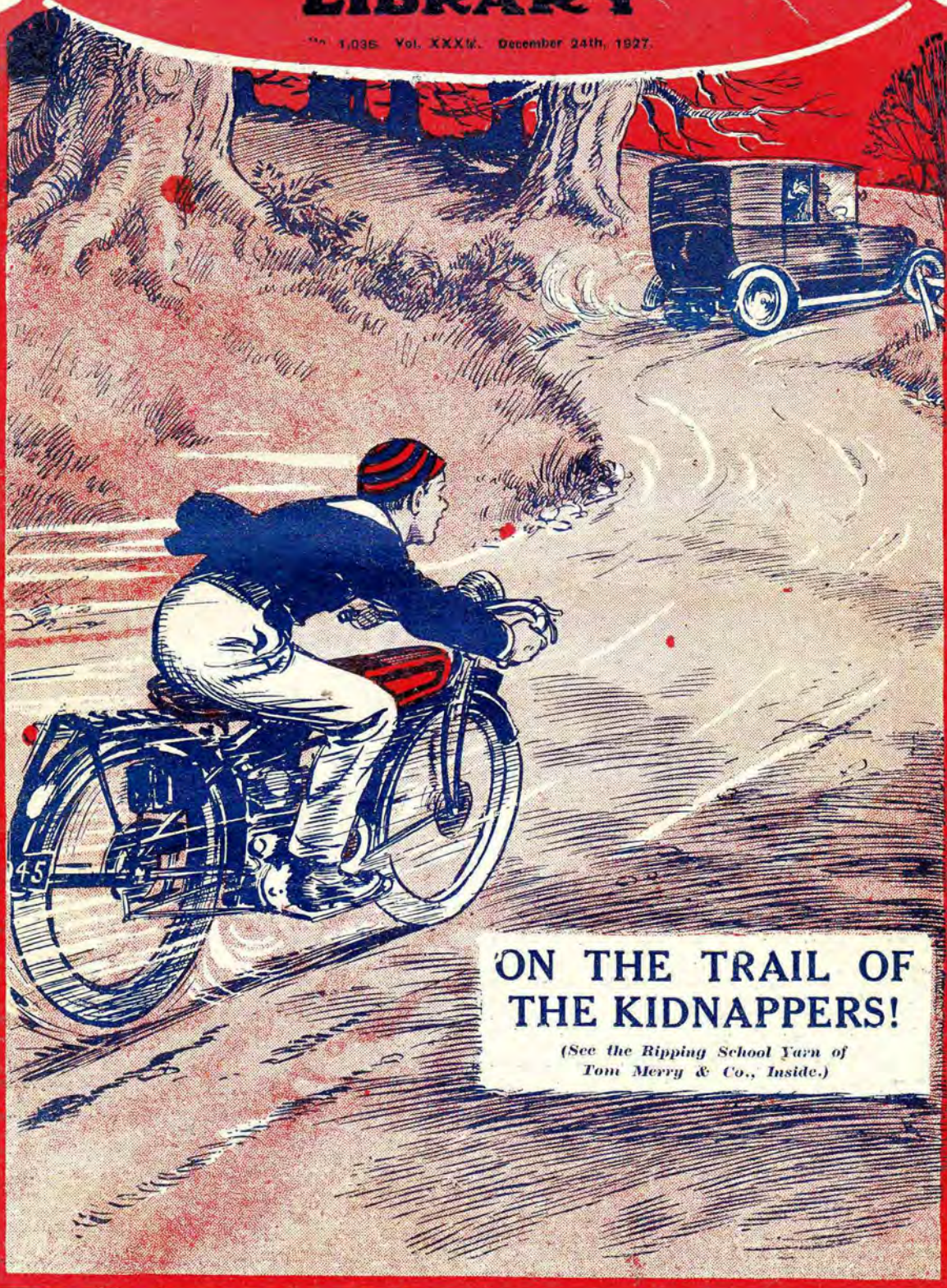


The GEM 2^p

EVERY
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**ON THE TRAIL OF
THE KIDNAPPERS!**

*(See the Ripping School Yarn of
Tom Merry & Co., Inside.)*

A SPLENDID LONG SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.



CHAPTER 1.

Not Like Digby!

BAGGY TRIMBLE sniffed. It was a most expressive sniff, and it expressed Trimble's deep disgust with his relations, and with his own family circle in particular.

The fat Fourth-Former was standing under the letter-rack in Hall. Trimble always made a point of visiting the rack after every postal delivery at St. Jim's, despite the fact that he had fewer letters, and still fewer remittances than any fellow at St. Jim's. But hope springs eternal in the human breast according to the poet; and it certainly did in the fat breast of Baggy Trimble, who was ever an optimist.

There was a possibility, slight though it was, that a letter containing a fat remittance had been held up in the post by the Christmas rush, and had just arrived. The fact that it was the first week of a new term made no difference to Baggy Trimble; he was in his usual impecunious state.

So, though he had no great expectations, Baggy had visited the rack in the faint hope that there would be a letter for him.

It was a hope seldom realised. Baggy was fond of bragging of the splendour and magnificence of Trimble

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Towers and Trimble Hall, and of the wealth of his titled relations and other swagger connections. But it was curious that nothing in the form of cash ever came Baggy's way from either mansions or relations; which was perhaps due to the fact that they existed only in Trimble's vivid imagination.

At all events, letters for Trimble were few and far between, and on this occasion there was none for Trimble in the rack—hence his sniff of disgust.

In fact, there was only one letter in the compartment of the rack reserved for the Fourth Form letters, and this was addressed to Robert Digby.

Trimble jerked it out and looked at it with a grunt. "Some fellows have all the luck," he grunted. "I bet there's a whacking tip in here for Digby—his people are jolly well rolling in tin. I'll take it up."

And Trimble rolled away with the letter to the Fourth Form passage. In the ordinary way Baggy was not at all an obliging fellow—unless he felt pretty certain it would pay him to be obliging.

He hoped it would now, for it was likely Digby would be at tea, and would be in a generous mood—especially if there was a remittance in the letter. He might even ask a fellow to tea; though he had only just had his tea, Baggy was quite ready for another.

Sure enough, the chums of Study No. 6 were at tea, and

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—OF ST. JIM'S, STARRING ARTHUR DIGBY, OF THE FOURTH!

Fourth-Former!

by MARTIN CLIFFORD



A letter which starts a split among the chums of Study No. 6, a kidnapping carried out almost under the shadow of St. Jim's itself, together with orders that the police are not to be brought into the matter at all, are mysteries which surround the missing Fourth-Former.

"Any remittance?" asked Herries anxiously. "Funds are getting low."

"No, blow it!" said Digby. He had opened the note-paper now, and was reading it slowly. "No. The pater seems jolly—Oh!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Blake, noting sudden alarm in Digby's tone. "Anything wrong, Dig?"

Digby said nothing—he was reading the note—it was little more than a note—slowly again, his face pale, a look almost of fear in his eyes.

"No tip—what?" grinned Trimble. "Hard lines, old chap! Like my dashed pater—mean old beast, y'know! Read it out, Dig—only rotten advice and no tip, I bet! He, he, he!"

"Shut up, Trimble!" snapped Blake, eyeing his chum's face with concern. "Kick that fat rotter out, somebody!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Anything wrong at home, Dig?" asked Herries. "Not illness, I hope?" Digby shook his head.

"It—it's nothing really," he stammered, folding the letter, and placing it in his pocket. "Only there's something wrong at home. The pater—" He paused, glancing at Trimble, a glance Trimble did not fail to see.

"Shortage of tin at home—what?" grinned Trimble.

"You—you fat cad!" said Digby thickly. "Get out!"

"Oh, I say, Dig!" snorted Trimble, not a little startled by Digby's savage manner. "What about me bringing your letter up? Nice way to treat a chap who troubles to oblige you. If you're going to be mean—"

"Get out!" shouted Digby. "Like your cheek to touch other peoples' letters!"

"But I did it to oblige you," hooted Trimble. "You might jolly well give a chap a tart, anyway—"

"Oh, give him one!" said Blake. "After all, Trimble always was a kind, obliging chap."

"Good man, Blake!" said Trimble, brightening up. "I knew you wouldn't be mean like that beast Digby. I might as well have a couple while I'm about it."

And Trimble reached out two fat hands towards the plate of jam-tarts.

Rap, rap!

"Yarooooogh!"

Trimble howled as Blake rapped the knuckles of both hands with the handle of a table-knife.

"Mustn't help yourself, Baggy," he said severely. "Not manners, you know. Here you are, though!"

Stepping forward, Blake plastered a jam tart over Trimble's features with one hand, and stuffed a second down the back of his fat neck with the other.

Trimble spluttered and roared.

"There you are, Baggy," said Blake kindly. "Just what you asked for. And here's something you didn't ask for!"

"Yarooooogh!"

Blake's right boot took the fat junior in the rear, almost lifting him to the door. Trimble himself finished the rest of the distance in one wild leap, just escaping Blake's boot again as he did so.

Trimble rolled in with an ingratiating smile on his fat features. On the table was hot buttered toast, a dish of boiled eggs, two kinds of jam, and a cake; quite a decent spread, in fact.

"Having tea, you fellows," said Baggy cheerily, his eyes on the festive board.

"Yes," said Jack Blake, reaching out for a cushion. "But we're not too busy to attend to you. Here you are!"

Whiz!

"Yooop!"

Bump!

Trimble sat down with a concussion that shook the room as the whizzing cushion took him under the chin.

"Now clear!" said Blake grimly. "We're not feeding any hungry porkers to-day. Scoot! Hand over that other cushion, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway wun away, Twimble," chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, reaching for another cushion.

"Hold on! You—you silly idiots!" spluttered Trimble, scrambling wrathfully to his feet. "It's a letter—"

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"A letter!" howled Trimble, holding up Digby's letter. "Is that how you treat a chap who obliges you by bringing your dashed letters up?"

"Oh! Why didn't you say so, then?" said Blake.

"Who's it for?"

"Digby! I say—"

"Hand it over and clear, then!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Hand it over!" roared Digby; he jumped up and snatched the letter from Trimble's hand eagerly. After a glance at it, he tore it open.

"From the pater?" asked Blake anxiously.

"Yes."

He vanished through the doorway, roaring, and Blake closed the door and sat down again, chuckling.

"That's got rid of the fat rotter, anyway," he remarked, becoming serious again as he glanced at Digby's strained face. "Dig, old bean, read the giddy letter out and let's hear the trouble!"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus kindly. "These patahs are wathah wowwyin' at times, and if we can help—"

"Cough the trouble up," said Herries. "I've noticed you've been a bit pipped after the last two letters from your giddy pater, Dig."

"No giddy tips in 'em, either," said Blake, shaking his head. "It won't do, Dig—your noble pater's getting slack! Read out the letter, and we'll put our heads together and find a way of tackling him. If it's a matter of cash—"

"It isn't cash!" said Digby shortly.

"If it's about the Head's reports—"

"It isn't!"

"Then what's the trouble?" demanded Blake, eyeing his chum curiously. "What's he been blowing you up about?"

"He hasn't been blowing me up," said Digby, flushing.

"I—I'd rather not speak about it."

"Eh?"

"Bai Jove!"

Digby's chums stared at him. Blake & Co. were an exceedingly happy family in Study No. 6, and they never had any secrets from one another. Indeed, the chums discussed family matters with a charming candour that would have astonished their respective parents had they only heard them. And Blake asked Dig to read out his letter as if it was just the usual thing—as it really was.

"It's—it's a private matter," stammered Digby, going crimson. "I'd rather not worry you fellows with it. The fact is there's something wrong, but I don't know myself what it is. The pater doesn't say—he only hints—about things being wrong. But he's coming to-morrow—at least, he says he's letting me know before two o'clock to-morrow afternoon whether I'm to expect him or not."

"All serene, old chap," said Blake, a trifle gruffly. "Of course, if it's a private matter—"

"We don't want to know," grunted Herries.

"Wathah not, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus gently. "Pway do not wowwy, Dig. It will all come wight, wath-evah it is, you know."

"I hope it isn't serious, anyway," said Blake.

Digby's lips were trembling a little.

"I—I'm afraid it is, you fellows," he said. "The pater's two last letters were—well, queer. And the pater hasn't written for over a fortnight. But—but I don't like it, and—and I'd rather not speak about it."

"Please yourself," said Blake, trying to speak cheerily. "But if you don't know what the giddy trouble is, why worry about it? Let it rip until your pater comes, anyway. Try another egg, old chap!"

"I've finished, thanks," said Digby. "I've got—What—"

He was suddenly interrupted by a wild yell from the passage outside, followed by flying footsteps and still wilder yells.

"Hallo, Trimble in trouble again," grinned Blake.

He jumped to the door, wrenched it open and looked out. He was just in time to see the fat, flying form of Baggy Trimble vanish round the corner of the passage, with Grundy of the Shell in pursuit, lunging out at Baggy with his foot as he ran.

"What's up?" asked Herries, joining Blake at the door.

"Only Trimble," grinned Blake. "Grundy's after him—I expect he went along to Grundy's study after he left us; perhaps been pinching Grundy's grub."

"Quite likely," said Herries. "More power to Grundy's boot, anyway."

And Blake and Herries re-entered their study to continue tea. They were used to Trimble's constant troubles, and they were not much interested. They would doubtless have been interested, however, had they known how Grundy's "booting" of Trimble was to affect them. But they did not know, and they continued tea—none of them with much appetite now. Digby was silent and moody, and obviously worried, and his chums were not a little puzzled and hurt that he was so unwilling to confide in them. It was certainly unusual, and not like Robert Arthur Digby at all.

CHAPTER 2. Trouble!

"YAROOOOGH!"

"What the dickens—"

"Yarooogh! Help! Stop him!"

"My hat! It's Trimble!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"With Grundy on his track," grinned Lowther. "Been raiding Grundy's grub I— Look out!"

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The Terrible Three, who were chatting in the doorway of their study with Talbot, scattered as Baggy Trimble came rushing along the passage with the wrathful Grundy in hot pursuit.

It was no affair of theirs if Trimble had been raiding another fellow's study cupboard; and though unwilling to answer Trimble's frantic call for help, they were just as unwilling to help Grundy by stopping Trimble. They felt Grundy could be safely left to deal with the grub-raiding Baggy without their aid.

"Go it!" called Lowther. "Two to one on Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy, however, stopped short as he reached the grinning juniors, leaving Baggy to vanish round the far corner of the passage.

"I'll teach the little worm!" he snorted. "He's had a good taste of my boot, anyway!"

"What's the fat ass been up to?" asked Tom Merry.

"Raiding your grub?"

"No," grunted Grundy. "I caught the fat little sneak listening outside the door of one of the Fourth studies—caught him in the dashed act. I hope I've taught the fat little sweep a lesson!"

And with that Grundy went into his own study. The Terrible Three and Talbot chuckled. Like the prying Baggy, Grundy was a fellow who never could mind his own business. He seemed to be under the impression that he was responsible for the moral behaviour of fellows in other Forms in addition to his own.

Still, Trimble certainly was a prying little toad, and they approved of Grundy's actions for once.

"I wish we'd stopped the little cad and let Grundy carry on with the booting," said Tom Merry. "That fat rotter needs a lasting lesson."

With that the juniors dismissed Trimble and Grundy from their minds and went on discussing football—a much more important matter than the misdeeds of Trimble, or the dutiful actions of Grundy.

Meanwhile, Baggy Trimble—having made quite certain that Grundy had given up pursuit—had dropped to a walk, panting and groaning. Grundy's boots were very heavy boots, and he was hurt.

"Ow! Wow!" he gasped. "The—the awful beast! Just because I happened to stop to pick my handkerchief up. The rotten bully! But—but, my hat! Fancy Digby's pater going smash—I bet that's what it means, anyhow! Must be!"

And Trimble ceased rubbing himself, and ambled on, grinning, his little eyes gleaming with excitement. Trimble was a fellow who seemed to find plenty of humour and satisfaction in the troubles of others. That was perhaps why nobody ever had any sympathy with Trimble's own troubles.

As a matter of fact, Trimble had not "happened" to drop his handkerchief outside Study No. 6 at all. Far from it. Trimble was a very inquisitive youth indeed, and he scented a mystery, or, at least, an interesting bit of gossip in regard to Digby's letter. The letter obviously contained startling and serious news, and Baggy was determined to discover what it was. He had not failed to note Digby's glance in his direction, and he guessed Digby would let the mystery out the moment he was out of the study.

So the moment Blake had closed the door Trimble, ignoring the painful effects of Blake's boot, had slipped swiftly back and applied an ear to the study keyhole.

He was still at his interesting hobby when George Alfred Grundy had happened along, and he had promptly introduced his boot to Trimble in an earnest desire to improve Trimble's morals regarding listening at keyholes.

But though Trimble was hurt, and though he really had not heard much, what he had heard gave him deep satisfaction. Something was wrong at Digby's home; no doubt about that. And Trimble had also no doubt that it was something to do with money matters.

Hadn't Digby himself admitted that his pater had sent two letters without a remittance, and this was certainly unusual. Sir Robert Digby was reputed to be wealthy, but even rich men often lose their cash.

"My hat!" mused Trimble. "What a scream! I bet old Digby's gone bust. That's it for a pension! Oh crumbs! I expect old Dig will have to leave St. Jim's now. Serve him right, the mean beast! Dig said it wasn't illness, so it must be that. Phew!"

Levison of the Fourth came along the passage, and he stopped and stared at Baggy's excited features.

"Hallo! What's the glad tidings, Baggy?" he asked. "Come into a fortune, or is some other fellow in for a licking? You look quite chirpy and joyful."

"Oh, really, Levison!" said Trimble, trying to look sorrowful. "I'm not joyful at all; quite the reverse, in fact. Old Dig was a pal of mine, and I'm awfully pipped about the bad news."

"Eh? What bad news?" ejaculated Levison. "You fat fraud—"

"It's rotten!" said Trimble. "I thought you'd heard about it," he added untruthfully. "Digby's pater's gone bust!"

"My hat! Is that a fact, Trimble?" said Levison, his face growing grave.

"Fact!" said Trimble, unable to restrain a grin. "Fancy the giddy high-and-mighty baronet going smash, you know. Old Dig won't have such airs now, I bet! He'll have to leave St. Jim's, I suppose. Go into an office, or something, I expect. Isn't it a scream? He, he, he! I bet his giddy mater— Yaroooooh!"

Trimble yelped with surprise and pain as Levison gave him a hearty kick.

"Take that, you gloating little worm!" he snapped in disgust. "And that, and that!"

"Yoooooh! Yaroooooh!"

Trimble took both—two more hearty kicks that almost lifted him from the floor. Then Levison walked on, deeply concerned at the fat Fourth-Former's news, as were Cardew and Clive when Levison told his chums a minute later.

"Rotten!" said Clive. "Poor old Dig!"

"If it's true!" said Cardew, yawning. "If it came from dear old Baggy—"

"Let's hope it isn't, anyway," said Levison quietly. "Jolly hard cheese if old Dig has to leave."

"Yes, rather!"

And that was the view on all sides as Baggy's "news" began to circulate in the Shell and Fourth. For after Trimble had told the story a few times it began to assume a substantial air of truth to the highly-imaginative Baggy. He was quite convinced now that Sir Robert Digby had gone "smash," and he began to drop the "I expect" and "I suppose," and gave it as "straight from the horse's mouth" that Digby was obliged to leave St. Jim's and go into an office to help the family fortunes, and that the baronet had sold the ancestral home and the cars, and sacked all the servants, and many more vivid details from Baggy's fertile imagination.

By the end of prep it was generally known in the Shell and Fourth that Digby of the Fourth was leaving St. Jim's to go into an office or something, and that his pater had "gone smash."

It was news which met with almost general and genuine dismay and regret. Old Dig was very popular in other Forms as well as the Fourth, and all felt deepest sympathy with him, or nearly all. Only Racke & Co. seemed to find satisfaction in the news and entertainment in the details.

Tom Merry heard the news as he came out of Study No. 10 from Glyn, and he stared unbelievably.

"Dig's pater gone smash? What rot!" he said. "If he had we should have heard something before this. Though—"

"Dig's been looking rather pipped lately," said Manners.

"I noticed that," admitted Tom Merry in dismay. "It's rotten!"

"Beastly!" grunted Lowther. "If—if it's true. It may be another of Trimble's wonderful yarns. But—"

There certainly was a "but." Now they came to think of it, the Terrible Three, like many more fellows, remembered that Digby had been rather quiet and reserved of late. That, obviously, would account for it.

But the Terrible Three were anxious to know the truth, and as Glyn passed on they hurried away to Study No. 6 in the Fourth. They found Digby alone, seated in the armchair, his face downcast and moody.

The sight of him seated there seemed enough for the Terrible Three. Digby was usually one of the sunniest juniors, and it took a great deal to upset his serenity and high spirits, as a rule. But he was obviously upset now—very much upset, as his chums had found out. Over tea he had been very different to his usual good-natured self, and though Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were a trifle hurt, they understood that he wished to be left alone, and they had left him alone.

"Dig, old man," said Tom Merry, coming into the room, "we—we don't like to bother you about it now. We can see you're worried, and we don't wonder. But I for one would like to tell you we're sorry—dashed sorry, and we hope it won't really come to you having to go."

Digby looked up and stared at them. "What on earth are you gassing about?" he snapped impatiently.

"Then—then it isn't true?" said Tom, in deep relief.

"What true?"

"I might as well have a couple of tarts while I'm about it," said Trimble. "Here you are, Baggy!" said Blake kindly. And stepping forward, Blake plastered a jam-tart over Trimble's features, with one hand, and stuffed a second down the back of his fat neck with the other. "Yarooooh!" (See Chapter 1.)



"About your pater," said Tom Merry hesitatingly. "We—we just heard he—he'd had business troubles."

"What!" yelled Digby, jumping up.

"I may as well tell you. You'll be able to deal with the rotter who set the yarn about, then," said Tom, setting his lips. "It's all over the School House, Dig, that your pater's gone smash, and that you're leaving St. Jim's to go into an office or something."

"Wha-a-at!"

Digby staggered back, his face suddenly white. His eyes were blazing.

"You—you say that's all over the School House?" he stammered.

Tom Merry nodded, eyeing him curiously.

"Yes," he said. "But if it isn't true, then I'm jolly glad, old chap—more glad than I can say."

"Of course it isn't true!" shouted Digby angrily. "You silly fools, it's all a yarn—a rotten yarn! If I get hold of the cad who set it about I'll—"

Digby suddenly broke off, a startled look coming over his face.

"Oh, the—the cads!" he breathed. "The—the—"

"You know who set it about?" asked Tom, staring.

"Yes," Digby bit his lip hard. His face had suddenly gone hard, almost savage. Rarely had the Terrible Three

seen him look as he did now. "Yes, I know. It must be. The—the sneaking cads!"

"It was a rotten trick to set a yarn like that about if it isn't true," said Tom Merry. "Who did it? Trimble, or those cads, Racke and Crooke?"

Digby bit his lip hard.

"It was neither," he said thickly. "If it had been I—I wouldn't have minded so much. But—but it was either Blake, Herries, or D'Arcy who set it about, the—the treacherous cads!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Riff in the Lute!

"**W**HA-AT?"

The Terrible Three stared blankly at Digby. If he had said the Head, or Mr. Railton, they could not have been more surprised.

"Don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry sharply. "You're not yourself, Dig! You know perfectly well Blake or the others wouldn't dream of setting a lying yarn like that about—if it is a yarn!"

"It is a yarn!" shouted Digby furiously. "A lying yarn! Blake, or whoever started it has jumped to a wrong conclusion, you fool! But—but it was a dirty, rotten trick to go gassing about my private affairs like that! They knew I didn't want it known—"

"But if it isn't true—" began Tom, bewildered.

"It isn't true!" gritted Digby. "But—but the fact is there—there's something wrong at home—some trouble; I don't know what. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy are the only fellows at St. Jim's who knew it, though."

"Oh!"

"Only they knew, and if anything's got about—as it obviously has—then they're responsible!" said Digby, his voice trembling with rage. "Would you like your private affairs to be gassed about the school?"

"No, I suppose I shouldn't," said Tom slowly. "But I can't see that it really matters much, after all. You've only got to deny it. You know it can't be true."

"I—I—" Digby paused. So far as he knew there really might be truth in it, after all. It was a rotten thought; but something was wrong at home, though Digby could scarcely credit it could be that his pater's financial affairs had suffered a severe blow like that. Indeed, it seemed incredible to him, for his pater was certainly not a financial "plunger," or anything like it. Yet—yet something was wrong, and at the back of Digby's troubled mind was the fear that it was something quite different—even worse—though his thoughts were vague and shadowy in that respect. "I—I'm certain it isn't money," he stammered. "It—it's something else! But in any case," he ended savagely, "it's nobody else's concern, and the cads have no right to go gassing about it outside this study!"

Tom said nothing. He was troubled at Digby's attitude, and certainly the Fourth-Former had good cause for anger if his own chums had been gossiping outside the study. They must have known that what Digby had told them concerning his private affairs was told confidentially, under the belief that they would not dream of speaking about it outside the study.

"I—I can scarcely believe it!" said Digby, his voice trembling slightly. "I—I didn't think Blake or Gussy or Herries would do such a thing! You—you really mean that it's all over the School House, Merry?"

Tom nodded.

"So Glyn says," he said uneasily.

"That—that my pater's gone smash, and that I'm leaving here to go into an office?"

"That's the yarn. It's rot, of course—I can see that now, though—well—"

Tom halted. He did not know what to say. Digby eyed him bitterly.

"Only it may not be rot!" he said savagely. "I can see you think that. Well, I don't say it may not be true. But I know Blake and the others had no right to set the yarn about, and I'm jolly well going to have it out with them! Do you know where they are?"

"Goodness knows! Most likely in the Rag," said Tom. "But hold on, Dig, old chap! Make sure first before butting in and making a row!"

Digby did not answer. He brushed past the chums of the Shell, his eyes glittering. He was plainly in no mood to listen to warnings or reason. Usually the most placid and good-tempered of fellows, Robert Arthur Digby looked anything but placid and good-tempered now.

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The Fourth-Former was inwardly seething with indignation. He was upset and deeply moved over that short letter—actually why he could hardly tell. He only knew he did not understand it, and feared it meant all sorts of terrible things. Why hadn't his pater told him the facts instead of leaving him in fear and suspense like this? It was the uncertainty of the whole thing that really upset Digby's usual good-temper.

"My hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "Looks like trouble in the family, chaps! Let's go down and see what happens. Perhaps we'll be able to smooth things over."

"Right-ho!"

And the Terrible Three went down to the Rag with that kindly intention of smoothing things over—if they could. But as it happened, Digby did not go down to the Rag at once. He went along to see Glyn.

"You've just been telling a yarn about me to Tom Merry!" he snapped, his eyes glinting.

"Why, yes," said Glyn, eyeing him uneasily. "I—I'm sorry, and all that, old fellow—dashed sorry! I hope it's not as bad as you think, and that you won't have to leave—"

"Cut it out!" said Digby through his teeth. "Who told you the lying yarn, Glyn?"

"Eh?" Glyn jumped. "Then—then it isn't true?" he said eagerly. "Your pater—"

"I know nothing of it if it is!" said Digby savagely. "It's a rotten yarn, and I'm going to get to the bottom of it! My pater's affairs are no concern of yours or anybody else's, either! But perhaps you'll oblige me with the name of the cad who told you?"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Glyn, too astonished to be angry at Digby's tone. "Then—then it ain't true! Oh, good, Dig! I'm jolly glad, old chap! But you've got a job on if you want to find out who set it about. It was Gore who told me—he told Noble as well, and I believe Julian mentioned it to him—just asking him if it was true, you know!"

"Right!"

Digby walked out, banging the door after him. He left Glyn whistling.

Outside the study door Digby halted a moment undecided. His first impulse had been to hurry along to have it out with Julian, but a moment's reflection told him he might spend the whole evening tackling fellows at that rate. So instead he set his lips and strode downstairs to the Rag.

He found the Terrible Three there with a crowd of others, but his own personal chums—Blake, D'Arcy, and Herries—were absent. Digby set his teeth. He fancied he could guess why.

The angry junior flashed a deep crimson as he felt all eyes upon him. Digby wasn't a particularly important member of the Lower School, but the startling news of the change in his family fortunes had caused no little sensation. If Dig himself was not very prominent, his pater, Sir Robert Digby, was a very big and important personage, and all the fellows were keenly interested, and nearly all deeply sorry for Dig himself.

"He, he, he! Here he is!" cackled Trimble.

"Shut up, Trimble, you fat cad!"

"You've no need to tell Trimble to shut up!" said Digby, his eyes glinting as he looked about him. "I heard what he said, and I understand! I've heard about the yarn that's going round about me, and I'm here to deal with the chaps who set it about!"

"I don't see why I should shut up!" grunted Trimble, giving Digby a glance of disdain.

"Who's Digby, anyway?"

"How are the mighty fallen!" murmured Racke; and Crooke chuckled. "Digby's fairly got his rag out, by his looks. I don't wonder, either; bit of a drop from St. Jim's to a giddy office stool—what?"

"Dry up, Racke, you cad!" snapped Tom Merry.

Racke grinned. Whether he believed the story or not, Racke was obviously only too glad to hear it, and glad of the opportunity of showing spite against a fellow he hated. Indeed, he felt it a good chance to rag Digby in public—to derive a bit of harmless entertainment from the sensation of the moment.

"Why should I dry up?" asked Racke, raising his eyebrows. "This is a free country, I suppose. No harm in discussing what every other fellow's discussing."

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S "HIDDEN NAMES" PUZZLE!

1. Jimmy Silver.
2. Reginald Muffin.
3. Algy Silver.
4. Kit Conroy.
5. Adolphus Smythe.
6. Roger Manders.
7. Sergeant Kettle.
8. Arthur Newcome.
9. Valentine Mornington.

"You rotter!" said Tom angrily. "Shut up!"

"Why should I?" said Racke, staring. "No harm in showing sympathy for a fellow down on his luck, is there? I'm sorry for Digby, and I'm sorry he's leaving. It must be jolly rough to be hard up when a fellow's been used to rollin' in tin, like Dig has!"

"Rotten!" agreed Crooke, winking at Scrope. "Rough luck to have to go in an office, too!"

"Beastly!" said Racke, shaking his head. "I'm specially sorry about that. In fact, Dig, if you like, I fancy I can put you right for a job in one of my pater's offices. How's that?"

"He, he, he!"

"Or your pater, too, for that matter," resumed Racke, going a bit further as he saw—or fancied he saw—that Dig refused to be drawn. "I'll speak to the pater about that, if you like. My pater will be no end pleased to have him in the office— Here, hold on, you—"

Racke's voice ended in a yell of alarm, and he sprang back as Digby came at him, his eyes blazing.

Crash!

"Yoocop!"

Racke went crashing down, clatching his nose frantically.

Racke had quite misconstrued Digby's silence, and he had ventured to go a bit further, hoping to succeed in "drawing" Digby. He had succeeded only too well. Racke was

by Herries and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. They stared in amazement at the scene.

"What the dickens—" began Blake. "Why, what's the matter, Dig, old man?"

Digby eyed his three chums with a bitter expression. He opened his mouth as if to speak, and then he snapped it shut, and left the room without a word.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"What's the matter with Dig?" demanded Herries, turning to Tom Merry. "What's happened?"

Tom coloured. He saw only too clearly that there was trouble ahead for the family circle known as Blake & Co.

"You've heard the yarn that's going about regarding Digby?" he said.

"Eh? No! What is it?"

Tom Merry told them; and the three chums fairly jumped as they heard it.

"What—what awful rot!" snorted Blake angrily. "If this is some of Trimble's work—"

"It isn't!" howled Trimble. "I know nothing about it—I only heard myself just now! Dig knows I didn't set it about—he said so!"

"Well, someone did!" snapped Blake, glaring at Trimble. "Come on!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy hurried out, eager to speak

HERE'S ANOTHER FASCINATING PUZZLE, BOYS!

We print below a further selection of "Anagrams," together with a list of clues. See if you can solve them.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Alight—be merry! | (Well-known boys' paper.) |
| 2. "Rain? Try THE GEM, Alb.!" | ditto. |
| 3. Lift in car from D— | (Famous author.) |
| 4. Queen's own cot. | ditto. |
| 5. I golf—Harry scores. | (Famous public school.) |
| 6. Frail dear. | (Village near Greyfriars.) |
| 7. Seal Kent box. | (World-famous detective.) |
| 8. Odes to a World. | (Famous nobleman who often visits St. Jim's.) |
| 9. His, her, and our yearly gift, Alan! | (The best book for boys and girls.) |



a fellow who often allowed his spiteful tongue to run away with him, and he often suffered for it.

He suffered now. Digby stood over him with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

"Get up, you rotter!" he cried. "Get up and have some more!"

"You—you bullying end!" wailed Racke. "Ow, ow!"

"You asked for it, and I'm thundering glad you got it, Racke!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"Up you get, Racke!"

But Racke had no intention of getting up while Digby stood there ready to do the same again. He bitterly regretted his attempt at humour now.

"That's what any fellow can expect from me who mentions that lying yarn in my hearing!" said Digby, glaring about him.

"Then—then it isn't true, Dig?" said Levison, staring.

"It's a rotten lie!" snapped Digby.

"You're not leaving, then?" gasped Gore.

"No, of course I'm not!" shouted Digby angrily. "And as for my father having lost money, it's the first I've heard about it, anyway!"

"Pshaw!"

"One of Trimble's yarns, I bet!" said Levison, his brow clearing. "I'm jolly glad, Dig, old chap! If I were in your shoes I'd give that fat little spoofer a thundering licking!"

"Here, hold on!" yelled Trimble, in sudden alarm. "It wasn't me! I know nothing about it, I tell you! I didn't set it about at all!"

"It wasn't Trimble this time," said Digby, his lip curling. "But I think I know who started it. And I'm going—"

He paused; for at that moment Blake entered, followed

to Digby about the astonishing affair. Knowing, as they did, that something was seriously wrong at Digby's home, they naturally feared there was truth in the story, after all. Indeed, it was the fear that this was so which sent them speeding upstairs after their chum. They did not dream that Dig imagined they had spread the yarn, Tom Merry having kept that little detail for them to find out themselves.

Digby was in Study No. 6, and he did not speak as they rushed into the room. His face was hard and bitter.

"Dig, old man," said Blake anxiously, "what does it all mean? It can't be true—"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus quickly. "Dig, deah boy—"

"It's Trimble's yarn, of course!" snapped Herries. "We'll smash the fat rotter for this, Dig—and those cads Racke and Crooke, too!"

Digby stood up and looked at them scornfully.

"So you're trying to put it on to Trimble now?" he said, with a sneer. "But it won't wash with me. You three were the only fellows who knew anything was wrong at all, and it's one of you who spread the yarn!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Nice chums, I must say!" said Digby, his lip curling. "Shouting my troubles from the housetops! You knew I didn't want it gassed about—you must have known!"

"Dig, old chap—" gasped Blake.

"You needn't call me 'old chap' again!" snapped Digby, his eyes glinting. "I think I told you I didn't believe it was money trouble with my pater. You fellows knew differently, though, of course. You were so certain about it, in fact, that to gain a bit of cheap entertainment you went gassing all over the school about it!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Dig—"

"You didn't think of me—you didn't think that I might have a bit of pride, and wouldn't like my affairs gassed about by cads like Racke and Trimble!" sneered Digby, his angry face looking quite strange to his chums. "It was a rotten, dirty trick to play on me! You knew jolly well that what I did tell you was in strict confidence. But I suppose you were piqued because I didn't show you the dashed letter."

"Dig, you idiot——"

"Dig," said Blake, half in anger and half in alarm, "what are you talking about? You know we wouldn't breathe a word to a soul. You must know it wasn't us, you fathead!"

"I know it was!"

"It wasn't, I tell you!" said Blake, raising his voice. "Dash it all, we haven't spoken to a soul since we left you in here! We've been out for a stroll in the quad, and until we came in we've spoken to nobody."

"Rot!"

Blake bit his lip, keeping his temper with an effort. He saw that Digby was not himself, and that nothing they said would alter his stubborn opinion. He was in a mood to listen to no reason or argument. Yet Blake was determined to be patient.

"Listen, Dig old man," he said quietly. "I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill. I don't know what was in that letter actually, and I don't want you to tell me. But I'm certain it isn't as bad as you seem to think. It's the way you're taking it yourself that's making the fellows think and say things. And I suppose that fat worm Trimble's added to them——"

"You needn't blame it on Trimble," said Digby doggedly. "You've let it out—I know you must have done. Trimble knew nothing—could have known nothing except what he heard in here. How did he know my pater may be here to-morrow? Only you fellows knew that."

"Dig, deah boy——"

"Shut up!" said Digby savagely. "I'm fed up—fed up with the lot of you!"

And, with a set, savage face, Digby marched out of the study.

CHAPTER 4. Gussy Fails!

"**R**OTTEN!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Feabfully wotten, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus dismally. "Poor old Dig seems to have got the hump vewy badly ovah this! It weally is wotten!"

And it certainly was. Blake & Co. did not know what to make of their chum's attitude. Certainly, it was enough to make any fellow angry to know the whole Lower School were discussing the story—a story that was, in their view, all rot. And undoubtedly Digby was worried about affairs at home. But it was so unlike Digby to take up such a stubborn, unreasoning attitude in regard to them. If they had been gassing, then Digby had a right to be angry—more than angry. But, nevertheless, it was unlike him to refuse to accept their word, and to be so doggedly unreasonable.

"Trimble must have overheard us talking somehow!" grunted Herries. "It's Trimble!"

"But I heard Trimble running away," said Blake. "If he did overhear he must have crept back again. But what's the good of saying that if Dig won't listen, the awful ass! If he goes on like this I shall get fed up!"

"Same here!" said Herries warmly. "Dash it all, he's no need to start slanging us like this!"

"He's not himself, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus dismally. "I—I weally do hope there is no twuth in the stowy, deah boys. It would be awful to lose old Dig!"

"Rot!" said Blake, though his voice sounded none too certain. "It's queer, of course, and Dig's attitude makes a chap think there's something in it. But—but——"

"It's queer!" said Herries. "I'd like to know who really did set the yarn going if Trimble didn't."

"I weally think I'd bettah go aftah Dig and twy to weason with him," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "You fellows had bettah wemain heah."

"Eh? Why?"

"You'd onlay make mattahs worse," said Arthur Augustus. "For a delicate mattah of this natuah a fellow of tact and judgment is wequahed."

"You silly idiot——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You'll only make matters worse yourself, you mean!" snorted Blake. "Leave the silly fathead to cool down, I say."

"Wubbish! You can safely leave the mattah to me, deah boys!"

"But—but hold on, you ass!"

"Wats!"

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Arthur Augustus marched out, his mind made up. Blake jumped up, but sat down again next moment.

"Better go after the ass!" said Herries.

"Oh, let him rip!" growled Blake. "Dig's bound to come round sooner or later, and I'm fed-up with the whole business. Let him go!"

"Oh, all right!"

Herries was as fed-up as his chum; but he looked very uneasy for all that, knowing how unlucky Arthur Augustus invariably was when acting the part of a peacemaker. So Arthur Augustus was allowed to go, and he started the search for Digby at once, looking into a few studies on the way downstairs, though he hardly expected Digby to be with anyone in his present savage mood.

"Pwobably stwollin' in the wotten," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Weally, this is wotten, and I must do some-thing. Yaas, wathah! I wondah—— Bai Jove, heah is that cad Wacke!"

Racke, Crooke, and Scrope came along, but, beyond a glare at Arthur Augustus, Racke said nothing, and the three went into Racke's study.

Arthur Augustus paused, a sudden idea coming to him.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I weally believe Wacke is at the bottom of this twouble, and I've a vewy good mind to tackle the wottah about it. If he admits it I shall dwag the wascal along to old Dig by the scwuff of his wotten neck!"

And without any further reflection on the matter, Arthur Augustus knocked at the closed door of Racke's study and walked in. Having a great belief in his own tact, Arthur Augustus imagined that a few tactful questions might get the truth out of Aubrey Racke. It was a vain hope—especially as Racke did not happen to be the guilty party.

Aubrey Racke glared at him as he marched in. Racke's nose was swollen and sore, and he was in a vile temper.

"Outside!" he snapped. "Who asked you in here, D'Arcy?"

"I invited myself, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I have come to question you in wegard to this affiah of Digby's."

It was scarcely a tactful opening. Racke fairly glowered at him.

"You—you silly owl!" he snarled. "Get out, before I kick you out, you silly fool!"

"I should wefuse to allow you to kick me out, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus disdainfully. "In any case, you weally could not do it, you know. I would like you to tell me who told you about this yarn of Digby leavin' St. Jim's, Wacke!"

"You cheeky cad! Get out!"

"I have no intention of goin' until I have learned the twuth wegardin' who first started this stowy of Digby's patah losin' his money, and of Dig leavin' St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I have vewy good weasons to suspect, Wacke, knowin' you as I do, that the stowy came from you."

"You—you silly ass!" hissed Racke. "Can't you see it came from Trimble?"

"Did Twimble tell you?"

"Find out!" snapped Racke angrily. "You cheeky cad, coming here cross-examinin' me as if you were a master. Get out, and go and eat coke!"

As a matter of fact, Racke had really no idea who had started the story—excepting that it looked like Trimble's work. It was Gore who had told Racke in the first place, though Racke had done his best, out of gleeful spite, to spread the yarn afterwards.

"I have already told you, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus, his noble eye gleaming a little behind his eye-glass, "that I have no intention of goin' until I am satisfied that you are not responsible."

"Won't you?" snarled Racke, looking quickly at his chums. "We'll see about that. Throw the cheeky cad out, chaps!"

And Aubrey Racke—brave enough with the odds on his side—rushed at Arthur Augustus. Crooke and Scrope hesitated a brief moment, and then they joined him—knowing better than to refuse to obey their leader.

"Bai Jove! One at a time, you wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

His fist clumped home on Racke's already injured nose, and Racke yelled. But he was more maddened than hurt, and after that Arthur Augustus had more than his hands full against the three of them.

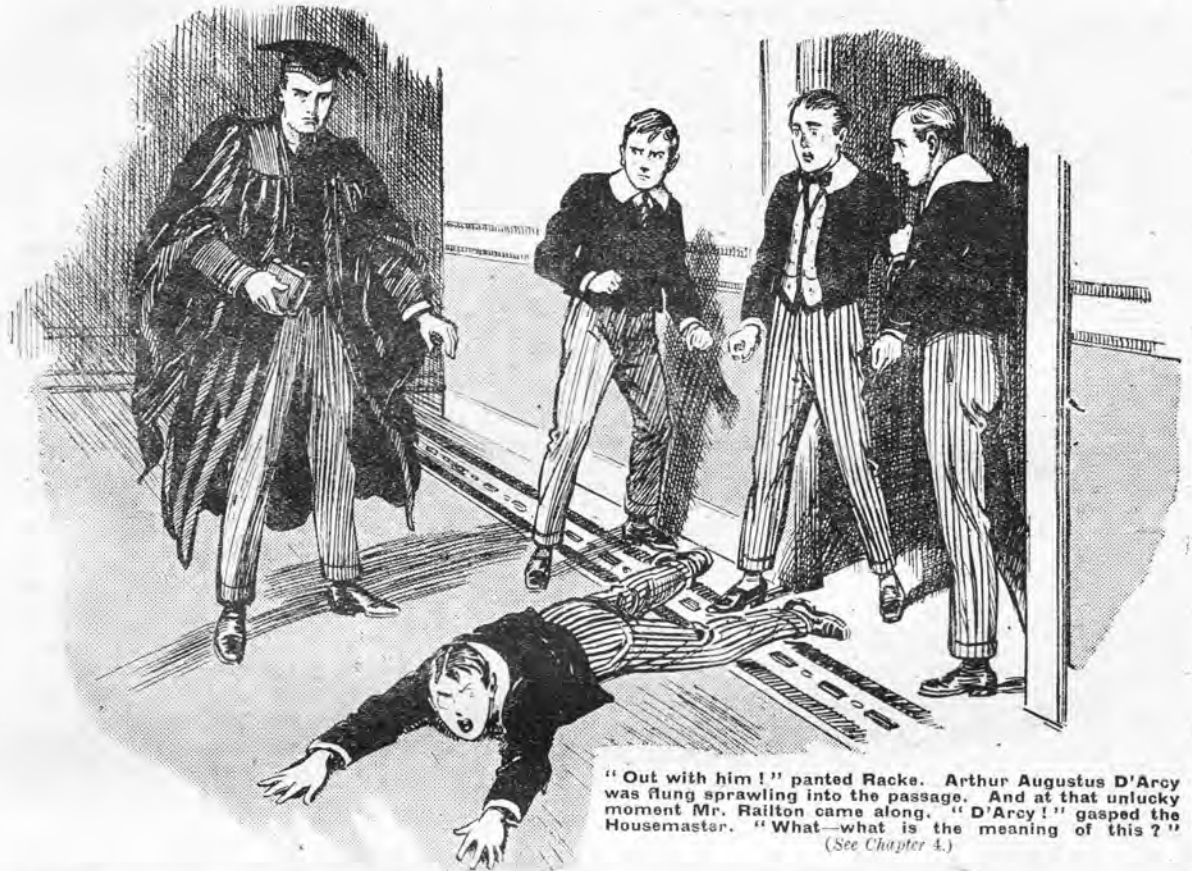
But he fought hard, having determined in his own mind that Racke was the guilty party, and being resolved to carry out his intention of dragging Racke to confess to Digby.

It was a very slim chance indeed—as Gussy soon discovered. Fighting desperately, he was forced towards the door, and then Crooke jumped to the door and flung it open.

"Out with him!" panted Racke savagely.

"Bai Jove! I wefuse—— Yawwoop!"

Bump!



"Out with him!" panted Racke. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was flung sprawling into the passage. And at that unlucky moment Mr. Railton came along. "D'Arcy!" gasped the Housemaster. "What—what is the meaning of this?"
(See Chapter 4.)

Arthur Augustus was out—sprawling with a crash on the passage floor. And at that luckless moment Mr. Railton came along. He stared down in angry amazement at the grovelling Arthur Augustus. Racke & Co. would have dodged back into their study, but the Housemaster's authoritative voice called them back.

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Railton. "What—what is the meaning of this?"

"Gwooooh!"

Arthur Augustus staggered up, clutching a damaged eye. Mr. Railton fixed a steely look on Aubrey Racke's scowling face.

"Racke," he said sternly, "I found you throwing this boy from your study. Perhaps you will explain, as D'Arcy seems beyond coherent speech."

"It wasn't our fault!" gasped Racke. "The cad—"

"What?"

"I—I mean D'Arcy came barging—I mean came into our study making unfounded charges against us!" said Racke, his eyes gleaming with spite. "He said we had spread about a story that's going round about Digby, sir."

"Digby?"

"Yes, sir. Digby's pater is supposed to have gone smash, and the story is that Digby's got to leave to go into an office or something."

"Bless my soul! Absurd!"

"It's only a yarn, I suppose, sir—as Digby denies it," said Racke glibly. "But D'Arcy seems to think we first started the story, and he came in here trying to cause trouble, sir."

"This is utterly absurd!" said the Housemaster, frowning. "I have heard nothing of this, and it is obviously a silly story. You deny that you started it, Racke?"

"Certainly, sir," said Racke, speaking with obvious truth. "It was Gore who told me, and he'll tell you it was news to me."

"Very well. Why did you think Racke was the person who started the tale, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"I—I— You see—well—I—I do not know, sir," faltered Arthur Augustus. "Exceptin' that Wacke seemed wathah glad about it, which made me suspect him."

Arthur Augustus saw now that he had been a little too over zealous in charging Racke without proof.

"You had no right to make a baseless charge!" snapped the Housemaster sharply. "You will catch two hundred lines for fighting, nevertheless. The whole story is an obvious fabrication, and if the name of its originator comes to my knowledge I shall punish him very severely indeed."

It is grossly unfair to Digby, and I— Ah, here is Digby now!"

Robert Arthur Digby came along the passage, evidently having been out in the quad. Mr. Railton looked at him curiously. Digby eyed the group, his pale face going a shade whiter. He clearly guessed something of what had happened.

After a moment's hesitation Mr. Railton beckoned to him. "I wish to speak to you a moment, Digby," he said kindly. "Come with me to my study."

"Very well, sir!"

Digby gave Arthur Augustus a look that made that well-meaning youth groan inwardly, and then he followed Mr. Railton. Arthur Augustus stared after them, and then he turned slowly and walked away, ignoring Racke's savage remarks. The swell of St. Jim's understood only too well that he had fairly put his foot in it, and that Digby would be more savage and bitter than ever now the Housemaster knew.

"Oh deah!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Oh, bai Jove! How feahfully wotten! I'd bettah see Dig and explain."

Not very hopefully Arthur Augustus went along and waited in the passage outside Mr. Railton's door. Digby was not long coming out, and when he did emerge his face was white and his eyes glittering. It had not been a pleasant interview for Digby. Mr. Railton had asked him to state what he knew about the extraordinary story, and he had told the master—keeping the names of his own chums out of it. And as Digby had not shown his father's letter, or told Railton a word about it or his fears, Mr. Railton had naturally looked upon it as a foolish, but unkind joke, and he had advised Digby to take it as that, and forget it.

But from Digby's face it was plain he had no intention of taking that advice. He knew now that the interference of Arthur Augustus was responsible for the Housemaster getting to know, and his eyes glittered as they rested on that hapless youth waiting in the passage.

"You—you cad!" breathed Digby. "So, not satisfied with what you've already done, you had to chip in again and let Railton get hold of the yarn!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Out of my way, you interfering rotter!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Dig, old fellow—one moment; allow me to explain, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus in dismay, and he clutched his former chum's arm.

Digby shook it off savagely.

"Let go! And don't speak to me again, D'Arcy!" he snapped. "I've finished with you!"

He walked away quickly, leaving Arthur Augustus staring after him blankly and in utter dismay. But the swell of the Fourth soon recovered, and he hurried after Digby, expecting to find him in the study. But Digby was not in Study No. 6; only Blake and Herries were there, and they looked up as Arthur Augustus came in.

"Well?" demanded Blake. "Mucked it up, I suppose? You look as if you had, anyway."

"Weally, Blake—" Arthur Augustus hesitated, and then he told his chums what had happened. "It was weally most unfortunate," he concluded dismally. "I weally cannot undahstand Dig at all."

"Unfortunate!" hooted Blake. "You—you clumsy, interfering owl! You've fairly done it now!"

"Absolutely finished it!" groaned Herries, glowering at the crestfallen Arthur Augustus. "Bump the fathead, Blake—hard!"

"Weally, Hewwies— Oh, what— Yooooop!"

Arthur Augustus descended to the carpet with a bump that shook the room. Then his disgusted chums left him there while they went along to see if they could see Digby, in the hope of talking him round. It was a forlorn hope, and it met with failure. They saw Digby, but Digby refused to speak to them, and when the Fourth went to bed that night it was known generally that there was a split in the Co.

CHAPTER 5. Racke's Plot!

TOM MERRY ran his hand through his curly hair and frowned. It was just after dinner the following day—a half-holiday—and Jack Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy had joined the Terrible Three in Study No. 10 before starting out for a cycling spin to Abbotsford—a little jaunt that had been arranged a couple of days before. In the ordinary way, Robert Arthur Digby would, of course, have been a member of the party; but he was absent from the gathering now. And it was just this fact that the juniors were discussing glumly now.

"You've asked him again?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," grunted Blake. "It's no good! We've eaten humble pie by the cartload, and we've tried to get him to listen to us. But it's no good!"

"He simply refuses to heah a word," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head despairingly. "Weally, I cannot undahstand Dig at all these days."

"It's all your silly fault!" snorted Blake. "If you'd only left him alone last night until he'd cooled down we should have talked him round all right before this. You've mucked it up now, you silly owl!"

"Weally, Blake—" began Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I hardly think so," said Tom Merry slowly. "Dig's fairly got his back up. It seems to me a heap of trouble and fuss all about nothing."

"I don't know," said Manners thoughtfully. "Dig's acting the part of a silly, stubborn owl, I know, but it's pretty clear there's something wrong at home, and it's fairly made him lose his head for once. He wouldn't act like this if he wasn't really upset and feeling generally bitter and miserable."

"Well, that's so," admitted Tom. "Still, he ought to take the word of you chaps instead of sulking like this. But the trouble is, most of the fellows still believe the yarn, and that Dig's bluffing it out until he has to go. It's rotten!"

"No good trying him again," said Lowther. "Besides, he's got to wait in for his pater, though I believe he hasn't heard from him yet."

"I'll go and try him," said Tom, with decision. "Wait here."

Tom hurried out, determined to try once again to bring Digby to reason, and hoping to get him to join the bike spin, after all. Digby had shown no definite change in his attitude towards Tom Merry; but he had refused to discuss Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy with him. Tom himself was getting a trifle impatient with Digby; but he meant to do his best, and he admired the chums of the Fourth for their patience. They certainly had good reason to allow Digby to "go to pot," as Lowther had put it. In Tom's view Digby was acting the part of a stubborn, unreasonable mule, and Tom frankly believed that Digby did believe that his chums had "gassed" simply because he wouldn't allow himself to think otherwise in his present mood.

The captain of the Shell was back under five minutes, and from Tom's grim face Blake knew he had failed.

"No go, then?" he asked.

"No, blow the ass!" said Tom. "Let's get off! He simply told me to clear out. In any case, though, I don't think he would come, for he's not heard from his pater yet."

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"Looks as if the old chap isn't coming, then," said Blake. "It can't be anything very serious, anyway. Let's get off!"

And the juniors went out, making their way to the cycle-shed for their bikes. Racke, Crooke, and Mellish were lounging about as the chums went downstairs, and Racke grinned as he noted the absence of Digby. It gave Racke & Co. a great deal of enjoyment to know that there was a split in the ranks of Blake & Co.

"It's rather a scream," chortled Racke, rubbing his swollen nose reflectively. "I'm practically certain it was that fat fool Trimble who really started the yarn, and I'm blessed if I can understand Digby thinking it was his pals. He must be potty."

"Dig isn't with 'em, anyway," said Crooke, with a chuckle, "so they haven't made it up yet."

"Dig's waiting to hear from his pater, I believe," said Racke. "The old hunk's promised to let him know if he was coming this afternoon or not. It's after two now, though, and he was to have let Dig know by this whether to wait for him or not. I'm rather keen to see the old chap, if he does turn up."

"So that's why you want to hang about," grinned Crooke.

"Just that," smiled Racke. "I fancy— Hallo, there's the phone in the Head's room. I bet that's old Sir Robert ringing up now."

The juniors happened to be near the Head's study at the moment, and they stopped as they heard the telephone bell. The Head's door was slightly open, and they heard it clearly. It went on ringing again after a pause.

"Nobody in," said Racke. "I—I wonder—"

A sudden daring idea came to Racke's mind at that moment. There was nobody but themselves near the Head's study, most of the fellows having already gone out of doors, and many of the masters also.

With sudden decision Racke left his chums and entered the Head's study, Crooke and Mellish fairly gasping at his "nerve." But, after all, as Racke had reflected, it was up to anyone who happened to be near to answer an insistent ring of the phone. The Head would scarcely blame any fellow for seeing to it as a matter of duty.

A moment later Racke, though he was trembling a little, was answering the phone.

"This is St. Jim's—yes! Who is that speaking, please?"

"This is Sir Robert Digby," came the reply—a reply Racke had fully expected. "I am speaking from Wayland. I wish to speak with my son, Robert. If Dr. Holmes would kindly allow him to speak—"

"Digby is out, I think, sir," said Racke smoothly, grinning himself as he spoke.

"What's that? Is my son out of doors?"

"Yes, sir—I think so!"

"Who is that speaking?" came Sir Robert's voice, a trace of anger in it now.

Racke hesitated a moment. Then his eyes glimmered, and he answered calmly.

"Blake—Blake of the Fourth, sir. The Head is out, and I happened to be near. If there is a message you would like me to give Digby, sir—"

"I would like you to find him and tell him I am coming along to St. Jim's at once!" snapped the baronet. "I told him he was on no account to leave the school until he was quite certain I was not coming."

"Very good, sir. I think he has only just started out, and I'll soon catch him up."

"Thank you, Blake. I remember you are my son's chum, and I cannot understand why he has disobeyed me by leaving the school. Did he mention to you that he was expecting me to send a message?"

"Oh, yes, sir! He—he didn't seem keen to stay in, though, I fancy, sir," said Racke, as if with reluctance. "But—"

"Then kindly do your very utmost to find him," came the snappy answer. "It is very important that I should see him this afternoon."

"Certainly, sir. You can rely on me," said Racke, chuckling softly as he heard something like a snort over the wires.

And with that Racke rang off, chuckling again as he thought of the baronet's wrath. He went out swiftly and joined his chums. Crooke and Mellish stared at him, their faces showing their alarm.

"You—you reckless ass!" said Crooke. "What the—"

"Come on, let's get away from here," grinned Racke. "And remember that we haven't been near the Head's study this afternoon, mind!"

"But—"

"Come on, you fool!"

And Racke fairly dragged the bewildered Crooke and Mellish away. Out in the quad Racke told them what had been said on the phone, and his chums stared at him.

"And you gave Blake's name?" gasped Crooke.

"Just that!"

"But why?"

"Because I don't intend to obey the giddy orders of dear old Sir Bob," chuckled Racke. "We're going out for a little stroll now, dear men. If Digby stays in there'll be no harm done, and it'll be lucky for him. But if he gives it up and goes out—as I bet a quid he does—then I fancy there'll be trouble for him. The old man sounded waxy enough as it is. And—"

"But Blake?" said Mellish. "Digby will rave—"
 "That's the cream of the little joke," smiled Racke. "Digby will think Blake did it out of spite, of course—was cheeky to his pater and purposely promised to give the message, intending all the time not to. See the wheeze?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Crooke and Mellish did see it, and they joined the rascally Racke in a roar of laughter. Then Racke & Co. strolled up and down the quad, waiting to see if the Fourth-Former did come out.

Meanwhile, Digby was hanging about Mr. Railton's study waiting moodily. He knew that his pater would either wire or phone, and it was already past two. The junior was bitterly disappointed. He was in an agony of apprehensive fears and hopes. He had been counting the minutes, feeling he would soon know what was wrong at home. But his father had stated clearly that if he did not send a message before two o'clock he was not to expect him—to wait in for him.

And it was well after two now. Digby's face showed his dejection and deep disappointment. The door of the Housemaster's study opened suddenly, and Mr. Railton came out. He eyed the waiting junior very curiously.

"Excuse me, sir," said Digby. "I—I'm sorry to keep worrying you, but—has a phone message come through for me yet?"

"Not to my knowledge, Digby," said the Housemaster. "I should have had the message reported to me if it had, as Dr. Holmes is out." The Housemaster paused, and eyed Digby keenly. "You seem to me to be worrying, Digby," he said kindly. "I hope you are attaching no importance to that absurd story regarding your father. If I can help you—"

"No, sir, it—it's nothing, only I'm disappointed, as he sent word he might come, and I was to wait in until two o'clock. It's past that now," he added dully, "so I suppose he can't be coming. I'm sorry to trouble you, sir!"

And Digby walked away, anxious to escape further questions. He went to his study, and after sitting there for some minutes he got his cap and walked out.

He had given it up now. His father obviously was not coming; and, being tired of being indoors, Digby rammed his cap on his head and went out for a ramble.

It was a fine afternoon, and he felt he would choke if he stayed much longer indoors. But he was feeling sick and wretched now—not only at his disappointment, but because he was beginning to realise he had been a stubborn fool in refusing to make it up with his chums.

Deep in his own mind, he couldn't help feeling convinced that neither Blake nor his other two chums had started the story. It was not like them at all, and far more likely to be Trimble, or, possibly, Racke—though how they could have got to know he could not imagine.

He had been a stubborn fool—Digby was beginning to realise that now. He realised it more as he passed Racke & Co. in the quad and noted their grinning faces. He guessed they were grinning at the split in the ranks of the Co., and he ignored them.

No suspicion of the real truth crossed Digby's mind, no suspicion of the cads' plot that was to make the breach a still wider one.

CHAPTER 6.

A Shock for Trimble!

"HALLO! Who's this old buffer? He, he, he! Blessed if it isn't Dig's pater, after all! Oh crumbs! And Digby's gone out!"

Thus Baggy Trimble. Trimble had sighted the tall figure of Sir Robert Digby crossing the quad towards the School House steps, and Baggy Trimble soon recognised him as Digby's pater. And the sight made Baggy chuckle. It entertained him to know that Digby had been waiting for his pater, and that, now he had given it up and gone out, lo and behold, Sir Robert Digby had arrived!

Trimble was a fellow who derived a great deal of enjoyment from the misfortunes and troubles of others. A glance at the elderly gentleman's face showed Trimble that Sir Robert looked "waxy." He fancied he would look waxier still when he discovered that his son had gone out of gates.

In the ordinary way Sir Robert would doubtless have gone first to the Head's house; but evidently the baronet's business was with his son, and he was in a hurry.

Trimble rolled over towards him. Sir Robert had the reputation of being generous, if he was a trifle short-

tempered. And though he was in a "wax" there was a chance of a tip, none the less.

Baggy touched his cap in his usual slack manner.

"You want the Head, sir?" he said, smiling ingratiatingly.

"I want my son Robert Digby," he said, glaring rather at Baggy. "You know him, boy?"

"Oh, yes; he's in my Form, sir!" said Baggy. "He's a great pal of mine, in fact."

"He will be waiting for me," said Sir Robert. "Do you happen to know where I can find him?"

"He's gone out of gates," grinned Trimble.

"What?"

"Went out ten minutes ago," said Trimble, quite enjoying the look of sudden wrath on the baronet's face.

"The Head's out, too. But Mr. Railton—"

"Robert has gone out," said Sir Robert, as if he could scarcely believe his ears. "And I distinctly said in my message that he was to wait indoors for me. Do you know where he is, boy?"

"I'll find him, if you like, sir," said Trimble. "He can't have gone far."

"Then, find him—tell him he is to come to me without delay! You understand?"

"Ahem! Oh, yes, sir!"

Trimble did understand—quite. But he waited. He was waiting for a tip, in fact. Trimble believed in making quite sure of his reward before taking any trouble to be obliging to anyone.

THE ARM OF THE LAW!

Can you picture the famous, immaculate, one-and-only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, "starring" in the dock at the Old Bailey? Visions of that terrible fate descend heavily on the peace of mind of the lordly Gussy. His chums are in a quandary, too, as to how they might come to the rescue of "the silly ass!"

It all came about because of Gussy's amazing gift of falling foul of people and things—the people in this case including a rascally firm of solicitors and a hefty hawker on the make; the things including the said hawker's barrow-load of pots and pans. Trouble piles on trouble, and fun on fun; a gallant rescue; a vigorous ducking in cold ditch-water. The yarn runs fast and furious from beginning to end. A veritable masterpiece story of the chums of St. Jim's!

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Apparently Sir Robert grasped the situation, however. He gave Baggy a very peculiar look—a rather disgusted look—and then he felt in his pocket and handed Baggy half-a-crown.

"Now go and find him—sharp!" he said gruffly.

"Oh, certainly, sir! Thank you very much, sir!" said Baggy, with a fat hand hiding his grin. "I'll go at once."

And Baggy went, leaving the baronet to enter the School House on his own. Sir Robert was an old St. Jim's fellow, and he knew his way about well enough.

Trimble scudded out through the gates. He hadn't the faintest idea where to look for Digby, but he really hoped Digby would happen to have gone towards the village, for that was where Baggy intended to look for him. Baggy was hungry, and he wanted to spend the half-crown tip. But he knew it would scarcely do to go straight to the school tuckshop and spend it there. His intention was to have a feed at Mrs. Murphy's in the village, and then have a hunt for Digby—perhaps.

"Mean old beast!" he grunted, as he rolled along the lane. "Might have made it five bob, anyway! Never mind! I don't see why I should tramp about for hours looking for Digby to please him! Blow Digby! I'll see how I feel when I've had something to eat. Rather a fag walking to the village, though. It's worth more than a dashed measly half-crown to do that!"

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Musing thus, Baggy hurried on, his thoughts not on the search for Digby, but on Mrs. Murphy's jam-tarts. He had heard from Fatty Wynn that she had got a fresh supply of ripping fresh tarts in, and Trimble was eager to sample them. After all, Sir Robert would never know that he hadn't done much searching. Besides, he intended to search—after he had had something to eat. And Digby was a beast—he had kicked him only that morning.

"Serve him right!" grinned Trimble. "My hat! His giddy pater looked no end waxy! Looks to me more than ever as if it's true about him going bust—only gave me a measly half-crown, anyway! I wonder—Hallo, who's that merchant with Racke?"

Trimble had sighted the figures of Racke, Crooke, and Mellish ahead, and he noted that they were talking to a stranger—a rather tall man, fairly well dressed. As Baggy sighted the four, he saw Racke look round and nod towards him. Then Racke & Co. walked on, and the man stopped—as if waiting for Baggy.

A minute later Baggy realised that the stranger was waiting for him.

He smiled at Baggy, though his eyes scanned him in rather a puzzled manner.

"You are Master Digby!" he stated.

"Eh? Me?" said Baggy.

"Your school friends ahead kindly pointed you out to me," said the man, smiling again. "It is very fortunate I came along just now, or I should have gone on to St. Jim's and missed you."

"Oh, would you?" gasped Baggy.

He was quite overcome, but he realised now that Racke had told the man he was Digby—quite the style of one of Racke's little jokes. But it was jolly curious that the man was after Digby of all people just then.

Baggy was a very cautious youth, and just as it was on the tip of his tongue to point out the man's mistake, he closed his mouth.

"I—I say, I don't know you," he said. "I—"

"Possibly, you don't," agreed the stranger smoothly. "But I have come specially to see you, Master Digby. If we could have a quiet conversation somewhere I think I could tell you something which would be of great interest to you."

"Oh, could you?" said Baggy.

His little eyes were glimmering now, and his curiosity was aroused. If the fellow chose to take him for Digby then let him, he reflected. And if he could learn something about Digby—

Trimble was quite certain that there was some curious mystery surrounding Robert Digby, and he was very keen indeed to learn what it was. He felt there was a chance here. Besides, though the fellow did not look quite a gentleman, and was obviously not a relative of Digby's, there was, none the less, the possibility of a tip.

"The—fact is," he said, a trifle loftily, "I can't stop now. I'm just going to the village. If you'd like to come along you can, and I can listen to what you want to tell me as we walk along, what?"

"Oh, certainly, Master Digby!" said the man. "If you have business in the village—"

"I'm hungry," said Baggy, "and I'm going to Mrs. Murphy's for some grub. That's the village tuckshop, you know. You can come along there if you like, and we can talk there."

"Certainly!" agreed the stranger. His glance ran over Trimble's fat form, and though he was obviously surprised to find that "Master Digby" was so fat, he seemed to sum up Baggy at once. "And perhaps you would allow me to give you some tea—at my expense, you know."

"Oh, good!" That suited Baggy very well. He grinned.

"But there is no need to walk," said the kindly stranger, smiling curiously. "My car is here—"

"Your—your car?"

"Yes, it is just round the bend here. Ah, here we are!"

A turn in the lane brought a car in sight. It was quite a decent, expensive-looking car, and it was backed in a narrow turning off Rylcombe Lane. Standing by it was a man in livery.

"Oh, good!" grinned Baggy, with no little satisfaction. "You'll be able to run me back to St. Jim's afterwards, what?"

"Oh, I shall be pleased to oblige you in any way I am able!" said the stranger smoothly. "Jump in, my boy!"

Trimble grinned and hopped into the car, which was a closed limousine. He felt he was in clover. The man followed him in and closed the door. The next second the car slid into the lane and went speeding ahead, flashing past Racke & Co., who scarcely troubled to glance at it.

The fat youth grinned as he thought of what Racke would think when he learned what a good thing his little

joke had put Baggy on to. He glanced at the man, who was smiling curiously, and just then Baggy happened to glance also out through the window at the front.

"Here, I say," he gasped, giving a jump. "The ass has taken the wrong turning. This isn't the way to the village!"

"How annoying!" said the stranger, starting forward as if to call to the driver, and then sinking back on to the comfortable cushions again. "However, after all, it scarcely matters, Master Digby. I suppose there are plenty of decent teasops in Wayland, and it would be quite easy for me to run you home again if necessary."

"Oh, all right!" grinned Trimble. Certainly there were plenty of decent teasops in Wayland, and Trimble didn't mind. The car fairly flew along the narrow lane, which was a short one, leading to the cross-roads where the Wayland road branched off from the Abbotsford road. He glanced out of the window again, rather afraid at the speed of the car. Then he gave another jump. "I—I say," he almost yelled, "the awful idiot's going wrong again. He's taken the Abbotsford road."

"So he has," smiled the man. "It scarcely matters, however, Master Digby."

"Doesn't it?" said "Master Digby." "I say, you know, what—"

Trimble suddenly stopped, and his face paled. Something in the smiling face of the man opposite had brought to him a dreadful feeling that things were not quite what he had supposed them to be. There was something jolly queer about the affair, a thing a keener fellow than Trimble would have seen long ago.

Trimble's face went whiter, and his fat little knees fairly shook.

"I—I say," he stammered. "What—what's this game? Look—look here, lemme down now! Make that rotten driver stop!"

"I'm sorry," said the man, and his face had lost its smile. "But you must come with me, Master Digby. You have not the slightest need to feel afraid, however. No harm shall come to you—quite the reverse, in fact. It is necessary—"

"Oh dear!" Trimble stood up, fairly terrified now. The man's face was grim now and very determined. "I—I say, you'd better let me down, you roofer!" he stammered, licking his dry lips. "If you don't I shall yell for help. This is some rotten game!"

"If you call out for help," said the man smoothly, "I shall be obliged to use force and gag you, Master Digby. I can assure you that I do not desire to do that. No harm shall come to you. You must come with me, however, and I shall stand no nonsense!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Trimble was utterly dumbfounded and dismayed. Incredible as it seemed, he had been kidnapped. It was all a trick—a trick to get him into the clutches of these scoundrels, for obviously the driver was in league with his captor. From the bottom of his fat heart Baggy Trimble wished he had not embarked upon the adventure now. He had fairly asked for trouble, and he had got it.

What it meant he hadn't the faintest idea, excepting that he knew the men imagined they had got Robert Digby. And why they wanted Digby Trimble did not know or care. All his curiosity regarding Digby's private affairs quite suddenly evaporated. His interest became suddenly fully taken up with his own affairs, and especially the terrible position he now found himself in.

"Oh dud-dear!" he groaned. "I—I say, you might lemme go. I tell you I'm not Digby. My name's Trimble. Honour bright. I wish I'd never done it now, but I was only spoofing—"

"Quite so," smiled the stranger, obviously not impressed in the slightest. "But you must come, Master Digby."

"I won't!" shouted Trimble, almost beside himself with fear. "I won't! Look here, I'll be missed, and the police will—Oh!"

Trimble's roving gaze of terror had suddenly fallen on the road ahead. Riding along leisurely were six cyclists, and Trimble's heart leaped as he recognised Tom Merry & Co. The sight of them was enough for Baggy.

As he looked he saw Tom Merry and the others turn their heads on hearing the car roaring behind them, and then they moved aside in a bunch to let it pass.

It was now or never, and as the car raced past the cyclists Baggy's terrified voice rose in a wild yell.

"Help! Rescue, you fellows! Help, help, help! Rescue, St.—"

Baggy's voice ended in a gurgle as the man leaped at him and, with a muttered gasp of alarm, clapped a hand over his mouth, effectually gagging him.

But the man was too late. Tom Merry & Co. had heard.

CHAPTER 7.

Amazing!

"WHAT the dickens—"
"Twimble, bai Jove!"

"It was Trimble's howl, for a pension!" said Tom Merry, in amazement and alarm.

Tom Merry & Co. nearly fell off their machines as they heard that terrific howl for aid.

They had cycled aside to let the speeding car pass, and that sudden outcry had fairly made their hearts jump. But Jack Blake had glanced at the car with more than casual interest, for the car was going at a terrific pace. And he had seen something his chums had missed.

"It—it was Trimble!" he stuttered. "I saw him! Oh, great pip! He was struggling with a man in that car—I'm certain he was! I just glimpsed 'em as the car flashed past!"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove! Pway put it on, deal boys!"

The juniors fairly jumped to it, pushing at the pedals of their machines with might and main.

AN American visitor to this country recently landed at Liverpool and, hailing a taxicab, instructed the driver to take him to the School of Science. The taxi-driver took him to the Everton football ground. All Liverpool says that the taxi-driver was right.

Signed on by a first-class football club at fourteen! That was the experience of Cyril Spiers, who afterwards kept goal for Aston Villa. He was signed on for the Villa as soon as he left school, but, of course, only became a professional some years later.

Dexter, the goalkeeper of Notts Forest, is a printer, and Streets, the goalkeeper of Notts County, is a linotype operator by trade. They ought to make an impression.

Of the first thirty goals scored against Derby County this season only seven were obtained by their opponents in the first half of the matches. Staying power wanted, evidently.

They say there is nothing in a name, but one can be sorry for a centre-forward recently introduced to the Wolverhampton team. His name is Rotton. It looks like asking for it. But Rotton was not so bad—he scored a goal in his first match.

Away back in the 'thirties, Sunderland once went for over three seasons without being beaten at home, and in a period of six years were only defeated once on their own ground. They were then called the team of all the talents.

Players often say they are put off their game by the shouts of the spectators. In other words, silence is "golden."

Havelock, the centre-forward of Crystal Palace, is the son of a man who played on several occasions for England at the Rugby game.

They call Irving, of Cardiff City, the League of Nations player. He was born in Ireland, of Scottish parents, was taken to live in England when still a youngster, and now plays for a Welsh side.

Alce Maley, formerly manager of Crystal Palace Club, has gone to Clydebank to take up the position of secretary-treasurer-manager. It sounds like a big job.

"It was Trimble, shouting for help, sure enough," said Tom Merry, his eyes fixed on the car ahead. "You're certain you spotted that, though, Blake?"

"Absolutely!" shouted Blake excitedly. "There's something wrong, chaps! Goodness knows who they are, or what their game is, but they've got Baggy! Go it, chaps!"

It seemed absolutely useless to "go it," for by now the car was already little more than a speck along the white, dusty road. But Tom Merry & Co. were not the fellows to give in, whatever the odds against success. Moreover, an idea had just occurred to Tom Merry.

"Yes, go it, chaps!" he gasped. "We'll get 'em, whoever they are!"

"Not in this lifetime!" gasped Herries, though he still pedalled furiously. "But—"

"Go it, I tell you!" said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "What about the field-path?"

"Oh!" said Blake. "You mean—"

"I mean we can cut the beggars off if we're mighty quick!" panted Tom. "Go it!"

The juniors went it now, with considerably more vim

and energy—and hope. In a flash they understood Tom's game; and when the captain of the Shell suddenly pulled up and jumped off a couple of minutes later, they dismounted likewise.

But Tom did not lose a second. The moment he was out of the saddle he leaped to a stile on the left of the road, and lifted his bicycle bodily over into a field beyond. Across the field was a narrow field-path, and in less than a minute the bikes had been swung over the stile on to it.

Then the juniors mounted again, and went tearing along the path in single file at a reckless speed. There was just a chance—though a slender one. The road higher up turned abruptly in an acute "hairpin" bend at a little bridge over a stream, where it doubled back again almost parallel with itself. And the field-path was a short cut across the intervening fields to where it joined up with the road again.

The juniors had used it more than once when cycling to Abbotsford. It was usually very muddy; but, fortunately, it was hard and dry now, and they fairly flew along it, crossing the rustic bridge over the stream, and then



They take great care of the Sunderland ground at Roker Park. At half-time on match-days the groundsmen go out and stamp down the pieces of turf which have been kicked up during the game. What about a golf notice: "Please replace the 'divots'?"

Joek Ewart, the goalkeeper of Bradford City, is football's linguist. He can speak several languages, and also play several musical instruments, and at one time had a place in an orchestra.

From the sale of season tickets the Leicester City club netted ten thousand pounds before the start of the present season.

In Spain amateur footballers start training at six o'clock in the morning in order to get through the strenuous work before the sun becomes too powerful.

Chandler, the centre-forward of Leicester City, was at one time a bookstall boy at Paddington Station, London.

One of the heaviest footballers in the game to-day is Hutton, the Blackburn Rovers full-back, who weighs nearly fifteen stone. Yet he only takes sevens in boots, and can wear a six and half at a "pinch."

on again across another field until they reached another stile leading on to the road.

Long before they had reached the stile, though, the juniors had glimpsed the car they were after, and, to their joy, it was far from the stile yet. It had to slow down at the bend, and the road was none too good. But it was going fast enough again now; the juniors could see the glint of the sun on it over the intervening hedge.

The juniors finished the last lap to the stile at break-neck speed, fairly hurling themselves over it.

"Never mind bikes!" panted Tom excitedly. "Jump in the road—they won't dare to run us down!"

"Oh crumbs!"

It needed no little nerve to do Tom's bidding; but there was nothing else to do if they were to stop the car. It was scarcely a hundred yards away now.

In a flash Tom was out in the middle of the road, and in an instant his chums had followed, spreading out across the narrow thoroughfare.

Would the driver stop? It was a question that brought

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a thrill of fear to the juniors. But it was only a temporary one, though the juniors could scarcely be blamed, for it was no pleasant feeling to see the car rushing down upon them, and to know there was a risk that the driver might not stop.

In any case, there was scarcely time to think of fear. For scarcely had they taken up their position when the speeding car swept up.

There was a sudden, angry yell, followed instantly by the swift applying of brakes. And then from inside the car came a sudden howl!

"Rescue! Help! Help, you fellows! Yarroooh! Murder! Help!"

Trimble had obviously seen them, and he was making no bones about letting them know it. He fairly shrieked for help.

It was enough for the juniors.

Ignoring the driver's angry shouts, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy tackled him in a flash. At the same moment Tom Merry tore open the door of the car and jumped in, followed by Lowther and Manners.

"Down them!" yelled Tom Merry excitedly. "St. Jim's to the rescue!"

"Yass, wathah!"

"Help!" shrieked Baggy. "Oh, help, you— Yoooop!"

Trimble roared as he crashed to the floor of the car, with the startled stranger on top of him. On top of him, in turn, jumped Tom Merry.

In a moment there was a furious scrimmage on the floor of the car. Trimble was yelling fiendishly, none too comfortable where he was beneath the scrum. The man was gasping and panting as he struggled. But he put up a very poor fight, and after a short scrimmage Trimble was released, and he tumbled thankfully out into the road.

"Now, my pippin!" panted Tom Merry, his knee on the chest of Trimble's kidnapper. "What's this little game mean?"

"I—I— Let me rise!" gasped the man. "I will explain—"

He was interrupted by a yell from Blake, in the road:

"Look out! Stop him! Quick, Tommy!"

"What?"

Lowther and Manners backed into the road, and Tom Merry scrambled up. There was no fight left in his prisoner, and Blake's tone held a note of urgency.

Then Tom saw that Blake was lying on the road, as also were Herries and Gussy, in a scrambled heap. As Tom looked, Blake scrambled up furiously, and as he did so the car began to move.

"Look out!"

There were two things for Tom Merry to do—and he had to decide swiftly.

He could either jump out and join his chums on the road, or he could be taken on with the men in the car—on his own.

Tom wisely chose the former, and just as the car leaped forward he sprang out, tumbling in the road and rolling over and over in the dust.

The next moment the car gained speed and sped away.

"Bai Joye! Aftah the wotahs, you fellows!"

"Groogh!" gasped Tom Merry. He scrambled up swiftly, rubbing his head; but as he saw the fast-disappearing car he stopped. "No good!" he groaned. "We've got Trimble, anyway. Let the rotters go!"

"But—but—"

"Hopeless to think of catching them up!" grunted Tom, rubbing his head ruefully. "Oh crumbs! I've nearly busted my napper! Blake, you ass—"

"We couldn't help it!" groaned Blake, who was also engaged in rubbing his head. "My napper's nearly busted, too. That driver merchant's as hefty as an ox. He handled me like handling a ball, and pitched me back into the road. Then he slung Herries and Gussy on top of me. And when we jumped up and went for him again, he did it again. Groooogh!"

"Yass, wathah! Oh deah!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Just look at the state of my clobber, you fellows!"

"Blow your clobber!" snorted Blake. He was feeling wrathful at having been handled so disdainfully and promptly by the burly driver of the car. "Dash your silly clobber! What about my napper?"

"Weally, Blake, I am hurt just as much as you are!" said Gussy warmly. "That fellow is weally a feahfully stwong wuffian! Howevah, we have weseted Twimble!"

"You jolly nearly made a muck of it, though," grunted Trimble, who was never noted for gratitude. "You could easily have stopped them before. Why the dickens didn't you?"

"And now you've let the awful villains go! Bah!"

"Why, you—"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"You—you ungrateful little worm!" snorted Herries. "So this is all the thanks we get for rescuing you—eh?"

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"Pitch the fat rotter in the ditch!" gasped Blake.

"Here, hold on!" Trimble howled. "I—I say, what do you fellows think about it? Fancy those brutes kidnapping me like this!"

"We'll tell you that when we've heard what's happened," said Tom, eyeing Trimble curiously. "How did you fall into their hands, Baggy? And what does it mean, anyway?"

All the juniors looked at Baggy. It was an extraordinary affair altogether, and they simply could not understand it. But as it had happened to the fatuous Baggy Trimble, they could not help feeling he had brought it on himself somehow.

Trimble hesitated.

"Thinking of a suitable whopper?" asked Lowther.



"Let's get back, chaps! We'd better report this to the Head!"

"Oh dear! I—I say, you fellows, I think you'd better not report it to the Head, you know. You—you see—"

Trimble paused. He was eager enough to tell his exciting and alarming experience. But he was not at all eager to tell it to Dr. Holmes. Baggy could not help seeing that he would scarcely figure as the hero of the adventure when the Head knew he had claimed to be Robert Digby.

"Well?" demanded Tom Merry, eyeing Trimble grimly. "What does it all mean, Baggy? Why did those men capture you and yank you off like that?"

Trimble hesitated again. But it dawned upon him that the juniors would be bound to talk about such an astonishing affair, and that when it came to Racke's ears he would "tumble" to what had happened at once. It would be much better—and safer for him—to tell the truth to Tom Merry & Co., and get them to keep it mum, or to keep his little deception out of it, at all events.

"It—it was like this, you fellows," he stammered. "Those

—those men weren't after me at all. It was—was Digby they wanted."

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared at him, thunderstruck.

"You mean to say they thought you were Digby?" demanded Tom.

"Oh dear! Yes. You—you see it was like this."

And Baggy told them what had taken place in Rylcombe Lane.

"So, you see, it wasn't my fault at all," said Baggy, almost tearfully. "It was all that cad Racke's fault. He told them plainly that I was Digby, and I thought, I—I thought—"

"You thought you'd collar a good feed and pry into affairs that don't concern you, you fat little toad!" snorted Tom Merry, in disgust. "It serves you jolly well right—or it would have done if they'd managed to get away with you!"

"Yeas, wathah! Twimble is a fearful little worm. But—but this is vewy swange indeed. Why did they want Digby, deah boys?"

It certainly was strange, coming, as it did, on top of the mystery that already surrounded that junior. It was very curious indeed that this had happened just now, when Robert Digby was so much in the limelight. The juniors' faces were grave as they recovered their bikes from beyond the stile.

"I suppose we ought to report this," said Tom Merry, looking at Jack Blake uneasily. "But—but—"



"Look out, Tommy!" yelled Blake. Tom Merry heard the call at the same moment as the car began to move. There was only one thing to do now. That was to get out of the car before it was too late. Tom took a flying leap into the road. (See Chapter 7.)

"We've already butted into Digby's affairs quite enough—according to Dig himself," grunted Blake. "But he must be warned, of course. I vote we just tell Dig and leave him to report the matter if he wants to."

"Oh dear! I say, d'you think Digby will tell the Head?" groaned Trimble in alarm.

"I don't know, and I'm dashed if I care much," said Blake, with a sniff. "You deserve a good licking for your cheek, you spoofing rotter!"

"Oh crumbs! Look here. Why tell Digby at all?" said Trimble. "No need—"

"You fat ass! We must warn him," said Tom Merry. "You'll have to take your chance, Baggy. It's your own fault, and you ought to think yourself jolly lucky to have escaped as you have. I think you're right about not telling the beaks about this, Blake. We'll leave it to Digby. Now, let's get back to St. Jim's."

"T-to St. Jim's?" stuttered Herries. "What about Abbottsford?"

"Trimble—"

"Blow Trimble!" said Herries warmly. "Let the fat idiot hoof it back on his own!"

"Oh dear! I say, you fellows—" Trimble squeaked in great alarm.

"We can't leave Trimble to tramp all the way back," said Tom, with a laugh. "It would kill him. And I, for one, don't feel like carrying him on my back step all the way to Abbottsford and back. We don't want his charming company, either."

"Oh, I say, Merry—"

"But that isn't all," said Tom, his face clouding. "I feel we ought to see Dig about this without delay. He ought to know what's happened, and the sooner the better."

"Well, that's so," said Blake, glowering at the apprehensive Baggy Trimble. "But I'm not carting this fat rotter back. Let him hoof it."

"He can ride on my back step," said the captain of the Shell good-naturedly. "We'll see old Dig, and then we'll go for a stroll until tea-time. It's rather nucked up our afternoon; but it can't be helped."

And after a little grumbling this was agreed upon. It was scarcely possible to leave the fat and flabby Baggy stranded miles from St. Jim's—though he certainly had only had himself to blame for what had happened. Moreover, all agreed that the sooner Digby knew of the attempt that had been made against him by the unknown men the better. So Tom Merry & Co. turned their machines towards St. Jim's, and started back, Baggy Trimble standing on Tom Merry's back step. But though the things Blake and the others said to Trimble were enough to curl that fat and fatuous youth's hair, they took their share of the burden, taking it in turns to give Tom Merry a rest.

CHAPTER 8.

Digby Lets Himself Go!

DIGBY returned to St. Jim's feeling considerably better for his stroll. He was still disappointed at not seeing his father and learning what the mysterious trouble was. But he had been doing a great deal of thinking, and the more he reflected the more he saw that he had been a silly, sulky idiot to treat his chums as he had done. He could not help admitting to himself that had he only been more reasonable, and stopped to reflect, he would have seen that it was very unlikely the story could have come from Blake or the others. He could not understand how Trimble or Racke & Co. could have got to know what had passed in the study, but after all, it was really amazing, at times, how Trimble, at all events, did get to know about things.

"It was Trimble, of course!" groaned Digby to himself. "The fat cad's always nosing about and listening at keyholes. Oh, what a fool I've been! Just when I feel fairly pipped and in need of pals, too! Only—only it was rotten to know every fellow was gassing about me and my affairs. If it had been any other time I should have laughed at it, of course."

Yet Digby knew it was his own silly pride at the bottom of the squabble with his chums. As he entered the gates of St. Jim's his mind was quite made up. He would chuck it—try to make it up with his chums again, if they would let him. But would they? Was it worth risking being snubbed? Again Digby's pride asserted itself, and by the time he reached the School House Digby wasn't quite sure what he intended to do.

As he went indoors he met Skimpole, and the learned genius of the Shell stopped him.

"My dear Digby," he said, blinking seriously at the junior, "I am exceedingly glad you have returned at last. I and several other fellows have searched far and near for you."

"Eh?" Digby jumped in sudden alarm. He grasped Skimpole's arm tightly. "What do you mean, Skimmy?"

"Mr. Railton sent us to search for you, my dear fellow," said Skimpole. "I very much fear that your father is exceedingly angry with you for having—"

"My—my pater?" gasped Digby, paling. "You don't mean to say my father came, after all?"

"Most decidedly, my dear Digby! I myself saw him, and he appeared to be very cross indeed. Mr. Railton sent myself and Tompkins and several other juniors to search for you," said Skimpole, eyeing him severely. "I trust that—"

"Is he here now?" snapped Digby, shaking Skimpole impatiently.

"Certainly not, Digby! He has been gone some time, my dear fellow. Trimble also—"

Digby did not stay to hear more from Skimpole. He hurried along to Mr. Railton's study and rapped on the door. The junior was dismayed. It was scarcely his fault, and yet—

"Come in!"

Mr. Railton was in, and he eyed the junior very severely as he entered the room.

"Your father has been, Digby," he said sternly. "Did you not see Blake before you went out?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Digby, not comprehending. "I—I saw him going out of gates."

"But did he not speak to you—tell you that your father had sent a phone message, my boy?"

Digby started.

"No, sir!" he replied, quite startled. "He did not speak to me at all."

"Oh!" said the Housemaster. "That alters matters considerably. I feared that you had deliberately gone out of gates to avoid your father, and that, I fear, is also his impression."

"To—to avoid him?" stammered Digby, his face flushing. "I—I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing, sir. I was only too anxious to see him. I was longing to see him. If—if Blake—"

"Blake has obviously completely forgotten the matter," said Mr. Railton. "It is very careless and inconsiderate of him."

"You—you are sure that Blake answered the pater, sir?" gasped Digby, his eyes gleaming.

"That is certainly the case," exclaimed Mr. Railton sharply. He did not dream that there was a fellow capable of such rascality as Rache had been guilty of at St. Jim's—or, rather, such a possibility never even occurred to him. "Your father rang up and Blake answered the telephone, and promised he would find you and give the message to you. I intend to speak to Blake on the matter, as he should have reported the call to me in the Head's absence."

"Oh!" panted Digby.

So that was it!

Digby suddenly felt a feeling of seething rage.

Blake could not possibly have forgotten the message. Digby saw it all now. It was a rotten, dirty trick; out of mean spite Blake had taken the message, never intending to pass it on to him.

Digby could scarcely believe it. Knowing Blake as he did, he had never dreamed him capable of such meanness. Yet there it was. Possibly Blake, in his anger with his former chum, had been tempted to play the trick, and had done it in sheer temper. Possibly he was sorry he had done it now. But he had done it.

Digby breathed hard.

"Your father was very angry—exceedingly angry," proceeded Mr. Railton, watching the boy's face closely. "It seems that, on the phone, Blake foolishly gave your father the impression that you did not wish to see him—that you had purposely gone out to avoid him."

"Blake did?" gasped Digby incredulously.

"Undoubtedly! Your father was very angry when he arrived. He was still more angry when he discovered that you actually had disobeyed him and gone out of doors. I cannot understand you acting in such a manner, Digby."

"I did not leave the school until after I had spoken to you last, sir," said Digby in a steady voice. "Blake did not tell me. I imagined my father was not coming, as he said he would not be coming if he did not send word before two. As I've told you, sir, I was longing to see him. You know how I was troubling you about it?"

"That is so," said Mr. Railton, his face clearing. "However, your father has gone now, and I am sorry, for your sake, that the mistake has happened. Blake has been very inconsiderate and very careless."

He nodded as if the interview was ended, and turned to a book he was reading. Digby left the study slowly, rage and amazement mingling in his breast. He went along to Study No. 6 and began to pace the room like a caged tiger. His face was dark and his eyes gleaming. All his good intentions were gone now; he never even thought of his resolve to make it up, if he could, with his old chums. Digby was light-hearted and good-tempered as a rule, but he could be very hasty and stubborn indeed when he liked.

He was in that sort of mood now. He did not attempt to reflect on the matter at all; his mind seethed with rage, and all he could think of was the fact that Blake had let him down—let him down out of sheer spite.

"Oh, the cad!" he repeated over and over again.

There was the tramp of feet in the passage at last that stopped outside the study door. Digby hardly expected his study-mates back so soon, but he knew from their voices it was the returning cyclists.

The door opened, and Blake, followed by D'Arcy, Herries, and the Terrible Three, entered the study. Blake looked rather hesitatingly at Digby.

"Hallo, there you are, Dig!" said Tom Merry. "I say, we've got a jolly funny yarn to tell you."

"I'm not in the mood for funny yarns," said Digby savagely, giving Blake a cold stare. "I think I know the yarn you mean. Blake thinks it very funny, I've no doubt. I didn't wish to speak to Blake again, but I'm

going to. I just want him to know that I think he's the meanest cad I've ever met!"

"Bai Jove! Dig, deah boy, weally——"

"You shut up, D'Arcy! This is between Blake and me," said Digby thickly, glowering at the astonished Jack Blake, "though I've no doubt the rest of you think it a funny joke to be insolent to a chap's father and to play a rotten trick on both!"

"What the thump——"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake stared, as did the rest of the juniors.

"What on earth are you gassing about?" said Blake, with a show of anger. "I warn you that you're going a bit too far, Digby. Why am I a mean cad?"

"What else are you?" shouted Digby. "You may say you forgot, but that won't wash with me! You could easily have told me about the message before you went out. You knew I was waiting to hear from the pater—you know what it meant to me; but you went out without speaking to anybody about it, like the rotten cad you are!"

"That's enough, Dig, you——"

"I don't care! I'm going to thundering well tell you what I think of you!" snapped Digby, his voice trembling. "You may think it a very funny yarn—as Tom Merry called it; but I think it was a rotten dirty trick—and as dirty a trick, too, to tell my pater I didn't want to see him, leading him to suppose I went out purposely to avoid him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Digby," said Blake, taking a step towards his old chum, "I don't want to quarrel any further with you, but I warn you that this silly rot is going too far. If you call me any more——"

"Hold on!"

It was Tom Merry, and he jumped between the two.

"Hold on!" went on Tom sharply. "There's something wrong here—something that wants clearing up before you start squabbling. Digby, you ass, keep cool for goodness' sake, and let's have this out! I don't know what on earth you're gassing about, but I can see you're on the wrong track. I said I've got a queer yarn to tell you, and if you'll listen a moment——"

"I'm listening," said Digby, with a sneer. "If Blake——"

"Never mind Blake now," said Tom quietly. "This matter concerns you more than Blake or anyone else. It's something you ought to know."

And with that Tom plunged into the story of the afternoon's adventures. Digby listened, his face showing his utter amazement. As Tom Merry finished, however, he gave a harsh laugh. It was only too plain he was too full of his own trouble to take a serious interest in it.

"Very funny," he said. "One of Trimble's wonderful yarns, of course."

"Don't be an idiot!" said Tom impatiently. "We saw the fat ass in the car. We chipped in and rescued him, and brought him back to St. Jim's. I don't pretend to know what it means. Those rascals were obviously after you, Dig. We think you ought to know—to be on the look out for danger. We haven't told the Head or anyone. We leave that to you, as it seems to be your affair. You can please yourself whether you report it or not. But if you'll take my advice you'll report it at once, or let us do so."

Digby said nothing for a minute. The story of the kidnapping of Trimble—if it really was that—was too amazing. He simply could not believe it. So far as he was aware there was no earthly reason why anyone should want to capture him. And while he did not doubt Tom Merry, it seemed to him altogether too fantastic. But at the moment it could wait, in any case. He was far too full of the other matter to worry about it, anyway.

"It's a wonderful yarn," he said bitterly. "And at any other time I should have been interested. But I'm not now. It's not going to stop me having it out with Blake, anyway. I don't know if he's told you what he did, and I don't care; but I'm going to have a reckoning with the sneaking cad!"

"Look here, Dig——"

Blake stepped forward again, his eyes blazing. But Tom Merry interposed swiftly.

"Hold on!" he said. "Let Dig go on, Blake. He's got a bee in his bonnet, and the sooner he lets it buzz out the better. What has Blake done?"

"He knows if you don't," said Digby thickly. "I told you I was waiting in this afternoon for a message from the pater, Merry."

"That's so," said Tom.

"Everybody seems to have known it," said Digby bitterly. "The pater said that if I didn't hear from him before two I should know he wasn't coming. Well, I waited until well after two. No message reached me, so I gave it up and went out for a stroll."

"Go on!"

"I came back," said Digby through his teeth, "to find my pater had been and gone. He told Railton that he had

phoned through just after noon, that he had spoken to a fellow, and that the fellow had promised to tell me the message. That fellow was Blake!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Me?" ejaculated Blake.

"You're going to bluff it out, then?" said Digby, eyeing Blake's astonished face in disgust.

"What the thump are you talking about?" shouted Blake angrily. "I know nothing about any dashed message! I never spoke to your pater on the phone!"

"My pater isn't in the habit of telling lies," said Digby significantly. "The fellow who answered him was you, Blake. You not only promised him to tell me and failed

Blake if it had been anyone else phoning but the pater, knowing Blake is up against me. That's the chap who called himself my friend!"

Blake glared at him, wrath and amazement in his face.

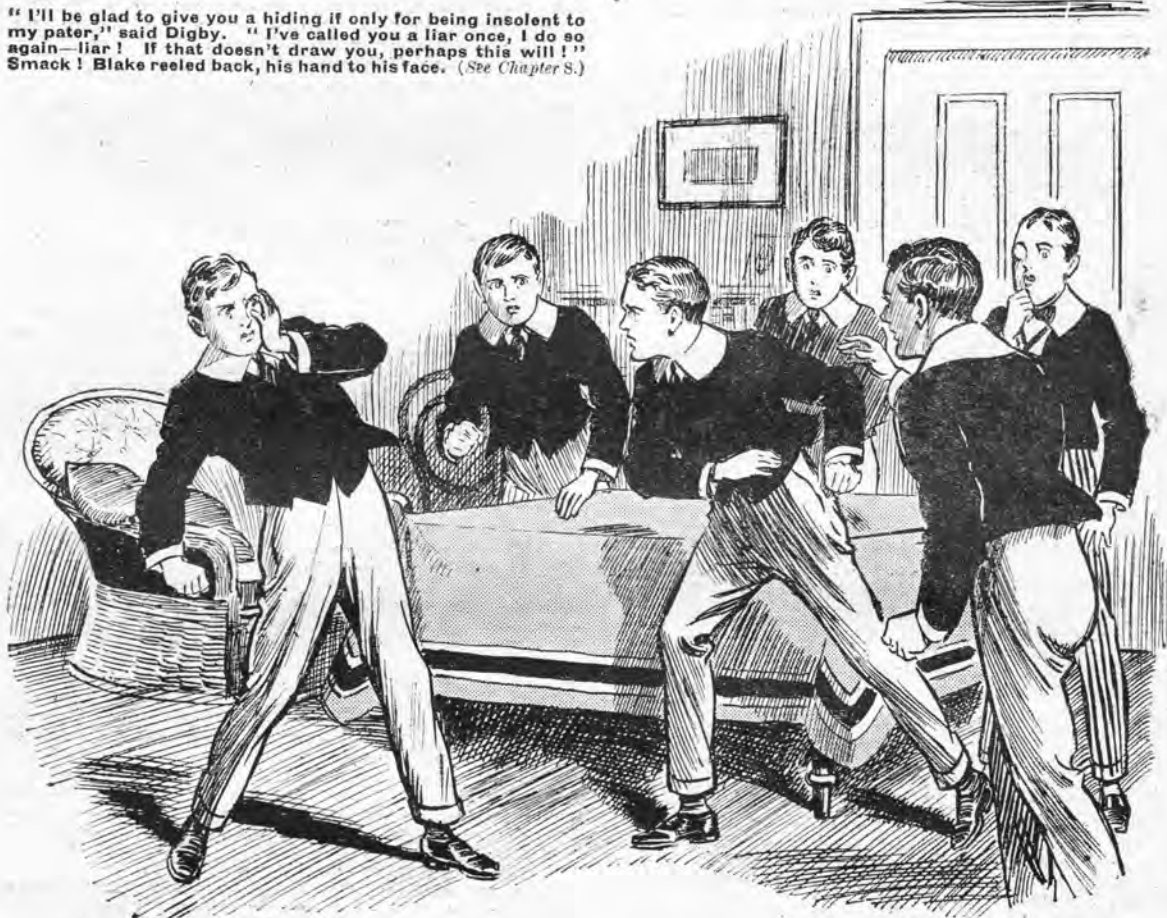
"You—you silly owl!" he spluttered at last. "You—you born idiot! I tell you I know nothing about it!"

"Don't you?"

"No, I jolly well don't!" roared Blake, stung to fury by the scorn in Digby's face and voice. "And if you dare to say I do I'll punch your dashed nose, you cheeky cad!"

"I do dare," said Digby deliberately and scornfully. "You're trying to back out now, knowing any decent fellow would scorn to do what you've done. You took that mes-

"I'll be glad to give you a hiding if only for being insolent to my pater," said Digby. "I've called you a liar once, I do so again—liar! If that doesn't draw you, perhaps this will!" Smack! Blake reeled back, his hand to his face. (See Chapter 8.)



to keep that promise, but you were cheeky on the phone, and you led my father to suppose that I didn't wish to see him, and that I was going out to avoid him."

"Wha-at?"

"If that," said Digby, his eyes blazing, "isn't the act of a dirty, mean-spirited cad, then tell me what is?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"If you fellows want proof of this," said Digby, turning his back on Blake and speaking to the others, "Railton will give it to you. Railton thinks you have been careless and have forgotten, Blake. But I don't. I know it was done purposely, in rotten spite and malice!"

"Digby!" gasped Blake, far too astonished to feel angry for the moment.

"It's all bunkum!" said Herries stoutly, glaring at Digby. "Why, we should have known it if Blake had taken the message. Blake scarcely left us since dinner."

"Scarcely!" echoed Digby, with a harsh laugh. "But he left you long enough to answer that phone message. You tried to play me a dirty trick, you cad, and you've succeeded. My father went away raging. He won't forgive me in a hurry."

"But—but hang it all!" gasped Tom Merry. "It must be all rot, Digby! We know absolutely nothing about this, and I'm certain Blake doesn't. Blake wouldn't do a thing like that, you silly duffer!"

"He did it!" gritted Digby. "Either he or the pater is lying. I prefer to believe the pater. I'd believe it was

sage. I'm not likely to suspect my pater of saying it was you if it wasn't, or making a mistake, either. Go on, punch my nose, you cad! I'll be glad to give you a hiding, if only for being insolent to my pater! I've already as good as called you a liar, and I do so again—a rotten, sneaking liar! And if that doesn't draw you, then perhaps this will!" Slap!

Blake reeled back, his hand to his face. Then his control left him, and he fairly flew at Digby.

CHAPTER 9.

Ructions in the Co.!

"HOLD ON!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Tom Merry leaped forward and grabbed at Digby. Arthur Augustus and Herries jumped forward and held back Blake, but not before the two had exchanged furious blows.

"That's enough, you silly idiots!" shouted the captain of the Shell. "You can't scrap here, anyway. Digby, you're a born fool to go on like this, without giving Blake a chance to defend himself! That's enough, I tell you!"

Digby would have wrenched himself free, but Lowther and Manners came to Tom's aid. None of them had expected such a development as this, and they were alarmed and dismayed.

"Let me go!" panted Digby. "I'll teach the cad to be cheeky to my pater, and play tricks like this! Let go!"

"Let him come on!" shouted Blake. "I've stood enough from him—more than I intend to stand again! I've been patient because the stubborn, sulky rotter was my pal, and because he was upset. But—but this has done it! Let the cad come on, and I'll give him the licking he's begging and praying for!"

"Not here!" said Tom Merry, with a frowning brow. "I suppose you'll have to fight after this, but you won't fight here."

"Won't we, you cheeky Shell rotter?" shouted Digby. "You get out, Merry! Let go and get out of my study!"

"Your study?" said Blake through his teeth. "It's your who's going out of this study! We've finished with you, and you go out to-day neck and crop, and your dashed things with you! Let him come on! We'll finish this now!"

"Don't talk rot!" said Tom Merry sharply. "What's the good of looking for trouble by fighting in school? If you must fight, you can make any arrangements you like, and we'll come and see fair play."

"Right! That's good enough for me!" said Blake. "I'll meet that cad anywhere he likes and as soon as he likes! I'll teach him to make unfounded charges against me!"

"Well, Digby?" said Tom.

"All—all right!" panted Digby, controlling himself with an effort. "I'll meet him; the sooner the better. I'll meet him at once, and we'll have it out!"

"What about the boathouse, then?" said Tom. "The meadow behind the boathouse is quiet enough. But as for having the scrap right away, that's scarcely fair to Blake. He's had a long bike spin, and he's had to take a turn at carting Trimble part of the way. If you want to get it over soon, though, why not after tea?"

"Any time will suit me," said Blake; and Digby nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"But—but—" Tom Merry hesitated. He hated the thought of the two chums fighting, and he wished from the bottom of his heart that he could stop it. "Look here, you fellows," he went on quietly, "can't you settle it some other way? You must be mistaken, Dig; and I'm sure that if you'll let the matter rest over until you've cooled down and until the rotten affair's been gone into—"

"It's not going to rest!" said Digby. "The affair's been gone into by Railton, and he's satisfied and so am I. Blake isn't going to crawl out—"

"Who wants to crawl out?" shouted Blake furiously, seeming about to fling himself again at Digby. "You lying cad! You struck me, and you're going to pay for it! I'm going to give you the licking of your life—or try to!"

"Right! Steady!" said Tom Merry. "We'll settle it at that, then. After tea behind the boathouse. Herries can second you, Blake, and if Digby likes I'll second him!"

And so it was settled. Digby nodded his agreement; and as Lowther and Manners released him he gave Blake one savage look and marched out of the study.

"Good job he's gone!" said Herries angrily. "I'm fed-up with the sulking rotter! He's finished in this study after this!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said nothing. His aristocratic face was clouded and full of concern. Thought of the coming fight filled him with distress and deep dismay. It seemed impossible that the two old chums should be going to fight together as bitter enemies.

"Blake, old chap," he exclaimed in a low voice, "don't go on with this; drop it, dear boy. You simply can't fight with old Dig."

"Old Dig?" echoed Blake, staring at Arthur Augustus. "You call him old Dig after this, Gussy! Do you mean to say you believe that rot he was talking—that rotten charge against me?"

"Bai Jove, no!" said Arthur Augustus hurriedly. "But—but Wailton seems to think so, too; and it is obvious there is some dreadful mistake somewhere. I weally think you ought to go and see Wailton."

"I think so, too," said Tom Merry quietly. "And I hope to goodness you'll be able to clear the rotten business up so that this silly fight won't come off!"

Blake set his face hard.

"It's going to come off, whether it's cleared up or not!" he snapped, his eyes glittering. "Digby knows me—or should do. He knows I'm incapable of a mean action like that, and he knows I wouldn't dream of speaking insolently to his pater. He should take my word!"

"I'm thumped if I think he actually believes you did it at all!" said Herries warmly. "He's out for trouble, and he's in the mood to make himself believe anything."

"Well, he is in a queer sort of mood, right enough," said Tom Merry. "I simply can't make the ass out at all! But I should go and see Railton now, Blake."

"I'm hanged if I don't!" said Blake. "You fellows wait here for me."

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And without further ado Jack Blake hurried out of the study, looking determined.

He found Mr. Railton in his study, and the Housemaster eyed him very sharply.

"You are just the boy I wished to see, Blake," he said, before Blake could speak. "I wish to know if you were the boy who answered Sir Robert Digby on the phone this afternoon?"

"No, sir. I was just coming to speak to you about that," said Blake hotly. "Digby has charged me with being insolent to his father, and with purposely keeping back the message Sir Robert was supposed to have given me. It's absolutely untrue, sir! I know nothing whatever about it. I have not been near the Head's study to-day, and I certainly haven't been on the phone at all."

"You give me your word of honour that what you say is true, Blake?" said Mr. Railton, eyeing him steadily.

"I do, sir. I did not speak to Sir Robert. The whole thing is utterly false! If my name was given at all, it was given by someone else—someone who wished to cause trouble between Digby and myself!" ended Blake bitterly.

Mr. Railton started. Such a possibility had never even occurred to him.

"I will take your word, Blake," he said quietly. "But it is quite certain that someone did answer Sir Robert, and that he gave your name. I can scarcely credit that any boy at St. Jim's would descend to such mean and cowardly trickery. I can only think that Sir Robert was mistaken in the name given to him."

"If the fellow was insolent to Sir Robert, then he wasn't likely to give his own name," said Blake. "And he certainly wouldn't if he never intended to tell Digby, sir."

"That is quite so, Blake," said Mr. Railton, frowning. "It is very strange indeed! I shall make the strictest inquiries, and if the culprit becomes known to me I shall ask the headmaster to deal with him. Now you have put it like that I can see that had you intended to be impudent to Digby's father, and to play a mean trick on Digby himself, you would scarcely have been foolish enough to give your own name. I am quite satisfied that you are not guilty, Blake. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

Blake left the study and hurried back to his chums. In a few moments he had explained what had passed.

"Then it's true enough," breathed Herries. "Some cad must have given your name, Blake."

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry, his brow dark. "It was a rotten trick—worse than actually letting Digby down, I think. What do you mean to do, Blake?"

"Thrash Digby!" snapped Blake.

"I didn't mean that," said Tom, smiling grimly. "But it's up to somebody to discover who did it."

"Racke or one of his pals, for a pension," said Herries.

"Like one of their tricks," agreed Tom Merry. "But it has to be proved, and I fancy it will take some proving. We can't act on guesses."

"I'm not going to trouble about it," said Blake doggedly. "If you fellows are satisfied I didn't do it, then that's good enough for me, and Digby can go hang! But I tell you what I am going to do—I'm going to ram Digby's accusation down his throat!"

"Blake, dear boy—"

"You dry up, Gussy!" said Blake. "If you're feeling so jolly sympathetic with Digby, why don't you go after him?"

"Oh, bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

"Cheese it, both of you!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Hang it all, isn't there trouble enough in the family? Keep your tempers better, you fellows! Anyway, I'm off to No. 10 for tea, and I think you Fourth chaps had better come along and join us in case you start squabbling."

"Well, we'll do that," said Blake. "Lead on!"

And Tom Merry led the way to Study No. 10, on the Shell passage, for tea. But it was not a very cheery tea for the chums that afternoon—far from it. All were more or less upset at the unfortunate turn of events, and though Blake tried to pretend that he was looking forward to smashing Digby, it was a dismal failure. He knew he had no desire for the fight at all, and now he was cooling down the prospect became more and more unpleasant.

But it had to be done; it was too late to draw out now, unless Digby would draw out, which certainly was not likely.

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy's Way!

"WOTTEN, bai Jove! Simply too feahfully wotten for words!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mumbled the words to himself. Tea was over in Study No. 10, and Arthur Augustus had just left his chums in the study talking together gloomily. Of all the chums Arthur Augustus was

perhaps, the most upset over the whole wretched affair, and over tea he had been thinking it out. And he had come to the definite conclusion that, as a fellow with an unusual amount of tact and judgment, not to mention brains, it was up to him to put matters right—to heal the split in the famous Co.

At all events, Arthur Augustus was resolutely determined that the fight should not take place.

Blake was just as resolutely determined that it should.

After tea, Arthur Augustus had pleaded with him, and had argued with him, and the Terrible Three had done their best to back up the good-hearted swell of the Fourth.

But it was of no avail. Indeed, Blake realised better than they did that it was useless to think of Digby himself allowing the proposed fight to be dropped. And not until the argument had become heated, and Blake had threatened to punch his aristocratic nose, did Arthur Augustus give it up.

He had left the study, and now he was wondering how he was going to carry out his resolve to stop the fight; the fight was to take place within a few minutes.

Arthur Augustus, at first, had a wild idea of visiting Racke & Co. to investigate matters there. He felt certain in his own mind that they, if anybody, knew something about it. But he could not forget what had happened to him when he had visited Racke & Co. before, and on reflection he decided not to risk it.

"Bai Jove! I have a vewy good mind to twy to talk Dig wound," he murmured, shaking his head. "There is yet time to save the situation. Yaas, wathah! Possibly he will now be in the mood to listen to weason."

So Arthur Augustus started to hunt for Digby. Talbot came along the passage, and Arthur Augustus asked him if he had seen the junior he wanted.

"He's strolling under the elms," said Talbot, eyeing Gussy curiously. "I say, I am sorry you fellows have fallen out. Anything I can do, old chap?"

"I am afwaid you cannot, deah boy, thank you vewy much," said Arthur Augustus. "But pway excuse me, as I weally must see Digby at once."

And Arthur Augustus hurried on. Racke & Co. were standing outside their study door, and Racke grinned gleefully as he saw Arthur Augustus coming along, his face full of distress and worry. Racke had already heard of the row in Study No. 6, and the success of his rascally scheme filled him with joy. It made him forget caution.

"Hallo, here's D'Arcy!" he remarked as Arthur Augustus came up. "Coming to visit us again, D'Arcy?"

"I'm not comin' to visit you again, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus, giving him a very suspicious glance. "Pway allow me to pass."

"Certainly, old top!" grinned Racke. "I hear Digby's leaving your den, what? I believe he's asked Tompkins and Mulvaney if he can dig in with them."

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

"Fancy good little Georgies like Blake's lot quarrelling," remarked Racke, without moving himself out of Gussy's path. "What a shocking example to us bad boys! I shouldn't be surprised if they aren't scrapping before long. I wonder why— Yooooop!"

The humorous Racke yelped as Arthur Augustus tapped



The driver swung the door of the saloon car open. As he did so the stranger's arms swept round Digby, lifting him from his feet. "Let go!" panted the junior, struggling desperately. "Help! Rescue, St. Jim's! Help!" (See Chapter 11.)

him smartly on his long nose. Racke staggered back, and the back of his head cracked against the doorpost of his study, eliciting another yelp from the cad of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus walked on.

"If you wequiah satisfaction for that blow, Wacke," he called over his shoulder, "you may follow me, and I will see that you get it."

"Grooogh!"

Apparently Racke did not require satisfaction just then. He hugged his nose—a very ill-used nose of late—and glared after the swell of the Fourth. But he did not follow. Arthur Augustus left the House, and he soon ran Digby down. He was pacing the grass under the old elms, his face white and still bitter and angry.

"Dig, deah boy—" said Arthur Augustus gently.

Digby turned his back on him.

"Clear off!" he snapped. "I've finished with you and the rest, D'Arcy—at least, I have when I've settled with Blake! I don't want to have anything to do with you! You're backing Blake up—"

"Dig, old fellow, pway listen to me!" said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I am not backin' Blake up any more than I am backin' you up. But, none the less, deah boy, I feah that you are doin' Blake an injustice—"

"Shut up! That's enough!"

"But Blake is entitled to faih play, Dig," said Arthur Augustus. "I do not believe Blake has done what you claim at all. I—"

"Will you clear off and leave me alone?" snapped Digby savagely.

"Weally, Dig, this is not like you at all," said Arthur Augustus, determined to stick to his guns. "Hasn't it occurred to you that some fearful wotnah may have given Blake's name on the telephone purposely to cause trouble between us all?"

Digby started. It was very clear that, as in Mr. Railton's case, such a possibility had not occurred to him—simple as such a possibility was.

"Oh! You—you mean—"

"Mr. Wailton has also wealised that possibility," said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "He has accepted Blake's word of honah, and—"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted. At that moment Tom Merry, with Lowther and Manners, appeared under the

archway from the quad, and Tom Merry shouted and held up his hand.

"Buck up, Digby! Coming now!"

Digby hesitated a brief second, and then he turned and ran to join the Terrible Three, leaving Arthur Augustus staring after him in dismay.

"Oh deah!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "The wottah weally might have listened until I had finished. I am afraid it is all up now."

Arthur Augustus realised that his chance had gone. It was unlikely that Digby would even listen to him while the Terrible Three were there. In any case, it had already dawned in upon Arthur Augustus that Digby would never back out now unless Blake made the first step in that direction. It would give the appearance of funkling the scrap, and neither would risk that.

It seemed a hopeless position. But Arthur Augustus was made of stern stuff, and he was not done with yet. Far from it. Desperate ills required desperate remedies, and Arthur Augustus had one in reserve for the occasion.

He acted upon it now.

Trimble of the Fourth was rolling across from the tuck-shop at the moment, and Arthur Augustus beckoned to him. "What's the matter?" granted Trimble as he rolled up.

"Would you care to earn a shilling, Twimble?" asked the swell of the Fourth.

"All depends," said Trimble cautiously.

"It is a vewy simple mattah," said Gussy. "I wish you to wun indoors and tell Blake that I wish him to come at once to Taggles' woodshed on vewy urgent business. You urdabstand?"

"Yes," said Trimble.

D'Arcy handed over half-a-crown into Trimble's fat palm. Trimble grinned and rolled away. Arthur Augustus, hoping that Trimble would not miss Blake, hurried away to the shed. The door was open, and Arthur Augustus opened it a bit wider. Then he slipped round the shed corner between the shed and the wall.

He had scarcely been there a minute when Blake and Herries, looking very puzzled, came running up. They evidently suspected nothing, and were merely wondering why Gussy wanted them there. Though, as a matter of fact, they had already come to the conclusion that it was something secret and urgent with the Digby affair and the forthcoming fight.

They hurried up, and, after a glance round, entered the shed. Blake went first, and Herries had scarcely reached

the threshold when Arthur Augustus jumped from hiding, gave him a vigorous push in the back, and sent him staggering forward.

Herries stumbled heavily against Blake, and, not expecting a footer charge like that, Blake sprawled forward on hands and knees, and Herries fell over him.

As they rolled on the floor, yelling in surprise, Arthur Augustus quickly slammed the door shut. In a flash he had grabbed the wooden peg which hung from a nail rammed in the post, and the next instant the door was securely pegged and fastened.

"You fat rotter!" shrieked Blake, banging on the door. "Let us out, Trimble, you fat cad! I'll smash you for this!"

"But we left Trimble indoors!" shouted Herries furiously. "He's tricked us, of course. But it looks to me like Digby, the cad!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Thump, thump, thump!

Both Herries and Blake made a terrific onslaught on the rickety door. Arthur Augustus frowned. His chums evidently blamed Trimble and Digby for their predicament. That was not playing the game, and would never do for Gussy.

"Just a minute, deah boys!" he called.

"Great Scott!" The hammering on the door ceased.

"That you, Gussy?"

"Yaas."

"Let us out for goodness' sake, you born idiot!" shrieked Blake. "What's this game? Oh, won't I paste that fat worm for this!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake, Twimble is not to be blamed in this mattah. I alone take full responsibility. If you wish to be let out, Blake, pway listen to me!" said Gussy calmly. "I have ewevy weason to believe I know who played that wotten trick on Digby and you, and I believe that, given a little time, I shall be able to wun the guilty party to earth, and so be able to pwevent the wretched fight takin' place. That is my sole weason for which I wegwet was most necessary. If you will give me your word that you will not fight with Digby this evenin' I will allow you to come out. Othahwise, I shall be wulcutantly obliged to keep you a pwisonah here until bed-time. Well, what is your ansawah, deah boy?"

"I'll see you hanged first!" roared Blake. "Open this door!"

"I shall not open this door until I have your word, Blake. I meahly wequiah this evening. If I have failed

to wun Wacke—I mean, the guilty party to earth to-night, you are at liberty to sewap with Digby if you still desiah to. Though I weally do hope that by that time bettah counsels will have pwevailed."

"Rats!" Blake fairly spluttered with rage.

"Vewy well, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "I wegwet that I will have to leave you now, as I wish to continue my investigations."

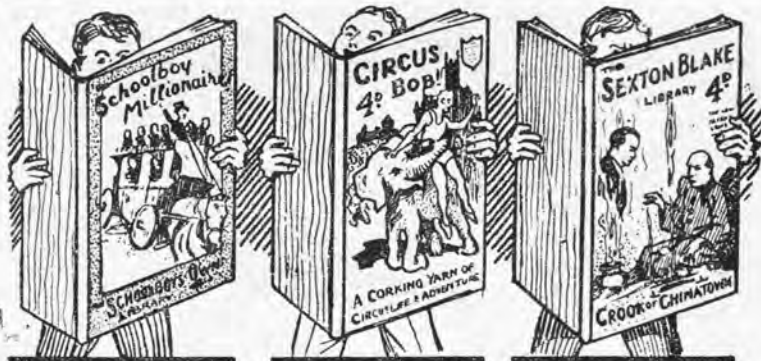
With that Arthur Augustus marched away. He had succeeded in carrying out his resolve, and he felt satisfied for the time being. It was very clear, however, from the remarks which came from the woodshed that there was a painful reckoning ahead for the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 11.

Kidnapped!

"YOU ready, Dig?"
"Yes, I'm ready!"
"Come along and let's get it over, then!" said Tom Merry shortly.

The juniors walked out of gates and made for the river. It was not a long walk—three or four minutes at most. The juniors walked along the lane for a hundred yards, and then they turned off down another much narrower lane leading directly to the towing-path. As they turned the corner they saw Skimpole of the Shell walking along, his nose and spectacles buried in a huge volume. A man who had been sitting on a fence a little higher up was just about to step out to speak to Skimpole when he sighted the four—



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juniors, and he slipped back into the shelter of the hedge again.

The juniors did not see him, for the hedge hid the fence as they approached. But it was obvious from the man's curious action that he had seen them. He watched them turn down the lane, a strange expression on his face. He was a tall man, with a short, dark moustache and keen eyes. Had Tom Merry only seen him he would have recognised him instantly.

But none of the four juniors saw him. Skimpole did not see him, either, until he spoke to Skimpole, stepping out into the lane now.

"One moment, my boy!"

Skimpole jumped and looked up, peering through his large spectacles at the man.

"G-good-evening, sir!" he said. "Did you speak to me?"

"Yes," said the man, smiling slightly. "I wonder if you would be so good as to tell me who that boy is—the one on the right, wearing a blazer. I fancy I have seen him before, though I cannot place him at the moment. I think I know him."

"Ah! Most certainly," said the obliging Skimpole, blinking at the stranger. "His name is Digby—Robert Digby, and he is in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's."

The man gave a start.

"I thought I could not be mistaken," he muttered. "And yet—are you quite sure, my boy?" he went on swiftly.

"Most certainly!" said Skimpole, blinking curiously at his questioner. "I have known Digby for a long time. If you wish to speak to him I will—"

"No, no; please do not trouble. I may see him later, for I happen to know his father—Sir Robert Digby. He is certainly the image of him; I saw the likeness at once. Yet, is there not another boy at St. Jim's, named Robert Digby—a short, fat boy, with small eyes and dark hair; rather an untidy fellow?"

"Extraordinary!" murmured Skimpole, staring at the stranger. "No, indeed. You are quite mistaken, my dear sir. The boy you mention is named Trimble—Bagley Trimble."

"Ah, I think I met him this afternoon! It is very strange, for that boy gave his name to me as Digby."

"I am afraid that Trimble is exceedingly untruthful," said Skimpole, shaking his head. "He is also extremely greedy, and would doubtless say anything to suit his purpose. It was very wrong of him to deceive you, my dear sir. However—"

"Then this Digby—the boy we have just seen—is the only boy of that name at St. Jim's? You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite—yes, indeed! If you really wish to speak to him—"

"Please do not bother, and thank you very much, my boy!"

And the stranger walked on. His eyes were gleaming strangely now. Skimpole was not the only St. Jim's fellow he had spoken to regarding Digby during the last hour, and he seemed quite satisfied with his latest chat.

"The—young scamp!" he muttered to himself. "I knew there was something wrong. I was careless; but no matter! I'm on the right track this time."

He looked round and saw that the innocent and obliging Skimpole was deep in his learned studies again, and as he noted it the man slipped back to his fence again. There he lit a cigarette and waited.

Meanwhile, Digby and the Terrible Three had reached their destination, and were also waiting—for Blake to turn up. Digby was sullen and silent, scarcely saying a word to his second, or to Lowther and Manners. He paced up and down on the grass in the shadow of the boathouse as if eager to get the business over.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Hang it all!" he said at last. "Blake's had plenty of time to get here by now. What's he thinking of?"

"I shan't wait much longer!" said Digby angrily. "I want to write a letter, for one thing, and I'm not waiting another minute."

"Well, I'm not anxious to wait longer myself," grunted Tom Merry. "I'm blessed if I can understand this!"

It certainly was surprising—to the Terrible Three and Digby. Blake wasn't the sort of fellow to funk a scrap, and he wasn't the sort to let them down like this. Tom looked at his watch anxiously during the next few seconds. Digby suddenly snapped his own watch shut.

"I'm off!" he said shortly. "You can tell Blake I'll see him again, and I'll give him a bit extra for playing another dirty trick!"

"Hold on!"

But Digby walked away rapidly. He was inwardly fuming at Blake's lateness; indeed, he did not believe Blake intended to turn up. It looked to Digby as if Blake was simply making a fool of him—treating him with contempt.

"Oh, the cad!" he gritted. "This is another count I've

got against him. I know he isn't funkng—it's just check!"

Digby reached the lane, and as he did so a man came out into his path from the hedge. Digby stopped and eyed him questioningly.

"What—?"

"Just one moment, my boy. I think your name is Digby, is it not?"

Digby stared. He was not in the mood to be polite to anyone, and he did not feel ready to be polite to this stranger. Not for one moment did the boy suspect danger. "Yes, my name is Digby!" he snapped. "Why?"

The man took out his handkerchief with rather a flourish. To a keener chap than Digby it might have been taken for a signal. He wiped his forehead with it and replaced it.

"I wish to have a word in private with you, Master Digby," he said. "I—Ah!"

A closed car had hummed along the lane. It came to a standstill. The driver jumped down. Digby stared, and then something seemed to warn him of danger. In a flash he remembered the story of Trimble's adventure that afternoon—a story he had derided and scarcely thought about since. He thought about it now, however, swiftly.

"Look—look here!" he gasped. "What's this game?"

At a sign from the man the driver of the car swung the door of the car open. As he did so the stranger's arm swept round Digby, lifting him from his feet.

"Let go!" panted Digby, struggling furiously and desperately. "You scoundrels! Let go! What—?"

"Do not struggle, boy," said the man calmly. "No harm shall come to you. But it is necessary that you accompany us. We are friends, and mean you no harm! Quiet!"

The man ended in alarm as Digby suddenly gave a wild yell for help:

"Help! Rescue, St. Jim's! Help!"

He struggled frantically, clutching at the sides of the car doorway; but he struggled in vain. He was lifted easily and deposited on the seat of the car. Then the man leaped in after him, slamming the door.

The car shot on the same instant.

And as it did so, Tom Merry came rushing along the side-lane, with Manners and Monty Lowther behind him, all of them looking startled.

They ran out into the lane, and Tom Merry gave a jump as he sighted the swiftly-disappearing car. He recognised it in a flash. It was undoubtedly the car they had pursued that afternoon.

At the same moment Tom Merry sighted Digby's cap lying on the dusty lane, and he gave a yell:

"Quick! They've got Digby! It's those brutes again! Oh, my hat!"

Tom glanced wildly round, scarcely knowing what to do for the moment. To race after the car was hopeless. But even as he stood undecided, a motor-cycle came racing up. On it was St. Leger of the Fifth. He pulled up and jumped from the saddle, his eyes following the car.

"What the thump's the matter?" he gasped. "I heard a howl, and saw something happening here. It looked to me—Here, what the dickens—Good gad!"

St. Leger stared, thunderstruck, as Tom Merry ran at him, pushed him unceremoniously aside, and, grabbing his machine, twisted it round with a rush. Then he slammed at the kick-starter, and sprang into the saddle.

"Here—" roared the astounded St. Leger. "Why, you—Come back!"

The Fifth-Former's angry voice ended in a howl of wrath. But Tom Merry did not come back. He was quite at home on a motor-bike, and even as St. Leger glared after him, with gaping mouth, he vanished up Rylcombe Lane amidst a cloud of dust, his engine roaring.

"Good gad!"

St. Leger almost fainted. For a Shell fellow—a Lower School kid—to push him aside rudely like that and help himself to a Fifth-Former's motor-bike, was the outside limit! It was time for the skies to fall!

"Well!" gasped St. Leger. "Well, I'm blowed! Merry, you young villain!"

St. Leger shrieked. But Tom Merry was gone. He was hard on the trail of the kidnappers, and it would have taken more than St. Leger's order to bring him back—had he heard it!

CHAPTER 12.

Bowled Out!

THE—the footling fathead! The—the burling bandersnatch!

Jack Blake had quite exhausted his epithets. He could only repeat himself again and again like a parrot. Herries was also in a similar position.

It was some minutes since the noble Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had effected his stroke of generalship and taken

his departure, and the two juniors were in a state bordering on frenzy. They quite understood Gussy's motive in locking them in the wood-shed—quite! They knew his kindness of heart only too well, and they realised what he was doing was the best for all concerned. None the less, both of them felt they would dearly like to come to close quarters with the peacemaker of the Fourth.

"If only I could get my hands on him!" breathed Blake for the hundredth time. "I—I'd smash him to bits! Fancy those fellows waiting for us! That rotter Dig's bound to say I'm funking him! Oh, great Scott! I'll—I'll—"

"Somebody coming now!" said Herries quickly, applying his eye to a chink in the door. "Hallo! It's that cad Racke, with Crooke and Mellish. Give the cads a shout, for goodness' sake!"

"No, don't!" snapped Blake hastily, taking a peep himself. "You know what the cads are! If they know we're locked in here they'll do anything rather than help us, you silly ass!"

"Oh crumbs! You're right! But—"

"Wait!" breathed Blake. "They're up to something, I bet. We'll let 'em come and open the door, and then we'll rush out. I bet they're coming here for a quiet smoke before lock-up!"

"That's it! Hallo! Racke's stopping!"

Racke had stopped, and was looking behind him cautiously. From the manner in which the three black sheep approached the wood-shed, it was only too clear that they did not wish to be seen.

"Come on, Racke!" they heard Crooke snap impatiently. "What the thump are you stopping for? Spot anyone?"

"Yes!" snapped Racke viciously. "That sneaking, prying cad D'Arcy! He's spotted us, and he's after us!"

"But what for?"

"Can't you see his game?" snarled Racke furiously. "He tackled me only a few minutes ago about that phone affair. The cad suspects me, I'm certain!"

"Phew! But he can prove nothing! Why worry about that silly fool? Come on!"

"I want to see what the cad's after!" snapped Racke, with fear showing in his pasty face. "He knows something, I'm certain. I hope nobody saw me go into the Head's study, anyway!"

"They didn't!" said Crooke impatiently. "We were watching, you ass! You're safe enough. In any case, nobody can prove anything. Digby thinks it was Blake. Everybody knows about it now, and who'd suspect you? Come and have a smoke to celebrate the giddy victory! Is the cad still following us?"

"Yes!" Racke scowled, his eyes still fixed behind him. "He's pretending not to see us, the fool! Look here, let's get in the dashed shed and fasten the door!"

"Blow him!" said Crooke.

"Now!" breathed Blake. His eyes were glittering now. By the merest chance they had stumbled on the truth—though Blake had already suspected it. And he now was determined to make the most of it. "Let the cads come in, and then collar Racke! Never mind the others—they can wait!"

"Right!"

Somebody fumbled at the door, and then it swung open, letting the evening daylight into the gloomy shed. And as it swung open, Racke stepped inside.

The next instant he got the shock of his life.

"Yooooop!"

He went down, with the furious Blake on top of him. Crooke and Mellish gave one look, and then they flew for their lives.

"Up you get, my pippin!" snapped Blake.

He dragged at the struggling Racke, and with the aid of Herries the cad of the Shell was hauled to his feet and held fast. And just then Arthur Augustus came hurrying up, his face showing his alarm. He had obviously been watching Racke approaching the shed, merely because he feared to open the door, and thus let the prisoners out.

Racke certainly had done that—to his sorrow now!

"You—you born idiot!" roared Blake, glaring at Arthur Augustus. "We'll deal with you afterwards, my pippin! Here, lend a hand now you're here, though!"

"Bai Jove! What—"

"Lend a hand with this howling cad!" snorted Blake. "You're silly game's done some good, after all, Gussy! We've just heard Racke admit he was the chap who used the phone this afternoon."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Look here—" howled Racke. "Leggo! You rotters, leggo! I was only joking when I said—"

"You'll find it a jolly painful joke before we're through with you, my pippin! Yank him along, chaps! We're going to take him to Digby and make him own up!"

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"Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus, his eyes lighting up as he understood. "How wippin', bai Jove! I think I told you fellows that you could wely on my tact and judgment to cleah the mattah up, bai Jove! Yaas, wathah! Come along, Wacke!"

But Aubrey Racke did not wish to come along at all. He knew now the game was up, and he struggled and yelled.

"Go on!" said Blake cheerily. "Yell as much as you like! It would just suit us for you to bring Railton or a prefect here, my lad! We should be obliged to speak out, then, and I fancy it would mean the giddy boot for you, Racke! Get on with it!"

"Oh!" panted Racke.

His yells and struggles suddenly ceased. He realised only too well that if a prefect or a master came along there would be awkward questions asked.

Racke's face was pale and drawn as he was piloted through the gates and out into Rylcombe Lane.

But he had to go—there was no escape for Aubrey Racke. He had plotted and caused trouble, and now he had to pay for it.

"Hallo! There's Lowther and Manners now!" said Blake suddenly. "Looks as if something's up."

Lowther and Manners could be seen standing in the lane higher up, and with them they recognised St. Leger of the Fifth.

"Digby isn't with them," said Blake, with a grunt. "Still behind the boathouse, with Tom Merry, I suppose. Never mind, bring that cad along!"

"Look here—"

Racke seemed to want to make a stand, but a pair of boots applied behind him forcibly soon made him change his mind, and he went on. They reached the group in the lane, and they stared at their excited faces. St. Leger was looking more amazed than wrathful now, and he was listening to something Lowther was telling him.

"Where's Digby?" demanded Blake grimly. "Is he still—"

"I wish we knew!" said Lowther. "And Tom Merry as well!"

"What do you mean?" ejaculated.

"Only this," said Lowther. "Digby's been collared—kidnapped by those men who got hold of Trimble this afternoon."

"What?"

"It's a fact," broke in Manners. "Digby got fed-up with waiting for you, and he cleared off. He'd only been gone a few seconds when we heard him yelling for help. We rushed here, and were just in time to see that car we followed this afternoon vanishing up the lane. And we found Dig's cap on the ground here."

And Manners held up a cap he was holding.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Blake. "The rotters! And within a hundred yards of the school. But—where's Tom Merry—what about him?"

"He grabbed St. Leger's bike and went after the brutes," said Manners.

"The cheeky little sweep!" snorted St. Leger. "Still, now I understand why—"

"It was the only thing to do," said Lowther, his face showing his alarm. "We shall have to hurry back and report this at once."

"You'd better!" snapped St. Leger. "It looks to me a thundering serious matter! I hope nothing happens to my bike, anyway."

But the juniors were not worrying about the motor-bike—possibly because it didn't belong to them! They looked at each other.

"Come on! Sooner we see the Head or Railton the better!"

"What about this merchant?" said Herries, glaring at Racke, whom Blake was still grasping by the scruff of the neck.

"What's he done?" demanded St. Leger, with the authority of a senior.

"A rotten, caddish trick!" snapped Herries. "It was Racke who used the phone this afternoon and answered Digby's pater. We heard him admit it himself. We collared him, and were bringing him along to make him own up to Digby."

"Phew! We guessed rightly, then!" said Lowther. "So it was you, Racke, you howling cad!"

"I—I—I don't admit it!"

"But you're going to," said Blake. "If you won't, then the giddy beaks will be brought on the job. If you'd rather own up to them—"

"It—it was only a lark!" gasped Racke.

"Well, I'm dashed!" gasped St. Leger, looking at the cad of the Shell with disgust. "I heard about that! So it was that toad!"

"Yes. But we've no time to deal with him now," said

Blake. "Pitch him into the ditch there, to be going on with, and we'll get back. I'm thinking of poor old Dig." "Look here—" Racke howled, as he was grasped. But he howled in vain for mercy. Even St. Leger, who was not over-particular himself at times, was disgusted at his trickery.

"Pitch the little reptile in," said St. Leger. "If I was a prefect I'd report the little cad!"

"Yaas, waiha!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Racke roared as he was swung up and let go. There was not much water in the ditch, but there was more than enough for the elegant Aubrey, and there was plenty of thick, slimy mud.

"Ooooooh!"

The yelling schemer dropped into it with a squelch, sending ditchwater spurting up all round him. He sprawled there, fairly wallowing in mud and water.

The juniors left him there and hurried towards the school with St. Leger. They had wasted enough time, and they realised that every second was precious, if anything was to be done to rescue Digby.

The Fifth-Former left it to them to report the matter. St. Leger was a lazy, easy-going youth, and he had no intention of being dragged into the affair if he could help it. He was only worrying about his motor-bike.

"I'll see Railton," said Blake. "You chaps wait!"

Leaving his chums waiting outside in the passage, Jack Blake rapped sharply on Mr. Railton's door and entered.

CHAPTER 13.

Not a Police Matter!

MR. RAILTON was busy writing a letter when Blake trapped in. He looked up rather irritably at the junior, but as he saw the look on Blake's features his expression changed, and he laid down his pen.

"Well, Blake," he said, "is anything the matter?"

"Yes, sir," said Blake, his voice trembling with excitement. "Something rotten has happened—something serious, I'm afraid, sir."

He plunged straightway into his narrative, and Mr. Railton listened in utter amazement and alarm.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped, as Blake paused breathless. "This is most alarming! Do you seriously mean to tell me that you believe Digby was kidnapped?"

"I can't see what else it can mean, sir," said Blake. "Lowther says they saw the car rush away and they heard

the cry for help. St. Leger also heard it, though he was too far away to see what was happening in the lane."

"But—but I do not quite understand why Merry knew what had happened if he only saw the car go," said Mr. Railton sharply.

"He guessed what had happened, sir, especially when he saw Digby's cap lying there."

"Guessed it?" echoed the Housemaster. "Why should he guess that Digby had been kidnapped? I confess that I do not see any reason to suppose that Digby had been kidnapped at all. Certainly it was significant that the car was driving away just after the cry was heard. But—but—" Mr. Railton paused and eyed the junior keenly.

"You are keeping something back, Blake," he snapped.

Blake coloured. He had not wished to get the hapless Baggy into trouble. But he saw quite clearly now that there was no help for it. Indeed it would have been absurd to attempt to save Baggy from a mere licking under the circumstances. He decided it the best to make a clean breast of what he knew.

"It—it was like this, sir!" he stammered. "The same sort of thing had happened to Trimble earlier this afternoon. Trimble was collar—I mean captured by those men, and we went after them and rescued him. That was why Tom Merry guessed at once what had happened. The men took Trimble for Digby."

"Good gracious!"

The Housemaster was really alarmed now. And as Blake told of the afternoon's adventure and of Trimble's spoof—not forgetting Racke's—the Housemaster's face went grim.

"That will do for the moment, Blake," he said. "Will you find Lowther, Manners, and St. Leger, and ask them to report themselves to Dr. Holmes. This is far more serious than I had supposed. You should have reported what happened to Trimble at once. However, please find the three boys and report with them to the Head at once."

"Yes, sir."

Blake hurried out, and Mr. Railton followed him and made his way to Dr. Holmes' study, his face grave. What the alarming affair meant he had no more idea than had the juniors themselves. But he could not help remembering Sir Robert Digby's visit that afternoon, and how strangely agitated and upset the baronet had been on learning his son was out. It had seemed to Mr. Railton at the time that Digby's supposed disobedience was not sufficient in itself to arouse Sir Robert to such a state.

When Blake and the others presented themselves in the Head's study they saw from Dr. Holmes' grave features

(Continued on next page.)

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What is the mystery that surrounds the remarkable kidnapping of Robert Arthur Digby, and why haven't the police been called in?

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that the Housemaster had already related what had taken place.

"Blake," snapped Dr. Holmes, "I have heard from Mr. Railton your extraordinary story. You should have reported what took place this afternoon without a moment's delay. Why did you not do so?"

"We—we told Digby, sir," stammered Blake, "and we left it to him to report the matter, if he wished. I think Tom Merry strongly advised him to."

"There are still, however, many things about this astonishing affair which I do not understand," said the Head grimly. "I wish you to relate to me in turn all you know about the matter, however unimportant it may seem to you. Though time is of the greatest importance, I cannot bring myself to acquaint the police with the story until I have satisfied myself that no absurd mistake has been made—that the matter has no simple and innocent explanation. I am waiting for you to begin, Blake."

"Oh, yes, sir."

Blake told all he knew, and the others told their story in turn. St. Leger had little to tell, and the Head dismissed him after a few questions. It was a trying ordeal for all, however, for the Head's searching questions soon brought out all details, and though they would have shielded Racke, his cross-examination brought the facts to light. Both the Head and Mr. Railton set their lips as they heard of Racke's rascality.

"Very well," said the Head at last. "It is a most amazing affair, and I fear it is serious. Mr. Railton, will you kindly ring up the Wayland Police Station?"

"Very good, sir."

The Housemaster's hand was on the telephone-receiver when an interruption came. A tap sounded on the door, and Toby Marsh, the School House page, entered.

"Well, Marsh?"

"Sir Robert Digby 'as called, sir," said Toby. "He wishes to see you."

The Head and Mr. Railton exchanged glances.

"Show Sir Robert in, Marsh."

"Yessir!"

A moment later Digby's father strode into the room.

"I am very glad you have called, Sir Robert," said the Head in some relief. "I understand you were here this afternoon, but—"

"I came to see my son, Dr. Holmes," exclaimed Sir Robert. "He was out of gates, and as I had business to attend to in Wayland I had to leave without seeing him. I have decided to stay overnight in Wayland, however, as it is important I should see Robert."

"Ahem!" Dr. Holmes coughed. He did not know how to break the serious news to the baronet. "I—I am afraid that I have grave news for you, Sir Robert."

"You—you have grave news?"

"Pray do not be alarmed, sir," said the Head quickly. "I have no doubt at all that it may not be so serious as we suppose. According to statements I have just heard only some moments ago your son has vanished, and we have reason to fear that he has been kidnapped, amazing as such a possibility seems."

"Kidnapped?" The baronet barked out the word. "You—you say my son Robert has been—been kidnapped?"

"I fear so. I have just heard an amazing story from these boys, who are friends of your son."

"G-good gad!"

"Sir Robert," began the Head, "pray do not take too grave a view of the matter as yet. It is exceedingly fortunate that you happened to be at hand just now. According to these boys, your son has been taken away by two men in a car, though the reason seems a complete mystery. One of his friends, however, in a very plucky manner, has gone in pursuit on a motor-bicycle, and it is very possible he may be able to keep in touch with the car, and thus be of aid to the police—"

"Police?"

Again Sir Robert barked out the word.

"The matter is urgent, of course," went on the Head, looking rather blankly at the baronet, who had a very strange look on his features. "I think it will be better to postpone details until I have got into touch with the police. With your permission, Sir Robert, I will speak to the inspector at Wayland. Mr. Railton—"

The Housemaster reached out again for the telephone. Sir Robert jumped up.

"Stop!"

The Head fairly jumped.

Sir Robert's strange manner had already astounded him, as it had all in the room. On hearing such serious and astounding news they had expected him to show some signs of agitation, or at least excitement and alarm.

But his expression was one of wrath—great and growing wrath. His rather handsome features were crimson. He was fairly trembling with anger.

"Stop!" he gasped, almost exploding. "I—I will not have the police brought into this!"

"Sir Robert—" gasped the Head.

"I will not allow you to call in the police!" exclaimed the baronet heatedly. "When did this—this affair take place, and where?"

"In the lane not far from the school, Sir Robert," said Mr. Railton quickly, looking as astonished as the Head. "It took place less than half an hour ago, though the rascals made an earlier attempt to get your son into their hands this afternoon. It failed, however—"

"Right!" Sir Robert Digby grabbed his stick and gloves from the Head's desk. "That is all I wish to know! Stay! You have no idea which direction the rascals have taken?"

"They disappeared in the direction of Rylcombe, sir. Beyond that we know nothing," said the Housemaster. "But if you will kindly allow me to explain the full story—"

"I cannot stay to hear it!" snapped Sir Robert. "But you may leave this matter entirely in my hands. And on no account, I beg of you, place the matter before the police. It—it is not so serious, possibly, as you may suppose. Indeed, I can assure you that it is not! I will very soon lay those rascals by the heels!"

With that, to the utter astonishment of all present, the wrathful baronet rushed from the room, not stopping to close the door after him.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head faintly. "Mr. Railton—"

"I am amazed—astounded!" said Mr. Railton. "That Sir Robert should not wish the police to be put on the track of those men is—is astonishing. And—and—"

He paused, suddenly remembering that the juniors were present.

"Boys," said Dr. Holmes, glancing at them, "you may go! One moment! Kindly send Racke and Trimble to me."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Blake.

The juniors crowded from the room, their faces showing their astonishment.

"Well," said Blake as they got outside—"well, I'm blowed! This beats the band! The old chap didn't seem to trouble about Digby's safety at all. He was just—just—"

"Waxy!" said Lowther. "It—it's the queerest thing out! What's going to happen now, I wonder?"

"Let's go and find those merchants, anyway," said Blake. "I fancy I can guess what's going to happen to them."

"My hat! Yes!"

And the juniors hurried away to look for Trimble and Racke.

Trimble and Racke were not in much doubt, either. They fairly tottered to the Head's study, having been warned what to expect by Blake & Co. Nor were their apprehensions misplaced. A few seconds later the sound of energetic swishing, followed by wails of woe, were floating from the Head's sanctum. And when Trimble and Racke came out some moments later they were both doubled up like pocket-knives. Trimble had got off fairly lightly, but Racke had not though Trimble made as much row about it as he did. Racke was noticed to be very particular how he sat down for some days after that licking, at all events. Blake & Co. had treated Racke's mean spitefulness as light as they could, but Dr. Holmes had understood his motives clearly enough. Racke had acted badly enough in cheeking Digby's pater, and in letting Digby down by withholding the message, but he had acted worse still by giving Blake's name and thus throwing the blame on an innocent fellow's shoulders. And the Head did not overlook it.

But this was small consolation to Blake and his chums.

They were not only deeply concerned in regard to what had happened to their chums, but they were bitterly disappointed. They had discovered the truth regarding the phone message. They had bowled out the guilty party, and they had looked forward to the reconciliation which they felt certain would follow when Digby learned the truth.

But they had discovered the truth too late—at all events, for the time being. Digby was gone—missing! And his manner of going was one that filled the juniors with grave fears and misgivings, despite Sir Robert Digby's strange assurance. And strange it was, and stranger still was the mystery that, they felt certain now, surrounded Robert Digby. It was beyond them. And all St. Jim's, in addition to the fuming St. Leger, waited anxiously for Tom Merry's return. But he did not return. And the whole school retired that night seething with excitement, and wondering what had happened to Digby and Tom Merry—the kidnapped junior and the fellow who had so pluckily gone to his rescue.

THE END.

(Be sure you read the sequel to this grand yarn, entitled "KIDNAPPED!" which will appear in next week's topping number of the GEM. An early order will save disappointment, chums.)

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THE PLOTTERS! Albert Biggs, one-time waif of the slums, is not wanted at Rookwood by Valentine Mornington and his snobbish cronies, and their one aim now is to get him "fired."



His Own Enemy!

A GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL
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JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON quarrels with his chum, Kit Erroll, over an imaginary slight, and goes off for the afternoon with Peele & Co., a shady set of rotters. Anxious to patch up the row, Erroll follows, but is holed in the lurch by a youthful tramp, whom he recognises as Albert Biggs, an acquaintance of his former dark days.

Biggs is on his way to Rookwood to apply for a job as garden boy. Erroll, pleased to see him, offers to help him. Going back to the school for money, Kit returns to find Peele & Co. ragging Biggs, while Mornington, perched on a nearby stile, is looking on. Erroll chips in to save his friend, and Peele & Co. are beaten off. On the way to the village tuck-shop Erroll and Biggs encounter Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth. Mr. Dalton listens to Erroll's story and promises to do his best for Biggs, telling him to come up to the school later that day, which Biggs does.

Angry at Erroll's refusal to "drop" his ragged friend, Mornington, in company with Peele & Co., meets Biggs at the school gates. The furious dandy of the Fourth is in the act of raising his boot to lash out at Biggs, when Erroll appears upon the scene, and grabs his arm.

(Now Read On.)

Caught in the Act!

THERE was a laugh from several fellows who had just rushed up, and Mornington's handsome face flamed with passion.

He turned on Erroll in a fury.

"You interfering cad!" he panted. "I—I— Take that!" Mornington's flat hand struck Erroll's cheek with a crack that could be heard half-way across the quadrangle.

Erroll staggered back with a cry.

"My only hat!"

There was a murmur from several juniors. Jimmy Silver & Co., who had come up, stood and stared at Mornington dumbfounded. Well as they knew Morny's ungovernable temper, they had never expected him to strike his chum.

There was a buzz.

Mornington himself stood motionless. His face was still full of passion, but there was a drooping of his glittering eyes that suggested he was already regretting that hasty, passionate blow.

"You cad, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "It was your own fault—your own rotten temper!"

"Shut up!" snarled Mornington. "You keep out of this, Silver! If Erroll's got anything to say or do, I'm waitin'."

Erroll, a crimson patch showing where Mornington's hand had struck him, placed his hands in his pockets.

"I've nothing to say."

"Right!" said Morny coolly. "Then I'll get on with chuckin' this hooligan out!"

He made a stride at Albert Biggs, who was standing as if undecided, his fists clenched.

The waif's eyes gleamed.

"Stand back!" he howled. "I ain't done you no 'arm as I knows of, and I ain't goin' to be touched agen! An' if you touches Master Erroll agen I'll go for you!"

"Will you?" snapped Mornington. "By gad!"

He rushed at the youth, his face savage. But his fists were knocked aside, and a harder fist took him full on the nose.

"Biggs—" gasped Erroll.

But others were before him. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Lovell grabbed the raging Mornington and dragged him back.

"No you don't!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his brow dark. "You'll leave that kid alone, you cad! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Morny!"

"I—I—"

In the grasp of the juniors, Morny spluttered with rage. A thin stream of crimson was trickling from his nose, and his face was white with passion. He struggled furiously.

"You may as well chuck it, Morny!" said Lovell in disgust. "Cut off, kid—you've no right in here! Erroll, better tell your friend— Hold him!"

Lovell broke off with a gasp, as Mornington dragged himself free with a desperate effort. But even as he jumped towards Biggs a sharp voice rang out.

"Mornington!"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was Dicky Dalton, the master of the Fourth. His face was dark and angry.

"Mornington! How dare you!"

Mornington pulled up, biting his lips. He knew better than to disobey Dicky Dalton.

"Mornington, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said the master angrily. "How dare you attack that youth!"

Mornington was silent for a moment, his face working.

"Because he's a beastly, thieving tramp!" he said at last. "He was trespassing in here, and I was trying to turn the cad out!"

"This boy is not trespassing!" snapped Dicky Dalton. "He is now a member of the school garden staff. Nor is there any reason for you to call the boy such disgraceful names, Mornington!"

"He pitched into me!" said Mornington thickly. "I was—"

"That is enough, Mornington," said the master, his eyes gleaming. "I myself witnessed all that happened from my window. You attacked this boy for no obvious reason—your attack was entirely unprovoked. You began all the trouble, and I distinctly heard you call to Peele to aid you in your ungenerous treatment of this boy. You then struck Erroll because he attempted to stop you."

"Oh!"

"In attacking a stranger, whether a member of the school staff or not, you have shown yourself to be ungentlemanly and a bully!" said Mr. Dalton curtly. "I am ashamed of you! You will go at once to my study and await me there, Mornington!"

"Yes, sir!" almost hissed Morny.

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He turned, and with a bitter glare of hatred at Biggs walked away to the School House. Mr. Dalton turned to Biggs.

"You should not have been loitering here in the quadrangle, my boy," he said, his voice becoming kindly. "Your position—"

"It—it was my fault, sir!" said Erroll hurriedly. "I asked him to meet me here at the gates. I was anxious to know how he had gone on with his interview."

"Oh, I see. Very well," said the master, looking from Erroll to Biggs dubiously. "I think it would be as well, Erroll, if you saw your friend, when you wish to see him, out of gates. I can see no objection in the circumstances to that."

"Very well, sir. And thank you!"

Mr. Dalton seemed as if he were going to speak to Albert Biggs again, but he closed his lips and walked away.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "Is—is this chap on the domestic staff now, Erroll?"

"Apparently—yes!" said Erroll quietly. "He came after a job as garden boy here."

"Fancy Dicky Dalton seeing it all!" grinned Lovell. "Old Morny's for it now!"

Jimmy Silver's face clouded, as he noted Erroll's distress.

"Dry up, Lovell!" he said quietly. "I'm sorry about this, Erroll, old chap! I don't like to see old pals like you and Morny come to blows."

"We shan't come to blows," said Erroll steadily, though there was a suspicious catch in his voice. "Morny lost his temper; he wouldn't have done it otherwise. I shan't fight him, anyway!"

"Not after that smack?" said Conroy.

"No!"

"My hat! Morny's a bit too fond of losing his temper for my liking," said Arthur Edward Lovell, with a growl. "Catch me letting a blow like that pass! I'd punch his head quickly enough—pals or not! He's not much loss as a pal, anyway!"

"I suppose it was through this chap, Erroll?" asked Jimmy Silver, eyeing Albert Biggs curiously. "It was too bad of Morny—"

"I'd rather not discuss it, Silver," said Erroll, and he took Biggs' arm, and the two went out through the gates together.

"Rotten!" said Jimmy Silver, gazing uneasily after them. "I'm afraid there's going to be trouble if that chap remains here. Now he's punched Morny's nose—"

"My hat—yes! Morny never forgets or forgives an injury!"

"Morny's right!" snarled Peele, rubbing his nose tenderly. "And I won't forget or forgive, either! What's that cad Erroll doin' bringin' a rotten dirty tramp here? We don't want our dashed pockets picked. He ought to be booted out! We don't want low hooligans at Rookwood!"

"You think they ought to be kicked out, Peele?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Of course!"

"Then we'll start on you!" said Jimmy pleasantly. "You're a low hooligan, if ever there was one! Here you are!"

"Yoooooop! Oh, you cad!"

Peele howled furiously, as Jimmy Silver's boot caught him. He jumped away, scowling, and he was wise enough to say nothing more then on the subject of kicking low hooligans out of Rookwood.

Plotting a Plot!

"MORNY, old man!"

Kit Erroll spoke quietly, and his voice was calm and collected.

It was some time later, and Erroll was settling down to prep in the study.

Erroll had been for a short stroll with Albert Biggs, and had heard with satisfaction that his old friend had obtained the job at Rookwood, and was now a member of the staff, as Dicky Dalton had said. He was also more than glad to learn that the ragamuffin's wanderings had ended; that he was to find shelter under the roof of Rookwood, having been allotted an attic bed-room in the servants' quarters. Biggs had been overwhelmed at his good fortune; the clean garret, with its sloping roof, its window, and plain furniture, was something like a palace to the homeless waif; and Erroll had smiled at his enthusiastic praises of it.

Yet Erroll's satisfaction had been mingled with gloomy forebodings. He knew Mornington better than anyone else, perhaps, at Rookwood, and he knew he would neither forget nor forgive. Erroll saw trouble ahead if Mornington did

keep on with his unreasonable feud against the innocent Albert Biggs.

And his own position was a delicate and unpleasant one. Determined as he was to befriend the hapless waif, he saw quite clearly what it was leading to. Already Morny had shown how he regarded the position—already he had done a thing that would have definitely broken any ordinary friendship and brought chums to blows.

But Kit Erroll was not an ordinary fellow; he was forgiving to a fault, and he felt he understood Morny. He strove to forget that hasty blow, and he had hopes even yet of bringing the wrong-headed Morny to be reasonable, though he had a dismal fear that that blow from Biggs and the final interview Morny had had with Mr. Dalton would have put an end to all his hopes.

And the look on Morny's face now added to his fears. The dandy of the Fourth sat sprawling in the armchair again, his brows dark, his eyes glinting under them. He seemed to have no intention of starting prep. He had entered the study and flung himself there without a word to Erroll. Now Erroll, after trying to work for some minutes, flung down his pen and spoke.

"Morny," he said quietly, "I want to speak to you."

Mornington looked up at him.

"You want to speak to me after what's happened?" he said, with a sneer. "To arrange the scrap, I suppose?"

"No; I'm not going to scrap with you, Morny."

Mornington gave a scoffing laugh.

"Gad! Have you considered what the chaps will think? They'll think you funk it, Erroll."

"I don't care what the chaps think," said Erroll. "I'm not fighting you, Morny!"

"Funk it, what?"

"You know I don't funk it, Morny!" said Erroll, keeping calm with an effort. "You're talking hot air, and you know it! You're just allowing your silly temper to make you do and say things you'll be sorry for later on—if you aren't already! I'm taking no notice of that—that matter in the quad, because I know you aren't yourself to-day."

"Turning the other cheek, what?" jeered Mornington.

"My hat! I never knew you were such a worm, Erroll!"

Erroll flushed crimson, and an angry light came into his eyes—only for a moment, though; it vanished swiftly. Mornington's face coloured, and his eyes dropped before Erroll's steadfast look.

"You're talking rot now!" said Erroll. "You're ashamed of yourself—and you know it, Morny!"

"Am I?" snapped Mornington angrily. "You'd better mind what you're saying, Erroll! I'm about fed with you! Ashamed of myself for tryin' to stop a fool bringing a rotten tramp into the school! Not likely! I tell you this, Erroll—you've managed to get the brute in; but I mean to get him out! I'll stop at nothin' to do it, either! I warn you!"

"Morny—"

"He punched me!" hissed Mornington, touching his nose tenderly. "An' he made me look a fool before the fellows—a low, thiev'ish ragamuffin from the slums! That's not all! He got me a lickin' from Dalton an' a rotten slagin', too! Am I likely to forget that?" he added savagely.

"I'm sorry about that!" said Erroll. "But it couldn't be helped; you attacked him, and you attempted to kick him. No fellow of spirit would have stood it. The fellow's done you no harm, Morny! You're entirely in the wrong, and you know it."

Mornington got to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"So you're still backin' the brute up?" he asked. "Still takin' his part against me, though you know what it's already led to?"

"I can do nothing less, Morny. Right's right; and I can't forget the past," said Erroll, with sudden earnestness. "Morny, can't you see my position? I can't forsake that kid. For goodness' sake, be decent, old man! I'm forgetting what's happened; I'm more than willing to be friends again as before."

"But I'm not!" said Morny savagely.

"Morny—"

"Unless you clear that interlopin', spongin' rotter out of Rookwood!" said Mornington, his dark eyes glittering with savage determination. "That's my answer, Erroll—I mean it! Clear that ragamuffin out and finish with him, and I'll be friends quickly enough. You can make your choice between that brute and me!"

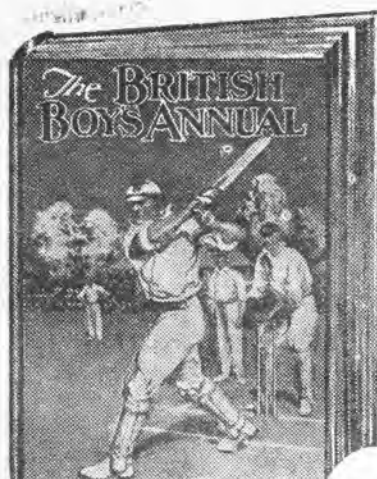
"I—I can't, and I won't, Morny! Do listen—"

"That's enough! I'm listenin' no longer!" snapped Mornington. "Gad! To think a dirty little sweep like that chap should come between you an' me! Well, you're welcome

(Continued on page 26.)

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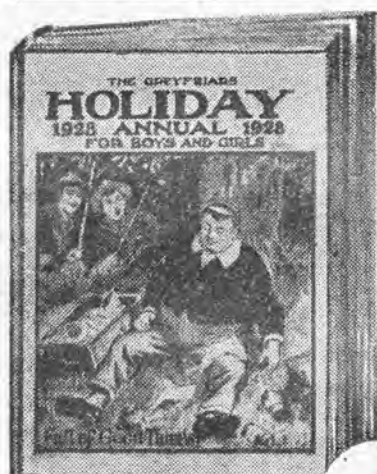
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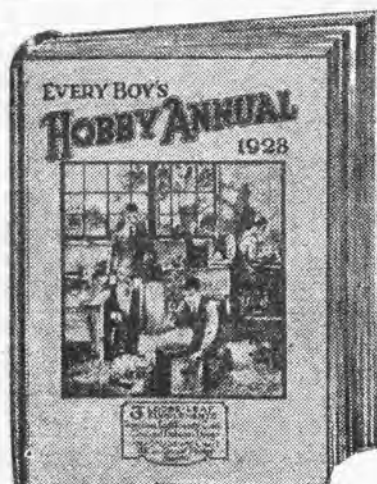
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A S' HIS OWN ENEMY!

(Continued from page 24.)

to him, Erroll, and you can go to pot! I'm finished with you for good!"

And Mornington left the room, slamming the door viciously after him. He heard Erroll call frantically after him, but he ignored the shout, and made his way to the study shared by Peele and Gower.

Inwardly, Mornington had nothing but scorn and contempt for those shady rotters, but he knew they were the only fellows in the Fourth likely to support him in his unreasonable feud against Albert Biggs. Like himself, they had felt the force of the wail's iron-hard fists.

Peele and Gower stared at him as he stamped into the room, and Peele grinned and exchanged a private wink with Gower. A day ago they would have eyed him suspiciously, with hostile looks. But things had changed in a day—Mornington had changed. They could not quite understand why he had changed. But they were more than willing to accept him on friendly terms now.

"Come in, old man!" said Peele cordially. "Have a fag, old fellow!"

Mornington accepted a cigarette, lit it, and flung himself into the easy chair. Peele grinned as he noted his black brow.

"Quite like old times, what!" he remarked, winking again at Gower. "Dropped in for a little game, Morny? We've done all the prep we're goin' to do—all serene!"

Mornington blew out a cloud of smoke.

"No. I haven't come for a game!" he said. "I've come for a talk about that tramp, Peele; you're not goin' to sit tight after what's happened, I suppose? He punched your nose, an' he punched mine. I hope you're not the fellow to take an insult like that from a low sweep without a kick."

Peele's eyes glittered—he understood the motive for the visit now.

"Good man!" he said. "I'm with you, Morny! Gower and I have been tryin' to think of, wheezes to get our own back, as a matter of fact! We're with you all the way, old man!"

"Hold on!" said Gower sullenly. "Peele was gassin' about payin' the howling sweep back, but—count me out! I'm fed up! It isn't good enough. Fellows aren't supposed to row with servants, an' now this bounder is a servant here—"

"You rotten funk!"

"I don't care! It'll only mean trouble for us," scowled Gower. "We're not supposed to touch servants—it isn't done! An' now Erroll's backin' the brute up—and Dicky Dalton—"

"Dicky Dalton gave me six—three on each hand!" said Mornington, between his teeth. "I don't want more! But there's more than one way of killin' a cat! An' we draw the line now at scrappin' with servants!"

"That's just it!" said Gower. "We—"

"But we don't draw the line at payin' out a low down hooligan who's got into Rookwood by trickery, and has insulted and struck fellows whose boots he's not fit to lick!" said Mornington, with glittering eyes. "We shan't scrap with

him—he's not fit to touch! But we're goin' to make him wish he'd kept his dashed paws off us, and we're goin' to get him shifted from Rookwood. That's the programme!"

"That's just what I've been tryin' to point out to this funk'n' fool, Gower, Morny!" said Peele. "I'm your man, anyway? Got any ideas!"

Mornington nodded slowly.

"I think so!" he said. "I've vowed to get the chap shifted out of Rookwood, and when I say a thing I mean it! Our programme is to make Rookwood so hot for the brute that he'll be only too jolly glad to get out!"

"But what about Erroll?" asked Peele.

"Hang Erroll!" said Morny savagely. "I'm finished with him!"

"Phew! Then you meant it when you slapped his chivvy," said Peele, with a grin. "Good man. I never liked the cad myself—too jolly snug for my likin'! I always wondered why you palled on with a chap like that, Morny."

Mornington winced.

"Never mind Erroll!" he snapped. "The less you say about him the better, Peele! I've finished with him; but—anyway, it's the cad Biggs we're dealin' with."

"Oh, quite so!" said Peele smoothly. "I'm dashed if I'm interested in Erroll, though he did handle me!"

"I'm not forgettin' that!" said Morny sharply. "But you'll leave Erroll alone, Peele—unless you want trouble with me!"

"Oh, gad!" Peele looked curiously at Morny. As a matter of fact, Peele's enmity was as much against Erroll as Biggs—if not more so. But he saw that Morny, whether he had quarrelled with his old chum or not, would not have anything said against Erroll. "Oh, all right," he went on coolly. "We'll leave Erroll out of it; just as you like, Morny, old man! What's the game, anyway? I hear this hooligan friend of his has been given a blessed room at Rookwood—inside the dashed walls! We'll have to lock up our dashed valuables now!"

"I know all about that!" said Mornington, smiling unpleasantly. "He's been given a garret next to the one Tupper, the page, sleeps in. I've taken the trouble to make inquiries, you see!"

"Good! You mean business, old chap!" said Peele.

"I do!" Mornington set his teeth. "I've worked it out, and this is the game for a start! We're going to raid his room to-night—"

"To-night?" echoed Peele blankly.

"Yes—to-night, old bean! We're goin' to raid his room—you, Gower, and myself—and we're goin' to bundle him up in his dashed bedclothes, tie him up, and, after doing that, we're goin' to shove him out into the lane and lock him out! How's that?"

"Phew! Good wheeze! But—"

"Safe enough!" said Mornington curtly. "No one will know! He won't know himself who did it—we'll watch that!"

"They—they'll guess, though!" stammered Gower.

"They can prove nothing!" snapped Mornington.

Peele nodded slowly, his sharp eyes glinting.

"I'm out!" he breathed. "Gad! Yes—rather!"

(There will be another instalment of this magnificent serial next week, chums. Don't miss it.)

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