

E *April 1928*
BOYS! YOU CAN'T BEAT OUR SCHOOL STORIES!

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No. 1,054.
Vol. XXXIII.
April 28th, 1928.

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**EVERY
WEDNESDAY.**

April 28th 1928



**IN THE HANDS OF
THE LAW !**

(A dramatic incident in this week's grand
story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)

A ROLICKING LONG SCHOOL TALE of FUN & ADVENTURE—

JAPING THE

Many times have Tom Merry & Co. fallen foul of Gerald Cutts, and the old feud breaks out again as a result of the Fifth-Former's latest blackguardly action. And this time, thanks to George François Kerr, Cutts is brought to book with a vengeance!



CHAPTER 1.

Borrowed Plumes!

"WELL, I'm blessed!"

Bernard Glyn of the Shell made that remark as he watched the approach of a motor-car in the old High Street of Wayland. There were four people in the car, and Cutts of the Fifth was driving. Hence Bernard Glyn's mild astonishment.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and as the April day was fine Glyn had taken a run into Wayland to make one or two purchases. He was hanging about with nothing particular to do, having made a tentative arrangement with Clifton Dane. He was on the look-out for the Canadian junior now.

But the arrival of Cutts & Co. in the car rather distracted Bernard Glyn's attention. With a great show

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of confidence, Gerald Cutts steered the car into the kerb and drew up with a flourish.

"There you are, Sparkey!" grinned Cutts. "How's that?"

"Pretty good, young gent—pretty good!" said the man who was sitting next to Cutts in the front seats. "Better than I expected!"

"I can drive all right, can't I?"

"You can drive a treat, Mr. Cutts!" said Sparkey, nodding. "It comes natural to some of us!"

Cutts "tickled" the accelerator, and the engine purred in response. Then it died down, as Cutts removed his foot, and continued ticking over.

"Look here, Sparkey, be a sport!" said Cutts eagerly. "You've told us that you're in Wayland on business, and that you won't need the car until this evening. Why not lend it to me, so that I can take my pals for a drive?"

"Not a bad idea!" remarked St. Leger languidly.

He and Gilmore were lounging in the rear seats, taking their ease. None of them noticed Bernard Glyn, as he stood in a shop doorway close by. They were all watching Mr. Sparkey.

This gentleman, however, did not give them much hope. He shook his head in a very decided manner, although he continued smiling. Sparkey was a fox-looking individual, loudly attired, and he seemed to smack of the racecourse. This wasn't very surprising, for Mr. Sparkey belonged to the racing fraternity, and Cutts & Co. had met him at one of their questionable haunts.

"Sorry, Mr. Cutts, but it can't be done!" he said, pursing his lips.

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, you haven't got any licence."

"That's my affair," growled Cutts. "If I'm willing to take the risk, why should you worry?"

"That's one way of looking at it, of course," admitted Sparkey. "And it's true that I don't need the car until this evening. All the same, I'd rather you weren't

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—FEATURING TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

FIFTH!

by
Martin Clifford



so pressing, young gent. Still, you can drive her along to the garage if you like."

"Why to the garage?" asked Cutts.

"I'm going to leave her there."

"Oh, look here!" urged Cutts. "Don't be such a beastly killjoy, Sparkey! You've admitted that I can drive. And I'll bring the car back after tea. She'll be safe enough in my hands."

But Mr. Sparkey showed no signs of giving way. He was, in fact, losing his smile. Cutts' persistence rather irritated him.

It was one thing to let this sporty St. Jim's senior drive the car for a mile or two while he—Sparkey—sat beside him, but it was a totally different thing to let Cutts go careering off on his own.

The blades of the Fifth had met Sparkey quite by chance about half an hour earlier. They didn't know him particularly well; they were on good terms with him it was true, but they were only acquaintances. And although he had taken them for a drive, and allowed Cutts to occupy the driving-seat, he was anxious to regard the incident as over.

The foxy gentleman was in rather an awkward position. He did not want to lend Cutts his car, and yet, at the same time, he did not want to offend this St. Jim's senior. Sparkey had an eye to future business.

"Well, let me have it for just an hour, then," said Cutts.

Sparkey hesitated, and as he did so he gave a little start and stared hard up the High Street.

"For the love of Mike!" he muttered, changing colour.

Gerald Cutts stared at him curiously. He failed to understand the reason for the man's abrupt change of manner. Cutts was feeling very pleased with himself; he had driven the car with confidence for two or three miles, and now his one desire was to borrow the "bus" for the afternoon, so that he could go along to St. Jim's and impress everybody with his own importance. It would be rather good to drive into the quad and to swank about. He would be the talk of the school. And Gerald Cutts rather liked the limelight.

"Don't be a dog in the manger, Sparkey," said Cutts. "You don't want to use the car yourself, and I might just as well—"

"Eh?" gasped Sparkey, turning on him. "Here, let me get into that seat! Let me—"

He broke off, his voice so full of alarm, that Cutts and Gilmore and St. Leger regarded him in astonishment. Sparkey was still staring down the High Street, and his attention was still fixed on the figure of a tall stranger, who was now approaching with rapid strides. There was something purposeful in the stranger's movements, and Cutts & Co. were at a loss to understand the situation.

"What's the matter?" asked Cutts, staring. "What do you want to get into this seat for? You just told me that I could drive to the garage—"

"All right!" interrupted Sparkey hastily. "You can borrow the car if you like."

"What!"

"Only be careful with her!" said Sparkey, as he leapt out. "I'll see you later."

"Good man!" said Cutts delightedly. "Here, half a minute! Shall I bring the car to the garage, or—"

"No; I'll come to the school for her!" said Sparkey hurriedly.

He bolted down an alley like a rabbit. Indeed, there was something strangely precipitate in his departure, and Cutts & Co. stared after him in blank astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter with the man?" said Cutts.

"Why worry?" drawled St. Leger. "Far better drive off—before he changes his mind and comes back!"

"By gad, yes!" ejaculated Cutts.

He engaged his gears, accelerated the engine, and let the clutch in with a jerk. The car lurched forward, gathered speed, and went on its way.

Cutts, out of the corner of his eye, noticed the tall stranger on the pavement. Gilmore and St. Leger, with nothing else to do, inspected the stranger with interest. He was staring at the car uncertainly, and he half raised his hand as though to signal to it. But he appeared to change his mind, for he suddenly turned and hurried off in the direction that Sparkey had taken.

"Queer sort of bird!" remarked Gilmore.

"Seems to be dashed interested in us!" said St. Leger.

"He's more interested in Sparkey!" said Gilmore.

"Gad, I believe Sparkey bolted from the chap!"

"What do we care?" grinned Cutts, turning his head for a moment. "We've got the car—and now we can go for a joy-ride on our own!"

And they dismissed Sparkey and the mysterious stranger from their minds. But there could be no doubt that they owed this joy-ride to the unexpected arrival of the stranger. It was he who had scared Sparkey off.

And, unknown to any of them, Bernard Glyn had been watching with more than casual interest. He stood looking after the departing car, and his expression was one of astonishment.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he murmured. "Cutts driving on his own! It'll be a wonder if he doesn't have an accident. He's not fit to be in charge of a car!"

He watched the blue four-seater until it vanished round a bend. That car was rather conspicuous in its colouring, for the blue was inclined to be aggressive.

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The car itself was a Morris-Cowley of the old type, with rounded radiator.

"Oh, well!" Glyn told himself. "It's none of my bizney."

He turned and looked up and down the High Street, hoping to see Clifton Dane. But, as yet, there was no sign of the Canadian junior.

And then Glyn saw that the tall stranger was making straight for him. The man had only glanced down the alley where Sparkey had departed, and now he approached Glyn, looking hot and impatient.

"Just a minute, young 'un!" said the stranger. "You're wearing the same kind of cap as those young fellows who went off in the car."

Bernard Glyn nodded.

"I belong to the same school," he replied.

"St. Jim's, eh?"

"Yes."

"D'you know who those young fellows are?"

"The one driving is Cutts, of the Fifth," replied Glyn. "The other two are his pals. Why?"

"Oh, nothing much!" said the stranger. "It isn't them I'm after. I wanted to get hold of that rascal Sparkey."

"Sparkey?"

"The fellow who owns the car," frowned the stranger. "The fellow who bolted as soon as he saw me."

"He seems to have gone," remarked Glyn, hardly knowing what else to say.

"He's a slippery customer!" said the stranger, frowning again. "But I'll nab him one of these days! Owes me fifty-seven pounds, and always dodges me!"

Glyn tried to appear politely interested.

"Hard luck!" he said sympathetically.

"It'll be hard luck on Sparkey when I finally get him in a corner!" said the stranger darkly. "The trouble is, I can't start any legal proceedings against him. I don't know the beggar's address!"

"That's awkward!" nodded Glyn.

"Fifty-seven pounds!" repeated the stranger, waxing indignant. "And every time I come anywhere near him he bolts!"

He went off, muttering to himself, and Bernard Glyn felt relieved. After all, it was none of his business, and he did not want to be dragged into it. The stranger had only addressed him because he was wearing a similar kind of cap to those of Cutts & Co.

"So that's why the man changed his mind and lent the car to Cutts," murmured Glyn. "He'll be lucky to get it back in one whole piece!"

At that moment some cyclists appeared farther down the High Street, and Bernard Glyn brightened up when he saw their caps. They were St. Jim's fellows, and probably Clifton Dane was amongst them.

Dane had been rather uncertain about it. He had told Glyn that he might ride into Wayland, and, if so, they would probably meet.

Glyn recognised the newcomers as Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, in the Fourth. Clifton Dane was not with them.

"Well, I'll wait another ten minutes—but no longer!" said Glyn decidedly. "And when I see that ass Dane I'll tick him off!"

Blake & Co. came riding by, and waved to the Shell fellow.

"Coming our way?" sang out Blake cheerily.

"Not yet, thanks."

"We are just weturnin' to St. Jim's, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway honah us with your company on the wide."

"Can't come yet, Gussy," said Glyn. "I'm waiting for Dane. Don't bother about me."

The chums of Study No. 6 pedalled on without stopping. They felt that any delay would be unwise, for some dark clouds were rolling up from the westward. It was April, and the weather could not be guaranteed.

Bernard Glyn, still standing there, rather at a loss, saw those threatening clouds, too. He eyed them dubiously.

"Well, I'm sick of this!" he decided. "I'm off home. Come to think of it, I might just as well have gone with those Fourth Form chaps."

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His attention became fixed a moment later. A blue car was coming down the High Street—an old type of Morris-Cowley, with rounded radiator.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Bernard Glyn blankly.

It wasn't the car that occasioned his surprise. It was the absence of Cutts & Co.—and the presence of a policeman in uniform, who sat at the wheel!

CHAPTER 2.

The Good Samaritans!

BERNARD GLYN was startled.

For a moment he believed that Cutts & Co. had got into serious trouble; but then, as the car drew opposite, and passed by, he realised his mistake.

It wasn't the same car.

And yet, at the first glance, it had given Glyn a start. It was a Morris-Cowley, and the colour was blue—not the usual quiet blue, but a loud, distinctive blue. At close quarters, however, Glyn could see that this second car was in much better condition than Sparkey's.

"Oh, they've found it, then!" said a voice.

Bernard Glyn turned, and found a cheery little man by his side. He was an assistant from one of the Wayland shops, and Glyn knew him well.

"Got what?" asked the Shell fellow.

"That stolen car."

"Oh, I see!" said Glyn. "That's why the policeman was driving, eh?"

"I suppose so," said the other. "There was a paragraph about it in the Wayland paper this morning—and yesterday, too, if it comes to that. The public was told to look out for a blue Morris-Cowley. It was stolen from Abbotsford at the beginning of the week. The police have been pretty smart, by the look of it."

"Yes," said Glyn.

But his interest in the stolen car was practically nil, for a few spots of rain had commenced to fall, and there was every indication of a sharp shower.

"I'd better be going!" said Glyn hastily.

"Yes," agreed the shop-assistant. "These April showers are pretty sudden, eh?"

Meanwhile, Blake & Co. were more than half-way to Rycombe, and they were only on the fringe of the threatened zone. However, they felt two or three drops as they pedalled onwards.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "It's wainin', deah boys!"

"That's all right, Gussy—we shan't melt!" said Blake.

"Pway do not be wediculous, Blake," answered Gussy. "Howevah, any fellow with a wight and pwopah respect for his clobber is wcluctant to get wet thwough. So we had bettah huwwy."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, grinning. "Race you to the bend, Gussy!"

"Good egg!" chuckled Herries and Digby.

They started pedalling for all they were worth, and Arthur Augustus was left behind.

"You uttah wottahs!" he shouted indignantly. "You know vewy well, Blake, that I object to wacin'. Pway wait for me, deah boys!"

"Can't stop!" sang out Blake. "It's raining!"

But at the bend they eased down, and allowed Arthur Augustus to catch them up. The rain was very slight—only a few drops here and there. And the fringe of clouds appeared to be passing away from them. It was only a local shower, centred over Wayland.

"I wegard you as fwightful duffahs!" panted Gussy, as he arrived.

"But I thought you were in a hurry?" asked Blake.

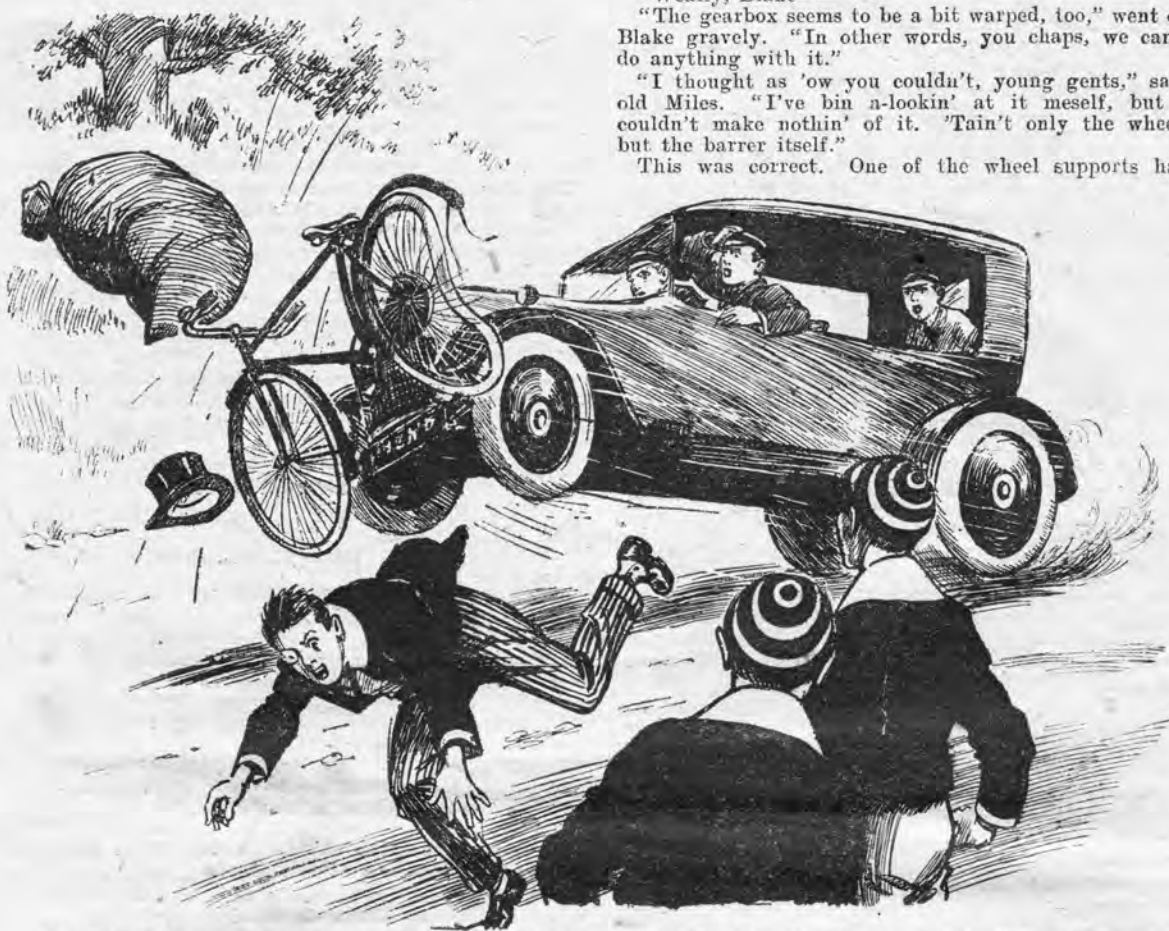
"Theah is no necessity to wush," said Arthur Augustus, with as much dignity as he could assume.

"All right, let's take it slowly," said Blake. "We're easy to please, Gussy. If we get wet through we can soon change our togs."

"I wefuse to get wet thwough! I mean——"

Arthur Augustus paused, and never explained what he meant. His attention had become attracted by an elderly man at the side of the road—a farm labourer, judging by his attire. He was very bent and he was very whiskery. He was standing beside a broken barrow, and he was scratching his head in a forlorn way.

"Looks like a breakdown," said Herries, as they were about to cycle past.



"Look out!" yelled Blake. Arthur Augustus jumped wildly for safety as a car, travelling at about thirty miles an hour, careered dizzily round the bend in the road. Crash! The car caught the bicycle and the bag of greens fairly and squarely and sent them flying across the road. (See Chapter 3.)

"Wheel's come off," nodded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I think it is up to us to wally wound, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus, leaping from his machine. "The old boy appeals to be in distwess."

"What about the rain, Gussy?" asked Digby. "It looks like coming on."

"Bothah the wain!"

And Arthur Augustus propped his bicycle against the hedge and turned to the old man. The other three juniors also dismounted and followed Gussy's example.

"Trouble?" asked Blake, with businesslike briskness.

"Ay, young gent," said the old man. "Seems like as the old barrow 'as broke at last."

"Perhaps we can repair it," suggested Blake. "Come on, you fellows!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's very kind of ye, young gents," said the old man, "but you don't need to trouble. It ain't right as you should soil your 'ands with my rough old barrer."

"Pway don't mention it!" said D'Arcy gracefully. "It is no twouble whatevah!"

They had recognised the old fellow by now. His name was Miles, and he lived in one of the small cottages on the outskirts of Rylcombe. Probably he had been to his allotment, and the barrow had broken down on the way back. For it was loaded and contained a heavy-looking sack.

"Better turn it upside down," said Blake practically. "Anythin' that matters in this sack?" he added, glancing at Miles.

"Only greens, young gent."

The sack of greens was unceremoniously bundled out on to the grass, and then the barrow was overturned.

"This is bad!" said Blake, inspecting the damage. "The differential is twisted, and the carburetter is out of alignment with the magneto."

"Weally, Blake—"

"The gearbox seems to be a bit warped, too," went on Blake gravely. "In other words, you chaps, we can't do anything with it."

"I thought as 'ow you couldn't, young gents," said old Miles. "I've bin a-lookin' at it meself, but I couldn't make nothin' of it. 'Tain't only the wheel, but the barrer itself."

This was correct. One of the wheel supports had

snapped clean off, and in the resultant crash the wheel itself had lost its hub, all the rotten spokes having smashed beyond all possibility of repair.

"We shall have to leave the barrow here," said Blake at length. "It's not in bad condition, really. To make a thorough job of it, it only needs a new wheel and new legs and new handles and a new body."

"That's all!" grinned Herries.

"You uttah asses!" said D'Arcy. "You are suggestin' that ewewythin' should be new."

Old Miles appreciated the joke, even if Gussy didn't.

"I reckon as you're right, young gent!" he chuckled. "A new barrer is what I wants right enough!"

"How about your sack of greens?" asked Blake.

"Well, young gents, if you'll give me a 'and with it on me shoulder, I'll—"

"Wathah not!" interrupted D'Arcy. "I uttably wufese to let you cawwy the sack of gweens!"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"But I want to get them greens 'ome to my cottage," said the old man. "The market gardener comes round with 'is van this arternoon, an' I've arranged—"

"That's all right!" interrupted Blake. "Gussy has got the right idea. He refuses to allow you to carry that sack on your shoulders."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So he's going to carry it on his own," said Blake blandly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now, Gussy, don't be so modest!" said Blake, waving a finger at the startled Arthur Augustus. "It was your suggestion, and we wouldn't dream of depriving you of the honour."

"You burblin' duffah!" shrieked Gussy. "I nevah suggested—"

"Don't deny it now!" said Blake sternly. "We know what a modest chap you are, Gussy, and we know how you love helping people in distress. You're not denying that you were the first to jump off your bike, are you?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Are you denying it?" insisted Blake.

"No!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Howevah, I fail to see what—"

"Then you shall have the honour of carrying the sack of greens!" said Blake cheerfully. "Come on, Herries! Lend a hand, Dig! We'll soon have it on Gussy's back!"

"Rather!" chuckled Herries and Digby.

"Look 'ere, young gents, there ain't no need——" began old Miles.

"You don't know Gussy," said Blake, smiling at him. "He loves doing this sort of thing!"

Arthur Augustus backed away in horror.

"I uttably wefuse to have that gwubbay sack placed on my back, you wottahs!" he shouted.

Blake stared at him.

"Oh, Gussy!" he said in a pained voice.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You've offered to help this old chap, and now you refuse!" went on Blake accusingly. "What are you made of?"

"Bai Jove! I—I——"

"Are we to think that you didn't mean it, Gussy?" continued Blake. "Are we to understand that you object to doing this good turn?"

"I fail to see why I should shouldah the sack when there are four of us!" replied Gussy, with dignity. "It will be vewy easy for us to cawwy the g'reens if we all lend a hand and wally wound."

"But I thought you wanted all the honour?"

"I wefuse to take all the honah!" replied D'Arcy coldly. "And I wefuse to take all the sack!"

Blake looked at old Miles and winked.

"Then it seems to me that you'll have to take your own sack, after all," he said regretfully. "Gussy refuses to shoulder it."

"That's all right, sir," said old Miles, with a crinkly grin. "My back may be a bit bent, an' I ain't what I was, on account of the roomatiz, but it wouldn't be the first sack of greens as I've carried. No, an' I dessay it won't be the last!"

The old man guessed—correctly—that Blake was having a little game with his noble chum.

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy, aghast. "Surely, Blake, you are not goin' to allow old Miles to cawwy the g'reens himself?"

"I?" said Blake, staring. "What do you mean, Gussy? You're the fellow who has refused to carry them!"

"You fwightful wottah——"

"Now, now, Gussy, don't try to get out of it!" said Blake sternly. "You know very well that you offered to help. You can't deny it. And as soon as we suggest that you should carry the sack you jib. I'm ashamed of you!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We're all ashamed of you, Gussy!" said Herries sadly.

Gussy pulled himself up, and his noble chin tilted.

"Vewy well!" he said coldly. "Pway help me to lift the sack of g'reens on my shouldah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy's chums yelled with merriment.

"You spoofin' boundahs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, as the truth dawned upon him. "You've only been wottin'!"

"That's all, Gussy!" grinned Blake.

"I have a vewy good mind to administah a feahful thwashin', Blake!" said Gussy indignantly. "I wegard you as a burblin' duffah!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"We've had our bit of fun, but, at the same time, I don't see why you should get out of taking the sack," went on Blake thoughtfully. "I'll tell you what, Gussy—we'll shove the sack on your bicycle, and you can wheel it to old Miles' cottage. How's that?"

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"It is bettah, I agwee," said Gussy. "But your bicycle is quite old and wustay, Blake, and——"

"We're going to carry the barrow, Gussy," said Blake. "Of course, if you prefer to——"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy hastily. "Pway let the awwangement stand, deah boys!"

The others chuckled, and they hoisted the sack of greens across Gussy's machine. It was straddled over the handlebars and the saddle, and it was a comparatively easy task to wheel the bicycle with this load.

Old Miles protested that it wasn't necessary to go to all this trouble, but Blake & Co. took no notice. Between the three of them they easily lifted the barrow and carried it along. The distance was not very great—less than a quarter of a mile. Rain was falling in a half-hearted manner, but the juniors took little or no notice.

And somewhere on the road behind them, Cutts & Co. were careering onwards. There seemed to be no connection between these two incidents—but the afternoon wasn't over yet!

CHAPTER 3.

A Shock for Cutts & Co.!

PURRRRRR!

The blue Morris-Cowley, with Cutts at the wheel, hummed merrily along the Wayland road, en route for St. Jim's.

Gerald Cutts was enjoying himself.

Gilmore and St. Leger, however, were not quite so sure about it. They enjoyed themselves in patches. For Cutts' driving, like the celebrated curate's egg, was only good in parts. At times he would go along sedately, and at other times he would "tread on the gas" and send the car hurtling along at breakneck speed.

Cutts, in fact, was a novice. In his own opinion, he knew everything there was to know about driving a car; but, in the opinion of Gilmore and St. Leger, he was a peril to the community. More than once he had only narrowly averted disaster, owing to his habit of swinging round curves at full speed.

At the moment, however, the road was straight, and Cutts was driving with moderate speed.

"By gad! We'll show 'em something at St. Jim's!" chuckled the blade of the Fifth. "We'll drive right into the quad and surprise the natives!"

"Unless you knock one of the gateposts down, old man!" said St. Leger.

"Idiot!" frowned Cutts, glancing round. "Are you suggesting that I can't drive?"

"As long as you go along like this I shan't have a word to say," replied St. Leger complacently. "It's a good wheeze to go to St. Jim's and swank."

"Who's going to swank?" said Cutts tartly.

"Ahem! Well, perhaps not!" murmured St. Leger. "Anythin' interestin' in the paper, Gilmore, old bean?"

Gilmore was leaning back at his ease, glancing through a local paper that he had bought in Wayland. But Gilmore was only looking at the latest racing intelligence. The general news failed to attract him.

Cutts had made a detour, and had driven round the countryside for a mile or two before taking the Rylcombe road. His plan now was to drive up to St. Jim's, enter the quad with a terrific hoot on the horn, and pull up outside the School House. Cutts was feeling very pleased with himself.

"Can't quite understand about Sparkey," he remarked, as he changed gear half-way up the hill, and made an awful hash of it. "I wonder why he lent us the car, after saying that he wouldn't?"

"He bunked from that stranger, of course," said St. Leger.

"But why?" went on Cutts. "Why on earth did he bolt like that?"

"Well, there's no need for us to worry," drawled St. Leger. "We've got the car, and——"

"Great Scott!"

It was a startled ejaculation from Gilmore. The Fifth-Former had gone pale to the lips, and he was sitting forward in his seat, holding the newspaper in his quivering hands.

"What's the matter, you idiot?" said Cutts.
 "Stop!" gasped Gilmore. "Stop, you fool!"
 "Confound you—!" began Cutts.
 "Stop, I tell you!" shouted Gilmore. "There's—there's something in here that you've got to hear! I've just spotted it! Oh, help! It's—it's awful!"
 Cutts pulled out the clutch and applied the brake. The car came to a standstill almost in the middle of the road. Cutts wasn't experienced enough to draw to the side.

"What the thunder is the matter with you, Gilmore?" he demanded, as he turned round.

"Listen!" said Gilmore hoarsely. "It's here—right on the front page!"

"What's there?"

"This—this notice!"

"What notice, confound you?"

"About a stolen car!" panted Gilmore.

"A stolen car?"

"Yes!" said Gilmore. "Listen—"

"Yes, but—"

"It's headed, 'Police Warning.' And then it goes on to say: 'The Abbotsford and Wayland police have every hope of recovering the four-seater car which was stolen from Abbotsford earlier in the week. The public is warned to keep a sharp look-out for this car, which is believed to be still in the district. It is an old type Morris-Cowley, with a bright blue body. Any person seeing this car should at once communicate with the nearest police station. The car is numbered "V W 823—"'

"Here, wait a minute!" panted Cutts. "What's that you said? An old type Morris-Cowley? Bright blue body?"

"Yes!" said Gilmore, in a strangled voice.

"But—but this is an old type Morris-Cowley!"

"I know it is!"

"With a bright blue body!" said Cutts, gazing at the car as if fascinated. "Oh, but it's all rot! This can't be the car, Gilmore, you idiot! It's only a coincidence!"

"Let's look at the number!" shouted St. Leger, leaping out.

He ran round to the front, and then uttered a gasp of relief.

"This car has got a different number—" he began.

"That doesn't count for anything!" exclaimed Gilmore. "All car thieves put false number-plates on as soon as they've stolen a car! I tell you, Cutts, this is the stolen car!"

"But—but Sparkey said it was his own!"

"Who the dickens is Sparkey?" said Gilmore. "We hardly know him! I wouldn't be so jolly certain, only Sparkey's actions were so significant! Look at the way he bolted in Wayland."

"Bolted!" said Cutts, with a start.

"Well, didn't he bolt?"

"Yes, but—"

"He bunked as soon as he saw that tall stranger down the street," said Gilmore huskily. "He wasn't going to lend us the car, and then he suddenly changed his mind. Why? Because that stranger was a detective, and Sparkey recognised him."

"A detective!" yelled Cutts.

"Of course he was a detective!" said Gilmore frantically. "Isn't it all as clear as daylight? Oh, my goodness! And we're in the stolen car, and you're driving, Cutts!"

Gerald Cutts went green.

"But—but I'm not in any danger," he said, with a gulp. "They can't touch me—"

"Don't be an idiot!" snapped Gilmore. "You know what the law is!"

"The law?"

"Yes!" shouted Gilmore. "Anybody found in possession of stolen property is liable to arrest and prosecution."

"Oh, dear!"

"We might be stopped by the very first bobby we meet!" said Gilmore. "And you haven't got a licence, Cutts! That'll be enough to get you a whacking great fine. But that's only a trifle! You're in possession of this stolen car—"

"We're all in possession of it!" interrupted Cutts.

"Rot!" broke in St. Leger. "You're the driver, and you're responsible!"

"Of course you are!" said Gilmore hastily. "St. Leger and I don't accept any responsibility, Cutts! It was your idea to borrow the car, and—"

"But—but what had we better do?" interrupted Cutts desperately. "Why not jump out of the car here, and leave it?"

"We can't!" said Gilmore. "There are some people in sight, and they'll only get suspicious. We've got to drive on. We'd better take the car somewhere, and hide it up."

"Great Scott!" said St. Leger. "It's coming on to rain now, too! How the thunder do you wangle this confounded hood?"

But Cutts wasn't worrying about the rain, or the hood, either.

He had grabbed the newspaper from Gilmore's hand, and was reading that significant paragraph. The police were on the look-out for a stolen car—an old-type Morris-Cowley, with a bright blue body! Yes, there it was—in cold print.

And Cutts remembered, vividly, how Sparkey had bolted with obvious fright at the sight of a tall stranger in the distance. Now that Cutts came to think of it, that stranger had been a grim, stern-looking man. A detective in every inch of him! Cutts also remembered how the stranger had stared at the car as it had passed him.

The blade of the Fifth was startled. Quite unconsciously he was implicated in this unsavoury mix-up. For it was an undeniable fact that he was in possession of the car—he was the present driver. It was also an undeniable fact that Gerald Cutts possessed no licence. His satisfaction of five minutes earlier had now turned to uneasiness and fear.

In the meantime, Gilmore and St. Leger were struggling with the hood, and they managed to pull it over the car and fix it in position. The shower was a sharp one, and the rain pelted down on the overhead canvas.

"Let's get going," said Gilmore frantically. "These people are coming along—and they'll probably recognise the car. Can't we drive it towards St. Jim's, and hide it somewhere in the woods?"

"It's no good stopping here, anyway," said Cutts thickly. "It's too open here—too public."

A moment later the car was on its way again, and Gerald Cutts was now driving with greater recklessness than ever. He was panic-stricken—he wanted to get away somewhere. He wanted to get beyond the public gaze, so that he could have time to think and plan.

For even Cutts, in his present condition of fear, realised that it was impossible to leave the car standing there, on the road.

And at just about this same time Blake & Co. were approaching old Miles' cottage.

They had received hardly any of the shower, and now the sky overhead was clear, and the sun was shining.

"Shan't be long now," said Blake cheerily.

"It's very kind of you young gents, to take all this trouble over me," said old Miles. "Thank ye kindly for—"

"Pway don't mention it, Mr. Miles," interrupted Gussy gracefully. "We're only too glad to wally wound."

"It's a pleasure," said Blake, nodding.

Arthur Augustus had the best of it, for it was an easy task for him to wheel his bicycle, with the sack of greens balanced on the top. Blake and Herries and Digby were carrying the barrow, and the ramshackle vehicle was now getting very heavy. However, the cottage was within sight, so their task would soon be over.

"Go easy with those greens, Gussy," said Blake warningly. "No need to walk in the middle of the road."

"I'm only givin' you fellows woom with the baw-wow," said D'Arcy.

"There's plenty of room for all of us at the side," said Blake. "If anything happens to come along, and you let that bike overbalance—"

"Wats!" interrupted Gussy. "Surely I am to be twisted with wheelin' a bicycle?"

"You're not to be trusted with anything, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look out!" broke in Herries, as he glanced round. "There's something coming now!"

A hoot had sounded from the rear. The chums of Study No. 6 had just turned a bend, so it was impossible to see the nature of the vehicle that was approaching.

Arthur Augustus, glancing behind, caught sight of a motor-car careering dizzily round the curve. It was on the crown of the road, and it was coming along at a reckless pace.

"Look out, Gussy!" yelled Blake.

That shout of his was rather unwise, for Arthur Augustus jumped. And for a brief second the top-heavy bicycle lost its balance. It veered over towards the off-side of the road, and Gussy clutched wildly at it.

"Gweat Scott!" he gasped.

His fingers slipped on the sack of greens, and the bicycle eluded him. It carried on under its own momentum, and swerved off towards the middle of the road, still keeping its balance.

And in the car Gerald Cutts uttered a howl of alarm. He had come round that corner far too quickly—and he knew it.

The windscreen was partially obscured by raindrops, and until the very last moment Cutts had not seen the obstruction ahead. Now, within the space of a split second, something had to be done, or there would be a collision.

Cutts was a novice, and, before he could pull himself together, the thing happened. Indeed, in his frantic alarm, he trod on the accelerator instead of on the brake.

"Oh!" yelled Blake wildly.

The motor-car, travelling at about thirty miles an hour, caught the bicycle and the bag of greens fairly and squarely before the machine could lose its balance. It was a direct hit.

Crash!

The bicycle and the bag of greens went flying across the road, the Morris-Cowley seemed to leap into the air, and swerved giddily towards the ditch. But then, as though by a miracle, the driver regained control and got back into the centre of the road.

And Blake & Co. set up a chorus of indignant shouts when they saw that the car was driving straight on under full power.

CHAPTER 4.

Cutts, the Criminal!

"BAI JOVE!"

"The awful rotters!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

Blake & Co. had dropped the barrow, and now they were standing in the road, staring angrily at the rear of the blue car as it vanished into the distance. Old Miles was looking, with a startled face.

Arthur Augustus had eyes for nothing except his bicycle.

But it wasn't a bicycle any longer. It was merely a mass of twisted debris. The handlebars were in the ditch; the frame, bent and battered, was in the middle of the road. The front wheel had completely come away with the forks and was looking like a figure 8. The rest of the machine was littered about untidily. The sack of greens had apparently come off unscathed.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Gussy dazedly.

"Did anybody see that rotter's number?" asked Blake.

"There wasn't time to look at it," said Herries. "Besides, we thought he would stop!"

"He ought to have stopped, too!" growled Blake wrathfully. "Any decent motorist would have pulled up. He knew jolly well that he had smashed up the bike, and yet he buzzed on at full speed. The road-hog!"

"There's no telling what they'll do nowadays, young gent!" said old Miles concernedly. "I reckon this is my fault, too. If it wasn't for me, you young gents wouldn't have——"

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"Don't you believe it!" interrupted Blake. "There's no need for you to worry at all, Miles. In fact, none of us need worry. It's only Gussy's bike that's smashed!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And it was Gussy's own fault!" added Blake tartly. "You uttah ass!" shrieked D'Arey. "You know vewy well that the motowist——"

"Blow the motorist!" said Blake. "I warned you a minute before that you were too careless, Gussy! Why the merry dickens did you leave go?"

"It was bettah for the machine to be smashed alone than for me to be slaughtered with it!" replied Arthur Augustus frigidly.

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Blake. "But if you had only hung on you might have pulled it clear."

"I wegard you as a wank wottah!" said D'Arey, adjusting his eyeglass and staring at Blake with some heat. "You know perfectly well that the motowist was at fault. He came woawin' wound that bend at full speed!"

"Gussy's right!" said Herries. "The awful cad gave us no chance. He was going like a track-racer. It's a jolly lucky thing that some of us aren't killed!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk—or over broken bikes!" said Blake practically. "We'd better clear up the litter and shove it in the ditch. And Gussy will have to walk home!"

"I uttably wefuse to walk home!" shouted Gussy. "Kindly wemembah, Blake, that this is my new bike!"

"It doesn't look new now, Gussy," said Blake, shaking his head.

"It cost ten pounds!" said D'Arey indignantly.

"And now it's worth about twopence!" murmured Blake.

"I shall inform the police!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway excuse me, deah boys, while I wun into Wylcombe and find P.-c. Cwump!"

"It'll be a fat lot of good finding Crump!" said Blake tartly. "He'll waste half the day in taking particulars, and by that time the motorist will be in Wales, or somewhere! Besides, is it worth the trouble of a prosecution? Even if we collar the motorist, there'll be all sorts of complications afterwards. Better grin and bear it, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to gwin and bear it!"

"Then grin!"

"You fwigthful wottah! I wefuse to gwin!"

"Oh, then bear it without grinning!" said Blake impatiently. "There's no pleasing you, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

But D'Arey's chums were not listening. As far as they could see, there was very little that could be done. The motorist had been unscrupulous enough to drive on, and there wasn't one chance in a thousand that he could be traced and forced to pay the damage.

And while Blake & Co. busied themselves in picking up the remains of Gussy's bicycle and tossing the bits into the ditch, the blue motor-car had pulled to a standstill in Rylcombe Lane, close to the old stile. It was quiet there, and not a soul was within sight.

Cutts had driven madly through Rylcombe, much to the terror of Gilmore and St. Leger. In vain, they had urged him to slow down. But Cutts, after that smash, had driven on in a panic. He had only stopped now because he was getting perilously near to St. Jim's. And it was necessary for him to stop, so that he could decide what should be done.

But Fate had played rather a shabby trick on Gerald Cutts.

For, all unknown to him, he had stopped the car at a very significant spot. Just beyond the hedge, near the stile, three figures were crouching. They belonged to Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners, of the Shell. And the celebrated Terrible Three of the School House glared at the car through the interstices of the hedge with undisguised annoyance.

"Who the dickens is this butting in?" murmured Monty Lowther. "Why can't these beastly motorists stop somewhere else?"

"Shush!" murmured Tom Merry. "Perhaps they'll carry on after a minute or two."

The Terrible Three, as a matter of fact, were in ambush. They had heard on excellent authority that Fatty Wynn had gone down to the station to claim a tuck hamper. And Tom Merry & Co. had their own ideas as to where that tuck hamper should ultimately go. Fatty Wynn could be expected at any moment, and the stopping of this motor-car was unfortunate.

But the Terrible Three forgot all about the tuck hamper a moment later.

"Great Scott!" breathed Tom Merry suddenly. "Look who's in the driving seat! It's Cutts of the Fifth!"

"Well, thank goodness!" muttered Cutts.

"No damage?" asked Gilmore.

"Nothing to speak of," replied Cutts. "But what are we going to do? That's what I want to decide!"

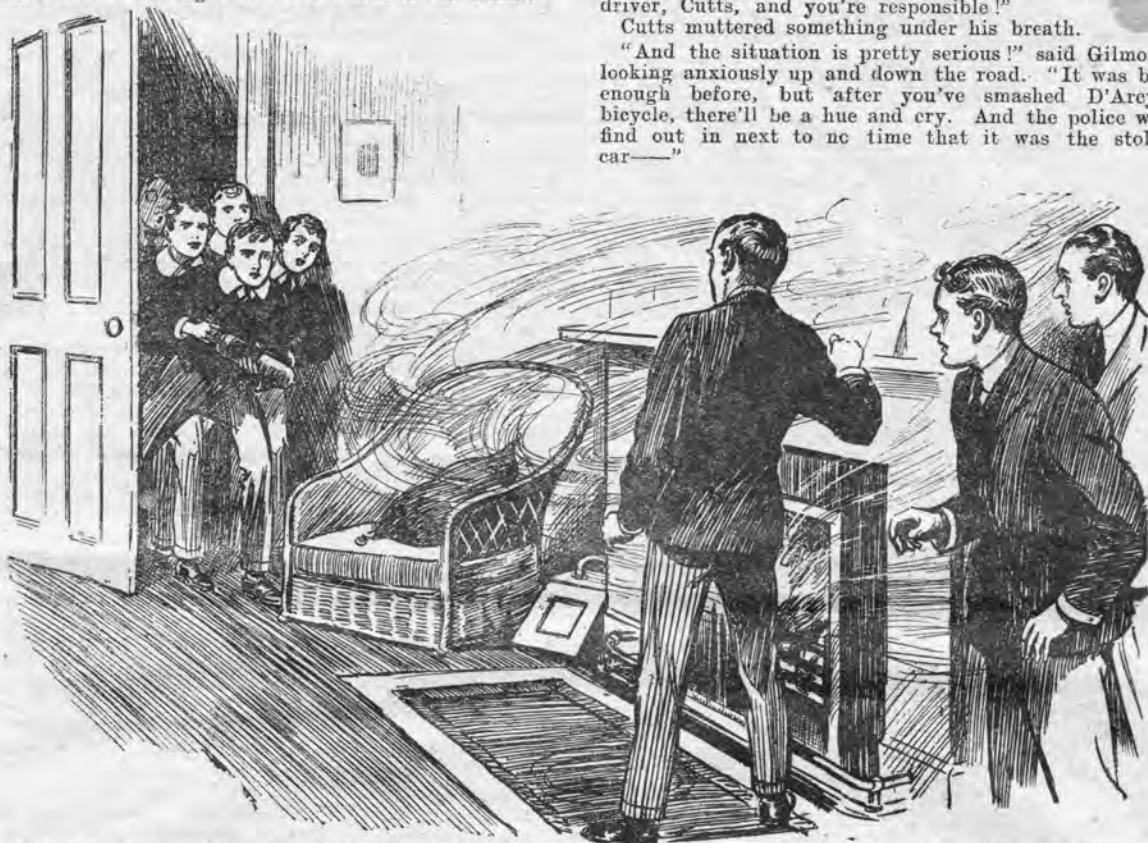
"Hadh't we better hide the car up somewhere?" suggested St. Leger. "You were in a pretty nasty fix before, Cutts, but you're in a nastier one now."

"Why me alone?" snapped Cutts. "What about you fellows?"

"We're only passengers," said St. Leger. "You're the driver, Cutts, and you're responsible!"

Cutts muttered something under his breath.

"And the situation is pretty serious!" said Gilmore, looking anxiously up and down the road. "It was bad enough before, but after you've smashed D'Arcy's bicycle, there'll be a hue and cry. And the police will find out in next to no time that it was the stolen car—"



Crash! The door of Gerald Cutts' study burst open and a flood of juniors came tearing in. Jack Blake, who was in the lead, was carrying a fire extinguisher. "The fire's in here!" he yelled. "Why, what the—Cutts!" (See Chapter 8.)

"Well, I'm blessed!" breathed Manners. "So it is!" "He's looking a bit green about the gills!" whispered Monty. "I wonder what he's been up to?"

Cutts & Co., all unconscious of the nearby juniors, were holding a quick confab.

"You've done it now, Cutts!" Gilmore was saying, in a frightened voice. "Oh, you idiot! You'll be lucky if you escape prison!"

"I couldn't help it!" panted Cutts, pale to the lips. "I—I didn't see the rotten bicycle until I was practically on top of it!"

St. Leger was breathing hard.

"Well, you can thank your lucky stars that nobody was riding the machine!" he said fervently. "D'Arcy, of the Fourth, was wheeling it, wasn't he?"

"Yes," said Cutts. "There was a sack of something on the bike, and D'Arcy, like a fool, let go. How could I avoid running into it?"

"Well, you smashed it up all right!" said Gilmore. "Hang the bicycle!" retorted Cutts. "It was D'Arcy's own fault for letting go of the machine! I'm worrying about what he'll do. He'll probably make a report to the police, and then there'll be detectives on the trail!"

"Oh, that's certain!" said Gilmore.

"Positive!" agreed St. Leger.

Cutts jumped out of the driving seat, and ran round to the front of the car. He uttered a deep breath of relief when he found that the damage was practically nil. One wing was slightly dented, but there was no other sign of the accident. It was the bicycle which had suffered all the damage.

"Can't you keep quiet about the stolen car?" panted Cutts.

"Where's the sense of keeping quiet?" said Gilmore. "You know jolly well that this is a stolen car—and you know that you haven't got any licence!"

The Terrible Three, behind the hedge, listened in amazement.

They had been prepared to hear that Cutts & Co. had been up to something questionable; but this conversation was giving them something of a shock. Tom Merry had had some idea of revealing himself—for he hated the thought of eavesdropping, even unintentionally. Now, however, he crouched low, and he warned his chums to remain silent.

Gerald Cutts forced himself to be calm.

"There's no sense in getting the wind up," he said steadily. "Let's look at the whole position in a cool way, and then decide what to do."

"There's nothing much to decide!" growled St. Leger. "The sooner we get rid of this car, the better!"

"Of course!" agreed Cutts. "We thought it belonged to Sparkey, and we borrowed it from him in good faith."

"You mean you borrowed it!"

"Well, I borrowed it, then!" snapped Cutts.

"Don't drag us into it!" said St. Leger.

"You rotters!" said Cutts hotly. "We were all in this together—and you're a couple of cads for not accepting your share of the responsibility."

"But, hang it, you've been driving—" began Gilmore.

"We borrowed the car from Sparkey in good faith!"

went on Cutts curtly. "But now we know that it's a stolen car. There can't be any doubt about that report in the paper. It's as clear as daylight! This car is stolen—and the police are searching for it!"

"I know that!" said Gilmore, looking up and down the lane again.

"And it doesn't matter whether you borrowed it or not, Cutts!" added St. Leger. "You're in charge of it—you're the driver. And so the police will nab you as the thief. You're in possession of stolen property and that'll be good enough. Besides, you ran over D'Arcy's bicycle and smashed it. And there are bound to be all sorts of inquiries. The police will be on the track in less than half an hour."

"And you haven't any licence!" said Gilmore.

Gerald Cutts clutched at the car for support.

"I know I haven't any licence!" he panted. "And I know I smashed D'Arcy's bicycle by running over it! What the thunder is the good of reminding me of all this? I want to know what we're going to do!"

"Well, St. Leger and I are going to walk on to St. Jim's!" said Gilmore hastily. "We're not in this thing at all, Cutts! You borrowed the car, and you're the driver. You can do what you like with it!"

"You—you cads!" shouted Cutts hotly. "You're not going to desert me, are you?"

"We don't want to be arrested, too!"

"Look here, if you chaps will stand by me, there's not much danger!" said Cutts quickly. "We weren't recognised by those confounded fags. The hood was up, and they hadn't time to see us. They'll think that it was some unknown motorist who smashed that bike."

"That's possible!" admitted Gilmore thoughtfully.

"I don't suppose they saw us at all."

"Then we're safe!" said Cutts. "We're as safe as eggs!"

"How are we?"

"Because we can hide this car in the woods somewhere—or perhaps at the back of the shrubbery, near St. Jim's," went on Cutts, his brain working rapidly. "By gad! That's it! Once we've hidden the car we can go to our study and spend the afternoon reading, or something. We shan't be suspected at all."

"You never know!" said St. Leger dubiously.

"Even if the police trace the car, there'll be nothing to connect it with us!" declared Cutts, with relief. "Nobody saw us in Wayland—nobody that matters, anyhow. And those fags didn't spot us, either. The police'll simply find the car, and they'll never know who drove it. They might even nab Sparkey as the thief."

"Well, he is the thief, isn't he?" said Gilmore.

"I don't know," replied Cutts. "He may be. Anyhow, he acted jolly suspiciously when he bunked from that detective. But never mind Sparkey! Our job is to shove this car somewhere, and then get away from it! We can't leave it here in the road, so we'll hide it behind the shrubbery!"

"And after that we shall be safe!" said St. Leger, with relief.

They climbed back into the car, and drove off, labouring under the totally mistaken impression that everything would be all right.

CHAPTER 5.

The Truth!

"PHEW!" whistled Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three had left their place of concealment, and they were sitting on the stile, looking up the lane. The blue Morris-Cowley had vanished, and Tom Merry & Co. were discussing the conversation they had accidentally overheard. The object of their ambush was completely forgotten.

"The awful rotters!" said Manners indignantly.

"Well, we don't know all the facts yet," said Tom Merry. "Cutts seems to be acting in a shady sort of way—"

"What do you mean—we don't know all the facts?" broke in Manners. "We know that Cutts & Co. are in a stolen car, and that they're in fear of the police."

"Yes; but it isn't exactly their fault," said Tom.

"Didn't we hear Cutts say that they borrowed the car

in good faith? They only discovered afterwards—apparently by a newspaper paragraph—that the car was stolen. Cutts can't be blamed for that!"

"But there seems to have been an accident down the road," remarked Monty. "Hadh't we better buzz along and find out the truth?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," agreed Tom Merry.

They hurried down the lane, and as soon as they got into the village they found that rumour had been busy. In a quiet place like Rylcombe it did not take long for tongues to wag.

Shopkeepers were standing at their doors, talking with the village gossips. A few St. Jim's fellows were there, too, including Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth. And Baggy, as usual, was listening eagerly.

As a matter of fact, a tradesman's van had travelled along the Wayland road, soon after the smash, and the driver had come upon Blake & Co., while they were clearing up the remains of D'Arcy's smashed bicycle.

Naturally, the juniors had told him of what had happened, and had described the blue car. And the van driver had at once jumped to the obvious conclusion. Now the whole of Rylcombe was throbbing with the sensational news that the stolen car was somewhere in the district, and that the desperate driver had nearly killed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. heard several versions as they paused, here and there, in the village High Street.

According to one story, Arthur Augustus had been tossed clean over the motor-car and had fallen into a ditch, with every bone in his body broken. In another version he had been run over, and his life was despaired of. But the generally-accepted story was to the effect that Gussy had come off scot-free, but that his bicycle was hopelessly smashed. And this had been done by the desperate car thief, who was even now in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe.

"We'd better hurry along and find out the truth," said Tom Merry. "We can't rely on these stories. I don't believe Gussy is hurt, anyway."

They hurried to the outskirts of the village, and near old Miles' cottage they came across Blake & Co. Even at a distance they could see that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was uninjured. No fellow who had been run over, or who had been tossed over a car, could have gesticulated and shouted as Gussy was gesticulating and shouting.

"I regard you as an utter ass, Blake!" D'Arcy was saying, as the Terrible Three arrived. "I refuse to let the matter drop. My bicycle cost ten pounds, and I shall inform the police, and—"

"What's the trouble here?" asked Tom Merry briskly.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, turning. "I'm glad you have come, Tom Merry! There has been a frightful accident—"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Nothing's happened at all."

"Nothing!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Well, hardly anything," amended Blake. "Gussy's bike has been reduced to scrap iron—that's all."

"Oh, a mere trifle!" said Monty Lowther, nodding.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"For goodness' sake don't make a mystery over nothing," said Blake. "An unknown car came along, and it smashed into Gussy's bike. There's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"But how was it that Gussy came off without being hurt?" asked Manners.

Blake explained the circumstances, and the Terrible Three were then able to understand.

"There's some talk that the car was a stolen one," went on Blake. "But I don't believe it. The motorist was just a plain road-hog, and—"

"Yaas, wathah!" broke in D'Arcy. "A frightful woad-hog, deah boys! No self-respectin' motorist would dwive on like that aftah smashin' a fellow's bicycle. It was an utterahly wascally thing to do."

"So it was!" nodded Tom Merry. "Cutts knew jolly well that he had smashed your bike, Gussy, and he ought to have stopped. He came round the bend too fast, and the accident was entirely his own fault. The least he could do was to stop and accept the responsibility."

"Cutts?" repeated Blake & Co., in amazement.

"Yes, Cutts," nodded Tom.

"What the merry dickens are you talking about?" said Blake. "Do you mean Cutts, of the Fifth?"

"Yes."

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Are you tellin' us, Tom Mewwy, that Cutts was dwivin' that car?"

"Exactly."

"Cheese it!" grinned Blake. "You can't spoof us like that, Tommy!"

"But it's a fact," said Tom Merry. "Cutts was driving the car—and Gilmore and St. Leger were with him."

"I say, is this true—honest injun?"

"Honest injun!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Blake, scratching his head. "So it was Cutts!"

"Bai Jove! Then, of course, the mattah is explained," said Gussy indignantly. "We all know that Cutts is an uttah wottah!"

"He was afraid to stop because he was frightened out of his wits," said Monty Lowther. "He hadn't got any licence, and he only borrowed the car for the afternoon."

"And it's a stolen car, too!" said Manners.

"Stolen!" yelled Blake. "Then that rumour is right?"

"So it seems," said Tom. "Cutts & Co. are in an awful funk, and—"

"But how the merry dickens do you know all this?" broke in Blake curiously. "How do you know Cutts was in the car? And how do you know that the car really is a stolen one?"

The Terrible Three explained how they had come by their knowledge.

"Phew!" whistled Blake, at length. "Of course, that's clear enough! Poor old Cutts! He's in a nasty mess!"

"I fail to see why you should waste any sympathy on Cutts!" said D'Arcy. "Weally, Blake, you appear to be forgettin' that Cutts is little bettah than a cwiminal!"

"Hardly as bad as that, Gussy."

"Cutts is a cwiminal!" insisted D'Arcy. "Nobody but a cwiminal would dwive on aftah w'eckin' a fellow's jiggah!"

"Well, that's true, in a way," said Tom Merry slowly. "We'll make as many excuses as we can for Cutts—but nothing can alter the fact that he acted wrongly. He ought to have stopped."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake grinned.

"Those Fifth-Form asses are in a nasty hole," he said. "It makes all the difference, now that we know who did it. Cutts has been driving a stolen car, without a licence, and he smashed Gussy's bicycle. No wonder he's in a funk! He's going to hide the car behind the shrubbery, is he?"

"So he said," said Tom Merry.

"And then pretend to know nothing about it?" said Blake. "Well, it's not such a bad wheeze. After all, Cutts didn't know that the car was a stolen one when he borrowed it."

Arthur Augustus regarded Blake frigidly.

"I am surprised at you, Blake," he said, in a cold voice.

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Blake, I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark," went on Gussy. "I am gweatly surprised that you should be makin' excuses for Cutts. He has behaved in a vewy wascally mannah—and is nothin' bettah than a cwiminal!"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to dwy up!" said Arthur Augustus. "If Cutts had had a wight and pwopah sense of honesty, he would have dwiven to the newest police station with the stolen car!"

"Gussy's right," said Tom Merry. "That's what Cutts ought to have done. As soon as he found out that the car was a stolen one, his only course was to hand it over to the police. By driving it to Rylcombe, and deciding to hide it, he almost made himself an accessory after the fact."

"Made himself a which?" said Blake.

"He's behaved like a funky rotter," said Tom gruffly. "And it was particularly rotten of him to drive on after smashing Gussy's bike."

"I am vewy glad, Tom Mewwy, that you see the twuth of this mattah!" said Gussy, with approval.

"Perhaps you're right, Gussy," said Blake. "All the same, I don't see that we can do anything."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "I shall go stwaight to St. Jim's and I shall tax Cutts with the whole mattah!"

"He'll deny it!"

"I shall make Cutts whack out a tennah, as compensation for my smashed jiggah!" went on Arthur Augustus firmly. "Unless he agwees, I shall give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"That's a bit too crude, Gussy," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "There ought to be a better way of getting the money out of Cutts. We all agree that he's liable, don't we? We all agree that he ought to pay up?"

"Yes, rather!" said the other juniors.

"But he won't pay up unless we do something special," said Tom. "Cutts jolly well knows that Gussy won't prosecute him, or sneak to the Head, or anything. He'll simply laugh in Gussy's face and tell him to go and eat coke!"

"I should uttably wefuse to go and eat coke!"

"All the same, Gussy, you wouldn't get your tenner," said Tom Merry gently.

"Pewwaps you are wight!" admitted D'Arcy. "We all know that Cutts is a wascal. But it's a frightful state of affairs if my jiggah is to be wacked and I am to get no compensation. Cutts smashed it by his weekless dwivin, and he should be made to pay."

"Yes, but how?" said Blake. "Do be sensible, Gussy! Cutts will only laugh if you demand compensation."

"And we can't give him away, either," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "It wasn't his fault that he was in a stolen car, and it wouldn't be playing the game to take advantage of the fact."

But at this moment a solitary cyclist hove in view, and he was soon recognised as Bernard Glyn of the Shell. He dismounted from his machine as he joined the group of juniors.

"Hallo!" said Glyn, in surprise. "What's the trouble here?"

He was soon informed.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he said blankly. "So Cutts bashed into your machine, Gussy, and smashed it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And if it hadn't been for these Shell fellows we should never have known that Cutts was the driver!" added Blake. "We didn't recognise him, and he would have got clean away."

"Rats!" said Glyn. "I knew that Cutts was in that car."

"Bai Jove! You knew, deah boy?"

"Of course I knew!" said Bernard Glyn. "I was in Wayland High Street when Cutts borrowed it from a pal of his named Sparkey—a bookie chap."

"Yes, we heard about Sparkey!" nodded Tom Merry. "Then you saw it all? Sparkey is the real car thief."

"The what?" said Glyn.

"He's the fellow who stole the car."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Glyn.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"You've made the same mistake as I did!" grinned Bernard Glyn. "At least, nearly the same. But that car of Sparkey's isn't the stolen one at all!"

"What!"

"The stolen car has been recovered by the police!" explained Glyn. "I saw it in Wayland five minutes after Cutts had driven off. It's the same make—a Morris-Cowley—and it's blue, too."

And Glyn explained the full details.

"Well, of course, this makes all the difference," said Blake. "But why on earth did Sparkey bolt from the detective?"

"He wasn't a detective!" grinned Bernard Glyn. "He was merely some chap that Sparkey owed money to. That's why Sparkey bolted."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Well, I'm blessed! And Cutts thinks that he's been driving a stolen car—and he's hidden it away behind the shrubbery! Oh, my hat! What a game!"

The humorist of the Shell had grown suddenly thoughtful and his eyes were gleaming.

"Listen, my children!" he said mysteriously. "I rather think that we can wangle the trick now."
 "What do you mean, Monty?" asked Blake, looking at Lowther curiously.

"Cutts thinks that the car is stolen, and it isn't stolen!" said Monty Lowther. "And we all know jolly well that Cutts won't pay for a new bike for Gussy. He ought to pay, as a penalty for his reckless driving. But the only way to make him pay is to frighten the money out of him."

"Frighten it out of him?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes!" grinned Lowther. "And if you'll listen to me, you men, I'll tell you exactly how it is to be done!"

And many heads were put together, and before long many chuckles were wafting on the afternoon breeze.

CHAPTER 6.

Trimble on the Job!

"**W**ERE safe!" Gerald Cutts uttered the words without much conviction as he sank into the easy-chair in his study in the School House. Gilmore and St. Leger only grunted.

"Of course we're safe!" said Cutts irritably. "Don't you fellows agree?"

"I'm not so sure about it," said Gilmore.

"Why aren't you sure?"

"Because you can never tell in these cases," replied Gilmore uneasily. "We don't know anything for certain, Cutts. That's the trouble. We believe that we weren't recognised by those fags. But how can we be sure of it? They may have spotted you at the wheel!"

"It's impossible!" said Cutts desperately.

Yet, in all truth, the same idea had occurred to him. It had been troubling him a good deal. What if he had been recognised? He wasn't worrying about D'Arcy's bicycle. That was only a trifle. But what might an inquiry lead to? It would come out that he had been driving a stolen car—without a licence—and he might have an awful time in trying to explain matters to the police. Perhaps they wouldn't believe him. Sparkey, of course, would deny all knowledge of the car if he was caught and brought into the inquiry. Thus Cutts would be held guilty.

"The trouble is, we don't know anything for certain," said Cutts, as he rose to his feet, and paced up and down. "And we can't make inquiries, because it'll look suspicious. All we can do is to wait."

"And perhaps the police are starting their inquiries," said St. Leger, with a gulp. "Perhaps they'll be here, at St. Jim's, next."

"Oh, my hat!" said Gilmore.

"And once they're here, it'll be all up!" muttered Cutts. "I believe that beast, Sparkey lent me the car on purpose—so that I should be in the cart!"

"It was bad enough to be in the car, without being in the cart!" remarked St. Leger.

"Don't be funny!" snapped Cutts. "I'm trying to think what I can say if the police do come!"

"Why not tell the truth?" suggested Gilmore.

"Don't be an idiot!"

"It's been done before now," went on Gilmore. "And, anyhow, if you tell the truth they can't bowl you out. You needn't worry about giving Sparkey away. He's not worth—"

"Hang Sparkey!" snapped Cutts. "I don't care a toss about him! Of course, I shall give Sparkey away if necessary. He's the car thief, and he's the chap who ought to be arrested. But if the car is traced to me, how can I explain that I borrowed it? Do you think the police will believe me?"

"Hardly!" drawled St. Leger, shaking his head.

"Then what shall I do?"

"That's your trouble, old man!"

"You—you rotters!" shouted Cutts. "We were all in this affair together—"

"Rot!" said Gilmore. "It was your idea to borrow the car, and you drove it. We're not going to be dragged into it!"

"Rather not!" said St. Leger.

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They were worried, but not to the extent of Gerald Cutts. Everything would have been all right if Cutts hadn't smashed into D'Arcy's bicycle. That was the snag. The hunt would probably be drawn into the St. Jim's district, and if the car was found there might be awkward complications.

The car itself had been left behind the shrubbery, carefully hidden amid the trees. Cutts' one hope was that he wouldn't be connected with the affair. But he was still very much in the dark. Had those juniors in the Wayland road recognised him? That was the all-important question!

"I can't stand this!" said Cutts, at length. "I'm going outside!"

"What for?"

"Just to walk about—and hear anything that's going on," said Cutts. "Perhaps the chaps are talking. After all, the best thing we can do is to appear unconcerned."

"And supposin' those fags spotted you as the driver?"

"Well, I shall deny it!" said Cutts. "I shall laugh at the very idea of it. They can't prove that I was driving, can they?"

Cutts went out, too unsettled to argue any further. And, as luck would have it, he no sooner reached the quad than he ran into Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth. Trimble was bubbling with news.

And, quite unwittingly, Trimble did much to help the little plot that Monty Lowther had recently instigated.

"I say, Cutts—"

"Get out of my way!" snarled Cutts.

"Oh, really, there's no need to talk like that!" protested Baggy. "Haven't you heard the latest?"

Cutts started.

"Eh?" he said, grasping Trimble's arm. "What do you mean?"

"Yow!" howled Trimble. "You're hurting me, Cutts! Leggo!"

"What have you heard?" demanded Cutts.

Baggy Trimble pulled himself away, and he looked at Cutts uncertainly.

"What are you looking scared about?" he asked, in a suspicious voice.

"I'm not scared!" roared Cutts, pulling himself together. "You cheeky young sweep! I don't want to hear any of your rotten gossip!"

It had struck Gerald Cutts very forcibly that it would pay him to appear indifferent. Baggy Trimble was every kind of a fool—but he was cunning, too. It would never do to put any suspicions into his crafty mind.

"I was only going to tell you about the accident," growled Trimble.

"What accident?" said Cutts guardedly.

"Haven't you heard?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, there's been an accident on the Wayland road," said Baggy. "D'Arcy of the Fourth has been nearly killed!"

Cutts reeled.

"What?" he said, in a strangled voice.

"Fact!" said Baggy, pleased at the result of his startling information. "Poor old Gussy! It's doubtful if he'll live!"

"You young idiot!" shouted Cutts. "You're lying!"

"I'm not!" denied Trimble, indignantly. "I've just come up from the village, and I've heard all about it." Cutts seized the fat junior again.

"What have you heard?" he asked gruffly.

"Ow! Yaroooooh!" howled Baggy. "Leggo, Cutts!"

"What have you heard, confound you?"

"Everybody's talking about it!" panted Baggy, as he wrenched himself away for a second time. "D'Arcy and some other chaps were cycling from Wayland when a motor-car came up behind them, and Gussy was knocked down!"

"Knocked down!" muttered Cutts.

"Rather!" said Trimble. "His bike was smashed to pieces, and he was run over by the car. I expect they'll be bringing him up soon—on a stretcher!"

Cutts took a deep breath.

During the first second a wild fear had leapt into his heart. Was it possible that he had made a mistake? Had Arthur Augustus D'Arcy been knocked down, too? But then Cutts received a clear mental vision of the actual occurrence.

He knew positively well that D'Arcy had been at the side of the road; he knew, too, that only the bicycle and a sack had been run over. St. Leger, in the rear of the car, had stared through the celluloid panel of the hood, and had reported that nobody had been hurt.

And Cutts, knowing Baggy Trimble, guessed the truth. Baggy was merely romancing.

"I don't believe a word of it!" said Cutts, cooling down. "If you tell me any more lies, Trimble, I'll kick you!"

"Well, perhaps Gussy isn't hurt so much!" said Trimble reluctantly. "But his bike is all smashed to pieces."

Cutts, relieved after his momentary fear, decided

police out everywhere. The car can't possibly get away!"

"No, I suppose not," said Cutts thickly.

"You see, they're making a thorough job of it," went on Trimble. "And if the car isn't seen on any road during the next hour or two, the police will jolly well know that the thief is hiding somewhere."

Cutts swallowed hard.

"Yes, I suppose so!" he muttered.

"And then they'll start a real search," continued Trimble. "They'll draw the net closer, and they'll finally bring the criminal to justice. I'm expecting the inspector from Wayland at any minute."

"What do you mean—you're expecting him?"

"The inspector is bound to want me as an important witness," said Baggy Trimble glibly. "Besides, he's a pal of mine. As soon as he comes I shall tell him everything I know."

"Then he'll know a fat lot!" said Cutts sourly. "You drivelling young idiot!"

TRIMBLE'S REFORMATION!

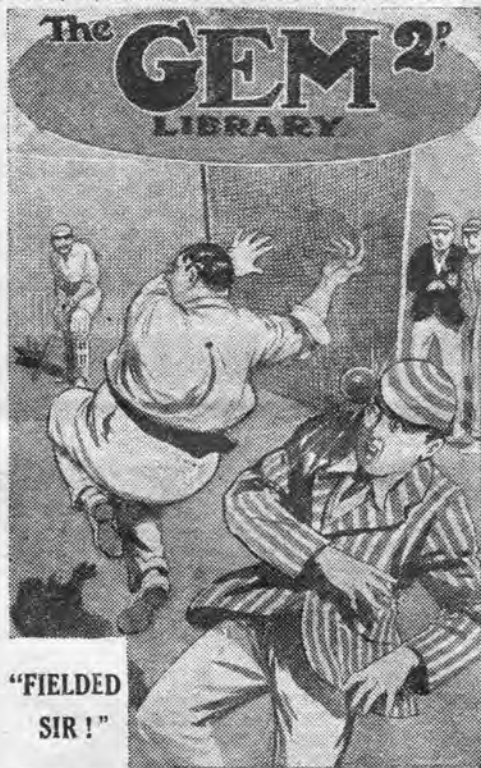
Everyone at St. Jim's is agreed that there's ample room for improvement in the character of Baggy Trimble. Yet no one is particularly keen to take on the task of reforming the fat Fourth-Former. This thankless and well-nigh-hopeless task, however, is foisted upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the good-natured swell of the Fourth. Just what success attends Gussy's efforts in this direction is vividly described in next week's grand extra-long story of the chums of St. Jim's.

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"FIELDER
SIR!"

that Trimble might be able to give him some useful information.

"Who did it?" he asked. "Who was the motorist?"

"Some rotten car thief!" replied Trimble promptly.

"Oh! A car thief!"

"Yes, rather!" said Trimble. "Everybody's talking about it down in Rylcombe. The car was a stolen one—a blue Morris-Cowley. There was a notice about it in the paper this morning. Didn't you see it?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, it was there!" said Baggy. "And the car thief is in this district, too. He may be nabbed at any moment. The police are hot on the track!"

"Oh, are they?" gasped Cutts.

"You bet they are!" nodded Trimble. "They're scouring the whole neighbourhood."

"Well, it's time they had something to do," said Cutts, trying to appear indifferent. "Didn't those Fourth Form kids recognise the driver?"

"I don't think so," said Trimble. "It all happened so quickly."

"Didn't they take the car's number?"

Trimble had no information on this point, but he saw no reason why he should appear ignorant.

"Yes, they took the number," he replied, "and every road for miles round is being watched. They've got

"Oh, really, Cutts—"

"Clear off!" snapped Cutts. "If I hear any more of your rot, I'll kick you round the quad!"

And Gerald Cutts turned on his heel and strode indoors.

He was more agitated than ever. He did not know how much of Trimble's story to believe. Were the police getting busy? Were they keeping a watch on all the roads? Were they preparing to close their net?

And if they found that car behind the shrubbery, what would be the result?

Cutts told himself that nobody could possibly connect him with the stolen car. But as he went back to his study he was undoubtedly in that condition which is commonly known as blue funk.

CHAPTER 7.

The Check Sports Suit!

"WELL?"

Gilmore and St. Leger spoke in one voice as Cutts came into the study and closed the door.

"I've heard nothing—definitely," said Cutts. "I've only had a word with Trimble of the Fourth."

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"That's a fat lot of good!" said Gilmore tartly. "You know what a liar Trimble is!"

"Yes, but he generally gets hold of all the gossip!" said Cutts. "But he's a liar right enough. He told me that D'Arcy had been half killed."

"That's rot!" said Gilmore. "D'Arcy wasn't touched."

"I know that," replied Cutts. "But he says that everybody knows that D'Arcy's bike was smashed by the stolen car. We can believe that, because it's true. That's the rotten part of it—the police are attracted to this particular district because of that accident. They might start making inquiries round the school."

"Yes, and they'll probably find that car, too!" said Gilmore, in alarm. "And you know what the police are! They're pretty cute, in spite of what people say against them. It won't take them any time to connect you with the affair, Cutts!"

"You idiot! How can they connect me with it?"

"I don't know—but they've got their own methods!" said Gilmore. "Look here, Cutts, you'd better go straight to the telephone and ring up the Wayland Police Station."

"What!"

"Dashed good idea!" said St. Leger, nodding. "Ring up the police and tell them everything, Cutts. Then you'll be safe."

"Safe?" howled Cutts.

"Well, you won't be accused of stealing the car, anyhow," said St. Leger. "If you tell the truth about it, the police can't suspect you—"

"Don't be a confounded idiot!" broke in Cutts harshly. "I can't tell the truth now—it's too late! And what the dickens do you mean by saying that I shall be safe? You fellows are only thinking of your own skins!"

This was true enough, and Gilmore and St. Leger were silent.

"Safe!" went on Cutts bitterly. "Why, if the truth comes out, I shall be sacked! I shall be bunked from the school!"

"Oh, I don't see that!" said Gilmore.

"I don't care whether you see it or not—I shall get chucked out of St. Jim's if the truth comes out!" said Cutts frantically. "How the dickens can I explain to the Head? I shall have to tell him that I'm on friendly terms with a bookie, and that that bookie lent me his car! There'll be a scandal in the papers, too! I shall be prosecuted for driving without a licence, and I shall have to pay for D'Arcy's bike. That doesn't matter much—because I can easily square that up. But the Head would want a lot of convincing that my association with Sparkey was innocent! No, I can't say anything; I've just got to wait and see what happens!"

Gilmore was inclined to be caustic.

"All this trouble has come about because you wanted to swank!" he said sourly.

"Confound you—"

"You can't deny it!" said Gilmore. "You had a great idea of looking important by driving to St. Jim's in that car. It was a jolly unlucky thing that we ever ran across Sparkey this afternoon!"

"Hold on!" murmured St. Leger, as he raised a hand. "Listen!"

A murmur could be heard out in the passage; and the murmur was growing louder. The tramping of feet sounded, too, and Cutts & Co. listened.

"By gad!" breathed Cutts. "They can't be here already?"

"The police!" gasped Gilmore, turning pale.

"Don't get so windy, my sons!" murmured St. Leger.

"It's only a crowd of silly juniors!"

Cutts & Co. became silent, and listened intently.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The voices grew louder, and at last the Fifth-Formers were able to distinguish some of the words. They recognised the voice of Blake of the Fourth; and the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, too. They were all relieved to hear Gussy's tones, for his presence proved, at all events, that he was perfectly safe and sound. Cutts had known it all the time, but it was just as well to be reassured.

"Only a matter of hours, you chaps!" Blake was saying.

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"Yaas, wathah!" came D'Arcy's voice. "It wouldn't surprise me in the least to see the police visit St. Jim's at any moment!"

"There's one thing certain, anyhow," continued Blake—"the criminal will never be able to get away!"

"Criminal?" came Tom Merry's voice.

"Well, the fellow who was driving the car," said Blake. "He may not actually be a criminal, but he's a rotter, anyhow! He drove on after smashing Gussy's bike, and that was enough to label him as a road-hog!"

"Yaas, wathah!"



"Look!" gasped Gilmore. Gerald Cutts nearly fainted as he saw the gates, pushing a car and shouting with triumph.

"He'll have a job to escape!" said Blake grimly. "We didn't actually recognise him, worse luck—but that doesn't matter much."

"Hear that?" murmured Gilmore, with relief.

"Yes, rather!" whispered Cutts. "They didn't recognise us!"

"Didn't recognise you, you mean!" drawled St. Leger. "You were driving, remember!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"We didn't recognise the driver," repeated Blake's voice; "but we know for a fact that he was dressed in a check sports suit."

"Well, that's a pretty important clue," said Tom Merry. "What kind of a check sports suit?"

"Oh, a particularly noticeable one!" said Blake. "A kind of reddy-brown, with a tinge of blue in it here and there. If anybody is seen wearing a suit like that, he'll soon find himself in trouble."

"I wonder how long it will be before the police come

"buzzing round?" asked Manners. "Of course, it's quite possible that detectives may be put on the job. And the case of a stolen car—"

The voices died away, and Cutts found himself staring dazedly at his reflection in the mirror. Gilmore and St. Leger were looking at Cutts in a startled way, too. "Oh, my hat!" said Cutts thickly.

"Did—did you hear what they were saying?" panted Gilmore.

"Of course I heard!" snapped Cutts, turning round. "They didn't recognise me, but they must have spotted my sports suit!"

He stared down at himself—at the check material, reddish-brown in colour, with a blue tinge. It was a very noticeable suit, as Blake had said. Cutts hadn't had it long. He was very proud of it, for it was the very latest in sports attire.

"You're trapped now!" said St. Leger. "You daren't move out of this study, Cutts! If anybody spots you, they'll—"



cross the quad. A crowd of juniors had just come in at the school. "Oh, gad!" breathed Cutts. (See Chapter 8.)

"But—but I've been out!" panted Cutts. "Trimble saw me in this suit!"

"Trimble's a fool!" said Gilmore. "He may have noticed it, and there's just a chance that you'll still be safe. But now that everybody is talking about the suit, you'll have to be jolly careful!"

"Look here!" panted Cutts desperately. "Rush upstairs, Gilmore, and bring down my ordinary grey suit, will you?"

"What on earth—"

"I've got to get rid of this suit—quick!" said Cutts huskily. "I daren't move out of this study, in case I'm seen. Smuggle that suit down, Gilmore, or I'm done!"

Gilmore hurried off, and he shot upstairs like a rabbit. Within five minutes he was down again, his coat bulging suspiciously. And after he had vanished into Cutts' study, several faces appeared round the corner of the passage.

"It's worked!" murmured Blake cheerfully. "Gilmore has just been upstairs for another of Cutts' suits, and I'll bet old Cutts is shivering with fright!"

There were many chuckles from the other juniors.

"We'll give him something to really shiver about before long!" whispered Tom Merry. "This is only the beginning! But we'd better wait a bit, before we start on the next stunt. I've got an idea that something interesting will soon happen in Cutts' study!"

And the other plotters were of exactly the same opinion.

CHAPTER 8.

Filing It On!

"THAT'S better!" said Cutts breathlessly.

He stood in his ordinary grey suit—the one that he wore regularly. The sports suit lay on the table, and Cutts had performed miracles in changing.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Gilmore, looking at the check sports suit with a dubious eye. "Better wrap it up and hide it away!"

"Burn it!" said St. Leger.

He had hated that sports suit ever since Cutts put it on. It offended him. St. Leger was something of a dandy, and his taste in clothing, on the whole, was not so bad.

"Burn it?" repeated Cutts, staring.

"Burn it!" said St. Leger firmly.

"You silly idiot—"

"Oh, all right—do as you please!" said St. Leger.

"But don't blame me if you're nabbed."

"What on earth—"

"You know what the police are!" went on St. Leger.

"Lots of fellows know that you have a check sports suit, and it may come out."

"Great Scott!"

"Some of the fellows may talk," continued St. Leger ruthlessly. "And if you're suspected, and the police come and question you, what are you going to say?"

"I shall deny everything!"

"Of course you will! But what if they find that suit?"

"They won't find it if I hide it."

"Do you suppose that you can hide anything from the police?" asked St. Leger sourly. "Once they start a thing they go ahead with it—relentlessly. And the very fact that you had hidden a check sports suit would be regarded as fatal evidence."

"That's right!" said Gilmore hurriedly. "You wouldn't hide the suit, Cutts, unless you were guilty."

"Burn it!" said St. Leger coolly. "Burn it, and be on the safe side!"

It was all very well for Cutts' chums to tell him to burn his new suit. They didn't care in the least; the loss wouldn't be theirs. But Gerald Cutts, in his present agitated condition, was full of fears and fancies. The police might be on their way to St. Jim's even now! And if they found that suit—

"Yes, I will!" said Cutts thickly.

He grabbed the newspaper and tore it up. Then he set fire to it in the grate, and when the blaze was big, he piled the suit on to the flames. It was slow in burning, however, and before long the study was filled with the pungent, acrid smoke of smouldering wool.

"Open that window, for goodness' sake!" said Cutts.

He blew at the smouldering mass, and flames began to lick up. Before long, the suit became partially consumed, and it could no longer be recognised as one.

Cutts was feeling slightly relieved now. The loss of his suit meant nothing to him, in comparison to the other issues.

Outside, Blake was sniffing suspiciously in the air. He had crept up in order to do some scouting. And now he ran back along the passage, to where the other juniors were collected.

"I say!" burst out Blake. "The ass is burning that suit of his!"

"What!"

"There's an awful niff of burning wool coming out of Cutts' study!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" grinned Tom Merry. "We didn't expect he'd do anything like that! But it shows you how much he's got the wind up!"

"Rather!"

"But, I say, isn't the jape going a bit too far?" asked Herries dubiously. "We didn't want to force Cutts to burn his giddy suit!"

"Well, it's his own doing—we didn't ask him to burn the thing!" said Blake. "It's his guilty conscience!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "And I must say, dear boys, that I entirely approve of the whole thing. It is the most sensible action that Cutts has ever taken!"

"Sensible?" repeated Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy. "That sports suit of Cutts' was the most atrocious abomination—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"There's no reason why we shouldn't take advantage of this!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Our idea is to make Cutts thoroughly windy—and to lay it on thicker as we go along. And then, at the right moment, we'll spring on him for the ten quid. It's only fair that Gussy should have compensation for that smashed jigger of his."

They were all agreed upon this, and a couple of minutes later there was a rush of feet in the Fifth Form passage and loud thumps sounded upon Cutts' study door. Inside, Cutts & Co. had started to their feet, pale with alarm.

"Who's that?" shouted Cutts frantically.

But his voice was drowned in the roar that came from outside.

Crash!

The door burst open, the lock having been torn away. A flood of juniors came tearing in, and Blake, who was in the lead, was carrying a patent fire-extinguisher.

"Thought so!" he yelled. "The fire's in here! Why, what the— Cutts is here!"

"Of course I'm here!" shouted Cutts. "What's the idea of bursting in like this, you young idiots?"

Blake and the others turned round, apparently dazed.

"Isn't there a fire in here?" asked Blake blankly.

"No, there isn't!"

"Isn't the study on fire?" went up a general yell.

"Get out!" hooted Cutts. "What made you think my study was on fire?"

"But—but there's a lot of smoke about!" said Tom Merry. "Hallo! What have you been burning, Cutts? What's all that ash and charred stuff in the fireplace? My hat! The whole grate is choked with it!"

Gerald Cutts gulped.

"Nun-nothing!" he gasped. "Only—only some old rags!"

"Rags!" said Tom Merry suspiciously.

"Rags?" echoed a dozen other voices, equally suspicious.

Cutts & Co. were flabbergasted.

"I don't want permission from a mob of dashed fags before I burn a lot of old rags in my fireplace!" shouted Cutts in desperation. "Get out of here! It's like your infernal nerve to break in! Get out, I tell you!"

"You've been burning some clothes!" said Blake accusingly.

"Eh?" gasped Cutts. "I—I mean—I tell you I've been burning nothing but some old rags!"

"Oh, well, it's none of our business, I suppose," said Tom Merry, turning to the door. "Come on, you fellows!"

They crowded out of the study, satisfied with the result of their little dodge. Gerald Cutts was now in a positive fever of funk.

"That's done it!" said Gilmore, after the juniors had gone. "You idiot, Cutts! Why did you look so flustered?"

"What about you?" snarled Cutts. "You were more flustered than I was!"

"Rot!"

"I'm afraid it's pretty serious," said St. Leger shakily. "Serious for you, I mean, Cutts! Those confounded juniors are suspicious now!"

"Suspicious?"

"Yes, rather!" put in Gilmore. "They guessed that

you had been burning some clothes. And if they tell that to the police—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Cutts, holding his head. "Let's get out of here! Those fags know that we're here now, so there's no object in remaining indoors. Let's get out, so that we can hear the latest news as it comes in!"

"All right. But we'd better wait a bit," said St. Leger. "It might look funny if we went out straight away. Besides, you'd better clear up that grate and get rid of the evidence. If the police search this study, they'll spot those charred ashes in a tick. You don't want to give 'em any loophole!"

And so, while Cutts was busy on his hands and knees in front of the fireplace, Tom Merry & Co. were equally busy outside. They had now been joined by Figgins and many other members of the New House brigade. Quite a large number of juniors, in fact, were taking part in this colossal jape. It was a great piece of fun to put the wind up Cutts!

At last the fireplace in Cutts' study was looking tidy again, and all the ashes had been rolled into a piece of brown paper and stuffed under Cutts' jacket.

"We'll go out, and we'll drop this parcel in a ditch somewhere," said Cutts, breathing hard. "Too risky to hide it anywhere in the school!"

In his agitated state of mind, he was making mountains out of molehills, and Gilmore and St. Leger did nothing to put him at ease. On the contrary, they made his condition even worse. For they were afraid of being implicated, and they were probably in a greater funk than Cutts himself.

As they reached the doorway of the School House they heard a great amount of shouting from the gateway, and they looked across the quad with some little apprehension.

What was the meaning of all that shouting? Had the police arrived? This was the thought that was constantly in Cutts' mind. How long would it be before the police came on the scene?

"Look!" gasped Gilmore, clutching at the doorpost. Cutts nearly fainted.

It was unnecessary to tell him to look. A crowd of juniors had just come running into the quad, and with them they brought the blue Morris-Cowley! Dozens of them were pushing the car, and they were all shouting with triumph. The effect upon Gerald Cutts was pitiful. His knees trembled, and he went pale to the lips.

"Oh gad!" he breathed. "They've found it!"

"Those confounded kids have dug out the car!" murmured St. Leger. "What the deuce are you going to do now, Cutts?"

"Be quiet, you fool!" panted Cutts, glancing hastily over his shoulder. "Don't tell everybody in the school!"

"But—but—"

"Pull yourselves together!" interrupted Cutts harshly. With a great effort he had gained control of himself. He was frightened, but he was not yet beaten.

"We can't go in again now!" he said quickly. "It would look too—too suspicious! The only thing we can do is to stroll over and have a look at the car."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Let's pretend to be unconcerned!" went on Cutts cunningly. "We'll take an interest in this car, and ask questions. Then we shan't be suspected. But if we bolted indoors it would be fatal!"

In this conclusion Cutts was probably right. The safest course was to go boldly out, and to pretend to know nothing about this strange car. If everything was as they believed, there was no evidence to connect them with the stolen car.

Cutts acted his part rather well.

Having made up his mind, he strode forward and pushed his way in between the crowds of juniors. They all regarded him curiously, wondering how he would act. But they gave no sign; they did not let Cutts see that they knew the truth.

"What's all this?" demanded Cutts sourly. "What are you kids doing with this car?"

"We found it, Cutts!" said Blake.

"Found it?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean? Found it?" demanded Cutts, working himself up. "How could you find a car?"

"We found it behind the shrubbery," said Blake. "And it looks very much like the car that has been missing from Abbotsford since the beginning of the week."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "Of course, we may be mistaken. It is quite possible that this is another car altogether. It is always wash to jump to conclusions!"

"All the same, Gussy, just look at the facts," said Tom Merry. "A blue Morris-Cowley was stolen from Abbotsford at the beginning of the week, and the police are hunting for the thief. And now we find a blue Morris-Cowley hidden away behind the shrubbery. Doesn't it seem pretty obvious?"

"Well, it does look like it," said Blake. "The puzzle is, who put this car behind the shrubbery? And why?"

"That's easy!" said Figgins. "It seems to point to the fact that the thief must be in the school!"

"In the school!" gasped Cutts.

"I don't say he is, mind you. But doesn't it look rummy?" went on Figgins, with a wink at the others. "Who else would put the car behind the shrubbery? Supposing that it's the stolen car, it's the very thing that any thief might do!"

"Besides, this is the one that ran over Gussy's bike," said Blake. "The fellow who drove it must have got the wind up, and he hid the car because he was afraid of the consequences. I wonder if he could have been a St. Jim's fellow?"

"I wonder?" said Tom Merry, looking at Cutts in a thoughtful way.

Cutts jumped.

"Don't be such idiots!" he snapped. "Are you suggesting that a St. Jim's fellow is a car thief?"

"Not exactly," said Tom Merry cautiously. "But he may be innocently implicated. And circumstantial evidence is deadly sometimes. Even innocent people are found guilty. But that argument hardly applies in this case, anyhow, because the driver of the car wasn't innocent. He ran over Gussy's bike, and he didn't even stop. He was a road-hog of the worst kind!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And he ought to be found, and made to pay up!" said Figgins firmly. "And he will be found, too!"

"I—I hope so!" said Cutts, swallowing hard. "But what are you chaps going to do with this car? You can't leave it here in the quad! Take it away!"

"No fear!"

"Take it back to where you found it!" said Cutts curtly. "That's the best thing you can do before you get yourselves into trouble!"

At this moment Ralph Reckness Cardew appeared, waving a newspaper.

"Dear men, this is interestin'!" he said genially. "Here's the very latest!"

Shouts went up, and Cardew was surrounded. His arrival, in any case, was unrehearsed, for this little piece of effect had not been previously arranged. But Cardew could generally be relied upon to provide a novelty.

CHAPTER 9.

Cutts' Decision!

"LET'S have it, Cardew!"

"Out with it, old man!"

"Hear, hear!"

Cardew elbowed his way free from the pressing crowd.

"Give me a little breathing space, old beans," he suggested mildly. "This is the Wayland evening paper—special early edition. They're on the track of the car thief."

"What!"

"Here it is—in the 'Stop Press' news!" went on Cardew glibly. "Listen to this: 'As we go to press we learn that the police are hot on the track of the thief who recently stole a Morris-Cowley car from Abbotsford. There is every reason to believe that the thief is a resident of the Rylcombe district—'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's this district!" shouted Blake excitedly.

"Don't interrupt!" said Cardew, frowning. "Let me finish, dear man! This is how it goes on: 'The stolen car has not only been seen near Rylcombe to-day, but it was involved in a serious cycle smash, the details of which have not yet come through. It is known, however, that the car thief has not been able to get away from the district, and police and detectives are concentrating their attention upon Rylcombe and the surrounding country. The best brains of the detective force are being employed, and there is every hope that there will be an early arrest. It can be mentioned that the police are in possession of certain clues which lead them to suspect a youth of exceptionally high social standing. This youth, who is well known to the police, was seen driving the car in Wayland this afternoon, and there is very little hope of him slipping through the police net.'"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"You boulder, Cardew!" murmured Tom Merry, in Cardew's ear. "You awful spoofer!"

"Shush! dear man!" murmured Cardew. "Don't spoil it!"

Tom Merry and most of the others knew quite well that there was no such report in the paper. And, if the truth must be told, the paper itself was two or three days old. It was quite like Cardew to come forward with this bluff. Tom Merry & Co. did not quite countenance it, but Cardew was not so particular.

And, in any case, the effect upon Cutts was startling.

"Come on!" he panted, as he turned to Gilmore and St. Leger. "Let's go indoors! I've had enough of this nonsense!"

Cutts spoke thickly—as though he could hardly pronounce his words. And he and Gilmore and St. Leger went in to the School House like a trio of bolting rabbits. In spite of themselves, they could not steady their pace. They were alarmed more than ever before; they were almost frightened out of their wits.

"Weally, Cardew, I entirely disapprove of your methods!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "There was uttably no need to tell whoppahs!"

"But think of the effect, old scout!" grinned Cardew.

"I will agree with you that the effect was most gwatifyin'," admitted D'Arcy. "But there is nevah any excuse for tellin' whoppahs!"

Blake grinned.

"Well, it's all to the good, perhaps," he said cheerfully. "That was rather a cute bit about the police being on the trail of a 'youth of particularly high social standing.' Cutts thinks that the bobbies are after him in earnest now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it'll soon be time for us to deliver the final blow," said Kerr, of the New House. "In fact, the sooner we can get ready, the better."

"Just what I was thinking!" nodded Tom Merry. "Have you got all the things, Kerr?"

"Waiting for you chaps to come along!" said Kerr. "Somebody had better keep a watch, to see what Cutts does, and the rest of us will get on the job."

And while the juniors were engaged in further plotting, Cutts & Co. had reached their study, and were all looking pale.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"I knew it!" Gilmore was saying. "You can't escape from the police, Cutts, once they get fairly on the trail! And they'll be here soon—at St. Jim's! What are you going to do?"

"I don't know!" panted Cutts, pacing up and down. "What can I do? If they get me, it'll be all up! I shall never be able to prove that I didn't really steal the car!"

"Even if you give information about Sparkey, it won't make much difference," said St. Leger uneasily. "The car's here—those confounded juniors have got it in the quadrangle! The police will know jolly well that a St. Jim's fellow brought it here. And you've heard what the paper said, haven't you? The police have got clues about a youth of high social standing!"

"That's you!" said Gilmore.

"I know it is!" snarled Cutts, turning on him. "Of course it's me! I was seen in Wayland, and the game's up! It's all because of smashing into D'Arcy's rotten bicycle. If it hadn't been for that—"

"What's the good of talking like that, you idiot?" broke in St. Leger. "The thing has been done—and the police are coming. You'll be arrested, of course, but what about us?"

"I can't be bothered with your troubles."

"Yes, but we're bothered with them!" said Gilmore shakily. "We might be arrested, too—although it isn't likely. We shall jolly well say that you borrowed the car from Sparkey, and we won't accept any responsibility."

"I'll tell you what!" said Cutts, who hadn't heard a word. "There's only one thing to be done. I've got to get out of here."

"What do you mean—get out?"

"Bolt!" said Cutts, between his teeth.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" gasped St. Leger. "You don't mean it, old bean?"

"Yes, I do!" said Cutts desperately. "I'm not going to stay here, to be arrested—to be taken off in disgrace! I'm going to bolt while I've got the chance! It's better than the disgrace of being taken away by the police. And if the detectives come, you fellows must cover my retreat by lying. Understand?"

"We'll do the best we can," said St. Leger promptly.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Gilmore. "Trust us, Cutts!"

They were both relieved. With Cutts out of the way, their own position would be easier. And it struck them as being a very sensible solution to the problem. For if Cutts bolted he would probably be caught before he had gone far—and then they might never be dragged into the unsavoury episode at all.

Without any delay, Gerald Cutts started off.

If he had stopped to think—if he had been in a condition to consider the whole matter—he might have hesitated before making this move. But he was panic-stricken, and his one thought was to get as far away from St. Jim's as possible.

He only paused to get hold of his overcoat and a small bag. Then he started off, having some vague idea of catching a train from Rylcombe. Exactly where he would go to he did not know. Neither did he care. But to escape from St. Jim's was imperative.

When Cutts got out into the quad, hardly a soul was in sight.

Under any other circumstances, Cutts might have been suspicious. But at the moment he was too full of his own troubles. All the juniors had vanished. It was nearly tea-time now, and it was rather surprising that none of the Fourth-Formers or Shell fellows were about.

Cutts walked quickly to the gateway and turned down the lane. As he did so, all sorts of figures appeared from behind the gym and from the angles of the various school buildings. And many chuckles went up on the afternoon air.

Cutts breathed a sigh of relief when he reached the lane. He had been half afraid that he would be stopped and questioned by some of the other fellows. But, no; he was allowed to get out unmolested. And now the lane was before him, and—

At that moment Gerald Cutts' thoughts came to a jarring stop.

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For an instant he had seen a figure down the lane. There it stood, a smallish man, dressed in a long black overcoat and a bowler hat. Cutts caught a glimpse of a big black moustache—of a fierce, determined face, and then in a moment the man had dodged hastily into the hedge.

"Great gad!" muttered Cutts hoarsely.

He came to a halt and stood there trembling.

A detective!

Without any question at all—a detective! Who else would be lurking about in Rylcombe Lane? And why had the stranger dodged into the hedge as soon as Cutts had appeared? Feeling like a hunted animal Gerald Cutts turned and walked rapidly back towards the gates of St. Jim's. He daren't go down to Rylcombe! This detective was watching the lane, and if Cutts passed by he would probably come out and confront him.

Cutts reached the gateway and passed straight on. In the quad a number of juniors chuckled with glee. This was just what they had expected! But the cream of the joke was yet to come.

Cutts had hardly covered a hundred yards before he received another shock. Turning a bend in the lane he came within sight of a second stranger. He, too, was dressed in a black overcoat and a bowler. He, too, wore a moustache. And, in exactly the same manner as the other stranger, this one dodged into the hedge as Cutts approached.

"Another detective!" panted Cutts in a panic.

He jumped round and stared behind him. Nobody was within sight. He made for a gap in the opposite hedge and bolted through it. Then he made off towards the River Rhyl. He would take the towing-path and reach the village by that means. The roads were watched—guarded!

And so was the towing-path!

For long before Cutts got to it he beheld a lurking figure in the distance ahead. As Cutts drew nearer the figure dodged behind a bush and crouched there, waiting. Cutts turned, his heart in his mouth.

"They're everywhere!" he breathed. "Oh, help! I'm surrounded! The place is swarming with the detectives! They're after me! They're closing in on me!"

During the next ten minutes Gerald Cutts received shock after shock.

No matter which way he turned he came within sight of a lurking figure—and in every case the stranger wore a black moustache! It was impossible for all these detectives to be the same man, dodging from place to place. They were different—they were cast in the same mould, but they were all part and parcel of a great spreading net. St. Jim's was surrounded by these grim, relentless detectives!

"It's no good!" babbled Cutts. "I can't even escape! Every path is barred!"

He dodged back into the playing fields, and he wasn't surprised to see another of those grim features lurking behind the junior pavilion. He turned his head, and jumped when he saw that still another was peeping from behind the senior pavilion. The detectives were everywhere!

The only direction that seemed safe was towards St. Jim's itself. And Cutts, with panic urging him on, ran at top speed for the school, and dashed up to the Fifth Form passage at top speed.

Here, at all events, he was free from those sinister, watching figures.

CHAPTER 10.

In the Name of the Law!

GILMORE and St. Leger leapt to their feet as Cutts came bursting into the study.

"You confounded idiot!" panted Gilmore. "You gave me a turn! I—I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought!" snapped Cutts, panting. "They're after me!"

He stood with his back to the door, and Gilmore and St. Leger stared at him in dire alarm.

"After you?" ejaculated St. Leger.

"Yes!"

"Who—the police?"



Gerald Cutts came to a sudden halt in the lane. He had a glimpse of the figure of a man dressed in a long black overcoat and a bowler hat—of a fierce, determined face with a big black moustache. Then, in a moment, the man dodged hastily into the hedge. "Great gad!" muttered Cutts hoarsely. (See Chapter 9.)

"Detectives!" said Cutts hoarsely.

"Good gad!" breathed Gilmore. "How do you know?"

"Because I've seen them!" said Cutts, as he tottered forward and leaned against the table. "Dozens of them! Detectives everywhere—hiding behind the hedges and bushes! I couldn't walk a dozen yards in any direction without spotting a detective!"

Gilmore and St. Leger looked at him incredulously.

"You must have been dreaming!" said Gilmore.

"Either that, or you're going off your rocker!"

"They'll get me!" muttered Cutts wretchedly. "Oh, why did I ever borrow that rotten car from Sparkey? What a fool I was! And the very fact that I tried to bolt will tell against me! When they come and arrest me the evidence will be conclusive! I shan't have a leg to stand on! And they're coming now! They may be here at any minute!"

He told his startled chums of the "detectives." And although Gilmore and St. Leger found it difficult to believe the story, Cutts was so obviously sincere that they were more or less convinced. It seemed certain, in any case, that the detectives had concentrated their attention upon the school.

Outside, behind the chapel, the "detectives" had joined forces. At close quarters the majority of them were palpable fakes. Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, and several other juniors had only donned overcoats and bowler hats, with the addition of a property moustache. They had seemed genuine enough at a distance, but there had been every reason for them to dodge into the hedge at Cutts' approach!

"Well, it worked!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We've scared the beggar back into his lair!"

"Yes, and now it's about time to deliver the final blow!" said Tom Merry. "I rather think Cutts has had enough. We don't want to be too hard on the poor beggar. As long as we've scared him into a sufficiently wobbly jelly, it'll be enough."

"Exactly!" said Blake. "All we want is to get ten

quid out of him. It won't be a rush, either, because he jolly well deserves to pay."

"Yaas, wathah!" said one of the other "detectives."

"Cutts has got to be taught that if he has an accident on the road, it's up to him to stop," went on Tom Merry judiciously. "Any motorist who drives on without caring what he has hit, or what damage he's done, isn't fit to hold a licence."

"Well, if it comes to that, Cutts hasn't got a licence," said Lowther, grinning.

"That makes his offence all the worse!" said Blake. "Still, if he pays up like a man, we shall be satisfied. I think we've just about got him in the right mood."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "It would have been utterly useless to approach Cutts in the ordinary way. The wottah would have laughed at the suggestion that he should pprovide me with the monay for a new jiggah. But as things stand at pwesent, I wathah think that we have Cutts on toast!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, and the sooner we deliver the coup de grace the better," he said. "Cutts might learn at any moment the real truth. He might get to know that this car really does belong to Sparkey and that it isn't the stolen one at all. That would ruin everything. So you can go along, Kerr, and do your stuff!"

"I'm ready!" chuckled Kerr, of the New House.

But Kerr was not recognisable. He, of all the "detectives," looked very much like the genuine article. His make-up was impressive. His moustache looked so real that—as Monty Lowther put it—it could almost be seen growing. There was no sign of make-up on his face, however; it seemed to be lined with middle age, and it was severe and stern. The schoolboy impersonator was an adept at this particular art. And his voice, when he spoke, was deep and grim.

He walked boldly out from behind the chapel, and he was prepared to face anybody in the quad. Yet it must be admitted that he was relieved when he found

that the quad was more or less empty. There were no prefects or masters within sight—and this was all to the good.

Kerr walked briskly into the School House, marched up the stairs, and arrived at the door of Cutts' study in the Fifth Form passage.

Tap!

It was a sharp, imperious rap upon the study door.

"Who—who's that?" came Cutts' voice, accompanied by a gulp.

In the study, Cutts & Co. were looking at one another with frightened eyes. They had been half expecting some such summons.

"Open this door!" came a strange, stern voice.

"I'm busy!" panted Cutts. "Sorry, but I can't open the door now."

"Open this door, or suffer the consequences!" came the voice. "Open, in the name of the law!"

Cutts nearly collapsed.

"The police!" hissed Gilmore.

"Oh, dear!" breathed St. Leger, crumbling up.

Cutts managed to pull himself together.

"All right—I'm coming!" he said thickly. "Just a minute!"

But, instead of going to the door, he dashed to the window. He had a wild idea of climbing down the ivy. Anything was better than admitting this policeman, and— At this point Cutts' thoughts became disintegrated.

For there, down in the quad, almost below his window, were three or four of those detectives! They were standing in a group, half averted from him, but their presence there was significant. They had been placed on guard, so that the prisoner should not escape by means of the window!

"I'm done!" croaked Cutts wretchedly.

He reeled over to the door and took a chair away from the knob. The lock had been smashed, but that chair had held the door closed even more securely.

"Come in!" said Cutts, in a hopeless voice.

His last chance had gone. There was no escape by means of the window, and he was trapped!

"Thank you!" said Kerr grimly, as he stepped into the study and closed the door behind him. "Ah, as I thought! Your name, I think, is Gerald Cutts?"

He pointed an accusing finger at Cutts, and the latter shook.

"Yes!" he muttered. "My—my name's Cutts!"

"And who do you happen to be?" asked St. Leger, staring at the stranger.

"I rather think you can guess who I am!" said Kerr sharply. "It won't do you any good, young man, to appear so innocent! But you're not the one I want. This young man is my prisoner!"

"Prisoner?" ejaculated Cutts.

"Or you soon will be!" amended Kerr. "Possibly you have heard of Detective-Inspector Hookum, of Wayland? No? Well, it doesn't matter. Sit down, Cutts. I want to ask you some questions. I may as well say that they are very important questions—very vital questions."

"I—I don't know what you mean!" muttered Cutts, trying to bluff it out.

"Nonsense!" said Kerr sharply. "Where were you this afternoon? I want you to give me a complete account of your movements since two o'clock. Come, now! No hesitation—no fabrications! I want the truth!"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" shouted Cutts, working himself up into a fine rage so that he would obtain a little false courage. "Why should I tell you what I've been doing this afternoon? You may be Detective-Inspector Hookum, of Wayland, but you've got no right to come in here, forcing your way into my study and asking me—"

"Silence!" broke in Kerr. "That tone won't do you any good, my lad! What are you so excited about? I haven't accused you of anything yet. But I had better point out that your conduct is very suspicious!"

Cutts gulped.

"I'm only wild because you're questioning me!" he blustered. "If you want to know the truth, I haven't been outside the school this afternoon—have I, you fellows?"

"Not once!" said Gilmore promptly.

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"Haven't set a foot outside the buildin'!" agreed St. Leger. "We've all been in here!"

"All the time!" said Cutts defiantly.

"H'm! That's queer!" said Kerr, frowning. "You haven't set foot outside this building, eh?"

"Not once!" said Cutts.

"Then you're a liar!" said Kerr.

"Why, confound you—"

"I saw you, with my own eyes, out in the quadrangle!" broke in Kerr, his voice icy. "Now, deny it if you can! I saw you outside in the quadrangle. Yes, and out in the lane, too! I saw you walking towards the towing path! What have you got to say for yourself, boy? Do you think it will serve any purpose to tell me these palpable lies?"

Cutts was shivering in every limb.

"I meant that I haven't been beyond the school!" he said desperately. "I haven't been to Rylcombe, or Wayland, or anywhere like that!"

"You're quite certain that you haven't been to Wayland?"

"Yes, I'm quite certain!"

"You haven't had a ride in a motor-car this afternoon?"

"No, I haven't!" insisted Cutts. "I can't drive a motor-car, anyhow. And I don't know anybody who owns one. I tell you I haven't been beyond the school grounds to-day!"

Kerr pursed his lips and stroked his chin.

"H'm! H'm! Well, well!" he said musingly. "I see! Of course, there's just a chance that I may have made a mistake. Even the greatest detectives make mistakes at times."

Gerald Cutts began to breathe more freely. Hope came to him. And then, with a movement like a panther, Kerr twirled round, and pointed an accusing finger at Cutts.

"Now!" snapped "Detective-Inspector Hookum," his voice vibrant with intensity. "Now, young man! I have had enough of these lies! I want the truth, and nothing but the truth!"

Cutts jumped suddenly, his face deathly white, and his gaze became thick and fascinated as he saw Kerr pulling a gleaming pair of handcuffs out of his inner pocket.

CHAPTER 11.

Working the Oracle!

EVERYTHING went blurry before Cutts' eyes.

"Take my advice, young man, and make a clean breast of the whole affair!" said Kerr relentlessly. "Come! Since you are reluctant to speak, I will question you. And much will depend upon the way in which you answer me! Were you or were you not in Wayland this afternoon? Quickly, now! Let me have your answer! Were you in Wayland or not?"

"Yes!" gasped Cutts. "I—I mean no!"

"I heard you the first time!" said Kerr promptly.

"You were in Wayland. Very well!"

He produced a notebook, and made a jotting.

"I—I didn't mean that!" panted Cutts frantically.

"You forced it out of me—"

"That's what I meant to do!" said Kerr, nodding.

"Well, you were in Wayland. Now, did you meet a man there named Sparkey?"

"Then—then you know about it?" gasped Cutts.

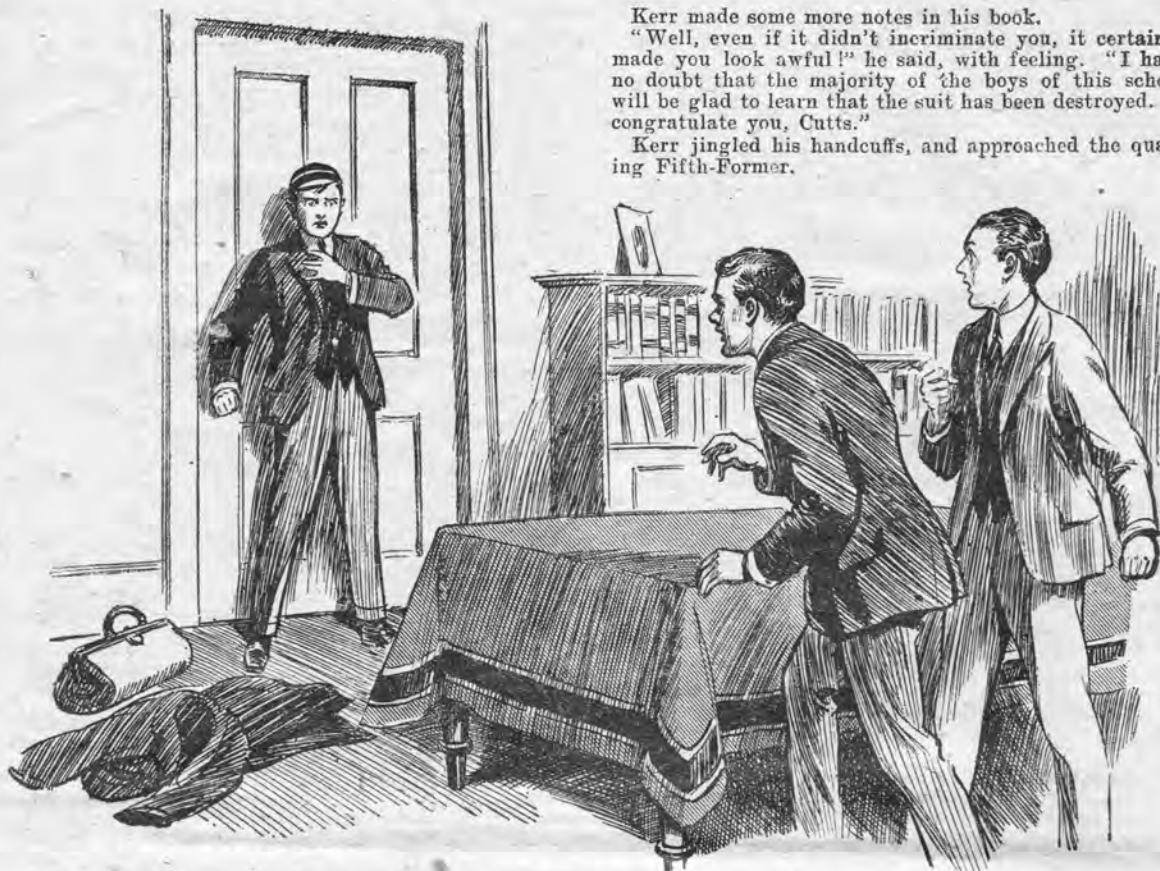
"There are very few things that I don't know!" said Kerr, tilting his hat back, and sticking a thumb into one of his armholes. "Well, you admit that, eh? You met this man, Sparkey, in Wayland?"

"Oh, what's the good of denying it any longer, Cutts?" put in St. Leger. "This detective has got you where he wants you, old man. Get it over, and done with!"

"Splendid!" said Kerr, making another note. "Now, Cutts, this next question is a very important one. Were you concerned in the theft of this particular motor-car—"

"No, I wasn't!" shouted Cutts vehemently. "I don't know anything about the theft of the car! I only borrowed it for the afternoon. Sparkey lent it to me, as one friend to another!"

"A very likely story!" sneered Kerr. "No, Cutts, that sort of thing won't do. However, I've got the information that I needed. You've admitted your associa-



Kerr made some more notes in his book.

"Well, even if it didn't incriminate you, it certainly made you look awful!" he said, with feeling. "I have no doubt that the majority of the boys of this school will be glad to learn that the suit has been destroyed. I congratulate you, Cutts."

Kerr jingled his handcuffs, and approached the quaking Fifth-Former.

Gilmore and St. Leger stared at Gerald Cutts in dire alarm as the blade of the Fifth tottered against the study door. "They're after me!" panted Cutts. "After you?" ejaculated St. Leger. "Yes—detectives!" panted the Fifth-Former. (See Chapter 10.)

tion with Sparkey, and I shall be justified in taking action. Now, there's just something else. Why did you fail to stop on the Wayland road when you ran into a bicycle smashing it up completely?"

"I didn't!" said Cutts, with a gulp. "I didn't see any bicycle—"

"What!" barked Kerr, leaning forward and staring into Cutts' face.

"I—I mean, I ought to have stopped!" babbled Cutts. "I'm sorry! I—I lost my head, I think, and I drove on in a panic!"

"That's better!" said Kerr, nodding. "Much better, young man! So you drove on in a panic, did you? Well, let me see your licence!"

"My—my licence!"

"Your driving licence!" said Kerr sternly.

"I—I haven't got one!"

Kerr backed away, horrified.

"Are you telling me, young man, that you don't possess a driving licence?" he demanded.

"Yes! I—I didn't think it was important—"

"Not important!" thundered Kerr. "Good heavens! You evidently don't realise the appalling nature of your words! No driving licence—and yet you have admitted driving this car, and you have confessed to being involved in a serious accident! My boy, there is no hope for you. Without question, you are in the very dickens of a mess!"

Kerr walked over to the fireplace, stared at the grate, and then spun round with one of those lightning-like movements of his.

"What have you been burning in this grate?" he demanded sharply.

"Nun—nothing!"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure!"

"You haven't been burning a check sports suit, by any chance?"

"Oh, help!" muttered Cutts, sinking into a chair. "What's the use? Yes, I burnt that suit! I—I thought it might incriminate me."

"Now, before I apply these little beauties," he said casually, "there is just a small matter of compensation, Cutts. It will be better to settle it at once. Indeed, if you are agreeable to this settlement, it is highly probable that my treatment of you will be lenient."

"I'm willing to settle!" said Cutts eagerly. "It was my fault, of course."

"You admit that?" snapped Kerr, pointing his pencil at Cutts.

"Yes!"

"You admit it, of your own free will, in the presence of witnesses?"

"Yes!" muttered Cutts.

"Good!" said Kerr. "You have admitted liability, remember. You smashed D'Arcy's bicycle, and rendered it absolutely nothing but scrap-iron. Therefore, the only possible compensation will be a new bicycle. And I have already ascertained that the price of that particular model is ten pounds, cash down."

Kerr held out his hand suggestively.

"I—I haven't got ten pounds!" said Cutts, with a gasp of dismay.

"That's bad!" said Kerr sadly. "Very bad! It may make all the difference—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Cutts, turning out his pockets. "Here you are! Four—five—six! Six pounds ten! Look here, Gilmore! Lend me three pounds ten!"

"I—I can't!" said Gilmore. "I've only got a couple of quid!"

"Then let me have it!"

Gilmore paid up in a fluster, and St. Leger "whacked out" the other thirty shillings. Kerr, very deliberately, counted the money, and tucked it away in one of his pockets.

"Ten pounds!" he said, in a satisfied tone. "Splendid! Now, Cutts, we must go through with this other business. Hold out your hands, please!"

"My—my hands!"

"Those things with knobs all over them," said Kerr, pointing.

More than once a chuckle had sounded through the door, but, fortunately, Cutts & Co. had not heard them. They were too terrified—too consumed with their own troubles.

"As for you other two, I shall do nothing with you at the moment!" said Kerr, turning to the relieved Gilmore and St. Leger. "But Cutts—yes, I must take Cutts with me. I cannot possibly allow him to remain."

"But you said that if I paid the money—"

"Exactly!" barked Kerr. "If you paid the money, I might be inclined to be lenient with you. Well, I shall be lenient. But I must handcuff you now, and take you downstairs. Come, no nonsense! Hold out your hands, boy!"

Cutts, looking dazed, tried to back away. But it was useless. With a tiger-like spring, Kerr was upon him. Click—click! The handcuffs were on, and they had closed relentlessly.

"Good gad!" panted Cutts, staring in horror at his manacled wrists.

"And that," said Kerr, "is that. Come!"

He flung open the door, seized Gerald Cutts by the arm, and led him out, a prisoner.

CHAPTER 12.

Spoofed!

"**B**AI JOVE!"

"Poor old Cutts!"

"They've got him, you fellows. He's nabbed!"

A crowd of juniors came surging round the doorway of the School House as "Detective-Inspector Hookum" appeared with his prisoner. This sudden rush had been pre-arranged, for it was highly necessary to conceal Cutts and the spoof detective from the general view. The japers did not want any of the masters to come making inquiries.

"Make way there—make way!" said Kerr sternly. "Remember who you're dealing with!"

The juniors fell backwards with respect, and Cutts, like a fellow in a dream, was led towards the centre of the quad. The general idea was to get him there and to then fade away in every direction. Gerald Cutts was to be left in the centre of the quad, handcuffed. This was Monty Lowther's idea, and the other fellows regarded it as a great joke.

"Gwout Scott! They've awvested Cutts!" ejaculated D'Arcy, in mock surprise. "I must say that I am relieved!"

"Why are you relieved, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"Well, we all know, deah boy, that Cutts is a wascal," said Gussy. "I have many times thought that he deserved to be awvested. Wetwibution has at last ovahtaken him!"

"Seems like it," said Tom Merry. "Poor old Cutts! I wonder what it feels like to be shut up in a cell?"

Cutts started violently.

"Get me out of this!" he said, turning fiercely to Kerr. "You've arrested me, and you ought to be satisfied! If you're going to take me to Wayland, take me, and let's get it over!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "There is no need to pwolong the wascal's agony!"

A figure appeared in the gateway, and somebody set up a cry:

"Cave!"

And as though by magic, all the juniors vanished in every direction, scuttling towards the School House, the New House, and the gym. During the first dramatic moment it was believed that the newcomer was a master. As a matter of fact, he was none other than Mr. Sparkey.

Gerald Cutts stood there, in the middle of the quad, bewildered. Even the "detective" had bolted with the other juniors! And this was, to Cutts' mind, a singularly unofficial proceeding. Gilmore and St. Leger, who were looking out of their window, stared in blank amazement.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Cutts!" said Sparkey, as he approached. "I thought I'd just come along and see—Hullo! What's the trouble? Why, bust my

eyes! What are you doing with those handcuffs round your wrists?"

The man stared at Cutts in absolute bewilderment.

"I've—I've been arrested!" panted Cutts, turning on Sparkey in fury. "And it's your fault, you hound! It's all your doing!"

"My doing?" gasped the innocent Sparkey.

"Yes. It was you who stole that car!"

"Stole the car!" yelled Sparkey. "Look here, my lad, you'd better be careful what you're saying! There's my car standing over there! And she's mine—and paid for! What the thunder do you mean by saying that I stole her?"

Cutts gulped.

"I've been arrested!" he said thickly. "You know jolly well that you stole the car, Sparkey, and you palmed her off on me this afternoon when you saw that detective coming for you in the Wayland High Street."

"Detective!" roared Sparkey. "He wasn't a detective, you young idiot! He was some man I owe money to!"

"Wha-a-a-t!" gurgled Cutts.

"You must be mixing up my car with another one!" went on Sparkey, as a light dawned upon him. "When I came to Wayland a day or two ago I was stopped by the police, and my car was examined. They thought she was a stolen one—a car that was taken from Abbotsford. But they've got that car back."

"Then—then your car isn't a stolen one at all?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Sparkey. "It's like your nerve to suggest such a thing!"

"Oh, thank goodness!" breathed Cutts. "Then—then why was I arrested?"

"My word, but you must be green!" said Sparkey, with a grin. "You haven't been arrested! If I know anything, these kids have been playing a game with you. They aren't real handcuffs on your wrists. They're just props!"

Cutts stared at them dazedly, and suddenly wrenched at his wrists. To his stupefaction, a couple of clicks sounded, and the handcuffs dropped to the ground. They hadn't been locked at all!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" panted Cutts.

"You haven't hurt the old bus, I suppose?" chuckled Sparkey, as he walked over towards his car. "No, she seems to be all right. Good! I'll bid you good-day, Mr. Cutts. Don't forget that you can always find me in Wayland if you want to do a little business."

He climbed into the car and drove away. Apparently, he had heard nothing of the smashing of D'Arcy's bicycle—which was just as well. For, a minute later, Sparkey had gone. And from every side of the quad came loud and prolonged chuckles.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts, as red as a beetroot, stared round him. Gilmore and St. Leger came running out of the School House.

"You've been fooled, Cutts!" shouted Gilmore wrathfully. "It was only a practical joke! Those dashed fags have been japing you!"

"By gad!" breathed Cutts, clenching his fists.

He was staring across towards the gym. Kerr was standing there, surrounded by Tom Merry and Blake and a good many others. And Kerr was solemnly handing Gussy the ten pounds, note by note. Kerr, incidentally, was still wearing his make-up.

Cutts rushed across, excited, relieved, and angry. He was full of all sorts of emotions.

"You—you young rotters!" he shouted as he ran up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Cutts! How do you like being arrested?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give that money back to me!" hooted Cutts wildly.

"Silence, boy!" commanded Kerr in a stern voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kerr removed his moustache, and then he took off his wig. He grinned cheerfully at Cutts.

"Wasn't so bad, was it?" he asked genially.

"You young sweep!" shouted Cutts. "You've been fooling me all the afternoon!"

"Have we?" said Blake sadly. "What a shame!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give that money to me, D'Arcy!" yelled Cutts.

"I uttably wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, you

(Continued on page 28.)

APPEARANCES ARE DECEPTIVE! No one looking at James Montgomery Babbington, the Freak, would think him capable of pulling off a first-class jape. But actually this amazing-looking freak is just the slickest and brightest japer Rookwood has ever had—bar none!

FOR THE HONOUR OF ROOKWOOD!

A New Story of Schoolboy Fun and Frolic, featuring Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

James Montgomery Babbington, a new boy, and a champion duffer, arrives at Rookwood smothered in coal-dust as a result of his encounter with Pankley & Co., the chumps of Bagshot, the rival school. That Babbington isn't quite such a duffer as he looks however, is proved when he more than holds his own with the bullying Higgs and later controls an excited elephant, thereby saving his Housemaster from possible serious danger. To crown all this Babbington next succeeds in japing Pankley & Co. by getting them to accept a challenge to a football match, the challenge not coming from Lingfield House School, as the Bagshot bouncers are led to believe, but from Jimmy Silver & Co. who turn up at Bagshot disguised as girls. To the accompaniment of loud chuckles from the touchline, Pankley, crimson with confusion, leads his shame-faced looking team on to the field. The "girls" win the toss, and the amazing game commences.

(Now read on.)

"Played, the Girls!"

FROM the moment the whistle went in that astounding match, Lingfield House began to press. Pankley and his team were flustered and ill at ease, and the shouts from the touchline naturally made them worse. Almost all Bagshot had been attracted by this time, to say nothing of a considerable number of Rookwood juniors, and the touchline resounded with shouts of encouragement for the girls' team.

The spectators seemed to find something very entertaining in the spectacle of Pankley & Co. fumbling with the ball in a state of hopeless "nerves," while their girlish opponents, cool and methodical, made rings round them.

"Go it, the girls!"

"Play up, Lingfield House!"

"Play up, the flappers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the young ladies did play up!

Getting the ball on his toes from Pankley, Jimmy Silver, alias Jenny Gold, neatly tricked the Bagshot centre-half and passed out to Lovell on his left.

Lovell, alias Edna, on being tackled in a half-hearted way by the flustered right-back, passed the ball to his centre, and that stalwart young lady whipped round the other back like a flash of lightning, and before the Bagshot goalie realised the danger, a real pile-driver whizzed past him into the net. There was a roar from the touchline.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the girls!"

"Goal for Lingfield House!"

"Hip, hip, hip, hooray!"

It was first blood to the girls, and the match was only a minute old. If anything could have added to the discomfiture of Pankley & Co., it was this unexpected blow. From that time they played, as one of the Bagshot fellows disgustedly remarked, like a set of moulting fowls.

The Lingfield House young ladies simply ran through them, and the busiest man on the Bagshot side was the unfortunate goalie.

Shots rained upon him from all sides until he was in a state of complete bewilderment. And they were shots, too; not gentle, delicate kicks, or half-hearted punts, but really hefty shots with plenty of beef behind them!

To Pankley and his team there was something positively unladylike in the way that Lingfield House kicked the long-suffering football about!

The Bagshot Junior Eleven were by no means composed of duds. Pankley himself was as a rule a tower of strength,

and he had collected a team round him which in an ordinary way could, and did, give a good account of themselves against Jimmy Silver's team at Rookwood.

But the circumstances of this amazing match were such that Pankley & Co. never for one single instant were able to do themselves justice.

They played like a team of hopeless duffers, and the more the crowd on the touchline yelled at them the worse they played. The Lingfield House team, on the other hand, did not seem to have a trace of nerves.

Not only was their ball control infinitely superior, but they did not hesitate to charge the unfortunate Pankley & Co. off the ball time after time. Each time this happened a perfect shriek of delight went up from the touchline; for, as everyone there knew well, none of Pankley's men dare charge their feminine opponents.

The young ladies of Lingfield House, however, had no such scruples, and the staggering Bagshot fellows were charged about the field, and, not seldom, were bowled clean off their feet.

Even Mason at times laughed so much that he almost swallowed the whistle.

Naturally, he did not think of pulling up any of the young ladies, however robust their charges; though, to give them their due, Lingfield House team played a perfectly clean, if hefty, game.

When Edna added a second goal from a wonderful corner kick there was another sensation; but when Valerie, otherwise Mornington, dribbled right through on his own, to score a third, the touchline crowd were almost dumb with astonishment.

The Rookwooders on the touchline were in ecstasies.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" almost sobbed Pons, who was watching with his chum, Van Ryn. "They're simply wiping the floor with poor old Pankley."

"Pankley's simply flummoxed," chuckled Van Ryn, "and no wonder! Poor old Pankley! Ha, ha, ha!"

Yelling with mirth, the Rookwooders cheered on the girl's enthusiastically. Bagshot fellows on the touchline, although still laughing, were beginning to get a little restive.

Three goals in ten minutes was rather too much of a good thing for a girls' team against their junior footballers.

But more surprises were in store for them.

A pretty piece of work between Conroy and Newcome, otherwise Kate and Ada, tricked the backs completely, leaving the Bagshot goalie no alternative but to run out. This he did, but in vain. Dodging nimbly aside, with the ball at his feet, Conroy trickled it into goal in the neatest way in the world, bringing another shout of laughter to add to the depression of spirit of Pankley's unfortunate footballers.

Four—nil for Lingfield House!

After this disaster Pankley gritted his teeth and strove to pull himself together. At the same time he made a desperate attempt to infuse some spirit into his humiliated team.

"For goodness' sake buck up!" he hissed to Putter. "Your play's all gone to pot! Pull yourself together, man!"

Putter glared at his chief.

"You ass!" he hooted. "That blessed centre-forward there just knocked me flying! By Jove, I'd like to—"

"Oh, scat!" growled Pankley. "Keep your temper! No rough house, you know!"

"Rough house!" howled Putter. "What do you call that, then?"

"That" was the spectacle of Poole, the third member of the famous Bagshot trio, being bowled over incontinently by a muscular young lady who was speeding down the wing with the ball at her toe.

On she went, to put in a beautiful centre just at the right moment, a centre which dropped practically at the feet of Miss Jenny Gold, who promptly kicked the ball into goal.

There was a yell.

"Well played, Jenny!"

"Well centred, Flossie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Before half-time came to give a brief respite to the agonies of the jaded Pankley & Co., another goal had been added to the total by the amazing Lingfield House girls.

Six—nil!

That was the score that faced Pankley & Co. as they almost tottered off the field!

"Six—nil!" muttered Mason to himself. "By gad, I never saw anything like it! This beats Banagher!"

And the stalwart Sixth-Former gazed in some admiration at the group of girls who were chatting together unconcernedly as if the beating of a boys' football team were a matter of very little moment to them.

A Shock for Pankley & Co.

JENNY GOLD, sucking a lemon, strolled over to the Bagshot group.

"Jolly good game, what?" she remarked brightly.

"Told you we could give you a good game, didn't I, Master Pankley?"

Pankley, red and furious, gave the cheerful young lady a basilisk glare, which he endeavoured at a moment's notice, catching a look from Mason in his direction, to change into a beaming smile. The result was an expression so extraordinary that Miss Jenny's eyes opened wide.

"Are you ill, Master Pankley?" she said, with concern in her voice.

"N-n-no, not at all!" gasped Pankley. "It—it's a ripping game, of course. We—we—"

"You're not quite in your best form, what?" said Miss Jenny brightly. "Never mind, Master Pankley. You may get a goal in the second half, you know."

Pankley, forgetting himself, glared again, and with a merry laugh Miss Jenny turned away to rejoin her team.

"I—I could brain that wretched girl!" said Pankley, in concentrated tones. "She's charged me about fearfully, too!"

Putter snorted.

"She thinks we may get one goal in the second half," he said, "and they have got six already—Crrumph!"

"By the by, did you notice how streaky her face looked?" said Poole. "Sort of streaks all down the sides. She's evidently rather made up—that's what I think!"

Pankley looked up thoughtfully.

"Yes; it's funny I noticed that," he said. "I s'pose that's what it is—their complexions come off when they get hot. Hallo! There goes the whistle!"

Mason blew his whistle, and the teams lined up for the second half. Pankley & Co. had got a little more used to the situation now, and were determined to make a desperate effort to retrieve the fortunes of the game.

But the Amazons of Lingfield House, unfortunately for Pankley & Co., were no less determined to carry on their policy of aggression.

In less than two minutes Miss Jenny had netted another goal for Lingfield House, and Pankley & Co. gazed at each other hopelessly.

"This is awful!" groaned Pankley.

"She's hot stuff!" said Poole grudgingly. "She's a blessed Dixie Dean!"

"Going to rain, I believe," said Putter, gazing up at the sky which had become very black.

"Good thing, too!" said Pankley gloomily. "I hope it comes down in torrents and washes the match out!"

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As a matter of fact, Pankley's wish was granted. Five minutes later there was a sudden deluge of rain which almost blotted out the landscape. But in those five minutes the Lingfield House team had had time to score two more goals.

In a terrific downpour the field cleared like magic. There was a rush to the house for shelter on the part of the crowd on the touchline, while Pankley & Co. led away at the double to the pavilion.

Although this was normally reserved for the players only, it was noticeable that half a dozen of the Rookwood Fourth-Formers, who had been among the spectators, made a dash for the pavilion, too.

Amongst these was James Montgomery Babbington, of the New House at Rookwood.

"Bad luck this rain," said Miss Jenny, when the shelter of the pavilion had been reached. "Looks as though we shall not be able to finish this delightful match."

There was more than a suspicion of a giggle from the other young ladies at this remark, and Pankley looked up sharply.

"I suppose you are satisfied, Master Pankley?" continued Miss Jenny blandly.

Pankley looked hard at this formidable young lady.

"I—I suppose so," he stammered.

There was a laugh from Mason. He, like others, had run for the pavilion.

"You ought to be satisfied, Pankley!" he grinned. "Bagshot never had such a licking, that I know of. It's your win all along the line, Miss Gold."

"It's very kind of you to say that, Mr. Mason!" cooed Jenny Gold. "Do you hear that, girls?" she called over her shoulder. "Mr. Mason says that it's our win all along the line!"

Pankley gazed hard at the cheery Miss Gold and her merry team, and there was suspicion in his glance. Strange and disturbing thoughts were working in Pankley's mighty brain.

He opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it again. Mason, the school captain, turned up the collar of his blazer.

"Well, I'm going to run for it," he remarked. "As soon as this rain lets up a bit, Pankley, bring the girls along to the house to tea. I'll tell the matron."

And, with a cheery wave of the hand, the Bagshot captain ran out of the pavilion and scudded off through the rain.

Pankley did not turn his head at Mason's departure, but kept his eyes fixed on the animated countenance of Miss Jenny Gold.

That young lady, if she noticed it, did not allow it to disturb her in any way.

"Well, girls," she remarked almost casually—and now there was a subtle change in her voice, as Pankley noticed, with a start—"Mason's gone! What about it?"

There was a sort of involuntary movement of the girls towards their captain.

"Yes, what about it, Jimmy—er—Jenny, I mean!" came the drawing tones of the tall girl who answered to the name of Valerie.

That did it!

In an instant the truth—the dreadful truth—dawned upon Pankley.

"Jimmy!" yelled Pankley, making a dash at "Miss Gold. "Jimmy Silver! I know you now, you bounder!"

The incensed skipper of the Bagshot team made a wild clutch at the provoking young lady's beautifully shingled hair. Miss Gold ducked swiftly, but Pankley's clutching fingers caught in the hair, and the whole coiffure came off in his hand. The transformation was amazing—and instantaneous. Jimmy Silver stood revealed to all beholders, in his own proper person.

There was a roar of mingled wrath and astonishment from the Bagshot fellows. Putter and Poole almost fell down with amazement.

The next moment there was a shout of defiance from the Rookwooders, as they charged the demoralised and gasping Bagshot fellows in a compact body; and inside ten seconds a wild and whirling combat was in progress.

"Sock it to 'em, Rookwood!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

"Give 'em beans!"

"Down with the Bagshot bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The conflict was short and sharp; there could be but one ending to it. To the Bagshot fellows, almost stunned by the shock of the paralysing discovery, it seemed like a horrible nightmare. For the most part they were too dazed to put up much of a fight against overwhelming odds. The Rookwooders who had been amongst the crowd on the touchline, and who had taken refuge from the rain in the pavilion, joined in the combat with zest.

Pankley and Puffer and Poole, wild with rage at the way they had been tricked, put up a terrific fight. But Rookwood outnumbered Bagshot by almost two to one, and in five minutes the fight was over. Every Bagshot fellow was prostrate on the floor, with one or more Rookwooder sitting on his chest!

The Rookwood fellows, however, had not got off without damage. Most of the "girls" wigs had been shed in the struggle, and a number of discoloured eyes and swollen noses testified to the stout fight put up by Pankley & Co.

Arthur Edward Lovell, from his perch on the chest of the redoubtable Pankley, nursed a cut lip as he grinned down at his fallen foe.

"Done you this time, Pankley, old son!" he chortled. "What a wind up to your footer season! Beaten nine—nil by a team of girls!"

Pankley glared in breathless rage.

"You lemme ger-rup, and I—I'll give you socks, Lovell!" he gasped.

"Not good enough!" grinned Lovell. "And call me Edna, please, Master Pankley!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Rookwooders.

Pankley almost foamed.

"You—you bounder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotter! I—I'll give you Edna if you lemme ger-rup!"

"Nothing doing, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is the jape of the giddy season!" gasped Jimmy Silver, wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes. "There's never been anything to equal it! Pankley'll never get over it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll have to clear off to Australia or somewhere, to hide his diminished head!" chuckled Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A real, gilt-edged, copper-bottomed stunt, an' it worked a treat!" put in Val Mornington.

"And don't forget it was a Modern wheeze!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Faith, an' ye're right, Tommy!" said Doyle. "It's a broth av a bhoys ye are, Babbington!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Three cheers for Babbington!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

There was a cheer which might easily have been heard in the Bagshot School House, but for the roar of the rain on the roof of the pavilion. Some such thought evidently occurred to Jimmy Silver, for he gazed out at the weather somewhat anxiously.

"It's letting up a bit, I believe!" he exclaimed. "We must buck up and clear out of here, you men, or we shall have a crowd of Bagshot bounders on our track."

"What shall we do with these beauties, Jimmy?" sang out Raby.

"Tie 'em up!" said Jimmy promptly. "Their clothes will be in the changing-room. Use their ties and braces and mufflers—anything—and rope 'em up!"

"What ho!"

"You—you rotters!" choked Pankley.

"Cheer up, Pank, old man! Someone'll soon come across from the house to see what we're doing; but we shall be gone by then!" grinned Lovell.

The unfortunate Bagshot fellows were securely trussed up, one after another, with their handkerchiefs or anything that came to hand. Each man's hands were bound behind his back, and his legs tied together at knee and ankle.

Then the whole team were sat up on the floor, with their backs against the wall.

"Pretty lot, ain't they?" grinned Jimmy Silver, stepping back to admire the effect, with his head on one side, while eleven pairs of eyes from eleven flushed, furious faces, glared at him with a deadly, concentrated glare.

Jimmy Silver wagged an admonitory forefinger at them playfully.

"Naughty, naughty! You mustn't lose your little tempers with young ladies, just because they have beaten you at footer!"

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

And Pankley fairly writhed.

"Jenny Gold—Jimmy Silver! Silver—Gold! Oh, if I'd only known!" he groaned. "If I'd only guessed!"



"Jimmy Silver, I know you!" yelled Pankley, and he made a wild clutch at Miss Gold's hair. The "young lady" ducked, but Pankley's fingers closed on the hair, and there was a yell from the Bagshot junior as it came away in his hand. "Jimmy Silver!" "Dished!" "Swindled!" (See page 24.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You would have done if you hadn't been such a chump, old man," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Give Mason our love—he was awfully nice and polite to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, and all that, but we must be going now—the rain looks like stopping. Just a moment, though!"

Jimmy Silver produced a piece of charcoal crayon from some recess of his gym costume, and, jumping on a form, proceeded to scrawl on the wall above the heads of the disconsolate row of bound Bagshot fellows:

"ROOKWOOD FOR EVER!"

"How's that?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hip, pip, hurrah!"

There was a wild cheer from the hilarious Rookwooders.

"Come on, now, girls—I mean, chaps! Gather up your wigs and things, and we'll make a bolt for the bus!" said Jimmy briskly. "We shall get wet, but that's better than being caught here by the Bagshot bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, Pankley! Thanks for the ripping game!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, Bluebell! Three cheers for us!"

And with another cheer, the whole party of Rookwooders—footballers and spectators—streamed out of the pavilion and bolted across to where the motor-bus was standing, leaving behind them eleven of the gloomiest youths in Christendom.

Breathlessly the Rookwood juniors clambered aboard the bus, while the driver started up the engine.

"Get a move on, driver!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's time we went—high time!"

"We've decided not to stay to tea!" grinned Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's us for Rookham!" said Jimmy. "Mr. Judson'll be wanting his things back, and we want a change badly. We're wet, but we've certainly had a wonderful day!"

There was a roar of assent. The bus started with a jerk, and rolled rapidly down the drive towards the gates of Bagshot School.

It was just in time.

Already a stream of fellows could be seen flowing from the door of the School House, as the rain now almost stopped; one or two of them stopped and stared as they saw the bus moving off.

"We've timed it beautifully," said Jimmy Silver. "If the gates are open we're all right."

Fortunately the gates were open.

Some of the Bagshot fellows were running after the bus now, evidently puzzled as to why the girls' team should be leaving so hurriedly. A noise of shouts came to the ears of the Rookwooders. Had the gates been shut against the bus, the delay might well have had serious consequences for Jimmy Silver and his merry men; but they were not shut.

The bus passed out of the precincts of Bagshot School without let or hindrance, and turned on to the high road, speeding towards Combe Village.

"Safe!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We have been successful in pulling off the jape of the century! It's the kybosh for Pankley & Co."

"Hurrah!"

"And the honour of Rookwood is safe!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The Eavesdropper!

"WE'LL make it a feed, then," said Jimmy Silver. The topic of conversation in the end study in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood was naturally the famous victory which the Rookwood juniors had just gained over their old enemies, Pankley & Co. of Bagshot School.

Jimmy Silver and his chums, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, were unanimously agreed that such a famous victory should be celebrated in some way or other.

The discussion had not been in progress more than a minute or two when Arthur Edward Lovell, in his decisive way, gave his opinion as to the form the celebration should take.

"Let's have a feed," was his suggestion; and Jimmy Silver agreed.

"Better have it in the dormitory, I suppose," said the captain of the Fourth thoughtfully. "We can get the Modern chaps over—smuggle them in somehow."

"Hope Manders won't be on the warpath," said Newcome. "He's a nosy old beggar, and he keeps a pretty sharp eye on the Moderns, you know."

"That's their look out!" grinned Lovell. "If they don't like to risk old Manders they can stay away."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Jimmy, laughing. "The man who thought of the whole stunt really was young Babbington, and he's a Modern. We must have him at the feed, and Tommy Dodd & Co., of course, will have to come."

"Babbington ought to be the guest of honour," said Newcome. "That Modern's got a headpiece on him, and no mistake!"

"He has," agreed Jimmy. "He's a mighty sharp chap is Babbington, and the funny part is he looks exactly like his cousin, Clarence Cuffy, the biggest ass at Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sh-shush!"

Lovell tiptoed across the study, and, grasping the handle of the door, suddenly flung it open. There was a gasp from a fat figure which staggered and almost fell into the room.

"Tubby Muffin!" roared the Fistical Four, with one voice.

Tubby Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood, was noted for his tale-bearing, eavesdropping proclivities. Evidently his ear had been at the keyhole of the end study. But for how long? That was the question.

"You fat clam!" roared Lovell, springing at Tubby like a tiger.

The fat junior, with a gasp of terror, turned to flee, but it was too late. Lovell's grasp was upon him, and with a horrified yell he was dragged backwards into the study.

"Shut the door," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, Muffin, how dare you listen outside our door, you young rotter!"

"Ow! I didn't—I wasn't! Leggo, Lovell!" shouted Tubby wildly.

"You awful little sneak!" hissed Lovell, shaking Tubby violently by the collar, much as a terrier might shake a very fat rat.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow! Yoop! I'm ch-choking!"

"Good thing, too, you spying worm!" snorted Lovell.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow! Help! Yarrah!"

"Go easy, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "We don't want a dead porpoise lying about the study."

Lovell desisted at last, and released Tubby, who gasped and gasped as if for a wager.

"Now, how much did you overhear—that's the question, Tubby?" said Jimmy Silver sternly.

"And tell the truth, Tubby," said Raby, flourishing a cricket-stump, "or we'll lay this round you!"

"Beast! I didn't hear anything—I wasn't listening!" gasped Tubby.

"Oh, tell that to the marines!" said Newcome.

"Fact! My—my shoelace came undone, and—"

"Oh, stow all that, Tubby!" snapped Jimmy Silver impatiently. "We know you were listening."

"I heard nothing, I tell you!" wailed Tubby. "I never heard anything about the feed. Anyway, I s'pose I shall be there—that is to say, I think it's a jolly good idea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You would think that," said Jimmy Silver, grinning in spite of himself. "So you know all about it, and you will cackle it all over the place, of course!"

"I won't—I swear I won't!" said Tubby earnestly.

"If you do," said Raby, flourishing the cricket-stump, "look out, that's all!"

"Now, listen to me, you fat ass," said Jimmy Silver earnestly. "If a word about this suggested feed gets out, Carthew or old Manders, or some of the beaks will get on to it and stop the whole thing. Then there'll be no feed. See?"

"I—I won't say a word—I swear it, Jimmy!" said Tubby hurriedly. "No feed! My hat! I won't breathe a word!"

"If you do, you will get a licking from the whole Form," said Lovell darkly. "Now, roll away, porpoise. I'm fed up with the sight of you!"

And Lovell threw open the door and made a lunge at Tubby with a large size in feet.

"Ow! You beast, Lovell! Shurrup kicking me! Help! Yarrah!"

Tubby Muffin stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once.

"That chap, Muffin, makes me sick with his spying habits," said Lovell disgustedly, slamming the door again.

"He's a worm!"

"Yes, but I don't think he'll let on in this case," said Jimmy Silver. "When there's a feed in the air he'll be jolly careful. We'll talk it over in the dorm to-night and have a whip round, and then get in the grub to-morrow. To-morrow night we'll have the feed in our dorm—a victory celebration—what?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Tommy Dodd & Co. will chip in all right," said Lovell.

"We'll go and see them about it now. They'll have to stand their whack, of course."

"All except Babbington," said Jimmy Silver. "That chap Babbington must be the guest of honour."

"Hear, hear!" agreed the Co. heartily.

And they swung out of the study en route for the Modern House to consult with Tommy Dodd as to ways and means for the great victory feed.

Catching a Tartar!

THE Fourth Form, Classics and Moderns alike, enthusiastically approved of the Fistical Four's suggestion of a dormitory feed, and the necessary preparations were quickly made.

A small buying committee was formed, consisting of Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd, and during the whole of the following day the two members of the buying committee were constantly haunted by the fat figure of Tubby Muffin, who hovered hopefully in the vicinity.

"Clear off, Muffin, will you!" said Tommy Dodd for the umpteenth time, as he was walking through the cloisters during morning break. "What are you following me about for, you fat freak?"

"N-nothing, Dodd!"

"Then what are you dodging from one pillar to another like a blessed defective for? I'll teach you to follow me!" And Tommy Dodd made a wrathful lunge in Tubby's direction.

Tubby skipped out of the way and fled.

"Ha ha, ha!" laughed Lovell, who had observed the incident. "Tubby won't let you out of his sight, in case you are going to start buying for the feed."

"Shush, you ass! Don't blab it out all over the place, Lovell!" said Tommy Dodd.

"It's all right," said Lovell, looking round hurriedly. "No one about."

"So that's what he's haunting me for, the fat freak!" growled Tommy Dodd. "If he comes after me again I—I'll burst him!"

"He's gone off to track Jimmy Silver, I expect!" grinned Lovell. "He won't lose sight of the buying committee today, I'll bet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After footer practice that afternoon it was arranged that the tuck for the great feed, which had already been ordered, should be conveyed from Sergeant Kettle's little tuckshop across the quad, in a number of parcels and baskets, by different juniors to avoid suspicion.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were particularly anxious that the eye of authority should not notice that large consignments of provisions were being smuggled into the house at one time.

At first the idea succeeded according to plan. Tommy Doyle of the Modern House was the first junior to emerge from the tuckshop with a large brown-paper parcel under his arm. Looking as unconcerned as possible, he strolled across the quad and scooted into the School House. There the parcel was deposited in Jimmy Silver's study. Lovell and Rahy were in to receive it.

Newcome came next with a basket, and attracted no particular attention, save from Tubby Muffin.

That junior was watching the proceedings from outside the tuckshop, his numerous attempts to enter having been firmly repulsed by the buying committee, in a state of great excitement.

As each consignment of tuck appeared Tubby followed it at a distance, his round eyes never removed from the parcel until it disappeared in at the door of the School House.

Flynn of the Fourth was the next to appear with a parcel. Tubby Muffin eyed it hungrily.

"Kape off, ye fat thafe of the world!" muttered Flynn as he passed Tubby.

"Oh, really, Flynn," said Tubby, in an injured tone, "I was only just looking!"

"If you look any more I'll take my boot to ye!" growled Flynn, passing on hurriedly.

"Hi, there, Muffin, come over here!"

A sharp voice rang across the quad, and Tubby Muffin gave a start and looked around.

From a window of the Modern House overlooking the quad the head and shoulders of Carthew, the unpopular prefect, appeared. He was beckoning to Tubby.

"Come here, Muffin!" came the sharp voice again.

Tubby Muffin, looking very anxious, rolled towards the window.

"What's going on here, Muffin?" said Carthew sharply. "I've seen two or three kids cutting across the quad with parcels. What's it all mean, hey?"

Tubby Muffin fairly spluttered with alarm.

If Carthew once got on the track Tubby knew there would be no feed that night. Carthew was the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood, and particularly down on the Fourth Form.

"I—I—nothing!" stammered Tubby. "Nothing at all, Carthew! It's quite all right!"

"All right, is it?" said Carthew, his suspicions thoroughly roused by Tubby's manner. "I think I'll come down and see about it myself."

"Y-yes, Carthew!" spluttered Tubby.

Here was an unfortunate turn of events. Somebody must be warned, and at once. Tubby gazed round hurriedly. Just emerging from the door of the Modern House was the figure of James Montgomery Babbington, the new boy at Rookwood, who had already gained quite a reputation for being a fellow of ideas.

Tubby rushed across to him in a moment.

"I say, Babbington!" he babbled. "Quick! Carthew!" Babbington blinked at him in surprise.

"Carthew!"

"Yes, Carthew! He's got on to it!"

"What?"

"On to the feed, I mean. He's seen the chaps carrying the parcels. He's coming down."

"Oh, is he?" said Babbington, his eyes gleaming. "Hold on a minute, will you?"

He turned and dashed back into the Modern House. He flew up the stairs like lightning, and along the passages to the study which he shared with his cousin, Clarence Cuffy.

It was the work of a moment to pick up a basket which was concealed under a rug in a corner and tuck it under his arm. Then Babbington turned and dashed downstairs again. In an incredibly short space of time he was standing by Tubby once more.

"Has he come down?" he gasped breathlessly.

"No, but he said he was coming, and—"

"Wait here and look out for him," said Babbington; and he dashed off at top speed for the tuckshop.

Carthew had, as a matter of fact, been delayed a moment or two owing to the fact that he had mislaid his ashplant. Carthew found more use for that implement than any other prefect at Rookwood, and he thought it might help him in the investigation he was going to make.

What was going on Carthew had no idea, and it was hardly his business to find out. But if Carthew could catch the Fourth-Formers, and especially Jimmy Silver & Co., out in any way, he felt that it would amply repay him for any trouble it might cause him.

He found his ashplant at length, and hurried downstairs.

Meantime, Babbington had reached the door of the tuckshop with his basket. He was just in time to meet Tommy Cook emerging with a large hamper under his arm.

(Continued on next page.)

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"Quick! Drop that!" exclaimed Babbington, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "Take this and carry on."

"Why—what—"

"Quick! Carthew!" gasped Babbington.

He snatched the hamper from the astounded Tommy Cook, and thrust the big basket he had been carrying himself into that worthy's hands.

Then, picking up Tommy Cook's hamper, Babbington made a jump for the tuckshop door.

Almost mechanically, Tommy Cook walked on, carrying Babbington's big basket. At the same time Carthew came out of the Modern House at a run, with his ashplant tucked under his arm. Tommy Cook looked across at him, but kept on walking towards the School House.

"Hi, Cook!" shouted Carthew peremptorily. "Stop!"

"What is it?" asked Tommy Cook, walking on steadily.

"Stop!" yelled Carthew, waving his hand. "Stop at once, Cook! I order you!"

Tommy Cook, by this time half-way across the quad, stopped reluctantly. A swarm of fellows came out of the tuckshop and stood looking on as Carthew came panting up.

"Now, what's all this?" said Carthew sharply. "You young sweeps are up to some game or other."

"Are we, Carthew?" said Cook innocently.

"Yes, you are, and I'm going to find out what it is," said Carthew. "Hand over that basket, Cook."

"What for, Carthew?" said Tommy Cook coolly. "It isn't yours, is it?"

Carthew grinned evilly.

"No, it's yours at present, Cook," he said. "But I'm going to confiscate it. My duty as a prefect, you know."

"Shame!" came a murmur from the indignant crowd.

"I'm not letting this basket go!" said Tommy Cook defiantly.

"We'll soon see about that!" said Carthew grimly, letting his ashplant slip into his hand. "Now, Cook, I order you, as a prefect, to hand over that basket to me!"

"Shame!" came the murmur again, only louder this time.

"Don't do it, Cook!"

"Stick it out!"

"Silence!" yelled Carthew savagely. "There's grub in that basket, I jolly well know!"

"Well, why not?" said Tommy Cook.

"You're the third or fourth young sweep I've seen carting loads of tuck across to the School House," said Carthew. "There's some game going on. Besides, what are you Moderns doing carting grub into the School House?"

"Has that anything to do with you, Carthew?" said Tommy Cook blandly.

"Yes, you young sweep, it has!" roared Carthew. "And I'll jolly soon show you! Hand over that basket or take a kicking."

Tommy Cook hesitated.

"Are you going to confiscate it, Carthew?"

"Yes, it's got grub in, I know that," said Carthew, "and you youngsters are not allowed to have grub by the basketful. Hand it over!"

Tommy Cook reluctantly handed it over, and Carthew, with a victorious grin, grasped it.

"Shame!" came in an angry roar from the onlookers, who by now included half the Fourth Form.

"Highway robber!"

"It's burglary!"

"Shame, Carthew!"

But Carthew only laughed. He was feeling quite pleased with himself. He had dished the juniors' little game, whatever that game might be, and, in addition, had confiscated what looked like a very promising basket of grub.

The basket was furnished with a heavy lid, which was kept in place by a wooden peg. As he held the basket by one arm, Carthew could not resist the temptation to have

a look at the contents of his prize. Amidst a breathless hush he pulled out the peg, and, opening the lid, peered in. Then a wild yell rent the air.

For, as Carthew looked into the basket, the hooded head of a big snake rose with an angry hiss, writhing almost into the prefect's face.

For a moment Carthew was transfixed with horror. His bulging eyes gazed at the fearsome head, fixed with terror.

The next instant, with a shriek of sheer fright, Carthew flung the basket from him.

There was a roar from the crowd of juniors.

"A snake!"

"Look out, Carthew!"

"Run, man, run!"

Carthew turned on his heel as six feet of angry reptile writhed out of the basket with incredible speed and made in his direction.

For the first time since the beginning of this little comedy the face of Montgomery Babbington wore an anxious look.

Would Carthew stand his ground and slash at the snake with his ashplant? If so, Babbington would have to intervene, and quickly, to save the life of his pet. But he need have no fear. Carthew did not even think of attacking the fearsome-looking reptile whose appearance had caused him such a shock. Turning on his heels, he fairly fled back towards the Modern House, followed by such a roar of laughter as had seldom been heard at Rookwood.

It was evident that the great victory celebration had nothing more to fear from the interference of Carthew!

(There'll be another thrilling instalment of this powerful serial next week, chums. Watch out for it!)

JAPING THE FIFTH!

(Continued from page 22.)

wascal!" said Gussy, drawing away. "Pway keep your paws off me, Cutts!"

"If you don't give me that money—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Tom Merry. "You ought to think yourself jolly lucky, Cutts, that you've got off so lightly."

"What do you mean?" panted Cutts.

"I mean that this is only the bare amount that will buy Gussy another bicycle," replied Tom. "You were driving that car recklessly, and you ran into Gussy's bike, and then drove on without even stopping. If you don't like to pay the just compensation you can complain to the Head. We'll leave it to you."

Gerald Cutts tried to speak, but something rose in his throat and nearly choked him. Then, with a look on his face that would have done credit to a Prussian Hun, he turned on his heel and strode away.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts was done, and he knew it. He couldn't appeal to the Head; he couldn't even mention the matter to his Housemaster. He had been driving that car recklessly, and he had been forced to pay the compensation for the damage that he had done.

On the whole, it would be better, he decided, to let the whole thing drop.

And he did.

But it was a long time before the Fourth and the Shell ceased to chuckle at the arrest of Gerald Cutts!

THE END.

(Look out for another topping story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "TRIMBLE'S REFORMATION!" You'll vote it a real treat, chums.)



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