erroll!" said Lovell. "He'll get it fairly in the neck! I—I suppose we can't rush the place?"

"Fathead!" said Conroy. "If we even show ourselves we shall be cut off from the camp, and it will be all U P!"

There was a footstep in the gloom, and the juniors hushed their voices. A diminutive figure loomed up.

"Only little me!" came the voice of Silver, II, of the Third; and a chuckle followed.

"Algy!" exclaimed Jimmy.

He looked rather grimly at his cousin as the fog joined them. Algy was grinning.

"I reckoned I should find you hanging about," he remarked. "I'd have come round to the camp otherwise."

"Have you seen Erroll?" asked Jimmy eagerly.

"Yes; they've got him!" Algy Silver jerked his head towards the School House. "He's sacked, and he's going to be taken home by a prefect, with a letter from the Head!"

"Oh!" muttered Jimmy.

"That's why I came," grinned Algy. "You've got time, if you like."

"What?" Jimmy Silver caught his arm. "What do you mean, Algy?"

"Carthew's going to take him, to catch the next train from Coombe," said the fog coolly. "It's pretty dark round the gates, if you wait for them there. Catch on!"

"My hat!" said Conroy. "The kid's right! You're a little brick, Algy!"

"Thank you for nothin'," answered Algy carelessly.

"Well, thank you for something, Algy!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's jolly good of you to come and tell us this. I never expected it of you."

"You never know what to expect, do you?" remarked Algy sarcastically. And he walked away whistling.

"I suppose the little beast isn't spoofing us?" observed Lovell doubtfully.

Jimmy shook his head.

"I'm sure not! Come on! There's a chance yet! They won't get Erroll out of Rookwood if we can stop them!"

"What-ho!"

The juniors hurried away through the darkness to the gates.

The gates were closed and locked, and old Mack was in his lodge, from which a faint glimmer of light proceeded.

It was dark enough by the gates, and it was easy for Jimmy Silver & Co. to take cover there.

They waited and watched breathlessly.

There was a glimmer of light at last from the direction of the School House as the big door was opened.

"Here they come!" murmured Raby.

Footsteps were heard in the gloom.

Keeping close in the shadow of the old stone gateway, the juniors watched eagerly.

Two dim forms loomed up and stopped at the door of the porter's lodge.

They could see that between the two was a smaller figure, and they did not need telling that it was Erroll in charge of a couple of prefects.

Knowles was with Carthew, who, on second thoughts, probably doubted whether he was quite equal to getting Erroll to his home unaided.

Carthew knocked at the lodge.

"There they are!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "They want Mack to come and let them out. I fancy they're not going out in a hurry!"

There was a breathless chuckle.

"Come on!"

Silently the juniors ran out of the shadow of the gateway for the lodge. Just as old Mack opened his door, and the light streamed out, Jimmy Silver & Co. reached it.

"Rush them!" shouted Jimmy.

The two prefects spun round in amazement.

Erroll's eyes danced.

"Jimmy!" he panted.

"Hands off!" roared Knowles. "You— you— Ah! Ooooo!"

The juniors were rushing on, and the two Sixth-Formers were fairly bowled over in the twinkling of an eye.

They sprawled right and left, and Jimmy Silver caught Erroll by the arm.

"Hook it!" he panted.

And they ran.

Knowles and Carthew sat up dazedly.

Before the prefects could gain their feet Jimmy Silver & Co. had disappeared in the darkness. Erroll in their midst.

The did not lose a second in reaching the rebel camp. There was a shout from the parapet as they came panting up.

"Hallo! Who goes there?" It was Dick Oswald's voice.

"Buck up with the plank!" shouted Jimmy.

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried across the plank over the trench, and it was drawn back after them.

Erroll squeezed Mornington's arm.

"Safe as houses, old fellow!"

"Hallo! Here's dear old Carthew!" chorled Lovell.

Carthew and Knowles came racing up after the plank was gone. A shower of clouds greeted them, and they disappeared, yelling, into the darkness.

And a loud and triumphant cheer rang out from the schoolboy camp.

Dr. Chisholm compressed his lips when he received the prefects' report that Kit Erroll was in the rebel camp once more with his comrades, and he dismissed them with scarcely a word.

For a long time the Head paced his study in deep and troubled thought.

He sat down at last to write a letter, and that letter was addressed to Mr. Lattrey, the father of the outcast of the Fourth. And if Jimmy Silver & Co. could have known what was written in that letter they would have felt that they were near to victory.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"THE REBELS' RAID!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

DON'T MISS IT!



The missile bowled the Sixth-Former over, and he sprawled to the ground.

The 7th Chapter. Erroll's Sentence.

"What—what—"

Mr. Bootles had heard the shouting, and he was looking out of the School House doorway when the two prefects arrived with Kit Erroll.

The breathless junior was bundled into the house.

Mr. Bootles blinked at him over his spectacles.

"Bless my soul! It is Erroll!"

"We've caught one of the young blackguards, sir!" panted Carthew.

"What—what! Kindly do not use such expressions to me, Carthew!"

snapped Mr. Bootles.

"Well, the Head ordered us—" began Carthew sullenly.

There was a rustle as the Head came on the scene. His eyes glinted at Erroll.

"You have done very well, Carthew," he said. "This boy is one of the most blameworthy I am assured."

Erroll stood erect as the prefects released him, taking care to keep between him and the door, in case he should attempt to bolt.

Dr. Chisholm looked at him grimly.

"We found him with Mornington, sir," said Carthew.

The Head started.

"Mornington! He is at his guardian's home, Carthew."

"Erroll seems to have brought him back. We found them together."

"Is that correct, Erroll?"

"Yes, sir!" said Erroll quietly.

"You have brought Mornington here!" exclaimed the Head in astonishment.

"Without asking his guardian's permission, I presume?"

Erroll smiled slightly.

"I don't think Sir Rupert would have been likely to give permission, sir," he answered.

"I presume not. However, Mornington

grin. It was Algy Silver of the Third Form. Erroll glanced at him, but only for a moment.

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TALES of the DORMITORY!

A Great New Series of Short Complete Tales, Told
By Juniors at Rookwood School.

This Week:-

"THE QUEEN OF THE RING!" By TOMMY DODD.

The 1st Chapter. At the Circus.

"Time we started!"
Thus Valentine Vane to his chums O'Connor and Brent of the Fourth Form at St. Mark's.
"What-ho! agreed Brent. "Mustn't miss the giddy circus for anything!"
"No fear!"

Next instant the three chums slipped on their hats and coats and left the school.
They were in cheerful moods, for they were going to see Conway's Circus, which had pitched its "tent" in Butcher's Meadow, three miles distant.
Many fellows at the school had been to see the circus, and had voted it first-rate.

The three chums were therefore looking forward to an enjoyable time.
Three-quarters of an hour's walk brought them in sight of the circus.
They arrived on the fair-ground to find a large crowd of men, women, and boys making for the circus.

They promptly joined the queue of people by the side of the pay-box, and in less than five minutes they had secured front seats in the arena, and were waiting anxiously for the first turn.

They did not have to wait long, however.

Soon a man in evening-dress stepped into the arena.

I suppose this is the boss of the show!" remarked Jack Brent.

"Looks like it," said Val.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed the man in a powerful voice, "it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all here to-night, and I hope the entertainment I am about to place before you will meet with your approval. My first item on the programme will be an exhibition of physical strength by Markham, the strong man."

He looked round the ring. "Markham!" he bawled.

"Coming, sir," came the reply, and the next moment a man of enormous build, with muscles that told of tremendous strength, stepped into the arena.

He gave several exhibitions of his strength that held the boys spellbound, and then the announcement was made that Mendip would appear with his performing lions.

The animals were brought into the arena in cages, and then Mendip appeared on the scene, cracking a whip.

The doors of the cages were opened, and out stepped three enormous lions.

Two of them were perfectly quiet, but the third growled menacingly, and several of the people in the audience shuddered nervously.

Mendip cracked his whip, and two of the lions scampered about playfully.

The third, however, stood stockstill and opened its mouth in a vicious snarl.

"Nero!" shouted Mendip, cracking his whip.

Nero growled, and much against its will, as it seemed, it joined the other two.

The lion-tamer cracked his whip again, and then held it out for the lions to jump over.

Two of them performed the leap in splendid style, but Nero refused to budge.

"Nero!" bellowed the lion-tamer; but still the animal did not move.

"My hat!" exclaimed Val to his chums. "I don't like the look of that beast!"

"Neither do I!" agreed Jack Brent. "I believe he'd tear old Mendip to pieces if he had his way!"

"Faith, an' ye're right, Jack darlin'!" said Terence O'Connor. "He's a brute, bedad!"

Crack, crack!

The lion-tamer's whip whistled through the air, but Nero stood stockstill. Mendip pleaded and urged the animal without success.

There were mutterings amongst the audience. They saw that Nero was in a vicious mood, and they were deeply concerned for their own safety.

Mendip managed to catch sundry remarks from people in the front rows, and he saw that the nervous feeling was spreading.

Then the lion-tamer acted wisely.

It was no good trying to persuade Nero to go through his performance. Nero was in an obstinate mood, and the only thing to do was to get him back to his cage.

This Mendip proceeded to do. It was not an easy task, but at last he succeeded, and there were sighs of thankfulness from the audience.

"I can't say I'm sorry," said Val thankfully.

"Nor I," said Jack Brent. "You never know what a beast like that is going to do when he's in a savage mood."

"Hear, hear!"

Mendip went through his performance with the two lions, and then came what was announced as the star turn of the evening.

A round of applause broke forth as Lena, the Queen of the Ring, came cantering into the ring on a bare-backed horse.

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack Brent. "That girl's pretty smart. What do you say, Val?"

"I—Great Scott!"

Val uttered a sudden exclamation as he caught sight of the Queen of the Ring, and his face paled slightly.

"What's the matter, Val?" asked Jack.

"Oh—er—nothing," faltered Val.

"Afraid she was going to fall off?"

"N-no!"

It was plain that something had occurred to upset Val.

Jack and Terry noticed it, but in their eagerness to watch the Queen of the Ring's performance, they said nothing.

The performance was indeed a marvellous one.

The Queen of the Ring proved herself to be a magnificent rider, and the audience were held spellbound in watching her actions.

"Splendid!" shouted Jack Brent hilariously, as the Queen of the Ring balanced herself on her horse on one leg, and scampered round the arena.

"Faith, an' the colleen's marvellous!" said Terence O'Connor.

"Give her a clap, you fellows," said Jack excitedly.

Jack clapped for all he was worth, and so did the Irish lad.

But Val did not move a hand. His face was pale, and his eyes were fixed firmly on the Queen of the Ring.

Jack looked at his chum in surprise.

"What's the matter, Val?" he asked.

"Aren't you enjoying the show?"

"Y-y-yes," faltered Val.

"Well, give her a clap, then!" exclaimed Jack. "A girl who can ride a horse like that deserves some applause."

"Y-y-yes, I suppose so, but—"

"Hang your buts!" said Jack abruptly. "Clap up, old son!"

Val clapped, but it was very evident that he was not doing so in order to show his appreciation of the girl's performance.

At length the Queen of the Ring's performance came to a conclusion, much to the regret of the greater part of the audience.

There were cries of "Encore! Encore!" But the Queen of the Ring did not make a reappearance.

Jerry, the clown, stepped forward, and sent the audience into roars of laughter.

Val kept a serious face through it all. At length he rose from his seat.

"Hallo! Where are you off to?" asked Jack.

"Shan't be a minute or two," said Val.

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, where the dickens are you going?"

"Not far," replied Val indefinitely. "I'll be back long before the show's over."

"Oh, all right," said Jack, and he turned his attention to Jerry, the clown, whilst Val, a serious, concerned expression on his face, wended his way towards the exit.

Meanwhile, the show continued, and Terry and Jack hardly noticed Val's absence in their excitement for the various turns.

There was no doubt that Conway's Circus was a splendid attraction.

Every turn was of the highest quality, and the audience received good value for their money.

At length, however, the show was brought to a conclusion.

There were sighs of regret from the two juniors.

"I believe I could stand another show like this," remarked Jack.

"Faith, an' so could I," agreed Terence O'Connor. "But I have me doubts about Val."

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack, suddenly remembering his chum's absence.

"Wherever can the boulder have got to? He said he was coming back in a minute or two. But, I say, Terry, did you notice the expression on his face?"

"Bejabers, I did!"

"I wonder what the dickens was the matter with him?" went on Jack. "He was all right until the Queen of the Ring appeared on the scene, and then he seemed to lose all interest in the show."

"Ye're right, Jack darlin'."

"Well, we'd better get a move on," said Jack. "Perhaps the boulder will be waiting for us outside."

The two chums left the circus, and searched the fair-ground for signs of their chum. But Val was not to be found.

"It's no good hanging about here," said Jack at length. "We'd better get back to the school."

They set off down the road which took them in the direction of St. Mark's.

They had not gone far before the sound of somebody crying in the wood at the side of the road could be plainly heard.

The two chums drew to the side of the road, and peered amongst the trees. The sight which met their gaze caused them to start with amazement.

For, not twenty yards ahead of them, stood Val and the Queen of the Ring. The girl was crying bitterly, and Val's hand rested in an affectionate manner on the girl's shoulder.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Jack Brent. "This beats the jolly band! Whatever is Val doing—"

"Faith, an' we can't interrupt the love scene," said Terry, with a laugh. "Come along, Jack darlin'."

"You're right," said Jack, thoroughly surprised. "But surely you don't think Val's fallen in love?"

"Bejabers! What else can ye think?"

"Phew!" was all Jack Brent said, as he and the Irish lad set out for St. Mark's, leaving their chum with the Queen of the Ring.

The 2nd Chapter. An Amazing Revelation.

The three chums did not meet again that evening until the time came for them to make tracks for the dormitory.

Jack and Terry were undressing when Val entered the dormitory, looking pale and serious.

"You've got back, then?" asked Jack.

"Ye-es," faltered Val uneasily. "I'm—I'm sorry I didn't come back for you fellows. The fact is, I—"

"Oh, it's all right," said Jack rather coldly. "We didn't wait for long. We guessed you'd be able to find your way back alone."

"I'm sorry, of course," said Val.

"All serene."

The chums did not speak again that night.

Jack Brent very much wanted to know the reason for Val's behaviour.

He refrained from questioning his chum, however, realising only too well that there were other ears in the dormitory besides his own and those of his Irish chum.

Nevertheless, he resolved to have the matter out with Val the next morning.

If Val had fallen in love, he had got to be made to fall out again, and pretty quickly, too.

When Jack awoke the next morning it was to find that Val had disappeared from the dormitory.

His bed was empty, and it was evident that Val had been gone some time.

Jack was amazed. He dressed himself quickly, and then went down to the study with his Irish chum.

"Look here, Terry," he said deter-

minedly, "we've got to put a stop to this sort of thing. It's ye meaning."

"What sort of thing are ye meaning, Jack?"

"Why, can't you see what's happened?" said Jack quickly. "Where do you think Val is? I'd bet my boots he's gone to see that circus girl."

"Faith, an' I'd been after thinkin' the same thing myself, Jack," said the Irish junior.

"There's no doubt about it," declared Jack. "The silly ass has fallen in love. But you mark my words, he's coming out of it pretty quick. I—Hallo, here comes the boulder!"

At that instant the door of the study opened, and in strode Valentine Vane, looking more serious than ever.

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack with a grin. "If this is what happens to a chap when he falls in love, let's hope I never do such a thing."

Val looked at his chum in surprise.

"Whatever are you talking about, Jack?" he asked.

Jack wagged a warning finger at his chum.

"Now, look here, old son," he said firmly. "Don't try and adopt such an innocent air. We know what's up with you, and—"

"Great Scott!" Val's face changed colour.

"Oh, you needn't look scared!" said Jack mildly. "One glance at your face is sufficient to tell us that you're in love."

"In love!" ejaculated Val. "What utter rot!"

"Go on!" said Jack, laughing. "It's as plain as a pikestaff. We know you've gone potty on the girl at the circus."

"Piffle!" growled Val.

"Very well, then," said Jack confi-

dently. "If you haven't fallen in love, what were you doing talking to the Queen of the Ring last night, and—"

"You saw me?" ejaculated Val.

"Couldn't help it, Val, old son," said Jack. "We had no intention of spying on you, but if you will persist in meeting the fair lady near the road where we pass—well, you can't blame us if we catch a glimpse of you, can you?"

"Er—er—no," stammered Val. "But—but Jack, old scout, you're right off the mark. I shouldn't be such a silly idiot as to fall in love, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack hilariously. "If you haven't fallen in love, you must have suddenly become possessed of a very deep affection for the Queen of the Ring to go out before breakfast to meet her!"

Val stared his chum straight in the face.

"You—you didn't follow me?" he faltered.

"Not at all, Val," said Jack blandly. "Merely guessed it, you know. Your face gives you away. Now, look here, old son, you've got to stop it! Chuck up love-making until you leave school, and—"

"I tell you I'm not in love!" roared Val.

"Rats!" exclaimed Jack. "It's as plain as—Well, I'm blowed!"

Jack concluded his remark with a grunt, for Val had suddenly turned on his heel and left the study.

Jack knitted his brow in thought.

"Look here, Terry," he remarked at length. "This is a jolly serious bizney. I never thought Val capable of such tomfoolery. We shall have to take a strong hand with him."

"Very strong, bedad!" agreed Terry.

"Hallo! There's the bell for breakfast!"

The two chums went into the dining-room. Val was already there, but he no more than glanced at his chums.

The three chums did not meet again that morning, and when, directly after dinner, Val made tracks for the wood-shed, and, bringing out his bicycle, jumped into the saddle and rode off, Jack's surprise and indignation knew no bounds.

"This is the giddy limit!" he said to his Irish chum. "He's gone off to meet the circus girl again!"

"Are ye sure, Jack?" asked Terry doubtfully.

"Positive!" said Jack. "It's a scandal—an absolute scandal! The girl ought to be jolly well ashamed of herself! She'd no right to egg Val on! She can't be a



As fast as the chums rode, the lion travelled faster, and, before they had covered a hundred yards, the monster of the jungle had hurled its huge body at Jack's bicycle.

year under twenty-five years of age, and—

Get your bike out, Terry; I'm going after the silly rathed!"

"Faith, an' ye may have made a mistake, Jack darlin'!"

"Rats!" growled Jack irritably. "Who knows but what Val has promised to marry the blessed girl! Maybe he's gone off now to get married. But he shan't! I'll stop such a silly happening, if I have to drag the silly ass back by the scruff of his neck! Come on, Terry!"

The two chums wheeled out their bicycles, and soon they were pedalling down the road in the direction of Butcher's Meadow as fast as they could ride.

They covered the first mile well under five minutes, and then Jack suddenly slackened his pace, for a strange sound had fallen upon his ears.

"Did you hear that, Terry?" shouted Jack, putting on his brakes.

"Bejabers, I did!" replied the Irish junior. "It sounded like—like that blessed lion we saw last night!"

"Just what I thought!" said Jack, his voice shaking. "It—My hat! There it goes again, and—and it's getting nearer, Terry!"

There was a slight touch of fear in the tone of Jack's voice.

Again came that deep, menacing growl, terrible in its mysteriousness.

Where did it come from? Where—

"Good heavens!" gasped Jack suddenly. "It's—it's Nero!"

The faces of the two juniors turned deathly pale as they jumped off their bicycles and stood stockstill in the centre of the road.

For suddenly there had emerged from the wood, some fifty yards distant, the form of a lion, its mane bristling, its mouth opened in a deep, savage growl!

It was the lion which had refused to obey its master's orders at the circus the previous evening.

"My hat!" gasped Jack. "What—what—"

He broke off suddenly, and, turning his bicycle, he mounted, and started to pedal back in the direction of the school.

Terry did the same, and in a moment the two chums were pedalling for dear life.

But as fast as they travelled the lion travelled faster.

Before the chums had covered a hundred yards the monster of the jungle had hurled its huge body at Jack's bicycle, and the next moment the junior was lying senseless in the road, with the lion standing over him, snarling fiercely.

Terry dismounted, and stood as one paralysed.

The lion turned Jack's senseless form over and over, and every moment Terry expected his chum to be sent to his death by one blow from the monster's paw.

The lion seemed to be toying with its captive. Terry waited through moments of bitter agony, debating in his mind what to do.

Suddenly, however, a figure on horseback emerged from a side-turning, and came tearing in the direction of the lion and its captive.

Terry gave a gasp as he recognised the rider as Lena, the Queen of the Ring, attired in riding costume.

She was riding for all she was worth, and behind her, running at top speed, was his own chum, Valentine Vane, and Mendip, the lion-tamer.

The girl pulled her horse up sharp, and, stepping down, she walked slowly towards the snarling monster.

"Good boy, Nero!" she said coaxingly. "Come along, my bonnie boy!"

Nero growled and showed his teeth, but the girl stood her ground. She stroked the lion's mane, and patted him on the head.

"Good old Nero!" she said fondly. "Come to Lena, there's a good boy!"

To Terry's amazement the animal left its captive and went over to Lena's side.

"It's wonderful—marvellous!" said Mendip, the lion-tamer. "I never thought Nero would obey you like that."

"Neither did I," replied the girl. "But he has. Hadn't we better get him back to the circus?"

"Ye-es," faltered the lion-tamer. "But—but what about this youngster? Is he—is he—"

"He's all right," replied Val, who was stooping at Jack's side with his Irish chum. "He's got a bit of a bump on his head, but otherwise I believe he's all right."

"Thank Heaven!" gasped the man.

"Hadn't we better be getting along?" interrupted the Queen of the Ring.

"Oh, yes!"

The girl had laid a fond hand on the lion and enticed him down the road. The lion, as Val said afterwards, went like a lamb. Nero seemed like a baby under Lena's control.

"I say, Lena," shouted Val, as the girl departed. "you'll come straight up to the school afterwards, won't you?"

The girl smiled, and nodded her head in reply.

"Come on, Terry!" said Val. "Lift Jack on to my back, and I'll carry him to the school. You had better look after the machines."

"All serene, Val!" said Terry. "And the next moment the strange procession started for St. Mark's."

Upon arrival at St. Mark's Jack recovered quickly, and was able to take his seat by the fire.

Tea was already laid, and the kettle was on the boil.

Suddenly the door opened, and in walked Val, and with him came Lena, the Queen of the Ring.

"Jack," said Val, his face wreathed in smiles, "allow me to introduce you to Miss Lena Vane!"

"Miss!" gasped Jack in wonderment. "Sure you don't mean Mrs. Val?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Val. "We're not married, Jack, old son. You can comfort yourself on that score. The Queen of the Ring is my sister, and—"

"But—began Jack, but he was too amazed to finish his remark.

"Perhaps I'd better explain," went on Val. "The fact is, Jack, old son, my sister left home some years ago to go on the stage. She failed to meet with success there, and, not wishing to return home, she joined Conway's Circus party."

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THE BOYS OF THE "BOMBAY CASTLE"

A Magnificent New Serial, dealing with the
School Afloat, and introducing Cy Sprague,
Lal Tata, Chip, and Captain Handyman.

By DUNCAN STORM.



THE LEADING CHARACTERS IN THIS AMAZING STORY ARE:

CAPTAIN HANDYMAN, who is commander of the Bombay Castle.
CY SPRAGUE, the famous American detective.

LAL TATA, a fat, genial Hindu, who is a master on board the Bombay Castle.
TOM and **FRED MORTON**, **CHIP** **PRODGER**, **DICK DORRINGTON**, **PONGO WALKER**, and the **SKELETON**, high-spirited juniors, who belong to Dormitory No. 3 of the floating school.

BULLY FLASHMAN and **STOAT**, two bullying juniors, in Dormitory No. 1.

In last week's instalment the boys went to see the sights of Venice. By a cunning trick on the part of Flashman, Chip and his chums were left to their fate in the Dungeon of Death. They had almost given up hope of being saved from a terrible death when Chip attracted the attention of Juicy, the gondolier, who immediately went in quest of assistance.

(Read on from here.)

Challenged to Fight!

Down in that grim cellar of death the boys were already out of their depth, the chill, black water taking them off their feet as it swirled down like a mill-race through the aperture.

Chip, who had hung to the bars till he had got his message to Juicy, slipped down and called for Cecil.

"It's all right, boys!" he cried. "Keep your peckers up! That was Juicy, and he's spotted us! He's turned his gondola, and he's gone off like a streak of lightning to get us help! They won't be long in getting us out of this trap!"

"Here you are, Chip!" called Tom from the darkness. "Here's Cecil! Give him a hand up. He can hang to the bars. He's very cold, and he won't make much of a show of swimming in this water."

Cecil was whining and whimpering. The cold and the darkness and the rushing water bewildered him.

Cecil had been caged long enough in his life to hate a cage of any sort with all the fear of a wild animal.

And this human cage into which he had fallen was the limit.

He clung to the bars, where the boys hoisted him, like a limpet, although the rush of the water into the dungeon was hitting him fair in the stomach.

The boys had cheered up wonderfully. They swam round in the black whirlpool in the dungeon, calling to one another by name, so that they knew that all were still above water.

The electric-torch had petered out, and Chip had dropped it.

They knew that the water was rising fast on the grating, and they soon found themselves floating up pretty well against the ceiling of the dungeon.

By stretching up their hands they could touch the rough, wet stones.

Still there was no sound yet of anyone coming to their assistance.

They had almost lost their count of time.

As a matter of fact, about six minutes had passed since Juicy had swung his gondola, and had raced off down the little canal outside those thick walls, shouting "Socorro! Socorro!" or "Help! Help!" at the top of his voice.

Suddenly, however, there was a bargaining and a scraping against the rough stone wall outside, and the roar of rapidly running motor machinery.

One of the powerful motor-floats of the Venice Fire Brigade had ranged up outside the cell, with a babel of chattering, friendly Italian voices, which shouted to the boys to have no fear, for the "bombas" were going to get to work.

"That's bombs!" said Pongo Walker, as he swam round in the black flood. "They're going to blow the grating out with a dynamite charge! Let's pull Cecil away from it!"

So they pulled Cecil away from the nearly submerged grating, and supported him between them.

There was not much strength left in Cecil now.

He hung limp and helpless as the boys supported him.

The bombas proved to be nothing more than pumps.

Powerful steel jacks were forced in between the bronze bars of the little grating, forcing them apart, and tearing them away as though they were made of paper.

Then a brilliant electric bulb gladdened the eyes of the boys, floating under the stream of water that poured into the cellar, whilst the end of a huge gleaming metal-sheathed tube was pushed down into the cellar.

It was a great spiral covered pipe of copper, flexible as gas-tubing, and nearly a foot in diameter, covered at the end with a large suction-box of white metal.

As soon as this was forced into the dungeon the motor-pumps on the craft outside started off with a buzz and a roar.

The powerful modern centrifugal pump held its own with the water, and soon the bars were forced and torn apart sufficient to allow of the introduction of another pump.

Whirr-r-r-r-r!

Away went the second pump, and to their delight the boys saw the level of the water beginning to fall on the streaming walls of the dungeon.

Another electric-light was thrust through the narrow, gaping hole in the wall, and a voice called through to them to have "Pazienza!" and all would be well.

They knew that this big word meant patience.

They were something more than patient.

They were absolutely cheerful as they began to be able to touch with their toes the stone seat in the dungeon.

And great was the wonderment of the Italian firemen outside when they heard coming from that dreadful dungeon a cheerful song.

Chip made the song, and the rest quickly picked up the stave. It ran:

"Cecil has spoiled his Sunday trousers!
Cecil has spoiled his Sunday trousers!
Cecil has spoiled his Sunday trousers!
Oh, what an afternoon!"

Then came a smashing on the door of the dungeon, with a bubbling and a sighing, as though some great marine monster was gambling outside.

Bang, bang, bang!

The door was splintering and heaving under the leverage of a great crowbar, pried from the outside by a diver of the municipality, who had been called from his work on some underwater foundations close by.

Descending the steps that led down to the door of the dungeon, he had plunged into the black pool which had welled up under the dungeon door, filling up the stone stairway to the passage.

The door heaved and swung, and the great lock burst asunder.

The boys were grabbed and dragged up the steps by the eager, outstretched hands of a crowd of gondoliers and firemen, who patted them on the back, called them "brave ones," hugged them, and even kissed them.

The diver in his helmet looked on in a friendly manner, as if he would have kissed them too, if he hadn't had his head in a copper scuttle.

One fireman grabbed Cecil, and patted him and embraced him before he hopped back with a yell, wondering what sort of a schoolboy this was.

But Cecil did not snarl or snap at him. The cold had taken all the spirit out of the orange, and he could barely stand when he was hoisted out of that fear-some cellar.

Juicy, almost beside himself, hugged the boys one after another, and, jabbering nineteen to the dozen, explained how he had heard their cry and seen their signals as he was paddling homewards.

He told with infinite gestures how he had broken the records down to the landing-place, and how he had been lucky enough to catch the fire-float just as she was doing her evening test-run with all her crew on board.

Then he had rushed to find one of the attendants who had the keys of the palace.

The man had finished for the day, but Juicy had known where to find him.

With the help of the attendant, Juicy had roused up the diver, who had just come up from examining some underwater piling close by the palace.

They had shifted the diver, helmet, air-pump and all, in less time than it takes to tell, and here were the boys all safe and sound!

The boys were borne off in triumph to the gatekeeper's lodge, where their clothes were stripped off them and dried in front of a huge fire of logs.

Cecil's clothes were taken off him, too, and the boys rubbed him down with rough towels, till the blood began to circulate once more in his veins, and his great paws began to feel less like iced fish.

The hospitable Italians wanted to give Cecil brandy.

But this Pongo would not allow.

"No good!" said Pongo, touching his forehead. "Brand-a no good-a for da monk-a. Brand-a mak-a monk-a loco, barmy, off-a crumpett-a. Savvy? Nutt-a on da pott-a. Monk-a him teetotal-a!"

So instead of brandy they gave Cecil a huge basin of sweet, hot chocolate, made in the Venetian fashion, so thick that a spoon would almost stick up in it.

And by the time he had finished this Cecil was thoroughly warmed up.

He sat with his paw in Pongo's hand, blinking at the glowing fire, and at the heaps of drying clothes.

Pongo was greatly relieved to feel life coming back again into Cecil.

"Old Cecil can't have taken any harm, chaps," said Pongo, in great relief. "If he had caught a chill he wouldn't stow

away chocolate in this fashion. He's all right!"

Cecil was getting through another bowl of chocolate, when the door of the porter's lodge was thrust open, and Mr. Parkins, followed by Lal Tata, burst into the quaint, old-fashioned room.

He stood aghast at the sight of the group who, wrapped in blankets, were gathered round the fire.

Having hurried out to the ship, and finding that the boys had not arrived, Mr. Parkins had raced back to the shore through the raging squalls, only to find that no such boys as he described had put off to the ship in any shore-boat.

Then he had picked up a rumour that some English boys, with an African prince, had been taken out of a dungeon in the prison where they had nearly been drowned.

It was said that the boys had been fooling about with the door of the dungeon, and had managed to get themselves locked in.

They had not been missed by their party or by the attendants of the old prison, and so they had come near drowning when the dungeon had flooded up.

Luckily for them the gondoliers had heard their cries for help.

The fire brigade had been summoned, and they had been rescued in the nick of time.

This was the story which had brought Mr. Parkins hurrying round to the porter's lodge, where he found the brightest and best of the Glory Hole gang seated round the great hearth, burning timber by the cartload, and wrapped in blankets, waiting for their clothes to dry.

"My dear boys," cried Mr. Parkins, "what an adventure! I should never

have come down to the boat-landing, where the launch was pitching uneasily alongside the wharf, and he hugged them all as they stepped into the little craft. He even embraced Cecil.

"Good-bye-e, Mist-a Monk-a!" said Juicy. "A riverderci! You come-a back again to Venezia, an' I will show you round some more!"

And Juicy stood there on the landing-stage, regardless of the wind and the rain, as the launch cast off and buck-jumped her way out to the roadstead, over short, steep, black seas that burst in showers over the spray-hoods.

Outside, it was a rough night, and the boys were jolly glad to see the huge shape of the Bombay Castle looming up in the darkness.

It was no easy job to get the launch alongside the ladder without smashing up ladder or launch, for the wind was blowing a full gale now.

But, one by one, they managed to hop on to the ladder, where a quartermaster was hanging on beneath a clutch of electric lights to receive them.

Mr. Parkins, to the great delight of everyone, got a bootful of sea-water, and Lal was pulled up the ladder by the scruff of his neck.

Cecil did not wait to be helped.

He made his own jump for it, chased by a sea which burst on the ladder in a shower of spray.

He shot up the long, teak stairway like a streak of greased lightning, amidst the shouts of the crowd who were hanging over the rail above to see this last remnant of the shore-party come off.

And as soon as the launch was discharged of her passengers, tackles were lowered, her fires were drawn, and she was hoisted up to the boat-deck and made snug for sea.

The boys had barely shaken down on board once more, when the clanking of the anchor-chain was heard, and the Bombay Castle steamed off into the black, gusty night, booked, as Captain Handyman remarked, with a grin, for a real old duster.

And a real old duster she got, too, as soon as she was clear of the roadstead, for, as she drove through the short, choppy seas, she surrounded herself with a cloud of spray which made decks and passages cold, damp, and miserable.

She started up a curious movement of her own, too.

The boys had long ago discovered that every sea puts its own gait into a ship.

There is no comparison between the long, smooth, majestic roll of the Atlantic, and the sharp, chopping seas of the Mediterranean.

But as the boys gathered at the

"What are you going to have, Skeleton?" asked Tom, looking at the menu-card. "There's a ripping supper on to-night—just the very supper for a cold, dusty night at sea! Listen! There's Irish stew, fat York ham, boiled pork and parsnips. Think of that, Skeleton—boiled pork and parsnips!"

The Skeleton evidently thought of the boiled pork and parsnips, for his face, which had turned pale, had taken on a slightly green tinge.

"Splendid!" he rejoined. "That's the jolly tack, ain't it?"

The Skeleton tried hard to make his voice sound hearty and cheerful, like the voice of an old salt. But there was no heartiness in it.

It sounded dreary, and ended up with a feeble little squeak.

Alessandro, the dark-faced, Goanese table-waiter, who was greatly attached to the skeleton, was hovering round ready to take his order.

Alessandro, who lived himself on a handful of rice and curry, with a clove or two of garlic, had a tremendous admiration for the Skeleton's appetite. He was never tired of discoursing amongst his fellow-stewards on the wonderful English boy at his table, who ate and ate like a giant, and who never got fat.

Alessandro was really much worried about the Skeleton, and always did his best to feed him up.

So as soon as he heard the word pork he dashed off to the galley-serving hatch, where the cooks and carvers were busy under the pendant electric lamps.

"Two portions of pork-a, parsnip—two potato—t'ree, plenty grave!" shouted Alessandro. "It is for the Hungry One," he added, in his own lingo to the carver, who was whacking away at a noble leg of pork.

The Goanese, who was carving the leg of pork, nodded.

He knew the Skeleton well enough.

The Skeleton had been kind to him, and had given him a slab of ship's tobacco.

So he did the Skeleton's plate well.

He gave him not only a double portion of pork, but a treble portion.

Then he heaped the plate up with parsnips and potatoes, and covered it with juicy gravy, so that the plate presented a splendid dinner for a hungry navvy in full appetite.

Alessandro, beaming all over his dark face at this splendid plateful, rushed off with it to the saloon.

He slapped it down in front of the Skeleton, who was staring across the saloon at the spray that was dashing up against the closed plate-glass of the scuttles.



Mr. Parkins stood aghast at the sight of the group of boys who, wrapped in blankets, were gathered round the fire.

have forgiven myself if anything fatal had happened. It was all my fault for not keeping a closer eye on you!"

"Bravo, boys!" exclaimed Lal, beaming all over his fat face. "Seems to me that you have got out of some deuced tight places again! It was most unfortunate that lock of dungeon door should have got cobbled away just at particular moment that waters of Adriatic Sea started to rise. It was jolly good licks that you did not lose your tickets over those jobs!"

It was plain that both Lal and Mr. Parkins had taken up the story which they had heard.

So the boys did not undecieve them. They knew well enough that Flashman and Stoat, the bullies, had sprung that trap on them, and, though they did not know how near it had come to costing their lives, it was a cunning trick, and they meant to get their own back in their own way.

Their clothes were dry now, and they slipped them on.

Then they rummaged through their pockets, and made up a real round sum as a reward to Juicy and the firemen who had saved them, not forgetting the diver, who, by this time, had come out of his helmet and diving gear.

Juicy was sorrowful at leaving them.

supper-tables in the great saloon, they all agreed that the Adriatic Sea had a nasty, curly, wiggly break from the off that was calculated to take the balls off any stomach.

The Skeleton, who had looked forward to his supper, began to change his mind as he lurched across the saloon, looking rather pale, and trying to smile a devil-may-care, Pirate King, sort of smile.

"How are you feeling, old Skull and Crossbones?" asked Tom briskly.

To tell the truth, Tom was not feeling any too good himself. But he wasn't going to let on.

Captain Handyman wanted to run out of this patch of bad weather as soon as possible.

So, down in the engine-room, Mr. Macstagers, the chief engineer, was whacking up the speed till the Bombay Castle was doing her level best.

Bang, thump, slump, crash!

The powerful ship forced her way through the steep, short seas, sending clouds of spray flying along her decks as her powerful bows tore the seas apart like some huge battering-ram.

And to the boys in the brilliantly lit saloon it seemed that every one of those thumps was transmitted through the great, quivering steel hull direct to their stomachs.

It was a dark and stormy night outside.

"There you are, Skeleton!" said Tom cheerfully. "There's a splendid supper for you!"

The Skeleton slowly looked down at the plate before him, and manfully took up his knife and fork.

Whirr-r-r-r! Bang—bang—bang!

Thump—swizzle—swizzle!

"What's that?" asked the Skeleton faintly, as a jarring ran right through the ship.

"Nothing, my dear boy!" said Lal Tata, who had taken his perch at the end of the Glory Hole table. "That was just the screw propellers lifting out of the water as the ship pitches some more than usual. There is a great turbulence on the sea to-night. But what do we care? We are all jolly sailor-fellows now!"

"I don't think!" added Dick Dorrington under his breath. "What are you going to have, Mr. Lal Tata?" he said aloud, politely handing Lal the menu card.

"I think I can recommend that roast goose, with the sage and onion stuffing. It smelled very good when I was passing the galley."

Lal's eyes rolled.

He wasn't exactly feeling like roast goose at that moment.

THE BOYS OF THE "BOMBAY CASTLE"

(Continued from the previous page.)



"The roast goose," he said slowly—"the roast goose is a richsome bird. He is apt to disagree with digestions. Also, sage and onion stuffings are difficult of digestions."

"Try it, sir!" urged Dick, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "I'm just going to have a few dry biscuits and a cup of tea myself. But an old sailor like you—a real old sea-dog—"

This flattery was enough for Lal. He had a tremendous admiration for British sailors, and loved to pose as a crusty old tar—when the weather was smooth.

"Yes," he said, "I will take the roast geese. Why should we not eat and make merry, even though it be a dark and dirty night outside?"

Bomble—bomble—bomble—bomble—boosh!

Up came the propellers again, racing like fury, and setting all the glasses in the racks shivering and dancing with a crystalline tinkle.

The Bombay Castle gave a heavy lurch, and the waiting stewards, clever as cats on their feet, bowed to it like cornstalks before the wind.

The plates and glasses rattled on the tables.

Several boys got up unsteadily, and, with pale faces, made their way towards the swing-doors of the saloon.

"Ha! Look at those fellows!" said Lal, who for a moment felt a little bit better of his qualms. "They are not jolly sailor boys! They succumb too quick to seasickness feelings. They should cultivate strengths of minds!"

It was just then that the beaming Alessandro, who had received a wink from Dick, slapped down a plate before Lal.

There was a leg and a big slab of roast goose.

There was bacon, and a huge pile of sage-and-onion stuffing.

Lal's eyes rolled.

He did not dare look at the Skeleton, who was manfully tackling his plate of pork.

But he started his supper.

The lurching of the ship increased. Captain Handymen had changed his course, and was bearing away from the Italian coast.

This had brought the choppy sea more abeam.

And the Bombay Castle, as though delighting to feel herself free of port again, was kicking up her heels in a most disgraceful fashion.

From the pantries came snatches and crashes and shouted exclamations of the pantry-men, as their crockery carried away.

Even Alessandro was caught napping with a pile of dishes at the doorway of the saloon, as the ship took a vicious roll.

He fell over a small boy, who was trying to sneak away to his bunk in Kid's Alley.

Down he went on his ear, with his neck in a dish of hot roast goose, and a cold blanchmange in his eye.

The tables were emptying fast now as, one by one, the boys gave up their attempts at supper, and stole off to their bunks.

Lal chuckled a hollow chuckle.

He looked proudly round the Glory Hole table, which as yet had not given up a single seasick soul.

"Stick to it, boys!" he said. "It is just triumphs of minds over matter. If you say to yourselves, 'I will not be seasicks,' you will not be seasicks! It is just matters of brain strength!"

It was just at this moment that the Skeleton gave up his plate of boiled pork.

"I don't want any more supper," he said, in sepulchral tones. "I'm going to lie down for a bit. I wish this old bucket would keep her screws in the water!"

The Skeleton moved away from the table, and Lal chuckled again.

"Poor old Skeleton!" he said. "He will never be brave, jolly sailor fellows like us. I—"

Then Lal suddenly looked straight in front of him, squinting into space as though he could see a ghost.

His dark complexion had suddenly turned a greenish grey.

The roast goose and onion stuffing had bitten back.

"Excuse me, you fellows!" said Lal, in muffled tones. "I have forgot. I have most important appointment to keep in engineer's cabin. Tell Alessandro to keep goose warm in oven till I come back."

Lal rose unsteadily to his feet, and made his way in a zigzag fashion to the saloon doors.

He did not, however, go in the direction of the engineer's cabin, but made a straight dash down the alley-way which led to his own bunk.

Dick Dorrington grinned.

"I thought that roast goose would bite old Lal's ear for him," he said mischievously. "There won't be any prep to-night, and I bet Lal won't come back to finish his supper! Look at the bullies! They are feeling a bit under the weather as well!"

The table at which Flashman and Stoot and their followers were seated had been a noisy one when the dinner had started.

Flashman had been regaling his set with

the yarn of his trick upon the Glory Hole fellows.

He had not learned how nearly that trick had come to costing the boys their lives.

He and his mob had looked with meaning glances at the Glory Hole table.

In the last week or so Flashman had succeeded in gathering round him again some of the worst elements amongst the older boys on the ship, and with this following he was eager to declare war on the Glory Hole fellows.

He and his crowd had grown rather quiet during supper-time.

The racket of the ship had churned them up a bit, and a bilious tinge was showing in most of their faces.

Perhaps it was a touch of sea-sickness that did not improve Flashman's temper.

He led his crowd across the saloon, passing close to the table where Dick Dorrington & Co. were seated.

With his hands in his pockets, he stopped at the end of the table, swinging slightly to the roll of the ship, and leaning down on the boys with an evil smile.

"Hallo, you swabs!" he said. "So you are still on the ship! I thought we had left you and your precious monkey pal behind at Venice. If I had been the captain I wouldn't have waited for you!"

"We should have been left behind if you had had your way," replied Dick Dorrington quietly. "What sort of a school were you brought up at, Flashy, to think of such a trick as that of pulling a door on us?"

Flashman's eyes glittered.

He looked round the saloon, and saw that there was no master present.

"Look here, you cheeky pup!" he said savagely. "Don't you take up that tone with me! I'm about fed-up with you, and your swanky friends. Take that!"

He picked up a half-emptied cup of coffee that stood on the uncleared table, and threw it in Dick's face.

Dick sprang to his feet, and twisted at the revolving chair in which he was seated.

It is not the easiest thing in the world to get out of such a chair, which must be twisted half round on its pivot, and the Bully was quick to take advantage of it.

He launched a blow at Dick.

But Tom, on the other side of the table, saw the move.

In a second he had snatched up the almost untouched plate of roast goose which Lal had left behind him, and slapped it into the Bully's face.

The vicious blow levelled at Dick's head missed its mark, and the Bully, caught by a roll of the ship, sprawled on the floor, smothered in goose and stuffing.

Stoot rushed to his pal's assistance.

But Chip had his eye on him, and a pink blanc mange, hurled with unerring aim, splashed in a mass on the Bully's face, and gave Dick time to get clear of his chair.

Flashman was up again in a second.

When he had wiped the goose from his face, it was green and yellow with anger and seasickness.

"You'll fight me for that, you young whelp!" he said.

"When you like," answered Tom quietly. "We can't bring off a fight on the ship. But the next time we are ashore!"

And you can make up your mind for a jolly good hiding!" snarled the bully.

"We'll see about that," replied Tom cheerfully.

"And you—" snarled Stoot, who was wiping pink jelly out of his eyes, and raking it up out of his shirt-collar, "you'll have to answer for this, you young guttersnipe!"

Chip flushed under the insult.

He knew that Stoot alluded to the poverty of his boyhood.

"I'll fight you!" he replied.

Dick was not going to be left out of it.

Percy Potts, the satellite of the bullies, was standing by, sneering.

"You Glory Hole pups will be eaten up!" he exclaimed. "We'll make hay of you!"

Percy was a good boxer, but a coward.

He looked at Dick, but he did not dare issue the challenge.

"Right, Glue Pot!" replied Dick quickly. "Since you are so anxious to make up a third, I'll take you on at the next port of call. It'll be a school fight, and there will be three mills going at once."

Percy Potts turned pale.

He did not like the notion of the challenge.

A school fight was a school fight, to be fought to a finish under the eyes of the whole of the boys of the Bombay Castle, and Percy had no stomach for such a scrap.

He would have backed out if he could, but Flashman was quick to fix him.

"Right, Percy!" he exclaimed. "Give him the coward's blow. That'll fix him! It's a fight!"

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"Right, Percy!" he exclaimed. "Give him the coward's blow. That'll fix him! It's a fight!"

Percy hesitated. But Dick did not.

"If there's any cowards' blows going, I'll give 'em!" he said, and, lifting up his hand, he cuffed Potts slightly.

Potts wiped his face and licked his lips.

He did not like being drawn into the fight, but there was no going back now.

"All right, Mr. Dorrington!" he muttered, wiping his face. "I'll pay you in full for that—when we get ashore!"

"When we get ashore!" agreed Dick lightly.

The bullies lurched out of the saloon, and took themselves off to their berths.

But Chip, Tom, Dick, with Porks and Pongo, made their way along the alleyways till they came to a small iron door, which led down to the great white-washed engine-room.

Down they went, climbing gingerly down the long, shining steel ladders that led by the great, stamping, flashing engines to the floor of the ship eighty feet below.

"Hallo, ye young rascallions!" exclaimed the voice of Mr. MacStaggers, the chief engineer. "What will ye be after, trespassin' down here in my engine-room?"

"Please, sir," said Chip humbly, "we've come down to look for Umpty Ginsen."

Mr. MacStaggers, who was in his working overalls, and busy at a bench making a model of a locomotive, smiled grimly at the news.

He had heard a bit of the boys' adventure in the Dungeon of Death, and he had put two and two together.

It was strange that both Mr. MacStaggers and Captain Handymen, who had the confidence of the boys, knew far more of what was going on in the Bombay Castle than Mr. Parkins or any of the masters.

"So ye'll be looking after Umpty to tell you somethin' about fightin'!" said Mr. MacStaggers.

"It is something of the sort, sir!" said Chip modestly.

"A-weel, and ye'll be fightin' wi' yon Flashman an' his crew?" pursued Mr. MacStaggers, with a twinkle in his keen eyes.

"That's about it, sir!"

"Well, mind ye give 'em a good hidin'!" replied Mr. MacStaggers. "Ye'll have a gran' chance to bring it off. The captain tells me that we are steamin' to a wee bit of a Greek-Turkish island, so that Mr. Parkins can view some

ancient ruins. An' there's a grand old Greek stadium there—a stadium o' marble that ye can seat five thousand people. There ye can ha' your mill nice an' quiet. An' ye'll find Umpty Ginsen oiling up in the starboard tunnel yonder."

The boys crept past the great thrust block of the starboard propeller, where the great, gleaming shaft set off into a long steel tunnel, lit by electric lights, a tunnel that looked uncommonly like the tube of an underground railway.

The boys' stomachs heaved as they made their way along the plunging tunnel, clinging by the handrail, and keeping well away from the whirling shaft of polished steel that shone like silver between its great steel bearings.

They were thirty feet below the water here, and as they crawled along they got near the tail end of the ship, where they could feel the rise and fall, and hear the thundering roar of the great starboard propeller vibrating through the ship's skin.

Almost up at the end of the tunnel, where the shaft passed out through the tube of the propeller bearing, they found Umpty, busy oiling the massive bearings with an oil-can as big as a garden watering-pot.

He set it down at the sight of the boys.

"Hallo, young gents!" he exclaimed. "What brings you down the tail end of the tunnel on a night like this? Should have thought you'd be afraid o' being turned up."

"We've come to see you, Umpty," said Chip, clinging to the handrail.

"We've got a fight on, and we want to bring it off when we stop at the Island of Syros."

"You got up agin' them bullies?" asked Umpty.

"Yes," replied Chip. "Tom fights Flashman, I fight Stoot, and Dick here has taken on the Glue Pot. It's a school fight, and we've got to bring it off ashore as fighting is not allowed on the ship."

Umpty Ginsen wiped his forehead with a piece of oily cotton-waste.

"Persh' Potts!" he said, with great contempt. "Why, Master Dick'll put paid to 'im in a couple of rahnds! He can box, but 'e ain't got no 'cart. He's jes' one o' them lardy-dardy, faint-away toffs that'll chuck the sponge as soon as 'e gets a good 'un landed on 'is nose. But them other two—they're big chaps. You jes' come to me to-morrer, an' I'll show you 'ow to set abaat 'em! Now, off you get, young gents! The ole bucket is kickin' 'ard to-night, and you don't want your stomachs upset!"

The boys were glad enough to get out of that close, narrow propeller tunnel, with its close air and its smell of hot oil.

They climbed up out of the engine-room, feeling like flies as they swarmed up the steel ladders.

Then they betook themselves to the Glory Hole, which was already buzzing with rumours of the great fight.

A Strange Welcome!

It was three days before the Bombay Castle sighted the picturesque hills of the Island of Syros, one of the most beautiful of the islets of the Greek Archipelago.

The weather was rough nearly all the way, for the Eastern Mediterranean can churn up weather as bad as most seas.

But Dick Dorrington & Co., getting their sea-legs, had not been idle.

Umpty Ginsen, in the privacy of the "Firemen's Union," as they called the stokers' quarters, had managed to teach them many a trick of the ring, and there were no lack of advisers.

The stokehold crowd had a great aversion for the bullies, and a great affection for the Glory Hole fellows.

So they were all eager to teach all they knew.

And the stokehold crowd of the Bom-

bay Castle was a crew of boxers of repute.

Nearly everyone in the ship knew of the coming fight.

It was freely discussed in the fore-castle, and down in the engine-room. Captain Handymen knew of it.

Everyone knew of it, save the two persons the boys did not want to hear of it.

And these were Mr. Parkins and Lal Tata.

Everything was arranged beautifully. Mr. Parkins was going ashore early to view the ruins of a Temple of Minerva.

The boys would be allowed to go ashore to visit the great marble stadium or circus, a noble monument of Greco-Roman architecture which had once been the scene of gladiatorial fights and chariot-races.

In the little bay, where the ship anchored that morning, were the white houses of a Greek village and a Turkish village, which stood apart, as there was little friendship between the Greeks and the Turks, who were the inhabitants of the island.

The rough weather had blown away, and the sea was calm and blue when the boys turned out for bathing.

There was a football match arranged as a mask to the fight.

And the match was to take place in the stadium or coliseum.

At least, this was what Mr. Parkins thought when he came on deck to enter the shore-boat that was waiting for him, and saw the boys grouped on deck in football-jerseys and shorts.

"Ha, boys!" said Mr. Parkins, beaming upon them. "So you are going to take part in a classic struggle on classic ground. Remember, when you are playing your match, that you are figuring upon a spot made famous by the greatest athletes of the olden days!"

"Yes, sir," said Dick meekly.

He did not think it worth while to tell Mr. Parkins that the classic struggle that was going to take place that morning would take place in rings carefully staked out by Umpty Ginsen and his mates, who had got shore-going leave by hook or by crook.

Umpty and his pals had already found their way up into the lifeboats, which were being cleared at the davits ready for lowering.

In the lockers of these they had stowed some very businesslike-looking gloves, sponges, and towels, together with lengths of rope and stakes, suitable for pegging out the rings.

Mr. Parkins went off, carrying his camera.

The boys watched him as the sail was hoisted, and his craft slid off for the shore.

Then a buzz of excitement went up as one by one the lifeboats for the shore-going crowd were lowered into the smooth waters of the Bay of Syros.

It had been arranged that on landing Umpty and his party should march straight through the Turkish village to the ancient ruin of the circus, and get things ready, whilst the boys should follow them, innocently kicking a football about.

This very innocent stratagem was a notion of Chip's, who wished to deceive Lal Tata as to what was happening.

The coming fight had been kept dark from Lal.

The boys knew that once they got him up in the circus, Lal would be overcome by popular feeling.

Although discipline demanded that Lal should not countenance a fight, his admiration for all that made up British school life would carry him away once he was up there, and found that football was not the game intended.

So the parties landed.

Captain Handymen watched them from the bridge of the ship through his glasses, and grinned as he saw Umpty and his pals sloping off ahead towards the Turkish village, behind which rose the magnificent ruins of the old circus.

"There go the lads!" he laughed, pointing the little group out to Cy Sprague.

"And there go the boys along the track that leads along to the village. See how innocently they are kicking that ball along. If Parky knew that they were going to bring off a school scrap he'd have a fit!"

On the track that led to the Turkish village the Glory Hole gang were leading the procession lightlyheartedly.

They were followed up by a crowd of chattering Greek boys, who were evidently astonished at this sudden invasion of their island.

Punting the ball one from the other, the Glory Hole fellows laughed at the gabbling of the islanders, and were suddenly astonished when this mob turned short on the outskirts of the white, blank-walled Turkish village, making pantomimic gestures that they should not kick the football through its deserted, sunny streets.

"What do they mean?" asked Dick wonderingly.

"I don't know," said Chip, passing the ball with a deft kick. "There is some sort of a row between the two villages. The Greeks are Christians, and the Turks are Mohammedans, and they don't like one another. At any rate, we are not doing any harm by playing footer down a street that's as empty as a drum, and there's no glass windows to smash."

So, in spite of the cries of the Greeks, the crowd of laughing boys punted the ball into the long, cobbled street.

The Greeks hung back on the outskirts of the village, yelling warnings.

But the boys took no heed of them.

Little did they dream that they were offering the most deadly insult possible to that blank-walled Turkish village by kicking that ball, and that this innocent pastime was almost as much as their lives were worth.

(Another magnificent long instalment of this amazing serial in next Monday's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND. I should be glad if readers would write and let me know what they think of this new story.)

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

Write to me whenever you are in doubt or difficulty. Tell me about yourself; let me know what you think of the BOYS' FRIEND. All readers who write to me and enclose a stamped envelope or postcard, may be sure of receiving a prompt and kindly reply by post. All letters should be addressed: "The Editor, the BOYS' FRIEND, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4."

FOR NEXT MONDAY!

"THE REBELS' RAID!"
By Owen Conquest.

In next Monday's magnificent tale of the Rookwood chums time hangs very much on the hands of the rebels. The Head makes no further attempt to bring about the surrender of the rebellious juniors, and things become very quiet.

But the rebels are anxious to be up and doing. The proposition is made to take the "war" into the enemy's country. The nature of the offensive they take up is both daring and ingenious, and creates a great deal of trouble in the school.

Sergeant Kettle is taken prisoner, and is forced to wait on the juniors. Sergeant Kettle does not care for the job, but the old soldier's likes and dislikes are not taken into account. There is some rare fun in this incident.

Finally the rebels receive the news that Mr. Lattrey is coming to take them in hand. But they are in no way daunted. They are as determined as ever to carry the revolt to a successful conclusion.

"THE HORSE HUNTERS!"
By Martin Clifford.

This story deals with Frank Richards

STRIKING A BARGAIN!

**A Magnificent Long Complete
Story, dealing with the
Schooldays of Frank Richards,
the Famous Author of the
Tales of Harry Wharton & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

The 1st Chapter.

Frank Richards Takes a Hand.

"The brute!"
Frank Richards' eyes blazed as he uttered the words.

Frank and his cousin Bob were on their way to Cedar Creek School in the frosty winter morning.

As they approached the opening of the trail through the timber a loud, shrill squealing greeted their ears—the shrill, hysterical squealing of a horse in pain.

The chums quickened their pace, and rode into the timber, and then the scene burst upon them that called that indignant exclamation from Frank's lips.

A horse was roped to a tree beside the trail, its head down to the trunk, and a man was raining blows upon it with a heavy cowhide.

The schoolboys knew the man by sight. It was Poker Pete, the "sport" of Thompson, an enterprising sharper who lived by playing poker and euchre with the cattlemen and ranchers.

The horse was a handsome animal, and evidently an expensive beast. It looked like a cross between a Western pony and an English thoroughbred.

Roped securely to the tree, the animal could only whirl about and kick, unable to get at its tormentor.

Taking care to keep out of reach of the lashing hoofs, Poker Pete lashed and lashed with the cowhide with all the strength of his arm.

The chums of Cedar Creek drew rein at once.

"You coward!" bellowed Bob Lawless furiously. "Leave that horse alone!"

Poker Pete glared round.

The man's swarthy face was set with rage, his eyes gleaming. He paused a moment in the cruel punishment.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped savagely.

Frank Richards jumped to the ground.

"It is any decent fellow's business to interfere, you cowardly brute!" he exclaimed. "How dare you treat a horse like that?"

"It's my horse, you young fool!"

"That doesn't give you a right to treat the animal in such a brutal way!" exclaimed Frank hotly. "You ought to be lynched!"

"Oh, don't chew the rag with me!" snarled Poker Pete. "Get on your way to school, you baby-faced whelp!"

He turned to the horse again, and the cowhide rose and fell with cruel force.

The horse kicked and plunged and squealed.

Frank Richards ran forward, his teeth set.

Poker Pete was a full-grown man, and Frank was a boy; and the man was reputed a dangerous character.

But Frank did not hesitate. He grasped the ruffian by the shoulder and dragged him back with such force that Poker Pete whirled round and sat down in the snow.

The sudden fall jarred every bone in his body, and he sat and gasped.

Bob Lawless joined his chum at once, riding-whip in hand.

Poker Pete glared up at them breathlessly.

"You—you—" he stuttered.

"Get up, you rotter, and try it on us instead of the gee-gee!" exclaimed Bob.

"We'll hand you as good as you give!" The sport staggered to his feet.

He gripped the cowhide hard, and seemed on the point of rushing on the two schoolboys.

Frank and Bob faced him coolly, gripping their riding-whips.

It dawned on the sharper that he was not likely to get the best of such a contest, and he paused, gritting his teeth.

"You young fools!" he shouted. "Can't you mind your own business? I'm breaking in that horse!"

"Liar!" said Bob cheerfully. "You're ill-treating it because you're a cowardly beast!"

"I tell you he threw me this morning!" said Poker Pete hoarsely. "He pitched me out of the saddle. I'm teaching him a lesson!"

"You should learn to ride, then!" said Bob contemptuously. "He wouldn't pitch me off, I guess. Take some riding lessons instead of playing poker so much in the Red Dog saloon."

"Will you clear off and leave me alone, you young hounds?" shouted Poker Pete.

"I guess not!"

"I tell you I'm goin' to cowhide that brute till he hasn't a kick left in his carcass!" said Poker Pete between his teeth.

"And I tell you you're not!" said Frank Richards grimly. "You're not going to touch him again!"

"I guess—" "Oh, shut up!"

Poker Pete seemed again on the point of springing at the chums like a panther. But again he restrained himself.

He stepped back, and leaned against a tree with a bitter look, and took out his cigar-case.

"I guess I'll wait!" he remarked.

There was a pause.

The sport knew that Rancher Lawless' son and nephew were on their way to school, and that they had no time to lose.

He could afford to wait, and they could not.

Bob Lawless looked doubtfully at his chum.

"We shall be late, Frank!" he muttered.

Frank Richards' jaw set grimly. He did not intend to abandon the horse to the cruelty of its owner.

From Frank's point of view a man who could not treat a horse decently had no right to own one, though perhaps that point of view was not yet embodied in the law.

He turned his back on the sport, and moved towards the panting horse.

"Look out, Frank!" exclaimed Bob anxiously.

"All serene, old scout!"

Frank was careful not to get within reach of the hoofs.

The horse was in a frantic state from its savage punishment, and would certainly have smashed up friend or foe if within reach.

Its eyes gleamed wickedly round at Frank, and it made an effort to reach him with a kick.

But the schoolboy kept clear.

He moved round the tree to which the animal's head was roped, and took out his clasp-knife.

Poker Pete started forward, as he understood the schoolboy's intention.

"Let that rope alone!" he shouted.

"Stand clear!" answered Frank.

The rope passed right round the trunk, and from the safe side of the tree Frank Richards sawed across it with the keen blade.

Bob Lawless ran back to the ponies in the trail, and mounted one, holding the other ready for Frank.

As soon as the maddened horse was loose it was prudent to keep out of its reach.

Poker Pete ran towards Frank.

But the keen blade was through the rope in a couple of slashes, and the horse threw up its freed head.

The sport made a desperate spring back, and leaped into the branches of the nearest tree as the animal reared and plunged.

Frank Richards swung himself upon a branch.

With a shrill neigh the black horse dashed out into the trail, his tail tossing wildly, his mane streaming in the wind.

Down the trail towards the distant Cedar Creek he went at a mad gallop, his reins on his neck, his hoofs thudding furiously.

Frank dropped to the ground again, and went into the trail. He mounted his pony, and rode on with his chum after the fleeing horse.

Loud and savage curses came to their ears from Poker Pete as they rode on. But they were out of hearing in a few minutes.

The sport was left, with his useless cowhide, to make his way home on foot, and his prospect of recapturing the horse, free now to take to the plains, was a very problematical one.

The 2nd Chapter.

An Interruption at School!

Bob Lawless grinned as the chums rode on at a smart gallop up the timber trail.

Frank's face was still dark and angry, but it cleared, and he smiled as he met his chum's glance.

The thud of the runaway's hoofs had died away ahead.

"By gum!" Bob Lawless chuckled. "Has it struck you, Franky, that it's rather high-handed to let a galoot's horse loose like that?"

"Wasn't it the only thing to be done?" asked Frank.

"Ha, ha! Yes, from the geegee's point of view. I don't know what a lawyer would say about it, though."

"Well, I don't, either, and I don't care much."

"Same here," said Bob cheerfully. "Poker Pete will be in a terrific wax, though. That horse was worth a lot of money. Three or four hundred dollars, at least. Poker Pete must have had a lot of luck lately with the wicked pasteboards, to buy a horse like that."

"The rotten cad!" said Frank hotly. "Why, the poor brute was marked all over with that cowhide! I'm sorry now we didn't lay our whips about that sharper."

Bob laughed.

"But that runaway may do some damage—breaking fences, and so on," he remarked, becoming grave. "If he does, we get the bill, Franky. I'm not sure whether Poker Pete won't have a claim on us for damages, if he loses the horse. Never mind; I think it was right."

"I'm sure of it," answered Frank.

"Hallo! Here's the Cherub."

The chums reined in their ponies and dismounted as they saw Vere Beauclerc waiting at the fork of the trail.

The remittance-man's son joined them, and they walked on together.

The cousins were accustomed to walk-

ing the rest of the way to school, as Beauclerc had no horse.

"There's a runaway gee on the trail," Beauclerc remarked. "He passed me a few minutes ago, going like thunder."

"We know—we know!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Franky conferred the boon of liberty upon him."

"Frank did?" questioned Beauclerc, in amazement.

Frank Richards explained.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed Beauclerc heartily. "The brute doesn't deserve to have a horse. That was a splendid animal, too. I wish I had the tin to buy him from that gambling brute."

"He didn't look an easy critter to ride," remarked Bob.

"No, that's so. I think I could ride him, though. I'd try, anyway."

Vere Beauclerc looked thoughtful as he walked on, and there was a shade on his brow.

The son of the remittance-man of Cedar Camp had little money at any time, and certainly never such a sum as would have purchased the black stallion.

When Mr. Beauclerc's remittance arrived from the Old Country, it always went the same way—in the payment of part of a mass of pressing debts, and the rest in a "tear" at Thompson.

The grim hand of poverty was always to be seen in the shack by the creek where Beauclerc lived with his father.

She knew the sport by sight, and Poker Pete had once had the audacity to "propose" to the mistress of Cedar Creek—a proposal that had been answered very shortly and sharply.

Poker Pete stared round him insolently, but as he met Miss Meadows' glance he had the grace to remove his Stetson hat.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Miss Meadows sharply. "You have no right to intrude here, during lessons."

"I guess I've got something to say to you, schoolmarm," answered the sport coolly.

"Kindly be brief, then."

"I reckon I want my horse."

"What?"

"My horse," answered Poker Pete.

"I don't understand."

"I dare say not," sneered Poker Pete. "I guess I'll enlighten you some. Two of your precious pupils have stolen my horse, and I want that animal."

"Nonsense! Is it?"

"Oh, nonsense, is it?" exclaimed Poker Pete angrily. "I guess if that beast isn't handed over to me, I'll lay the case before the sheriff at Thompson. Horse-thieves ain't popular in the Thompson Valley, Miss Meadows, and if you don't teach your pupils better there are others that will."

The schoolmistress flushed.

"You need not be insolent, sir," she

said sharply. "What boys do you accuse?"

Poker Pete jerked his thumb at Frank Richards and Bob Lawless.

"Them's the thieves," he answered laconically.

Frank Richards sprang to his feet.

"That's a lie, and you know it!" he called out.

"Richards!" exclaimed Miss Meadows reprovingly.

"Sorry, ma'am," said Frank, his face crimson. "That rascal is lying, all the same."

"Rascal, hey?" shouted Poker Pete threateningly.

"Yes, cowardly rascal, if you like that better!" retorted Frank Richards.

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob.

Poker Pete made a stride towards the class, his brows knitted, and his hands clenched.

"Stop!" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

Frank picked up his ruler, and looked at the sport with flashing eyes.

Poker Pete stopped, probably more influenced by the ruler than by Miss Meadows' command.

He muttered an oath between his teeth.

"Kindly keep your temper, and tell me exactly what complaint you have to make of Richards," said Miss Meadows coldly. "I will hear you."

The 3rd Chapter.

Exit Poker Pete.

Frank Richards stood facing the sport over his desk, quite undaunted.

Many of the fellows were on their feet now, and the looks they gave Poker Pete were not at all friendly.

The Cedar Creek fellows naturally resented the attempt of the Thompson sharper to "bulldoze" in their school-room.

The sport gave Frank Richards a black scowl, and turned to the schoolmistress again.

"That young thief's got my horse," he said sullenly. "I guess I'm going to have the critter back, or there will be trouble!"

"Is that true, Richards?"

"No, ma'am!"

"Tell me what occurred, then."

Frank Richards explained the incident of the morning, frankly and fearlessly.

"You set the horse free?" said Miss Meadows, with a troubled look, when he had finished.

"Yes, ma'am. It was the only thing to do."

"You should have seen how that brute



The riding-whip sang through the air, and came down across Poker Pete's shoulders with a cut that made him howl with pain.

was beating it, Miss Meadows!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "If you could see it, you would see marks of the cowhide all over it. The brute had drawn blood."

"I guess it was my horse!" said Poker Pete.

Miss Meadows gave him a look of contempt.

"So you were ill-treating an animal, and Richards interfered!" she said. "I cannot blame Richards for that. As for stealing the horse, you know yourself that it is not true!"

"That horse was taken away from me," said Poker Pete doggedly. "If it isn't handed back, I'm laying a complaint before the sheriff!"

"Do you know where the horse is now, Richards?"

"Somewhere in the timber, I suppose, ma'am."

"You see for yourself that Richards cannot hand it to you, as he does not even know where it is," said Miss Meadows.

"And I wouldn't, if I could!" exclaimed Frank. "That fellow isn't fit to have a horse!"

"Silence, please, Richards!"

"I guess it's all bunkum about setting the horse loose," said Poker Pete.

"They've got the critter hidden somewhere in the timber, I reckon, to sell it

STRIKING A BARGAIN!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"I guess so—a little," admitted Billy Cook. "Poker Pete's spun a yarn about you stealing his horse."

"Well, popper wouldn't believe that, anyway."

"Nope! He reckons it's one of your tricks, and he's waiting for you to come home," said Cook, with a grin. "Pete's waiting, too. He's threatening to lay the case before the sheriff of Thompson."

"Let him!" growled Frank. "If he had a good case, he'd have laid it before the sheriff already!"

Billy Cook nodded, and the schoolboys rode on to the ranch.

Frank Richards' brows were wrinkled. "It's rotten if it means any trouble for your father, Bob," he said ruefully. "I didn't think about that, at the time."

"I guess we couldn't have done anything else, if we had," said Bob sturdily. "I don't think popper will blame you, Franky, when he knows the facts. He's only heard Poker Pete's yarn, so far."

But it was in a rather troubled frame of mind that the chums of Cedar Creek entered the ranch house, after putting up their ponies.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Mr. Lawless gruffly, as they came in.

Mrs. Lawless looked very distressed, but she did not speak.

Poker Pete was in the room, with an unlighted cigar gripped between his teeth.

His eyes gleamed at the sight of the two schoolboys.

"Yes, here we are, dad," said Bob. "Have you brought the horse here?" demanded the rancher.

"Eh? What horse?"

"Poker Pete's horse, of course. He says you took it away from him in the timber this morning," said the rancher gruffly.

"I am sure they did nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawless.

Bob gave his mother an affectionate grin.

"Right!" he answered.

The rancher looked puzzled.

"Did you have anything at all to do with the man's horse?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that much is true, uncle," said Frank Richards.

"Well, tell me what you did."

"They'll tell you lies, of course," sneered Poker Pete. "But I reckon I want that animal, or there will be trouble."

The rancher turned on him angrily.

"My son won't tell me lies, or my nephew, either," he said. "I'll thank you to keep your tongue between your teeth, Poker Pete. Now, then, Bob, I'm waiting to hear you."

"Frank had better spin the yarn," grinned Bob. "He's a better hand than I am. Go ahead, Franky; I'm going to get busy with this corn-cake."

Frank smiled, but his face became grave as he related the incident of the morning.

His voice vibrated with indignation as he told how the tied-up animal had been lashed with the cowhide.

The rancher listened with a rather grim expression on his bronzed face.

But his face relaxed after a time.

"We couldn't do anything but what we did," concluded Frank. "It would have been mean and cowardly to leave the poor animal to that brute."

"I knew the boys were right," remarked Mrs. Lawless.

The rancher smiled.

"Hold on!" he said. "Horses need lapping sometimes, Frank, my lad; and we don't stand on ceremony on this side of the Rocky Mountains. A man's horse is a man's horse."

"I guess so!" chimed in Poker Pete emphatically.

"Yes, I know, uncle," said Frank. "But there's a limit. The brute had drawn blood; the horse was marked all over. He was nearly mad with pain. You should have seen how he bolted when I set him loose!"

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"Still, I guess it's a bit high-handed to set a man's horse loose in this country," he said.

Frank coloured.

"I'm sorry if you think I did wrong, uncle," he said.

"I don't know about that. It depends a good deal on the way the man was treating his horse," said the rancher. "I hope no son of mine—or nephew, either—would stand by and see an animal ill-treated without chipping in. You're quite sure that Poker Pete was actually cruel to the beast?"

"I wish you could have seen it," said Frank. "There was blood running down its flanks."

"Robert, you cannot blame the boys!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawless warmly. "I should be ashamed of them if they had not interfered."

"Leave it to me, Mary," said the rancher. His brow was wrinkled with thought. He turned at last to Poker Pete, who was waiting with a sneering face.

"I guess, Poker Pete, that the boys have made out their case. You were treating that horse badly, and they were bound to chip in."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob delightedly, and Frank Richards looked very relieved.

Poker Pete gritted his teeth.

"I guess you're not the judge in the

matter," he said. "I claim that horse, and it's mine. I reckon you ought to cowhide those young scoundrels."

"I guess you'll be disappointed on that score," said the rancher, unmoved.

"That's as you choose," sneered Poker Pete. "But you'll hear from the sheriff about my horse, I promise you. Boss thieves are not encouraged in the Thompson valley."

"Better language, please, Mr. Poker Pete," said the rancher quietly. "I guess I've made up my mind. I've always known you for a sharper and card-player, and I know now that you are a bully and a brute. If I'd been on the scene this morning, I'd have laid my cowhide about you yourself. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

The sport flushed with rage.

"The matter can be settled," continued the rancher, in the same stolid way, quite unheeding the looks of the Thompson card-sharper. "The boys speak of a black horse. I guess that's the horse I've seen you with in Cedar Camp. How much did you give for that horse?"

"What's that to do with the matter?"

"I'm willing to buy it from you."

"I'm not willing to sell," said Poker Pete coolly. "I'm going to get that horse back, and I'm going to cut him into ribbons when I get him. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

He added, with a grin.

He made a movement towards the door as he spoke.

Mr. Lawless stepped between him and the door, and the sport halted, with a furious look.

"Let me pass!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I haven't finished with you yet."

"I'm finished, and I'm going."

"I'm not finished, and you're not going," answered Mr. Lawless calmly.

There was a pause, and the chums looked on breathlessly.

But the sport of Thompson did not care to try conclusions with the stalwart Canadian rancher.

And Billy Cook's burly form loomed up in the porch outside. Poker Pete stepped back, with a muttered curse.

"What do you want?" he muttered.

"I want to buy that horse," answered Mr. Lawless.

"I won't sell!"

"You will!"

And again there was a breathless pause.

The 5th Chapter.
Brought to Terms.

Poker Pete stood with his hands clenched, his eyes blazing at the calm, stolid rancher.

His rage did not affect the rancher in the least; indeed, Mr. Lawless did not seem even to observe it.

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT!

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He was as calm and unmoved as if he were conducting any ordinary business transaction.

Frank and Bob were smiling now.

Mrs. Lawless went out quietly from the room.

"The horse is lost at present, it seems," said the rancher, after a pause. "You claim that it has been stolen."

"It has been stolen!" hissed Poker Pete.

"Lost, at all events. You claim compensation. I understand?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Very good. Sell me the horse at a reasonable figure, and I'll take the risk of not finding him," said Mr. Lawless.

It was a fair offer enough, but Poker Pete was not in the least inclined to accept it.

"Yes, or no?" asked the rancher impatiently.

"No!" snapped Poker Pete.

"You won't sell the horse?"

"No, I won't sell him!"

"Not though he's lost, and, according to your own yarn, you can't recover him?"

"I guess I shall get him back some time," said Poker Pete venomously; "and then I'll take the skin off him in strips. That's the good your meddling brats have done him."

"Oh, you brute!" muttered Frank.

"How much did you give for that horse, Poker Pete?"

"Find out!"

"I intend to," said Mr. Lawless calmly. "You there, Billy?"

"Hyer I am, boss!" answered Billy Cook, from outside.

"Bring me a riding-whip, will you?"

"Won't I just!" grinned Billy Cook.

Poker Pete turned pale.

His hand slid inside his jacket to the hip-pocket, which concealed a weapon.

Mr. Lawless' quiet glance upon him never wavered.

"If you draw a gun here, Poker Pete, I'll have you up before the sheriff, and have you sent to prison for five years by a Thompson jury," he said coldly.

"You're not in Boot Leg Camp or the Black Hills now, my man!"

Poker Pete drew a hissing breath.

"Will you let me pass?" he muttered, in a choking voice.

"Not yet, I guess."

"I—I—"

"Answer my question," said Mr. Lawless. "You'll have to answer it when Billy Cook comes in, anyhow."

"I—I didn't buy the horse," muttered Poker Pete. "I won him over a poker game."

"I might have guessed that," assented the rancher, with a nod. "What figure would you put on him to sell?"

"I'm not going to sell."

"I should say three hundred dollars," remarked the rancher.

"You can say what you like," sneered Poker Pete. "I'm not selling."

"I don't want to skin you on the deal," continued Mr. Lawless, unheeding. "It's a good horse—a very good horse—a dash of the Old Country thoroughbred in him, I should say. I've seen him, and I know something about horseflesh. What do you say to three hundred and fifty?"

"I'm not selling."

"Why not?"

"Why not!" repeated Poker Pete between his teeth. "Because I'm going to cut him to ribbons after I get hold of him, even if I lose half the value of the beast in doing it. Is that good enough for you?"

He cast a malignant glance at Frank Richards as he spoke, all his cruel, base nature gleaming in his eyes.

He knew what the boy felt like when he heard that savage threat uttered. And there was no doubt that the ruffian meant it.

Frank cast an almost beseeching glance at his uncle.

Mr. Lawless looked the sport over with a calm eye. His bronzed face was just a trifle harder and grimmer.

"So that's the game, is it?" he remarked.

"Yes, that's the game, and be hanged to you!"

"I don't think you'll play that game," said the rancher quietly. "I'm offering you three hundred and fifty for that horse, Poker Pete."

"Make it three thousand, and I'll say the same."

"I don't intend to make it three thousand. Three hundred and fifty is the figure. Bob, bring pen and ink and paper here for the gentleman."

"Yes, dad."

Bob brought the writing materials at once.

Poker Pete looked at them and at him, and then at the rancher, puzzled and savage.

"I'm not going to sell you the horse!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you can make me?"

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"Yes, I think I can make you," he answered calmly.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Frank Richards. He had never admired his uncle so much as he did at this moment.

Bob's face was beaming.

"Make me," repeated Poker Pete, in angry amazement.

"I guess so."

Billy Cook entered the room with a riding-whip in his hand and a huge grin on his rugged face.

There was no love lost between the honest cattleman and the sharper from Thompson.

"Hyer you are, boss!"

Mr. Lawless took the riding-whip, and advanced towards the sport.

Poker Pete's hand slid into his hip-pocket again.

"Lay a finger on me, and I'll let daylight through you!" he said hoarsely.

"And be hanged afterwards at Kamloops," smiled Mr. Lawless. "I guess that's all moonshine, Poker Pete. I'm risking it, anyhow."

The sport's face was pale with rage now.

But he did not draw his weapon.

The Thompson Valley was not the Black Hills, and Poker Pete knew the difference.

Blood had stained his hands during his reckless career, but not under the shadow of Canadian law.

He trembled with rage, and perhaps something else, as the stalwart rancher came at him.

Mr. Lawless, with his left hand, pointed to the writing materials on the table.

"Make out the paper," he said. "Put in the horse's description and sign the receipt for three hundred and fifty dollars sale price. It's a bit over the mark, but you're welcome to the difference."

"It won't hold in law," muttered Poker Pete, gnawing his lip.

"I think it will. You'll be welcome to dispute it in the law courts afterwards, if you like."

Poker Pete clenched his hands.

"You know I'd have no chance—a sportsman against a rich rancher in the law courts!" he muttered.

"That's your look-out!" said Mr. Lawless. "You're a card-sharper by your own choice, I suppose. There's work for you to do in Canada, if you choose; and in your own country, too, I dare say. But I've wasted enough time on you, Poker Pete. You're going to sell me that horse, and I take my chance of recovering him. The butt-end of the bargain is all on your side. I may be simply throwing my money away if the horse isn't caught. You ought to be glad of the chance."

"I won't sell!" shouted Poker Pete furiously.

"You'll be thrashed till you do, then."

"Oh, ripping!" gasped Bob.

Poker Pete sprang back, and then made a desperate rush for the door.

Billy Cook grinned, and collared him.

He grasped the sport's arm, and held back his hand from the hip-pocket, for the desperate man might have drawn the revolver at that moment.

"Take his pill-box away, Bob," said Billy Cook, holding the rascal in his muscular grip.

Bob Lawless jerked the revolver from Poker Pete's pocket, and laid it on the table.

"Throw him over here, Billy!" said Mr. Lawless.

Crash!

The sport sprawled on the floor at the rancher's feet.

The riding-whip sang through the air, and came down across Poker Pete's shoulders with a cut that made him howl with pain.

He scrambled away, and staggered to his feet.

"Are you selling yet?" asked the rancher calmly.

The sport panted.

"Hang you! I'll sell! Hang you!"

"Good! You might as well have saved the time you've wasted. Put it in black and white."

Panting with rage, the baffled rascal sat down at the table and jabbed the pen into the ink.

"Make the receipt for three hundred and sixty—that covers the popgun," said Mr. Lawless. "You're better without this popgun, my man. It will get you into trouble some day."

Poker Pete was too enraged to reply; but he did as he was bidden.

He finished the paper, and Mr. Lawless picked it up and read it carefully through.

Then he nodded.

"I guess that's square. It's a good sale," he said. "Bob, take this key, and fetch me three hundred and sixty dollars from the strong-box in my room."

"Yes, dad."

Bob hurried out of the room.

Poker Pete rose to his feet, trembling in every limb with rage and humiliation.

Mr. Lawless, quite unmoved, called Billy Cook to witness the document, which the ranchman did with great gusto.

Mr. Lawless folded the paper, and placed it methodically in his pocket-book. The black horse was his property now—if found.

As the animal was at large, the former owner had all the "butt-end" of the bargain, as the rancher expressed it, but he did not look gratified.

Bob came back with the Canadian bills, and Mr. Lawless counted them over and laid them on the table.

"There's your money, Poker Pete!"

The sport gathered up the bills sullenly and savagely.

He was braced, and the money was all that remained to him.

"Now you can go, and the sooner the better!" added Mr. Lawless.

Poker Pete stepped towards the door, and Billy Cook, grinning, stepped aside to let him pass.

In the doorway the sport half turned, his face white, his eyes gleaming.

"I'll remember this!" he said, in a choking voice. "My turn will come!"

"Your turn in the penitentiary perhaps," said the rancher. "It's high time you were there, my friend. And I'll give you a warning. There's law in Canada to deal with brutes of your sort, and if you don't take mighty good care, you'll find yourself inside Kamloops Prison! Now get out before you're kicked out!"

The sport gave one last savage look of hatred round the room, and tramped out, and his footsteps died away.

Billy Cook, grinning from ear to ear, followed him out.

"Oh, dad," exclaimed Bob breathlessly. "it was ripping! I never reckoned you'd deal with that bulldozer like that!"

"It was splendid, uncle!" said Frank Richards. "But—but you lose your money if the horse isn't found."

"I guess Billy Cook and the rest will be hunting him to-morrow," said the rancher, with a smile. "I'll take the risk of that. But I guess he'll be found sooner or later. Now, you young rascals, get to your supper."

Frank and Bob were very cheery over their supper that evening. The affair of Poker Pete's horse had ended to their complete satisfaction.

As for the threatened revenge of the card-sharper, they did not give that a thought.

"Isn't the popper a brick, Franky?" said Bob Lawless, when they went up to their room that night. "A real gilded brick—eh?"

"Yes, rather!" said Frank heartily. "I only hope he won't lose the money over it. If the horse isn't found by Saturday, Bob—"

He paused.

Bob grinned.

"Just what I was thinking," he agreed. "If the gee's not found by then we'll take a hand in looking for him, and show them how Cedar Creek fellows do it. Rather! It will be ripping fun!"

"Good!" said Frank.

And the chums of Cedar Creek went to bed feeling quite satisfied with their day's work.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

"THE HORSE HUNTERS!"

By MARTIN OLIFFORD.

DON'T MISS IT!