

The GEM 2^D



LATHOM'S LOOKING FOR A FIVE-POUND NOTE AND BAGGY A—

The SHADY THREE!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

Whose Cake?

"O H jiminy!" Baggy Trimble, of the St. Jim's Fourth, uttered that ejaculation.

He looked alarmed.

Baggy was in Study No. 10, in the Shell, where he certainly had no business. But it was not uncommon for Trimble of the Fourth to be found in places where he had no business.

Footsteps came along the Shell passage. They stopped at the door of Study No. 10.

The door handle turned. And as it turned Baggy Trimble also turned and made a jump towards the old and somewhat tattered screen that stood across the corner of the study.

Baggy Trimble's motions were seldom swift.

Generally, they resembled the movements of an easy-going caterpillar.

But on the present occasion Baggy did the distance between the study table and the screen in the corner at about sixty m.p.h.

He vanished behind the screen as the door opened.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, ruddy and cheery from football, tramped into the study. Tom Merry dropped a parcel on the study table. The chums of the Shell had stopped at the tuckshop to obtain supplies for tea on their way back to the House.

"Shove the kettle on, Monty, old man! My hat! I'm hungry!" said Tom. "Nothing like footer to give you an appetite! Hallo, Gussy, old bean! Have you come to tea?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, looked into the study from the passage. The usual genial expression was missing from the countenance of Arthur Augustus, and his eye gleamed through his celebrated eyeglass.

"I have not come to tea, deah boy; I am lookin' for Twimble."

"Well, tea's better than Trimble," suggested Tom Merry. "Give Trimble a miss and have tea instead."

"The fact is, deah boy, I am s'andin' tea in my studay to my minah, young Wally, and some of his fwiends in the Third," said Arthur Augustus. "I had a special cake sent ovah from the Wayland Stores—"

"And you want Trimble?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There won't be much of that special cake left for Wally & Co. if you have Trimble," grinned Manners.

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"You misappwehend me, deah boy. I am not havin' Twimble to tea; the fat villain has bagged the cake!"

"Oh!"

"It is wathah awkward," explained Arthur Augustus. "I am expectin' Wally, and young Levison, and Weggie Mannahs ewevy minute. Funds are wathah short, and there is pwactically nothin' for tea except the cake. I left it on the studay table while I went along to Skimmy's studay to bowwow some sugah. When I came back it was gone. Of course, it was Twimble—nobody else in the Fourth would bag a fellow's cake. I am anxious to find him before he scoffs the cake. Aftahwards, it would be too late. Tompkins says he saw the fat boundah dodgin' into the Shell passage with somethin' undah his arm. I am goin' along all the studies lookin' for him!"

"Better buck up, then," chuckled Monty Lowther. "If you give Trimble a few minutes with a cake you will want an X-ray apparatus to find out what has become of it!"

Arthur Augustus nodded and passed on his way. His noble brow was knitted, and his eyes gleamed wrath. There was evidently a warm time in store for Baggy Trimble when the swell of St. Jim's ran him to earth.

"That fat bounder ought to be jolly well kicked!" said Tom Merry. "The blessed fire's out! Where's the fire-wood?"

"In the corner," answered Manners, "behind the screen." Tom Merry stepped to the screen in the corner and pulled it aside.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped a startled voice.

FIVE-POUND CAKE! AND THEY MEET IN THE MASTER'S STUDY!



Tom gave a jump.

"Why—what—"

"Trimble!" ejaculated Manners.

"Trimble!" yelled Lowther.

The Shell fellows stared at the fat figure revealed in the corner. Baggy Trimble gave them an imploring blink.

"I—I say, don't yell!" he gasped. "That brute D'Arcy isn't far away! He—he thinks I've bagged his cake."

"And haven't you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Of course not! I hope I'm not the chap to bag a fellow's cake. I say, shut the door, will you? He—he might come back!"

"Where's Gussy's cake?"

"I don't know anything about his cake. I think it's rather hard cheese that a fellow can't miss a cake without immediately thinking that I've had it," said Trimble plaintively. "It's unjust!"

"Well, if a cake's missing a fellow would naturally think of you," said Tom Merry, eyeing Baggy Trimble doubtfully.

"And a fellow would generally be right," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, I know absolutely nothing about his cake," said Trimble. "I never knew he had a cake. I've been nowhere near Study No. 6. I'm keeping out of his sight because I don't want a row with him. It's simply rotten, you know, getting after a fellow like this, without an atom of proof. I hope you fellows believe that I never touched his beastly cake."

The Terrible Three looked dubious.

"Well, if you never had it—" said Tom.

"Honest Injun!" said Baggy.

There was a sound of returning footsteps in the Shell passage. Baggy Trimble gave a gasp of affright.

"I—I say, d-d-don't give me away!" he gasped.

Baggy squirmed behind the screen again. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced in at the open door.

"I can't find that fat brute!" he said. "He seems to have disappeared! Bai Jove! I will give him a fearful thrashin' when I wun him down!"

Tom Merry & Co. did not reply. Arthur Augustus passed on, to seek farther afield, and the Shell fellows eyed one another dubiously. There was at least a possibility that Baggy was innocent—and they felt disposed to give him the benefit of the doubt. Arthur Augustus, evidently, was not in a mood to give him anything but a thrashing.

"Is—is—is he gone?" came a fat voice from behind the screen.

"Yes, you fat duffer!"

Baggy Trimble emerged into view again. He crossed quickly to the study door and closed it.

The Shell fellows looked at him expressively. Baggy did not seem to observe it.

"I'll stay here a bit," he remarked. "I'd rather keep out of D'Arcy's way. He'd be sorry afterwards if he started punching a chap and then found out that it was another fellow who had the cake. Don't you think so?"

"Well, I suppose so," said Tom. "If you never had it—"

"Never, old fellow! I hope you can take my word."

"Well, I'll try," said Tom doubtfully.

"You fellows just going to have tea?" asked Baggy. "Well, look here, I'll tea with you—"

"Will you?" asked Manners grimly.

"Yes, old chap! Mind, I'm going to stand my whack!" said Trimble, with dignity. "I'm not the fellow to sponge, I hope!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And what are you going to stand?"

asked Monty Lowther, with deep sarcasm.

"One of those ripping hampers from Trimble Hall, that we've heard so much about and never seen?"

"I'm going to stand a cake—"

The Terrible Three jumped.

"A—a—what?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"A cake, old chap! I've got a ripping cake, specially sent from home. It was made specially for me by the cook at Trimble Hall. I've got it here."

"Here!" gasped Manners.

"Yes, old fellow."

Trimble stepped behind the screen again, and emerged with a cardboard box—evidently a cake-box—in his fat hand.

He laid it on the study table. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther stared at him like fellows mesmerised.

Trimble opened the lid of the box. A large and handsome cake was revealed.

"There," said Baggy, "that's something like a cake—what? Our cook at Trimble Hall knows how to make cakes, I can tell you! You don't often get a cake like this! Look here, we'll begin with the ham and eggs, and wind up with the cake—what?"

"You—you—you!" gasped Tom Merry. He stared blankly at the fatuous Baggy.

"Looks all right—what?" asked Trimble complacently.

"You fat villain!" roared Tom.

"That's D'Arcy's cake!"

"Why, there's the name of the Wayland Stores on the

lid of the box!" gasped Manners.

Baggy Trimble started.

"Is—is there? I—I forgot that! I—I mean, this—this cake wasn't sent directly from home, it was ordered from the Wayland Stores. The pater telephoned specially to them to deliver it to me—see?"

Tom Merry threw open the study door.

"Gussy!" he roared.

"I—I say, d-d-don't call D'Arcy!" howled Trimble. "He would make out that this was his cake, very likely! He's quite capable of it! I say—"

"Gussy!"

"Look here, you know—"

"Gussy!" roared Tom.

"Yaas, deah boy," came D'Arcy's voice from the distance. "Have you seen that wottah Trimble?"

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"This way!"
 "Oh jummy!" gasped Baggy. "I—I say, I—I keep on telling you that this is my cake—it was specially telephoned be our cook at Trimble Hall. I—I mean the pater specially cooked the telephone—that is to say—I—I—I mean—"

"This way, Gussy!"
 "Yaas, deah boy!"
 "Oh jummy!"
 Baggy Trimble clutched up the cake and made a jump for the door. Tom Merry made a clutch at Baggy. In sheer desperation Baggy lowered his bullet head and butted.

"Ow!"
 Tom Merry sat down suddenly. Trimble staggered for a moment, and then, barely escaping the grasp of Manners and Lowther, leaped out of the study and fled. His rapid footsteps died away up the Shell passage. A moment later Arthur Augustus arrived from the other direction.

"Tom Mewwy—"
 "Groooogh!"
 "Have you seen that fat wottah?"
 "Urrrrggghh!"
 "Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?"
 "Groogh! Gug-gug!" Tom Merry pressed both hands to his waistcoat and gurgled. "Ow! Groogh! Groooogh!"
 Manners and Lowther helped him up. They patted him on the back. He found his voice at last.
 "Oh! Ow! I'm winded! Groooogh! He's gone up the passage with the cake! Ow! Leave some of him for me! Groooogh! I'm going to slaughter him! Ow! Grrrrrr!"
 Arthur Augustus rushed on. Hardly a minute had elapsed since Baggy had fled from Tom Merry's study. But a minute, in the circumstances, was enough for Baggy—and he had elapsed, too.

CHAPTER 2. Still Running!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW leaned back in the armchair in Study No. 9 in the Fourth, with his hands clasped behind his head, and one elegantly trousered leg crossed over the other—with due regard to the crease of the trousers.

Sidney Clive was kneeling before the study fire, with a toasting-fork and a stack of slices, making toast.

Ernest Levison was seated at the study table, a pen in his hand, a sheaf of foolscap before him, and a wrinkle of thought in his brow.

Occasionally he dipped the pen in the ink, and it scratched on the paper.

Cardew was watching him idly.
 There was silence in Study No. 9, broken only by a grunt or two from Clive, who seemed to find the fire rather warm at close quarters, and the scratches of Levison's pen. It was broken at last by the voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew, speaking in drawling tones:

"Can I help?"
 Clive looked up with a scarlet visage.
 "Yes, if you like! I'm getting jolly warm! And I haven't made half of it yet!"

Cardew smiled.
 "Dear man! I wasn't addressin' you!" he said. "Sorry to have drawn your attention. I was pretendin' not to notice how busy you were."

Sidney Clive grunted.
 "Well, you can't help Levison, you ass! He's doing his history essay! Still, probably you couldn't make the toast without burning it." And Clive turned to the fire again.

Levison had not looked up. He was working very slowly, and thinking hard as he worked.

"Ernest, old bean!" murmured Cardew.
 Levison of the Fourth glanced round at last, and laid down his pen.

"Chuckin' it?" asked Cardew.
 "Yes, if you're going to talk," answered Levison, quite good-humouredly. "No good trying to dish out an essay while your chin's going, old chap. And there's lots of time."

"Not at the rate you're working at," said Cardew. "Did I notice you thinkin' while you were writin'?"

"Yes, ass!"
 "Isn't that rather old-fashioned?"
 "Fathead!"

Levison impaled a slice of bread on a pair of compasses, and joined in the toasting. There was only one toasting-fork available. Cardew remained reclining at ease in the armchair.

"But I'd really like to help, old bean," he said. "I've been thinkin' of goin' in for that historical essay myself. It's jolly decent of Lathom to offer a prize of a five-pound note for the best essay in the Fourth. It would come in

useful to me! I've got a tip on the Abbotsford races—straight from the horse's mouth—"

"What about buttering the toast?"
 "You butter it so much better than I do, old bean, answered Cardew. "Besides, brain-work is my long suit. I'm not goin' to cut you out of Lathom's prize—too much fag. But if my vast stores of historical knowledge are any use to you, they're at your service."

"I don't suppose I shall bag it," said Levison. "Kerr of the New House will beat me, most likely. Still, I'm going to try. You might have a chance if you tried, Cardew. Why not?"

"Too much like work!" sighed Cardew. "But I'm willin' to help! I've thought a lot about history and things. It's rather a pity I haven't your industrious energy, Ernest, old thing. I fancy I could produce rather a brilliant essay. I've got a rather original idea of the way history ought to be written."

"And what's that?"
 "Puttin' in the facts," said Cardew gravely. "No historian has ever thought of that, so far as my readin' of history goes. Fancy a fellow gettin' hold of a history book and findin' facts in it! It would make him jump—what? F'rinstance, supposin' you're dealin' with Nelson's time—"

"I'm not!"
 "Supposin' you were," said Cardew calmly. "Describin' the thrillin' death-scene on the deck of the Victory, you report Nelson as sayin', 'Kismet, Hardy!' Kismet bein' an Arabic word, my beloved 'earers, meanin' Fate—a very natural remark for Nelson to make, in the circumstances!"

Clive stared up from the toast.

"You ass! Nelson said 'Kiss me, Hardy!'"
 "Such," said Cardew, "is what you read in history books. Of course, Nelson never said anythin' of the sort! He was no such ass! His hearers reported him as havin' said 'Kiss me, Hardy!'—probably never havin' heard of 'Kismet,' and not followin' his line of thought. What he actually said was—and must have been—'Kismet!' If you like to use that, Levison, I'll give it to you for nothin'!"

Levison chuckled.
 "I won't borrow it, thanks. It's rather too original for Lathom."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Cardew, with a nod. "No good talkin' sense to a schoolmaster! But—what on earth's that?"

The study door opened quite suddenly, to admit the podgy figure and fat face of Baggy Trimble.

He came in hurriedly, and closed the door as hurriedly behind him.

"You men having tea?" gasped Trimble.
 "We are about to partake of that harmless and necessary meal," said Cardew. "Did you ask Trimble here, Levison?"
 "No fear."

"Then which of you is goin' to kick him out?" asked Cardew. "Don't ask me to do it—I'm too comfy in this chair."

"No larks, you know," said Trimble breathlessly. "I say, I've brought you fellows a cake for tea!"

"Wha-a-at?"

All three of the denizens of Study No. 9 stared at Baggy Trimble. Even Ralph Reckness Cardew was startled out of his airy nonchalance.

"I mean it," said Trimble. He dropped a cardboard box on the study table. "After all, why not? We're friends, ain't we?"

"Are we?" asked Cardew, in surprise.

"Yes, old chap! Only got toast for tea?" asked Trimble. "Well, I'll have some of the toast—and we'll whack out this cake! Look at it! Specially made by our cook at Trimble Hall and sent to me—"

"In a Wayland Stores' box!" remarked Cardew.

"Now, I wonder how the cook at Trimble Hall got hold of that box?"

"I—I mean, I ordered it specially from the Wayland Stores to bring here for you chaps," said Trimble. "Look at it! Some cake, what?"

Levison & Co. simply stared at Trimble. In spite of the vast wealth at Trimble Hall, of which the Fourth Form often heard, it was very, very seldom that Baggy was in funds—very, very seldom that he was seen with a cake like this. And still more seldom did Baggy offer to whack out a cake when he had one. It was more like Baggy to retire with his prey to a solitary spot and devour it to the last crumb.

"Well, my only hat!" said Clive. "That's jolly decent of you, Trimble!"

"Well, I mean to be decent," said Trimble. "Generous, in fact! Nothing mean about me, I hope! As soon as I got this cake I said to myself: 'My old pals in No. 9 will like this!' So here I am."

"Toppin'!" said Cardew cordially. "By the way, whose cake is it?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Clive; and Levison laughed.

"If you think this cake isn't mine, Cardew, I can show you the letter that came with it from home—I mean the bill that came from Wayland Stores!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Here it is!" said Trimble, fumbling in his pockets.

"No—oh—yes, I must have left it in my study! Yes, I remember I left it on the study table. Look here, if you fellows don't want this cake—after I've brought it here specially to whack it out with you—"

Trimble broke off suddenly. A voice was audible in the Fourth Form passage outside the study.

"Any of you men seen that fat wottah Twimble?"

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Trimble.

"That sounds like the one and only!" yawned Cardew.

"Gussy seems to want you, Trimble. Anythin' to do with a cake?"

"Nunno!" gasped Trimble. "The—the fact is, I—I'm rather dodgin' D'Arcy at present! I've had rather a whacking remittance from home, and he wants to borrow money from me—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"D—don't tell him I'm here!" stuttered Trimble.

"The brute seems to be looking into every study for me, up and down the Shell and the Fourth—"

"There was a tap at the door."

"Oh jiminy!" groaned Trimble.

He seized the cake-box and backed to the wall behind the door.

The door opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped in. Only the open door hid Baggy from his sight; and behind the door Baggy scarcely breathed.

From where he sat Cardew could see the fat Fourth-Former squirming behind the door, and Trimble made him frantic signs to keep silent.

"You fellows seen Twimble?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"The fwightful wottah has bagged a cake fwm my studay!"

"Dear me!" said Cardew, while Levison and Clive grinned.

Baggy blinked round from the door. Arthur Augustus had stepped in, and his back was to the doorway.

On tiptoe, Baggy Trimble crept out from behind the door within a couple of feet of the swell of St. Jim's.

He made no sound; and D'Arcy, of course, had no eyes in the back of his head!

In an agony of trepidation, Trimble tiptoed from his hiding-place. Arthur Augustus was looking at three grinning faces.

"What are you fellows gwinin' at?" he inquired. "There is nothin' to gwin at in a fat wottah baggin' my cake! You see, it was pwactically all I had for tea, and threee fags are comin'—your minah is one of them, Levison. If I don't get hold of Twimble befoah he scoffs that cake—"

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

The sight of Baggy tiptoeing out of the doorway behind the back of the unsuspecting Gussy was too much for them. They yelled.

"Bai Jove! I see no cause whatevah for this widiculous mewwiment!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in surprise.

"What the mewwy dickens—"

There was a sound behind him.

He was just in time to see a fat figure vanish into the passage. Hurried footfalls floated back.

"Bai Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh ewikey! That fat boundah was heah all the time! Twimble! Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus whirled out of

Study No. 9 and rushed in pursuit. "You fat scoundwel! Stop! Bai Jove—"

Pursued and pursuer vanished into space, leaving Study No. 9 yelling.

CHAPTER 3.

Any Port in a Storm!

GERALD CUTTS, of the Fifth Form, lounging elegantly along the Fifth Form passage with his hands in his pockets, stopped and stared. Cutts of the Fifth was surprised—and not pleased. In that passage, where only Fifth Form men had a right to walk, juniors were not supposed to walk—much less run—and still much less to race along as if the passage was a cinder-path. So Cutts of the Fifth stared and frowned at the sight of D'Arcy of the Fourth coming up the passage on his highest gear.

And Cutts promptly planted himself in D'Arcy's path, and stopped him. Arthur Augustus had to stop, or else



Three hungry fags hurled themselves upon Gussy and introduced his aristocratic features to the coal-scuttle.

barge into the Fifth Form man; so he stopped—unwillingly and impatiently.

"Pway don't delay me, Cutts!" he gasped. "Please get out of the way!"

"You cheeky little sweep!" said Cutts, slowly and distinctly. "What the thump do you mean by barging in here?"

"Weally, Cutts—"

"Get out!" snapped Cutts.

He waved his hand in dismissal.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not get out.

"You see, Cutts—" he began.

"That's enough! Cut!"

"I am afiah Twimble!"

"I've told you to get out of this passage!" said Cutts ominously.

"That fat wottah has bagged a cake fwm my studay—"

"Hook it!"

"He is dodgin' me all ovah the House!"

"I can see that I shall have to kick you!" remarked Cutts, while several other Fifth Form men, coming along the passage, paused to look on and grin. "Turn round, D'Arcy!"

"Twimble has dodged into this passage—"

"I'm waitin' for you to turn round."

"He has got the cake with him!"

"Slew him round for me, St. Leger!" said Cutts, drawing back his right foot.

St. Leger of the Fifth laughed, but he did not slew Arthur Augustus round. St. Leger was a good-tempered fellow.

"Oh, let him cut!" he said. "Clear off, D'Arcy, you young ass!"

"You see, I am aftah Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus. "He is hidin' in this passage somewheah, and if I don't bag him pweety soon he will scoff the cake!"

"Slew him round, Prye!" said Cutts.

Prye of the Fifth grasped Arthur Augustus by the shoulder and "slew" him round.

"Bai Jove! Welease me!" howled Arthur Augustus. "I tell you— Oh, ewikey! You fwrightful wottah, Cutts! Yawoooooh!"

Gerald Cutts' foot landed on the most elegant trousers in the School House at St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus fairly flew.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fifth Form men.

"Whooooo!"

The swell of St. Jim's landed on his hands and knees at quite a little distance. Cutts had put a good deal of beef into that kick.

"Are you goin' now?" grinned Cutts.

"Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled to his feet. He stared round, wrathfully and indignantly, at the grinning Fifth-Formers. Cutts made a stride towards him, evidently with the intention of administering another kick.

"Keep off, you bwute!"

gasped Arthur Augustus.

And he retired—hastily.

One drive of Cutts' boot was enough, if not too much; and it was no use asking for another. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared round the corner, leaving the Fifth-Formers laughing.

If Baggy Trimble had found a refuge in the Fifth Form quarters, with the famous cake, he was safe there, so far as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was concerned.

CHAPTER 4.

No Tea!

WALLY of the Third glanced at the study clock, in Study No. 6, and snorted. Frank Levison grinned. Reggie Manners grunted.

The three fags were waiting for tea. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the kindness of his heart, had asked his minor to tea; and wherever Wally went his comrades in the Third went also.

Fags of the Third Form were always ready to go to tea, whenever and wherever they were asked; they were a hungry generation. The three had arrived in Study No. 6 early. They might as well have been late. Funds, as it happened, were low in that celebrated study; but Gussy, whose credit was good at the Wayland Stores, had laid in a huge cake "on tick." Tea would have lacked, perhaps, variety; but there would have been ample, at least—but for Baggy Trimble's felonious and nefarious proceedings with the cake.

Now the fags waited—but, like Marian of the Moated Grange, they waited in vain. They might have said, "He cometh not!" like that unhappy lady; but what they did say was much more emphatic and personal. Arthur Augustus' ears ought really to have burned, wherever he was. The remarks of the three fags were frequent and painful and free.

D'Arcy, in chase of Trimble and the cake, seemed to have lost all sense of time and space. It was really not much use to return to Study No. 6 without the cake. His guests were there; but there was nothing to offer them in the way of eatables. And when the Third went out to tea they expected to eat.

Matters were getting serious now. The Third did prep in the Form-room with their Form master, Mr. Selby; not in studies like the Fourth and the Shell. It was impossible, therefore, to be late for prep. And it was now close on time for prep. And there had been no tea—and it did not look as if tea were probable.

"We can't wait much longer," said D'Arcy minor. "We can't be late for prep. Lucky we had tea in Hall before we came."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Frank Levison. "What on earth can have happened to your major, Wally?"

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Wally shook his head. He gave that one up.

"Pulling our leg," said Manners minor. "Just asking us here to tea to pull our leg! Fourth Form cad!"

"My major wouldn't do that!" said Wally. "He's a silly ass, but he's not a cad!"

Snort from Manners minor.

There were footsteps at the door, and the three fags looked round hopefully. There were still a few minutes, if this was Gussy and tea; and Wally & Co. were prepared to bolt anything that was going, regardless of indigestion, and then scud to the Form-room before Mr. Selby got there.

But it was not D'Arcy! Blake and Herries and Digby came in; and they stared at the fags.

"Hallo! What do you microbes want here?" asked Blake.

"Gussy asked us to tea!" grunted Wally.

"Well, haven't you had your tea? It's past tea-time."

"He hasn't turned up yet."

"Oh, my hat!" Blake grinned. "I'll jolly well buzz something at him next time I see him! Asking men to tea and never turning up! He said there was a cake."

"So there was," said Digby. "I've seen it! We'd jolly well have liked that cake ourselves, instead of going down to Hall 'o tea."

"Only Gussy said he had guests," remarked Herries. "So we let him keep the cake!" Herries' tone implied that Study No. 6 had risen to a pitch of generous self-denial.

"Blessed if I know why Gussy hasn't come," said Blake. "But why don't you look for the cake and scoff it without waiting for him?"

"Think we haven't looked for it?" snorted Wally. "Of course we have! There isn't any cake in the study."

Evidently it was not good manners that had restrained the Third-Formers. They could not find the cake!

"Well, that's queer!" Jack Blake looked in the study cupboard. Like Mrs. Hubbard's, it was bare. "It was jolly well here after class."

"I dare say D'Arcy's scoffed it himself, and so he's

keeping away till we, have to go to prep!" said Reggie Manners sourly.

"Oh, rot! He wouldn't!" said Levison minor.

"Well, we can't wait any longer," said Wally, with his eye on the clock. "Selby will scalp us if we're late; and we've only got time. Come on, you men."

There was another footstep at the door. This time it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He came in rather breathlessly, having for once lost the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Bai Jove! I'm fwrightfully sowwy, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I'm wathah afwaid I've kept you waitin'!"

"You silly ass!" roared his minor.

"Weally, Wally—"

"What do you mean by asking men to tea and never turning up?" demanded Reggie Manners indignantly.

"Weally, Mannahs minah, I apologise—it's fwrightfully unfortunate!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "That fat wottah, Twimble, bagged the cake, and I have been chasin' him all ovah the House to get it back!"

"Well, where is it?"

"That's the howwid part of it, deah boy—I haven't got it. Twimble has got away with it!"

"So there's nothing for tea, even if we could stop?"

"Sowwy, no! That wottah Twimble—"

"You silly chump!"

"Weally, Weggie—"

"You howling ass—"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Oh, come on!" said Wally. "We're up to Selby now; and we shall get scalped. Bung his head in the coal-scuttle and let's cut!"

"Weally, you know— Why—what— You uttah young wapscallians— Bai Jove— Yawoooooooh!"

Three hungry fags fairly hurled themselves on the swell of the Fourth. Perhaps it was unjust; but fellows who had waited an hour for tea that did not materialise even after that long wait, were in no mood to hand out even justice. Gussy had asked them to tea, and there had been no tea; so they found solace in up-ending Gussy and strewing him over the floor of Study No. 6.

"Gweat Scott! Yawoooooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he was strewn. "Gwoogh! Leggo! Bai Jove! I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound! Welease me, you young wottahs! Wescue, deah boys! Woooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake & Co.
They looked on and roared, apparently seeing something comic in this hectic ending to Gussy's tea-party.

"Yawoooooo!"
Arthur Augustus struggled valiantly. But three pairs of exasperated hands were rather too many for him. He was rolled over the carpet, and his aristocratic features were introduced into the coal-scuttle. There was a horrid gasping and gurgling from Gussy as he masticated coal-dust.

"Gurrgrgh! Guf-gug-gug! Gwooooh!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"There!" gasped Wally. "That'll be a lesson to you, you fathead! Come on, you men; we're late already—and you know Selby."

"Gwooooh! Oh ewmbs! Oh ewikey! Oooooop!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake and Herries and Dig.
Wally & Co. rushed out of the study. Tea had been a bitter disappointment; but the final scene had been solacing. They tore away in the direction of the Form-rooms.

Arthur Augustus extracted his features from the coal-scuttle and staggered to his feet. Blake & Co. shrieked. Coal-dust clothed the noble features of the swell of St. Jim's, and he looked more like a Christy minstrel than the best-dressed fellow in the School House.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Where are those young scoundwels? I will give them a fearful thwashi' all round!" He glared round for the fags—a dusty glare—in vain. The feet of the trio were sending back distant echoes as they fled down the stairs. "Bai Joye! If evah I ask a mob of fags to tea again—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"There is nothin' to laugh at, you asses!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "I do not call this funny!"
"Look in the glass!" chortled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You uttah asses——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, wats! I wufeso to stay heah and listen to your idiotic cacklin'!" snorted Arthur Augustus. And he departed from Study No. 6 in search of a wash, leaving Blake and Herries and Dig still yelling.

CHAPTER 5.

No Rest for the Wicked!

MR. LATHOM jumped.
He was astonished.
The master of the Fourth had cause for astonishment. The sight that met his eyes, as he opened his study door and switched on the light was a most remarkable one. It was such a sight as had seldom been seen in a Form master's study at St. Jim's before.

Mr. Lathom was dining with the Head that evening. Properly speaking, he should have been in the Head's house at this very moment. But Mr. Lathom was a rather absent-minded gentleman. He had reached the green baize door that divided the School House from the Head's private residence, when he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten, so to speak. That was why he had hurried—unexpectedly—back to his study.

Mr. Lathom had called at the bank that day for a five-pound note, which was the prize for the history essay in the Fourth. Coming in, he had taken it from his note-case, with the intention of locking it up in his desk. He had laid it down on his desk while he sorted out the key.

By the time he found that he had mislaid the key, he had forgotten the five-pound note. Then he had recalled that he was due to dine with the Head, and had rushed away to dress. So the five-pound note remained lying where he had laid it; and Mr. Lathom, suddenly remembering it as he was on his way to Dr. Holmes, hurried back to place it in safety.

That was why he happened to open his study door, and switch on the light, at the unfortunate moment when Baggy Trimble, seated in his armchair, was taking his first bite at the famous cake.

It was utterly unexpected.
Baggy knew that old Lathom was dining with the Head! He had had a glimpse of him on his way down the corridor to the green baize door. After that, Baggy had naturally concluded that Lathom was safe for a long time.

What could be simpler, then, than to dodge into Lathom's study, sit down in Lathom's armchair before Lathom's fire, and devour the cake at his leisure—and in perfect safety? Even if that brute, D'Arcy, guessed that he had taken refuge in Masters' Studies, he would hardly hunt for him there. As the light was out, no other master was likely to drop in to speak to Lathom. Baggy had felt absolutely safe. He felt like a pilgrim who had reached a haven of rest, at last, after a long and weary pilgrimage.

Then Lathom happened.
The glimmer of the fire was light enough for Baggy. By

that glimmer he had jerked off a hunk of the great cake, and was starting on it. The luscious flavour of that cake was just permeating his fat palate when the door opened, and the switching on of the light revealed him to Mr. Lathom's astonished gaze.

It was a mutual surprise.
Mr. Lathom gazed at Trimble in astonishment. Baggy fairly goggled at Mr. Lathom in blank dismay.
"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom.
"Grooooh!"

Baggy's mouth was full of cake—too full! He bolted that big mouthful hurriedly—too hurriedly. Some of it went down the wrong way. A series of explosions came from Baggy.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.
"Groooooooogh!"
"Trimble! How dare you!"
"Gurrrrrggghh!"

"This is—is unheard of!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.
"Upon my word! I—I find a boy in my study—my own study—eating, or, rather, devouring—I may say gorging—yes, gorging—a cake! Upon my word!"

"Oooooooggggghh!"
"How dare you, Trimble!"
"Gug-gug-gug!"

"Disgusting!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "Atrocious! Revolting! What have you to say for yourself, Trimble?"
"Gurrrrrghh!"

"Cease those revolting noises at once, Trimble! Place that cake on the table! I shall confiscate that cake, Trimble! It will be sent to the House dame. Place it on the table at once!"

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Trimble. "I—I say, sir—I say—grooooh!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom angrily. "Dear me! Where is my cane? Where did I leave my cane? Can you see my cane, Trimble?"

Trimble could see the cane, but he did not mention the fact. He hoped that Mr. Lathom would overlook it.

"I—I say, sir!" gasped Trimble.
"Place that cake on the table at once!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, lor'!"
Baggy Trimble placed the cake on the study table. Mr.



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Lathom blinked round, and discovered the cane. He picked it up.

"Now bend over that chair, Trimble!"

"Oh crikey!"

"At once!" hooted the Fourth Form master.

With a dismal groan, Baggy Trimble bent over the chair. The cane rose and fell, and there was a yell from Baggy.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Ow, ow! Yow! Wow!"

"Now go!" said Mr. Lathom, pointing to the door with his cane. "You may go, Trimble!"

"M-m-may I—I—I take the c-c-cake, sir?" gasped Trimble.

"Upon my word!"

Mr. Lathom made a stride towards Baggy, brandishing the cane. The fat Baggy vanished like a ghost at cock-crow.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom.

He laid down the cane, turned off the light, and left the study. This delay was likely to make him late for dinner with the Head. He closed the study door and hurried away.

It was not till he was in the Head's dining-room, this time, that Mr. Lathom remembered once more that he had forgotten the five-pound note. The episode of Trimble had driven it out of his mind. It quite worried him.

But it was too late to return to his study then. And in the interest of conversation with the Head, Mr. Lathom forgot it again.

CHAPTER 6.

A Bating for Baggy!

"TOM, old fellow!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Tom, old fellow" from Baggy Trimble, would probably have been answered by a whizzing book, in other circumstances. But the captain of the Shell was rather entertained to see the fat face of Baggy Trimble peering cautiously into his study. Manners and Lowther chuckled.

In the big armchair, the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was gracefully reclined. The high back of the chair was towards the door; so Baggy, as he peered in, could not see the swell of St. Jim's. Obviously, he was not aware that Gussy was there. As it was time for prep, Gussy should have been in his own study. Gussy, unsympathised with in his own study, had been relating his woes and wrongs to sympathetic ears in Study No. 10 in the Shell, and incidentally mentioning to Manners what he thought of his minor, Reggie of the Third. So Gussy was there—present but invisible to Trimble—when Baggy butted in.

A grim smile came over the noble visage of Arthur Augustus. He did not rise, or speak. Trimble was fairly walking into his avenging hands at last; and Gussy was not going to frighten him off. He sat tight, and waited for the fat Baggy to come in. Like a deponent verb, he was passive in form, but active in meaning.

"Tom, old chap!" Baggy ventured within the doorway.

"I—I say, you ain't waxy, are you, old fellow?"

"You fat chump!"

"The—the fact is, that was my cake," said Baggy. "That chap D'Arcy makes out it was his cake—he's rather unscrupulous, you know. I know you wouldn't take his word before mine, of course."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And—and what I really want is to whack out that cake with you fellows," said Baggy. "That was really what I bought it for—I mean, that was why I had it sent from Trimble Hall. But I say—Lathom's got it."

"Lathom!" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes! I—I thought he was gone to dine with the Head, you know, and he came back suddenly, and caught me in his study, and he's confiscated the cake," said Baggy dimly. "I had just one bite!"

"My dear chap, come right in," said Monty Lowther blandly. "Don't stick there by the door. Come and sit in the armchair."

"Do!" urged Manners.

Baggy eyed the Shell fellows suspiciously.

"No larks!" he asked.

"So far as we're concerned, none!" said Tom Merry.

"Of course, you'd better look out for D'Arcy."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that dummy!" said Baggy. "I'd lick him as soon as look at him. The fact is, he's taking jolly good care to keep clear of me. He's rather funky, you know. But I say, about that cake—if I nip into Lathom's study and bag it, he's sure to suspect me, because it's my cake. As likely as not he wouldn't take my word

that I'd never touched it. Well, what about you nipping in, Tom, old chap?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"You see, he'd never suspect a Shell man," said Baggy eagerly. "He's left it on his table, and he's gone to the Head. They're jawing nineteen to the dozen by this time—you know what beaks are like when they start wagging their chins. You bag the cake—"

"Do I?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yes, old fellow, and I'll stay here with Manners and Lowther. Then they can swear—"

"We never swear in this study," said Lowther, shaking his head. "Of course, if anything would make us swear, your company would do it. But we never do."

"I mean, you can swear I never went near Lathom's study, if he makes out that I had the cake. You bag it, Tom, old bean, and we go halves. What?"

"I can see myself doing it!" agreed Tom Merry.

"It's a ripping cake! D'Arcy must have given ten bob for it—I mean, I gave fifteen shillings for that cake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it a go?" asked Baggy. "There's lots of fellows would do it if I asked them. Levison would jump at the chance. So would Cardew, and—and lots of fellows. I've come to you because I specially want you to have the cake. After all, we're pals."

"First I've heard of it!"

"Look here, you know—"

"Don't keep that door open, Baggy," said Lowther. "For goodness' sake sit down in the armchair and make yourself at home."

"Oh, all right, old fellow!"

Baggy Trimble shut the door and rolled across to the armchair. The Terrible Three watched him with deep interest.

The fat Baggy came round the big chair.

Then Arthur Augustus dawned on him.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Trimble.

He made a jump backward. Arthur Augustus made a jump forward at the same moment. Arthur Augustus was the more rapid jumper. His grasp closed on Baggy Trimble.

"Bai Jove! I've got you now, you wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy, pway lend me a fives bat!"

"Yaroooooooh!"

"Here you are, old bean!" said Tom cheerily.

"I—I say—Yaroooh! Leggo! I say, Gussy, I—I never had that cake!" yelled Trimble. "I say! Whoooooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-woooooop!"

"That is for baggin' my cake, you fat wottah," gasped Arthur Augustus, "and that is for takin' it to Mr. Lathom's study!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Wow! Rescue! Help!" yelled Baggy.

"And that is for gettin' it confiscated by a Form

mastah!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh! Help! Yooooooop!"

Baggy Trimble made a desperate effort and wrenched himself loose from the grasp of the wrathful and indignant Gussy. He leaped for the door, tore it open, and fled into the passage.

"You fat wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I have not finished yet! Come back, you fat scoundrel!"

Baggy's flying footsteps died away.

"Bai Jove! The feahful cheek, you know, to bolt befoah I had finished thwashin' him!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I see nothin to cackle at in that fat boundah's feahful cheek. Howevah, pewwaps he has had enough."

"I fancy he thinks so," agreed Tom Merry. "In fact, I'm sure he thinks so. What about the cake, Gussy? You know—where it is now."

"It would be wathah diswespectful to bag it ffrom my Form master's studdy, Tom Mewwy. And I cannot vewy well explain to him that it is my cake, as that would be givin' Twimble away. It is wathah wotten, but I am afwaid that cake is a gorah!" Arthur Augustus laid down the fives bat. "Howevah, that fat blightah will pwwobably think twice befoah he bags a cake ffrom anothah fellow's studdy again!"

And Arthur Augustus, feeling much better now, departed to his own study for prep.

The Shell fellows settled down to prep. When that task was over, and they left Study No. 10, a fat figure dawned on them in the passage.

"I say, Tom, old fellow—"

"Seat!"

"About that cake, old chap—"

Three pairs of hands seized Baggy Trimble, swept him

off his feet, and deposited him on the floor—hard. The Terrible Three walked on, and left him there.

"Oh jiminy!" groaned Baggy, as he scrambled up. Evidently there was no help to be hoped for from Tom Merry & Co.

But the cake haunted the fat mind of Baggy Trimble. It was lying on Mr. Lathom's table, where the Fourth Form master had left it. Mr. Lathom never dreaming for a moment that any fellow would venture into his study to "bag" a confiscated cake. But Baggy Trimble, though as a rule the least venturesome member of the Fourth Form, was thinking of making the venture. He had asked a dozen fellows at least, and every answer had been in the negative. And at long last Baggy rolled away to Masters' Corridor.

He had hesitated long, and it is well said that 'he who hesitates is lost.' As he came into the corridor he almost butted into Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, chatting there with Linton, the master of the Shell. Both the masters glanced inquiringly at Baggy.

"What is it, Trimble?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Oh, nothing, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

"If you're going to your Form master's study, Trimble, Mr. Lathom is now with the Head," said the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir, that's why—I mean, I wasn't going to Mr. Lathom's study, sir," stammered Baggy.

"Not at all, sir!"

Mr. Railton stared at him.

"Then why are you here?" he asked.

"I—I'm not—not—"

—sir—"

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

"You may go, Trimble!" said Mr. Railton, with an extremely suspicious look at the fat Baggy.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

And Baggy went. He went in the lowest possible spirits. He had bagged several hectic hours and a licking from a fives bat on account of that cake, and the cake was gone!

CHAPTER 7.

Breakers of Bounds!

YOU silly ass!"

St. Leger of the Fifth yawned.

"You funky fathead!"

Gerald Cutts was annoyed. Sitting in the arm-chair in his study in the Fifth, with a cigarette between finger and thumb, Cutts was telling his pal what he thought of him. Prye, sitting on the table and swinging his legs, nodded assent to each of Cutts' remarks.

St. Leger coloured a little at Cutts' last adjective.

"I'm not funkin'!" he snapped. "But it's not good enough. Breakin' bounds at night—"

"Will it be for the first time?" sneered Cutts.

"Well, no. But the beaks are gettin' wary," said St. Leger. "I tell you, Railton's a downy bird. He's had a lock put on that window in the lobby that we used to get out of. Don't that look as if he smells a rat?"

"Let him smell all the rats he likes," grunted Cutts. "He will never nail me! I've told the men at the Green Man that you're comin' with me, and if you don't turn up they'll all know you're funkin' it."

St. Leger shifted uneasily in his chair. The weak-natured, good-humoured Fifth Former was very much under Cutts' influence. But for that influence it was probable that St. Leger of the Fifth never would have kicked over the traces at all. When he joined Cutts and Prye in their dingy adventures after lights out, it was with only half a heart. Sometimes he wished that the dandy of the Fifth would not be so dashed friendly and pressing. But in the long run he generally gave in. The taunt of "funking" could always influence him.

"It's safe as houses," went on Cutts. "We can't use that old lobby window again, but there's more ways of killin' a cat than chokin' it with cream. I'm going out to-night by a study window."



Outside all was dark under the shadow of a tall elm tree. One after another the three Fifth-Formers dropped from the window!

"Whose study?" asked St. Leger.

"Lathom's."

"Great gad! You've got a nerve! You'll have the cheek to use a Form master's study window—"

"It's as easy as fallin' off a form! Lathom never locks his study door of a night, as some of the beaks do. His window's screened by a big elm. Couldn't be a better spot."

"Safe as houses!" agreed Prye.

"But—" murmured St. Leger.

As a matter of fact, it was not wholly the danger of the "sack" in case of discovery that deterred St. Leger. He was only half-hearted in following Gerald Cutts' example of blackguardism. If he had cared to own up to it, he would have preferred his bed in the Fifth Form dormitory to the shady company at the Green Man.

"If you're funky let it drop!" growled Cutts.

"I'm not funky, confound you! I'll come, if you like!"

"Done!" said Cutts; and the frown left his face. "Look here, we're going to have a good time—and the risk's practically nil. Even if it came out, the Head would think twice before he sacked a fellow with your connections. I

run more risk than you do—so does Prye! We ain't related to half the peerage!"

"Rot!" said St. Leger. "That wouldn't make any difference to Dr. Holmes. But I've said I'll come—and I'll come! When do we start?"

"Sharp at eleven. I'll call you."

"It's a go."

"Right—ho—old bean! Have a smoke?"

"No; I'll get along and see the fellows."

St. Leger strolled out of the study. His face was very thoughtful as he walked down the Fifth Form passage. It was against his own wish that he had agreed to accompany Cutts and Prye in that excursion after lights-out; but his word was given now, and he was not thinking of going back on it. He would have been glad enough had something occurred to knock the whole thing on the head; but unless that happened St. Leger was booked for a "spree" that appealed to him very little, and that would lead to his being expelled from St. Jim's if it came to light.

It was safe enough if it came to that; at all events, it seemed so. Cutts, if he could be trusted in little else, could be trusted to make arrangements for his own safety. Lights were always out in Masters' Studies by eleven; and as for Mr. Lathom, as he was dining with the Head, it was probable that he would not return to his study at all that evening. And certainly, even if Mr. Railton was in a suspicious mood, he was hardly likely to suspect the black sheep of the House of using a Form master's window as a mean of egress and ingress.

Unless the unexpected happened it was as "safe as houses"! But sometimes the unexpected did happen!

In Hall that evening Cutts was very merry and bright.

He was looking forward to his night out, if one of his companions was not.

In the Fifth Form dormitory, after lights-out, St. Leger dropped off to sleep.

Cutts was not sleeping. When the stroke of eleven boomed out from the clock tower a hand shook St. Leger's shoulder in the darkness, and he opened his eyes.

"Quiet!"

It was Cutts' whispering voice.

St. Leger suppressed a grunt, and turned out of bed and dressed in the dark. Dimly, like shadows in the gloom, he made out the figures of Cutts and Prye.

The rest of the Fifth were sleeping soundly enough. In silence the three seniors dressed, and Cutts opened the dormitory door softly. There was no light in the passage outside.

"Come on, old beans!" whispered Cutts.

And like spectres the three trod away silently in the gloom. By a staircase and a corridor they reached Masters' Corridor, wrapped in darkness now.

The door of Mr. Lathom's study opened to Cutts' hand. The trio glided into the room, and Cutts closed the door again softly.

"All serene, what?" chuckled Cutts.

"What-ho!" murmured Prye.

"Feelin' fit, St. Leger?"

"Oh, frightfully!" yawned St. Leger.

"Come on, you slackin' ass!"

Cutts opened the window. Outside all was dark, under the shadow of a tall elm that grew at a little distance. One after another the three Fifth-Formers dropped from the low sill.

Cutts was the last, and he closed the window carefully, leaving the sash an inch up at the bottom to open when the breakers of bounds returned. Then they scudded away across the dark quad, climbed over the school wall where a slanting oak made the climb easy, and dropped into the road.

"Now put it on!" said Cutts.

And at a trot the breakers of bounds disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Silly Night!

"YOU fellows asleep?"

Baggy Trimble, sitting up in bed in the Fourth-Form dormitory, blinked round him in deep gloom, and asked that question in cautious tones.

It was getting on towards midnight, and at the "witching hour of night," as a rule, Baggy was safe in the arms of Morpheus.

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But this night was not quite as other nights. Baggy was not, as usual, fast asleep and snoring. For one thing, the application of the fives bat had left effects that had not quite worn off. For another, Baggy was haunted by the memory of the cake he had loved and lost.

Baggy had dropped off to sleep several times. But he had woken up again. And as he lay awake, his fat thoughts naturally ran on that cake. In Mr. Lathom's study in the School House that cake lay on the table—confiscated, but at the mercy of any raider who was bold enough to raid it.

All that was needed was nerve. Baggy, unfortunately, lacked nerve. Still, if anything could nerve Baggy to desperate measures, it was a cake. A lioness robbed of her young probably felt a good deal like Baggy deprived of his cake—only not so much so. Thinking it over in the stilly night, Baggy grew, as the poet expresses it, bolder and yet more bold. After all, where was the risk? That old ass, Lathom, always left his study door unlocked. The old donkey was fast asleep, far from his study. The cake was there—and a fellow had only to go down quietly and bag it!

Baggy might be suspected! He would be, in fact! But Baggy was not trammelled by any undue regard for the truth; he was prepared to state, or to deny, anything! They could never prove it against him. The cake, certainly, they would never be able to trace, once Baggy's clutches fastened on it—not without the aid of an X-ray apparatus, at least.

"You fellows asleep?" breathed Baggy. He had made up his fat mind, but he did not want all the Form to know. A secret like this could not be too carefully kept; besides, some of them might want some of the cake. The secret was important, the cake more so.

There was no answer to Baggy's whispered query. The Fourth Form of St. Jim's were asleep. Baggy crawled cautiously out of bed.

It was like Baggy to bump into a chair in the dark and send it reeling. The silence of the dormitory was broken by a loud crash.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy.

"Bai Jove!" came a sleepy voice. "What's that? What's that feahful wow?"

"I—I say, it wasn't me!" gasped Trimble. "I'm not out of bed, you know."

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Go to sleep, old fellow! I'm not out of bed."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up. So did several other fellows. The crash of a falling chair was sufficient to wake most of the Fourth.

"What's the row?" mumbled Blake. "Who's up?"

"That uttah ass Twimble—"

"What's that fat idiot up for?" asked Levison.

"I—I'm not up!" gasped Baggy. "I wasn't going out of the dormitory, you men! Nothing of the kind! I wouldn't, you know."

There was a sleepy chuckle from Ralph Reckness Cardew. "You fat chump! You'd better let that cake alone, now a Form master's confiscated it!"

"I—I wasn't going after the cake, Cardew—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Clive, "is that it? You frabjous chump, you might bag a Head's flogging for that."

"Well, who'd know?" said Trimble. "Besides, I wasn't! I haven't really got out of bed at all. If you fellows think I'm up, you're mistaken. I haven't just put my trousers on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! If you are thinkin' of goin' aftah my cake again, Twimble—"

"Nothing of the kind, old chap! I say, I wish you fellows would go to sleep. Think how tired you'll be in the morning when the rising-bell goes."

"Go back to bed, you howling ass, and let a fellow sleep!" growled Herries.

There was a sound of some other junior getting out of bed. Arthur Augustus turned out, and grasped his bolster.

"Who the thump's getting up now?" asked Digby.

"Only me, deah boy!"

"You ass!" roared Blake. "You're not going after that cake! It's a goner, now a beak's bagged it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Get back to bed, fathead!" hooted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Trimble anxiously. "You go back to bed, D'Arcy! I'm jolly well not having you after that cake!"

"You uttah wapsallion—"

"Turn in, Gussy, you duffer!" said Levison. "There'll be a frightful row if a cake's bagged from a master's study."

"I guess you're asking for it, Gussy," said Wildrake. "Oh, let's get up, and bung him back to bed!" said Jack Blake resignedly. "It's up to us, as we're his keepers."

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I should wefuse to be bunged back into bed, as you coarsely expwess it! I am not thinkin' of waidin' that cake, you dummies! I should wegard it as extwemely diswepctful to Lathom to do anythin' of the kind. I have got up to twash Twimble with this bolstah!"

"Yaroo!"

"As a warnin' to him to leave my cake alone! Where are you, Twimble?"

"Oh, go it!" chuckled Blake. "My mistake, though, of course, I couldn't be expected to guess that you were going to do a sensible thing for once."

"Wats! Where is that wottah, Twimble?"

There was a sound of Baggy Trimble scrambling back into bed.

"I—I say, I'm not up, Gussy! I'm not getting up! I'm not going down! I'd forgotten all about the cake! I say—Oh jiminy!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Yow-ow-owwoop! Leave off, you rotter!" yelled Trimble. "If you don't keep that bolster away—"

Swipe! Swipe!

"I'll jolly well lick you! Whooooo!"

Swipe! Swipe!

"Yaroooooo!"

"There," gasped Arthur Augustus, "pewwaps that will be a warnin' to you to keep your hands fwoim pickin' and stealin', Twimble!"

"Oh jiminy! Ow! Gerraway!" gasped Trimble. "If I heah you gettin' up again, Twimble, I shall give you some more bolstah, and weally hard next time. I wefuse to allow you to lay your wascally paws on my cake!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Arthur Augustus went back to bed. There was a chuckle in the Fourth Form dormitory, and a series of gurgling gasps from Baggy Trimble.

Slumber settled down once more on the St. Jim's Fourth. In a short time most of the fellows were asleep again; but sleep did not visit the eyes of Baggy Trimble.

Baggy was more wakeful than ever. The bolstering had added to the insomnia already caused by the fives bat and the lingering memory of the cake.

But Baggy made no sound and no movement for a long time. He did not want any more bolster. And he was determined that he was going to have the cake. He was hungry. Had he been asleep, as he ought to have been, that would not have worried him. But being awake, and thinking of the luscious cake in his Form master's study, made Trimble hungry—in fact, famished. His fat mind was firmly made up; he was going to have that cake. But he was cautious, and a whole hour passed by before he stirred.

This time he did not whisper before he got out of bed. And he did not knock over a chair, or bump into a bed, or drop a shoe. He was awfully, fearfully cautious this time.

Silent as a ghost—a very fat ghost—Baggy, half-dressed and wholly resolute, crept to the door. The door opened softly, and Baggy slipped out into the passage. The door slipped from his hand as he pulled it shut, and slammed, but not very loudly. Baggy's fat heart jumped for a moment; but, anyhow, it was too late for those rotters to stop him now, even if they woke up. Baggy trod away down the dark passage.

Late hours and dark passages were somewhat disagreeable; but Baggy's fat mind was so wholly occupied by cake that he did not even think of ghosts or burglars.

From the distance he heard the boom of one from the clock-tower. It was an hour, past midnight. There was no danger of anyone being awake, or up at that hour. Here and there a glimmer of starlight came in at high windows; but Baggy was familiar with every inch of the way, and hardly needed it. By stairs and passages he groped on and reached Masters' Corridor, dark, and silent, and deserted.

His fat heart beat faster as he reached the door of Mr. Lathom's study. Success was within his grasp now. Already, in his mind's eye, he had grasped that scrumptious cake; he saw himself, in his mind's eye, scuttling back to the dormitory with it; sitting up in bed, and devouring it to the last crumb, and the last plum. His mouth watered as he saw all this with his mind's eye; but Baggy, alas! was not destined to see it with any other eye.

As he groped for the door handle there was a sound behind him. He jumped, started, and turned his head.

Across the corridor, near at hand, was a passage that

led towards the stairs. From the passage came a faint gleam of light—obviously from a candle. Baggy's podgy heart almost froze.

For an instant he thought of burglars. But even Baggy knew that burglars did not walk about with flickering candles. Along with the footsteps, too, he heard a swishing sound as of a dressing-gown. Some beast, some dummy, some utter idiot, some frightful chump, had come down for something, and in a few seconds more Baggy would be revealed!

He opened the study door, popped in, and closed it swiftly and silently. He stood just within the door, listening, his fat heart thumping like a piston. Who was coming—and where was he coming? Was it Railton, Linton, Selby, Monsieur Morny, or—Baggy's blood congealed at the thought—Lathom? What could have brought a master down at one in the morning? If it was Lathom, he would be coming to that very study!

"Oh jiminy!" groaned Baggy, under his breath.

Outside in the corridor he heard the swishing of the dressing-gown, and a little cough. He knew that little cough. It was Mr. Lathom's own special little cough.

Baggy could have groaned with horror.

He would have given that cake, and all the other cakes in the Wayland Stores at that moment, to be safe back in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

But it was too late to think of that.

Lathom was in the corridor, and he could only be coming to his own study, inexplicable as it was that he should be coming there at one o'clock in the morning. Baggy, of course, knew nothing about the five-pound note which Mr. Lathom had left on his desk, and which the Fourth Form master had forgotten once more while he was dining with the Head, and which he had not remembered before going to bed. Mr. Lathom was a forgetful gentleman; but he was a careful gentleman, and he had gone to bed with a distinct feeling on his mind that there was something he had intended to do—something that had slipped his memory. Absent-minded people are like that. It worried Mr. Lathom, and when he woke up at the boom of one from the clock-tower, that worry came back into his mind, and he remembered.

He remembered the note—the fiver—lying loose on the desk in his study, and he could not, of course, leave it there. It might be swept away by the early morning maid. It might blow out of the study window; it might even be annexed, causing a lot of unpleasantness. Mr. Lathom, with a sigh, but with a strong sense of duty, turned out of bed, donned dressing-gown and slippers, lighted a candle, and came down. He would not switch on electric lights at that hour. A candle was sufficient. Little dreaming that a member of his Form had preceded him, Mr. Lathom swished and rustled on to his study, and coughed as the draught caught him.

And Baggy Trimble stood frozen with horror.

Lathom was coming—coming to the study. He would find Trimble there, and know what Trimble was there for.

Baggy could have groaned aloud.

But instead of groaning, which would have expressed his feelings, but done him no other good, Baggy dropped on his hands and knees, and crawled under the study table. It was a case of any port in a storm, and Baggy Trimble crouched under the study table, shivered with terror, and hoped for the best.

CHAPTER 9.

Desperate Measures!

"QUIET!" whispered Cutts.

"All serene!" murmured Prye.

"For goodness' sake, buck up with that window!" muttered St. Leger. "I'm deuced sleepy!"

"Don't make a row!"

Gerald Cutts was not in the best of tempers. In fact, none of the breakers of bounds was feeling merry or bright.

An hour or two in a smoky atmosphere over dingy cards, with the choice spirits at the Green Man, was perhaps "life," but there was no doubt that it left the black sheep of the Fifth rather nervy and irritable. The choice spirits at the Green Man, too, had relieved the three sportsmen of the Fifth of a considerable amount of their loose cash. St. Leger did not care much about that, but Prye was feeling sore, and Cutts was savage. Tired and sleepy, disappointed and irritable, were two members of the party, and the third was sleepy and bored. So it was not a happy trio that arrived under the window of Mr. Lathom's study soon after one o'clock.

Cutts knelt on the wide sill and forced up the lower sash, which went up easily enough. He dropped cautiously and silently into the study. Prye climbed in after him, and then

St. Leger. Gerald Cutts closed the window and fastened the catch.

The study was in dense darkness. The whole House should have been in dense darkness, too, at that hour.

But Cutts, as he crossed softly towards the door, suddenly stopped, with a suppressed gasp of horror.

Under the study door came the faintest flicker of light. From the corridor came the faintest of swishing, rustling sounds.

Cutts felt his heart leap into his throat with a feeling of physical sickness.

He did not speak; even a whisper might have been heard. There was no need to speak; his two companions had seen what he had seen.

He felt Prye tremble at his side, and though he could not see St. Leger in the dark, he knew that that youth had shrugged his shoulders.

"Caught!" was the word that flashed through Cutts' mind and the minds of his companions.

Prye grasped his arm.

There was already a sound of a hand groping at the door-handle outside the study. Whoever it was with the light, he was about to enter that study.

There was not even a second to lose. There was no time to reopen the window and escape into the darkness of the quad; no time even to get back across the study to the window before the door opened. To Prye, in utter terror, it seemed that all was lost; to St. Leger it seemed the same, though he was perfectly cool. But Cutts was the man for an emergency. More than once, in his career as a sportsman, Gerald Cutts had found himself in a tight corner, and every time his wits had served him well. With something like despair in his heart—for escape now seemed almost impossible—Cutts did not lose his icy presence of mind. He acted swiftly.

He grasped his two companions and dragged them behind the door, so that it would hide them as it opened.

It was impossible to speak without betraying himself, for the door was on the move. But they understood, and obeyed his silent direction, though it seemed to the wretched Prye that the man who was entering would hear the thumping of his heart.

There was a chance—one chance, and a slim one—but Cutts was the man to fight to a finish. Not if he could help it would Cutts of the Fifth be reported to the Head for breaking bounds at midnight and hear the sentence of the "sack." Cutts, white as chalk, was cool as ice. The man who was coming had a candle, whoever he was—apparently Lathom, as it was Lathom's study. He was carrying a candle, not desiring to switch on electric lights at such an hour of the night. It was probable, then, that he would not switch on the light as he entered the study. If he did not, there was a chance, and Cutts, with icy coolness, was ready to take that chance.

The door swung open, hiding the three Fifth-Formers.

Mr. Lathom, in trailing dressing-gown and swishing slippers, entered the study.

He held the candlestick before him as he entered. Had he passed the door and turned, he must have seen the Fifth-Formers in the light of the candle. But Cutts gave him no time for that.

The candlestick being held out in front of the Form master, it passed the edge of the open door before Mr. Lathom did.

As it passed, Cutts suddenly struck at it, the unexpected blow sending candlestick and candle spinning from Mr. Lathom's hand.

Crash!

In the deep silence the crash of the candlestick on the floor had an effect almost of thunder.

There was an amazed, startled gasp from Mr. Lathom.

"Ooooooh! What—what—"

Cutts & Co. whipped round the door.

Mr. Lathom was in the way, and though he could see nothing in the sudden dense darkness, he was aware of some presence. He groped out blindly, and his hand caught Cutts' sleeve as he brushed past.

"You—who—what—" stuttered the astounded Form master.

Cutts shut his teeth.

He wrenched at his arm, but Mr. Lathom's grasp had closed on it. The Form master was amazed, alarmed, astounded; but he had caught somebody, and he held on. It was no time for half measures. Cutts, with gritting teeth, struck out with a clenched fist, and the blow landed on Mr. Lathom's chest.

"Ooooooooooooooh!"

Bump!

Mr. Lathom sat down on the floor of his study with startling suddenness. The next instant Cutts of the Fifth was out of the study. His two comrades were already out.

Swiftly in the darkness they fled for their dormitory. Behind them, from Mr. Lathom's study, came a spluttering and gasping. But the sound was lost to their ears in a few seconds. Cutts & Co. did not lose time.

In a very few moments, breathless but safe, they reached the door of the Fifth Form dormitory.

"Not a word!" breathed Cutts. "Not a syllable! It's the sack for this! Mind you don't wake a man in the dorm!"

"There'll be a fearful row!" muttered Prye, between his chattering teeth.

"It's startin' already!" murmured St. Leger, as sounds came from downstairs. "The old scout never saw us, thank goodness!"

"Did he grab you, Cutts?" breathed Prye. "I thought he—"

"Yes!" said Cutts, between his teeth.

"My hat, if he hadn't let go—" gasped Prye.

"He didn't—till I hit him!"

There was a gasp of horror from Prye.

"You hit him—hit a Form master! Great gad!"

"Cutts, that's about the limit!" breathed St. Leger.

"You fool!" Cutts snarled. "Did you want to be walked into the Head's study for the sack in the mornin'? Keep mum! It's the boot all round if this comes out! Quiet!"

He opened the dormitory door. All within were asleep, and the three sportsmen crept silently in, and Cutts closed the door. A minute more, and they were in bed. But it was long before they slept.

CHAPTER 9.

By Whose Hand?

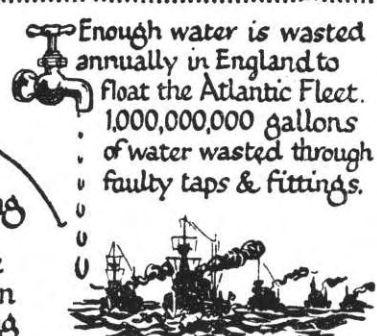
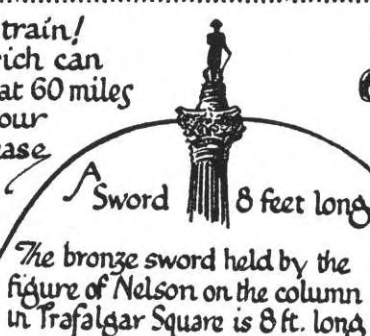
"O H! Ah! Ooooooh! Woooooh! Goooooh! Ooooooooooh!"

Mr. Lathom made those incoherent remarks.

Like the heathen, he sat in darkness. The candle had gone out when it was struck from the Form master's hand. The study was black as the inside of a hat. Mr. Lathom knew that he had grabbed hold of somebody. He also knew, with rather painful clearness that that somebody had thumped him on the chest, and that he had sat down on the study floor with considerable violence. For the rest, Mr. Lathom was in a state of mental confusion. He sat in darkness, and gasped and spluttered.

For a minute at least the Fourth Form master spluttered

Would You Believe It?



and gasped in a confused and breathless state. Then he staggered up.

Who had been in his study, who had thumped him over, he had not the vaguest idea. Somebody had! Surprise and confusion were giving way to wrath as Mr. Lathom's dizzy brain cleared a little.

He tottered towards the electric switch and groped for it. The study was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. Lathom blinked round him, rather like an owl in the sudden light. He was alone—so far as he could see, at all events. It did not occur to him for the moment to look under the table. He blinked round the study with dizzy eyes, and blinked into the dark corridor without.

"Bless my soul!" gurgled Mr. Lathom. "Upon my word! Who—who—what—what—why—why— Dear me! Dear me! Goodness gracious!"

Somebody had been in the study—that was certain. Vague thoughts of burglars floated through Mr. Lathom's mind. There was a step in the corridor. Mr. Railton, also arrayed in dressing-gown and slippers, arrived on the scene. Mr. Railton's quarters were just over Masters' Corridor, and he had heard the disturbance below, and from his window he had caught the sudden blaze of illumination flashing out into the quad when Mr. Lathom switched on the light in his study. The Housemaster had come down rather hurriedly to inquire what was the matter. Burglars, naturally, were in his thoughts also; he did not suppose that St. Jim's men and a St. Jim's master were indulging in a shindy at one o'clock in the morning.

"Mr. Lathom!" he ejaculated.

"Mr. Railton!" gasped the Fourth Form master.

"What has happened? I heard a heavy fall—"

"I—I—I have been knocked over, sir! I have been knocked down, sir! I have been felled—felled by a blow, sir—a blow on the chest!" gasped Mr. Lathom.

"Upon my word! But what—why—"

"I came down, sir, to put a banknote in safety which I remembered I had left on my desk!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "I came down with a candle, as I did not desire to awaken or alarm anyone by turning on the lights on the stairs and in the passages. As I entered my study, someone struck the candlestick from my hand—"

"Who was it?"

"I saw nothing—nobody! I was taken utterly by surprise! I had not the faintest idea that anyone was in the study. The candlestick was struck from my hand—the candle went out. I seized hold of someone in the darkness, and was knocked down, sir—knocked down—"

Mr. Lathom rubbed his chest where the blow had landed.

"The—the person escaped?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"I presume so, sir. I released him, I think, when I was knocked down; indeed, I must have done so. I saw nothing—heard nothing, no one was here when I got up and switched on the light. If—if it was a burglar, the wretch must be in the House—still in the building."

Mr. Railton shook his head. He had turned out of bed with a vague thought of burglars in his mind. But he did not think there were burglars in the House.

"You say you left a banknote on your desk, Mr. Lathom?"

"Yes, a five-pound note which I brought from the bank. It is a prize I am offering for a history essay in my Form."

"Is it still there?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom.

He spun round towards his desk.

"You—you think it possible that—that someone may have seen it; may have come down to—to purloin it!" he stuttered.

"At all events, ascertain whether it is there."

"Immediately."

Mr. Lathom blinked and groped over his desk.

"Bless my soul! It appears to be gone! I certainly left it here! No—here it is! I remember now I placed a paper-weight on it when I laid it down. Here it is—quite safe!"

Mr. Lathom held up the five-pound note.

"I am glad it was not that," said Mr. Railton quietly. "It would be advisable, Mr. Lathom, to lock that note up in safety."

"I came down from my room, sir, for that very purpose," said Mr. Lathom, laying the banknote on his desk again.

"I have my keys somewhere. I am sure I put my keys in the pocket of my dressing-gown. Bless my soul, where are my keys? Oh, here they are!"

The banknote was locked up at last.

Mr. Railton's gaze, in the meantime, had fixed on the cardboard box on the study table, which obviously contained a cake. A very disagreeable suspicion had crossed the Housemaster's mind when Mr. Lathom mentioned the five-pound note, and he was deeply relieved to find that the banknote was safe. He had no doubt that it was someone belonging to the House who had been in Mr. Lathom's study.

It remained to discover the reason and the offender. And the big cake-box on the table hinted at the reason, to Mr. Railton's mind.

"Have you any reason to suppose, Mr. Lathom, that any boy of this House might desire to enter your study secretly?"

"I cannot imagine, sir—"

Mr. Railton pointed to the cake-box.

"Bless my soul! Yes—yes; that—that is a cake!" said Mr. Lathom. "It was confiscated! You would scarcely believe, sir, that I found a boy of my Form in this study this evening who had had the unparalleled audacity to bring that cake here to—to consume it, sir—actually in my study, while I was gone to the Head's house! I returned and actually found him, sir, sitting in my study, devouring—I may say gorging—"

"And the cake was confiscated?"

"Certainly."

"No doubt the boy concerned may have thought of attempting to regain possession of the cake, sir."

"Upon my word! Surely no boy would have the audacity—the impudence—" stuttered Mr. Lathom.

"It is certain, sir, that someone has been here," said Mr. Railton. "Who was the boy to whom the cake belonged?"

"Trimble, of my Form."

"I guessed as much," said Mr. Railton grimly, "for this evening I found Trimble in this vicinity, and he was unable to explain why he was lurking in the corridor. His manner was extremely suspicious. I have no doubt, sir, that he was intending to enter your study and regain possession of the cake."

Mr. Lathom gasped.

"You—you think, sir, that—that Trimble may have had the audacity to leave his dormitory and—and enter my study surreptitiously in the middle of the night, and—and— Bless my soul!"

"We shall see," said Mr. Railton. "Trimble, at all events, had a motive for coming here. Whoever it was, your unexpected entrance surprised him in the study, and he struck the candle from your hand to avoid recognition. That seems to be clear. Then, when you seized him in the darkness, he struck you and escaped—"

"I was certainly struck—a sudden blow—on the chest!"

Facts from Far and Near.

Roller Skates were first seen in London in 1760



Worn
at a ball by a
Fleming who
crashed into
& broke a mirror
& cut himself

The English
Parliament
founded by a
Frenchman.
Simon de Montfort
forced Henry III to
grant the first
English
Parliament



Can you read this
sentence—
TUCCO?

Can you take one
from nineteen
and leave
twenty?

(See solutions on page 27.)
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,205.

gasped Mr. Lathom. "I—I was taken utterly by surprise. I—I sat down with considerable violence!"

"It must be ascertained at once who was here, Mr. Lathom. The surreptitious purloining of the cake, or the attempt to purloin it, would be a serious enough matter, but the striking of a Form master can only be followed by the expulsion of the offender from the school. The identity of the young rascal must be established without delay. Please wait for me here, sir. I will visit the Fourth Form dormitory at once and ascertain whether Trimble is, or has been, out of bed—"

"Oh jiminy!"

Mr. Railton jumped.

"Upon my word! Who—what! He is still here—"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton stooped and glared under the table. Crouched there, blinking at him like a frightened rabbit, was Baggy Trimble!

CHAPTER 11.

Guilty!

BAGGY TRIMBLE fairly wriggled with terror. What had happened in the study during those hectic moments was more or less of a mystery to Baggy.

He had seen nothing of Cutts & Co. in the darkness. He had heard some vague sounds in the room as he squatted under the table, listening in a state of palpitating funk to his Form master's approach. That was all; and he had not the vaguest suspicion that fellows had got in at the window, and had been as scared as himself by the approach of Mr. Lathom. He had had a terrified feeling that someone was in the study as well as himself, without understanding in the least what it might mean. The candle had been extinguished the instant Mr. Lathom entered the doorway, and the fat Baggy had seen nothing; indeed, his impression had been that Mr. Lathom had dropped the candlestick.

He heard Mr. Lathom sit down; he heard him gasp and splutter. But Mr. Lathom was sitting between the table and the door, and Baggy did not dare to leave his hiding-place.

He remained where he was, almost frozen with terror, while Mr. Railton arrived. Not a sound came from Baggy while the two masters were comparing notes. He still nourished a faint hope of getting away undiscovered when they went. At all events, he was undiscovered so far, and neither master seemed to have any suspicion that any fellow was still in the study. Hope springs eternal in the human breast, and Baggy still hoped till he heard Mr. Railton announce his intention of going to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Then the wretched Baggy knew that the game was up.

In the dormitory the Housemaster would find Baggy's bed empty, and that was the finish.

He gasped in sheer terror, and the next moment Mr. Railton was staring under the table.

Not that it mattered much whether Baggy betrayed his presence now; a search would have revealed him, as soon as his absence from his dormitory was discovered.

The game was up for Baggy.

"Trimble!" said Mr. Railton, in a deep voice.

"Ow!"

"Come out!"

"Oh jiminy!" groaned Trimble.

He squatted where he was, too frightened to move. Mr. Lathom stooped and peered under the table.

"Trimble!"

"Ow! It wasn't me! Oh dear!"

"Emerge!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

"Ow!"

Mr. Railton reached under the table, grasped Baggy by a fat shoulder, and jerked him out.

Baggy stood blinking. The looks that the two masters cast at him might have terrified a stouter heart than Baggy Trimble's.

"So—so—so it was you!" stuttered Mr. Lathom.

"Ow! No! It—it wasn't me, sir!" groaned Baggy. "I—I never came here after the cake, sir! I—I—I wouldn't!"

"Then for what reason are you here at this hour?"

"I—I—I—"

"It is obvious, Mr. Lathom, that this wretched boy came here to purloin the cake," said Mr. Railton. "That, however, is a very trivial matter compared with his subsequent action. Trimble, I shall take you back to your dormitory now. You will be taken to the Head in the morning, and expelled from the school."

"I—I didn't, sir!" gasped Baggy. "I—I—I wasn't!"

Wha-a-at am I going to be expelled for, sir? It was my cake."

"You would have been caned severely, Trimble, for attempting to regain possession of any article confiscated by your Form master. But for raising your hand to Mr. Lathom—for daring to strike your Form master—you must know that you can only be expelled."

"I didn't!" shrieked Baggy.

"How dare you deny what is perfectly obvious!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Be silent, wretched boy!"

"I never did!" roared Baggy. "I never touched Mr. Lathom! I—I wouldn't! I was under the table all the time!"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "This boy's prevarication passes all bounds! He is the most untruthful boy in the Form—I have had to punish him many times for prevarication. But this—"

"I didn't—" raved Baggy.

"I will not listen to your mendacity, Trimble!" exclaimed Mr. Railton sternly. "Silence! Come!"

He grasped Baggy by the shoulder again, and led him out of the study. In a state of dizzy dismay, Baggy was marched up the stairs to his dormitory. Mr. Railton switched on the light there, and marched him in.

"Go to bed at once, Trimble!"

"I never did, sir—" babbled Baggy.

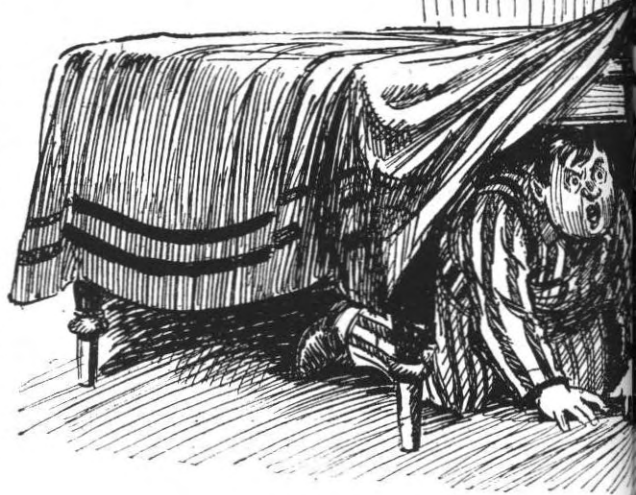
"Silence! Go to bed!"

"Bai Jove! Is that Mr. Railton?"

"It is I, my boys," said the Housemaster. "Do not be alarmed. Trimble, go to bed at once!"

Trimble, with a dismal groan, rolled into bed. Mr. Railton put out the light and left the dormitory.

"By gad!" yawned Cardew. "You went down after the cake, after all, Fatty. Huntin' for trouble, and findin' it, what?"



Mr. Railton stooped and glared under the table.

"You uttah young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "I have a gweat mind to give you some more bolstah."

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Baggy will bag enough from Railton in the morning," he remarked. "The old scout looked in a fearful wax."

"Yaas, wathah."

There was a deep, deep groan from Baggy Trimble. It was such a dismal, doleful hair-raising groan, that it made the Fourth-Formers jump.

"Bai Jove! Don't make that frightful wow, Twimble!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You are goin' to get a lickin' in the mornin', but fellows have been licked before, you wotten funk!"

"I'm going to be sacked!" groaned Trimble.

"What?"

"Railton says so!" groaned Trimble.

"What rot!" said Blake. "You'll be licked, and you well deserve it. But they couldn't sack a man for trying to bag a confiscated cake."

"Oh dear! They make out that I hit Lathom—"

"What!" yelled the Fourth.

"Railton says I did!" gasped Trimble. "Somebody hit Lathom, and knocked him over. I didn't! I was hiding under the table. Oh dear! The old idiot butted in, and I hid under the table—ow! Somebody hit him—oh crikey!"

"Somebody hit Lathom?" gasped Levison.

"Oh dear! Yes! Knocked him over in the dark! Oh jiminy! They make out that I did it!" groaned Trimble.

"Bai Jove! Were you weally idiot enough to hit Lathom?" gasped Arthur Augustus.



blinking like a frightened rabbit, was Baggy Trimble.

"Not!" yelled Trimble. "Somebody did! I didn't."

"Who was it, then?" asked Herries.

"I don't know. There must have been somebody else in the study—somebody else after the cake, I suppose. Was it you, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, it was your cake—I mean, you make out that it was your cake. Some chap was there, and he hit Lathom when the old dummy collared him and got away. They make out I did it."

"Well, so you jolly well did, if anybody did!" said Clive.

"Nobody but you went down after the cake, that's a cert."

"Yaas, wathah."

"I didn't!" shrieked Trimble. "They make out I did, and Railton says I'm to be sacked in the morning. I never touched Lathom. I didn't see anybody there, but somebody must have been there. It wasn't me! I—I say, d-d-do you think the Head will take my word for it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't a laughing matter!" howled Trimble. "They're going to sack me. Sack me for hitting a Form master! I never did it! I should be too jolly frightened! Oh jiminy! I say, Lathom thinks I hit him—"

"Well, so you did, if anybody did."

"I didn't!" shrieked Trimble. "Railton thinks so, too—"

"Railton's right. I suppose you were in such a state of potty funk that you didn't know what you were doing!" said Blake. "But if you hit Lathom, you're for it, that's a cert."

"Yaas, wathah."

"I didn't—"

"Gammon!"

"I wouldn't—"

"Rats!"

"Oh crikey!" groaned Trimble.

There was little more sleep for Baggy Trimble that night. While the other fellows dropped off to sleep again, Baggy lay wide awake—thinking of the morrow. Somebody had hit Lathom—that was certain. Who had done it Baggy had not the faintest, vaguest idea. He knew that he hadn't. Unfortunately, nobody else knew that, and the evidence against Baggy was indisputable. From the bottom of his fat heart Baggy Trimble wished that he had never gone down after that beastly cake. But it was rather too late to wish that now, and Baggy could only quake and think of the morrow.

CHAPTER 12.

Cutts Gets a Shock.

TOM MERRY jumped.

"Sacked!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Trimble?" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas."

"Well, my hat!" said Manners.

It was the first the Shell fellows had heard of it. Tom Merry and his chums came out into the quad before breakfast that morning, which was to be Baggy Trimble's last at St. Jim's. Some of the Fourth were out of the House—and Blake and his friends were talking to Figgins & Co., of the New House—giving them the startling news. And the Terrible Three came up to learn what was on. They jumped when they learned.

"Poor old Trimble!" said Tom. "He must have been off his rocker! Scared out of his wits, I suppose, and not knowing what he did."

"That's it!" said Figgins. "Sorry for the fat ass! But, dash it all, you can't hit a Form master, you know!"

"I regard it as a frightfully disrespectful action," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, a fellow can't help feelin' sowwy for a man that's bunked; but, weally, they're bound to bunk him!"

"Can't do anything else," said Kerr. "When's he going?"

"I believe they're taking him to the Head after brekker," said Blake. "He makes out he never did it—can't help telling whoopers."

"Hard cheese!" said Fatty Wynn. "He's rather a sweep, but a man's sorry for him. I—I'll give him some toffee to eat in the train."

"That will console him, if anything will!" grinned Blake.

"Blessed if I understand how he found the nerve to do it," said Tom Merry. "Hitting a Form master is the jolly old limit; he ought to have known they'd sack him! And hitting poor old Lathom! It's the sack for him, of course."

"What's that?"

The group of juniors started, and turned their heads at that sudden, husky exclamation.

Cutts of the Fifth had come out of the House just in time to hear Tom Merry's words.

Cutts was not feeling happy that morning.

He was, so far as he could see, safe! Nobody—so far as Cutts knew, at all events—had been on the spot when Lathom had been knocked over. Lathom had not seen the Fifth Form men—nobody else had. Not a man in their Form, even, knew or suspected that they had been out of their dormitory.

All was safe—as safe as houses! But the matter was so serious that Gerald Cutts could not feel quite at his ease.

Obviously, there would be a severe and strict inquiry. Cutts was assured that the inquiry would never reach him—or even move in his direction. Still, he was not feeling happy.

Tom Merry's words, as he heard them, gave Cutts the shock of his life. He stopped and stared blankly at the bunch of juniors. The sack for him—the sack for whom?

Tom was speaking as if the fellow who had done it was known! Cutts' feeling of security vanished, replaced by a sudden, awful, overwhelming terror. He stood for a moment dumb; then he almost sprang towards the juniors, panting out a question:

"What's that? What do you mean, Merry, you young fool?"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"You're jolly polite this morning, Cutts!" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cutts glared at him.

"You were saying—" he panted. "What do you mean? What do you know about the matter?"

"Only what D'Arcy's just told me," answered Tom, amazed by the expression on Cutts' face. "A School House man hit Lathom last night, and he's up for the sack this morning—if you haven't heard."

"How do they know?" almost yelled Cutts.

"Railton saw him," said Blake.

"Railton—"

"And Lathom, too!" said Herries.

"They—they—they saw him!" gasped Cutts.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you—you mean to say they knew who—who—" Cutts hardly knew what he was saying.

Every eye in the little crowd of juniors was fastened on Cutts of the Fifth in astonishment. He was white as a sheet.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah with you, Cutts?" asked D'Arcy, in wonder. "Twimble isn't a friend of yours, is he?"

Cutts panted.

"Twimble?"

"Yaas—Twimble of the Fourth!"

Cutts stared at him almost wildly. It seemed to Gerald Cutts that his head was turning round at the moment. What Twimble of the Fourth had to do with it was a mystery to Cutts.

"What do you mean, D'Arcy? What has Twimble to do with it?" Cutts hardly articulated.

"Eh! Twimble's the man."

"Wha-a-at?"

With an effort Cutts pulled himself together. Amazing as it was, utterly unexpected as it was, it seemed that someone else—a Fourth Form junior—was suspected of that assault on Mr. Lathom. The dandy of the Fifth realised that he had very nearly given himself away; and he made an effort to recover.

"Eh! Oh! You—you gave me rather a start, saying that that fat young ass Twimble struck his Form master! In class, do you mean?"

Gerald Cutts was himself again now.

"No; last night," said Tom. "He went to Lathom's study after a cake, and Lathom caught him there—"

"Good gad!" breathed Cutts. "Twimble in Lathom's study last night?"

"Yes. From what we can make out, Lathom went down for something just when Twimble had got there," said Blake. "Baggy seems to have knocked the candle out of his hand, and then Lathom grabbed hold of him, and he hit Lathom and knocked him over. Then the young ass seems to have hidden under the table. I suppose he heard Railton coming. Anyhow, they found him hiding under the table."

"Oh!" breathed Cutts.

"The young ass says he was undah the table all the time, and that somebody else must have been there and hit Lathom," said Arthur Augustus. "But that's all wot, of course."

Cutts laughed.

"Well, it sounds rather thick," he remarked. "Twimble will have to tell a better story than that to get out of the sack!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cutts of the Fifth walked away, his heart beating fast, though his looks were cool enough now. He was safe—safe, as he had supposed; all the safer, in fact, as someone else was believed to have done what he had done. Cutts, to do him justice, was not glad of that; he would have preferred that no suspicion had fallen in the wrong quarter. But "safety first" was Cutts' chief consideration; and if that fatuous fool Twimble had indeed been on the spot, he could take what was coming to him without Gerald Cutts worrying unduly about his fate.

The news had spread all over St. Jim's before the breakfast bell rang. New House as well as School House discussed it breathlessly.

Prye of the Fifth caught Cutts by the arm when the black sheep of the School House came in. The scared look on Prye's face made Cutts grit his teeth.

"I—I say, they've got a junior. They think—" whispered Prye.

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"Shut up, you fool!" muttered Cutts. "Keep a stiff upper lip, you dummy! Mum's the word!"

"But—but that kid—Twimble—they're goin' to sack him—"

"Would you rather be sacked instead?" hissed Cutts.

Prye gave him a look.

"Cutts!" His voice was husky. "We—we can't let it go on! We—we—"

"Can't we?" sneezed Cutts savagely. "Well, go to the Head, if you like, and own up. Leave me out, though!"

Cutts swung away with a scowling brow. Prye stared after him, troubled and conscience-stricken. But he did not go to the Head—and he did not think of going to the Head.

CHAPTER 13.

Sacked!

BAGGY TRIMBLE, at the breakfast-table in the School House, was the cynosure of all eyes.

Every man in the House stared at Trimble. Even from the high table, where the prefects sat in lofty dignity, curious glances were cast at Baggy. Great men of the Sixth, who had hardly known that there was such a fellow at St. Jim's at all, were now deeply interested in Trimble. The fellow who had hit his Form master was sure of heaps of limelight.

Baggy had a taste for limelight, as a rule. But he did not enjoy it now.

His fat face was the picture of dismay. For the first time in his fat career he ate little breakfast—hardly enough for two. His dreadful fate had taken away his appetite.

After breakfast he was to go before the Head to receive his sentence. He would be leaving St. Jim's in charge of a prefect when the other fellows went into class that morning.

With tears in his eyes, Baggy had asseverated his innocence—but he had not found a single believer. Baggy's untruthfulness was too well known. That he would not hesitate at any "whopper" to get himself out of a scrape every man in the House knew. And his present denials were taken as "whoppers"—rather more whopping than usual; that was all.

The thing spoko for itself, in fact.

Even Baggy could not surmise what any other fellow could possibly have been doing in Lathom's study at one in the morning. That problem bewildered him. Only he knew that somebody must have been there, because he knew that he had not hit Lathom. Baggy knew that; but he was alone in his knowledge. All the House knew that he had!

After breakfast Mr. Railton came along from the high table and tapped Trimble on the shoulder. With his fat knees knocking together, Baggy followed the Housemaster out of Hall. Mr. Lathom, with a very distressed face, followed them to the Head's study. It was a blow to Mr. Lathom for a member of his Form to be sacked. It was a shock to him to think that any member of his Form would raise a hand against him. The whole thing was terribly disagreeable; and Mr. Lathom, felt, as most of the House felt, that the sooner Trimble was gone the better.

Dr. Holmes had already been informed of the strange happenings in Mr. Lathom's study the previous night. It only remained for him to pass sentence.

His usually kind face was very severe, as he fixed his stern eyes on the wretched Baggy.

"Trimble!"

"Ow! I didn't!" moaned Baggy.

"There is no need for words, Trimble! You have dared to raise your hand against your Form master!"

"Ow! It wasn't me, sir."

"Silence! You are expelled from this school!" said the Head. "A prefect will take you to the station in one hour's time. Go and pack your box!"

Baggy yelped.

"I—I ain't going! I never did it! I—I— Oh jiminy! I never did it, sir!" howled Baggy.

Dr. Holmes gazed at him. Had it been almost any fellow but Baggy, that frantic denial might have made some impression. But Baggy's besetting sin of untruthfulness had found him out now. Even in trivial matters, Baggy's word was useless. In such a matter as this it was worse than useless.

"There is, I suppose, no shadow of doubt, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head.

"None, sir," said the Housemaster. "Trimble was there—hiding in the study."

"Unfortunately, none!" said Mr. Lathom.

"It was somebody else!" moaned Baggy. "It wasn't me, sir."

"Do you assert that you saw someone else in the room, Trimble?"

"N-n-no!" groaned Baggy. "I—I thought I heard somebody move, just before Mr. Lathom came in. But—but I know somebody was there, because—because somebody hit Mr. Lathom, and—and it wasn't me."

"The case is perfectly clear," said the Head. "Indeed, I do not see how a case could be clearer. Your guilt is obvious, Trimble!"

"Ow!"

"Trimble is not, I think, a truthful boy?" said the Head.

"He is the most untruthful boy in my Form, sir," said Mr. Lathom.

"Or in the House!" said Mr. Railton.

Trimble groaned dismally.

"Go and pack your box, Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble almost tottered from the study. He tottered along the corridor. At the end a crowd of juniors were waiting to hear the verdict.

"Sacked?" asked Cardew.

"Oh jiminy! They've sacked me!" gasped Trimble.

"Me, you know! And I never did it! The Head won't believe me, you know—me!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"It's all your fault, D'Arcy, you rotter! Making out that it was your cake!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You fat idiot!" gasped Tom Merry. "It was D'Arcy's cake! You grouse because the Head won't believe you—and here you are telling lies again."

"It's your fault, Tom Merry, you beast!"

"Mine!" gasped Tom.

"Yes, blow you! If you'd gone and bagged that cake when I asked you, I shouldn't have gone down for it!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I wish they'd never sent that cake from Trimble Hall

now!" groaned Baggy. "I mean, I wish I'd never bought it at the Wayland Stores!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" hooted Trimble. "I'm sacked! My belief is that D'Arcy went down after that cake and hit Lathom—"

"Gweat Scott!"

"You silly chump!" said Levison.

"Or perhaps it was you, Levison!"

"I!" yelled Levison.

"Yes, I think very likely it was you. Or Cardew!"

"Oh, gad!" said Cardew. "Why don't you say you saw one of us in the study, Trimble? Make up your mind which one it was, though, first."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A gleam of hope came into Baggy's eyes.

"I—I say, I think the Head would believe me if—I said I saw a fellow. Suppose I said it was a New House man? He might have got in at the window. Now I come to think of it, I—I believe I heard a noise at the window. Suppose—suppose I say it was Figgins?"

"You fat villain!" roared Tom Merry.

"Look here, you know—"

"Bai Jove, I was feelin' sowsy for Twimble, but weally, I think the soonah he is bunked the bettah!"

"I—I say, Gussy, old chap! Be a pal! I—I say, you go to the Head, and—and say you were there, and—and saw Figgins!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus turned and walked away. Baggy was rather too much for him. The other fellows followed him. There had been sympathy for Baggy; but it was at a very low ebb now. And Baggy, realising that there was nothing doing, tottered away, and with many dismal groans proceeded to pack his box. It was Baggy's darkest hour; but the darkest hour is before the dawn!

(Continued on next page.)

The heat of the game



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EL 23

"They've sacked that fat little beast Trimble," remarked St. Leger, on meeting Cutts and Prye in the quad, "but the young scoundrel's not going to be sacked for what he never did. There's a limit to everything."

Prye looked white, while Cutts stood quivering.

"You—you can't say it was you hit Lathom—" began Cutts.

St. Leger laughed.

"Not quite! I shall own up that it was a fellow with me—might have been any fellow! You're safe, old bean!"

"You're a fool—a fool—a fool—"

"I don't need tellin' that! If I hadn't been a fool, I shouldn't have been mixed up in this!" said St. Leger.

"But I'm stoppin' at bein' a fool—I'm not goin' to be a dashed cad, too! Leave it at that!"

And leaving Cutts of the Fifth standing white and furious, St. Leger walked into the House. He went straight to the Head's study.

CHAPTER 14. All's Well—

"GREAT Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that ejaculation in tones of amazement.

Mr. Lathom was late for class that morning. The Fourth were in their Form-room, and had been waiting quite a little time when the Form master entered.

To the astonishment of the Fourth Baggy Trimble followed him in.

The Fourth had supposed that Baggy was on his travels by that time. Evidently he wasn't!

There was a fat grin on Trimble's face.

Baggy seemed to be satisfied with things generally.

Mr. Lathom was looking rather grim. But the cheery Baggy seemed to have forgotten all his troubles.

He bestowed a fat wink on the staring juniors as he rolled in. Mr Lathom went to his desk.

"Trimble!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"You need not go to your place yet, Trimble."

The cheery grin faded from Baggy's face. Mr. Lathom had picked up a cane from his desk.

The Fourth Form stared on blankly. Trimble, it appeared, was not sacked after all. They could not make it out.

"I—I say, sir—" gasped

Baggy.

"It has transpired, Trimble," said Mr. Lathom, in a deep voice, "that it was not you who struck that blow to my study last night. You will not, therefore, be expelled. Dr. Holmes has rescinded his sentence now that he has been acquainted with the facts. But—"

Mr. Lathom paused. The Fourth hung on his words. Baggy blinked at him in great uneasiness.

"But," resumed Mr. Lathom, "this does not alter the fact that you left your dormitory at a late hour last night, and that you endeavoured to regain possession of a—a comestible that had been confiscated by your Form master. For this offence you will be severely punished."

"Ow!"

"I shall punish you all the more severely because, owing to your habitual untruthfulness, it was impossible to believe you when you were making a true statement."

"Oooh!"

"And this is not all," said Mr. Lathom sternly. "Having examined the — the

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comestible that was confiscated yesterday, I have found a note from the Wayland Stores in the box, which indicates that the—the comestible was not your property at all, Trimble, but belonged to another boy in this Form."

"Oh dear!"

"D'Arcy," rapped Mr. Lathom, "was that cake your property?"

"Yaas, sir."

"You may take it from my study after classes."

"Thank you, sir."

"Trimble, your rebellious, disobedient, reckless, unscrupulous conduct merits the severest punishment. That I shall now administer."

"Oh jiminy!"

"You will bend over that chair, Trimble!"

Mr. Lathom pointed with his cane. With a face from which every vestige of fat satisfaction had departed, Baggy bent over the chair.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

Every echo in the Form-room—and in the greater part of St. Jim's—was awakened by the voice of Baggy Trimble.

Mr. Lathom did not heed the sounds of woe. He laid on the cane with a vigour that was really surprising, and very creditable in a gentleman of his years. Baggy yelled and wriggled and roared; and still the cane came down.

Mr. Lathom was gasping when he had finished.

"You may go to your place, Trimble."

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Baggy crawled to his place. He sat down—and jumped up again as if the form were red-hot.

"Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, Trimble! Sit down at once!"

"If—if—if you please, sir, I—I can't!" gasped Trimble.

"Oh jiminy!"

Mr. Lathom glared. Then he smiled grimly. Trimble was allowed to stand during first school.

Tom Merry & Co. were rather glad that Trimble had not been sacked after all—entirely on Trimble's account, and certainly not on their own. Exactly how it had come about they never knew; but it was clear that the powers were satisfied that it was not Trimble who had tapped Lathom.



St. Leger of the Fifth had fully expected the "sack" when he went to the Head; all the more because he firmly declined to give the name of the fellow who had been with him, and who had floored the Fourth Form master. True, he did not mention too many details. He and his friends had been out for a "ramble"; he did not mention that the ramble had led them in the direction of the Green Man. Fully expecting the "sack," St. Leger was quite surprised to find himself still at St. Jim's. His confession, which saved Trimble, perhaps even his obstinate loyalty to the real culprit, moved the Head in his favour, and St. Leger escaped with a heavy imposition and gating for the rest of the term.

But of all this the juniors knew nothing; so they wondered how Baggy had got clear. But they did not wonder long. Baggy soon dropped once more into his native obscurity.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's great side-splitting story: "MR. JUSTICE GRUNDY!"

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I've found a question Whiskers can't answer! I've answered it myself! Read it, it's sure to interest you!—Editor.

I POPPED into the Editor's room the other morning, and when I saw his desk, I nearly fell down. It was piled high with letters. I had a most horrible sinking feeling. I saw myself shut up in that office for at least a week.

Just then I heard a noise, and saw that the Editor was beginning to rise over the top of the letters.

"Are you the moon or the sun?" I asked.

"You'll sun find out if you moon about there any longer," he snapped. "And let me tell you, Whiskers, all these letters ask the same question."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" I shouted, and began to dance round the room.

"Sit down," said the Ed. "You haven't heard the worst yet. For once, you don't know the answer to the question."

I smiled my most superior smile, and tried to look intelligent.

"Thousands of readers, Whiskers, are anxious to know what has happened to Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood School."

"Oh, yes, sir!" I shouted, jumping to my feet. "So do I. I want to know that, too."

"Very well," said the Ed., with a twinkle in his eye, "this time I'll tell you the answer. Now listen. Starting next week stories of Rookwood will appear exclusively in the GEM. Tell 'em that, Whiskers. I was keeping that bit of news as a surprise; but I can't suppress it any longer. But you didn't know it, did you?"

I kept very quiet, but inwardly I felt tremendously bucked, for I've got a very warm spot for those cheery fellows, Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, as I know all you fellows have. Just then the door opened and the office-boy came in. He had a bundle of manuscripts under his arm, and was holding another in his hands, which he was busily engaged in reading. So busy was he that he didn't look where he was going, and before I could stop him he had walked right into the old Ed.'s desk and sent the letters flying.

I leapt forward and rescued the Ed. from under a pile of correspondence. He glared at the boy.

"What were you reading?" he snapped.

"The first batch of Rookwood stories have come in, sir," said the boy, "and I was reading one of them."

While they were talking I slipped one of the stories from under the O. B.'s arm. I wanted to have a quiz at it. But no luck! The Ed. looked up, and I had to drop it and pretend I was just picking it up.

for you among these other letters, my lad," said the Ed., sorting through another pile.

"Now, here's a query from Bill Summers, of Plaistow. He wants to know if it's correct that at one time heavy-weight boxing championships were fought for without gloves?" "Yes, sir," said I, "and the last bare knuckle championship for the heavy-weight title was fought in July, 1889, at Richbourg, between J. L. Sullivan and J. Kilrain. It lasted for seventy-five rounds." "Gee, some fight that!" said the Ed. "Wait a minute now, there are a few more questions in this letter; I rather think Bill Summers is going to catch you out with one of them. Can you tell Bill which heavy-weight contest was stopped by the police?"

"The fight between J. Johnson and T. Burns, in 1908," I answered promptly. "The police stopped that after fourteen rounds. Four years later, in 1912, they stopped another fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Flynn, after nine rounds."

"And how did Schmeling get the championship last year?" asked the Ed. "On a foul, sir," I informed him, "against Sharkey, in New York. And speaking of that, sir, that was a very weird arrangement, to my mind. In America they allow the fight to be resumed after a foul, the victim being given a rest in the meantime. We'll see many changes in the boxing world in the near future, believe me."

"I wonder you don't have a cut at it," said the Ed., grinning. "It may surprise you to know, sir," I told him, "that I often pop out of an afternoon for a couple of rounds—rounds of toast that is. Now, what's the next brain twister, Ed.? Don't be nervous."

"Can you tell Roger Holmes, a Huddersfield 'Gemite', whether Aston Villa have won the F.A. Cup more times than Blackburn Rovers?"

"Easy, Ed.," said I. "Both those teams have carried off the Cup six times. Next to them come the Wanderers, with five victories to their credit, and Sheffield United with four. Bolton Wanderers have won the Cup on three occasions, while Bury, Newcastle United, Old Etonians, Tottenham Hot— "That'll do!" snapped the Ed. "You needn't think you're going to keep talking about that all the morning. Plenty more questions here, Whiskers. George Nash, of Liverpool, wants to know something about gliding. Know anything about gliding, old son?"

"Gliding has become very popular," said I, "during the last year or so as a sport. There's an association at Dover Street, London, which was formed just about a year ago, called the British Gliding Association, and they'll provide

all the particulars, if our friend George wants to take it up."

"I don't know whether he wants to take it up," said the Ed., "or whether he wants the glider to take him up. Anyway, what's it cost?"

"A practical glider, capable of a mile glide, can be built for £25," I told the Ed. "For £250 you can get a machine that will keep you in the air for hours."

"How high can a fellow get in a glider?" was the Ed.'s next question.

"With one of the advanced types, and with the air currents favourable, it's possible to reach a height of several thousand feet. This," I explained, "is done by gliding from the peak of one air current to the peak of another. You might tell George Nash that in order to get an Aero Club licence as a gliding pilot, he must make a glide lasting for more than half a minute. In Germany there are some very skilful gliding pilots. F. Schulz, in May, 1927, kept up for fourteen hours. He travelled at an average of thirty-three miles an hour."

The old Ed. began to rake feverishly through his letters, trying to find a real twister. "Now, then," he chortled, "here's one you won't answer! What's the longest railway platform in Europe?"

Without a moment's hesitation I had the answer ready. "The longest railway platform is in Manchester, at the Victoria and Exchange Stations. The platform there is 2,238 feet long. The largest railway station is Waterloo. One of the fastest runs ever achieved by a steam-train was made in 1904, by a G.W.R. engine, which touched 102 miles per hour, carrying mails between Plymouth and London."

The Ed. groaned. "It doesn't matter what I ask you, you seem to know all about it, and a bit more besides," he said. "There's no doubt you're a human marvel, a whiskery wonder, if ever there was one. You ought to be in the Museum, stuffed, then all my readers could come and look at you. And speaking of that, there's a letter here from a reader at Highgate; he wants to know how the skins of stuffed animals are preserved?"

"A preparation called Taxidermy is often used," I told the Ed. "Arsenical soap can be used also, or wood-ashes, if nothing better is at hand. Skins of large animals can be preserved by pickling, that is, treated with salt, and put in a barrel of brine. Snakes and fishes are usually kept in spirit. Skinning and stuffing animals and birds is a highly skilled job, believe me. The great difficulty is to prevent the skin from stretching. An inexperienced person could easily turn a five-inch animal into a ten-inch one."

"Is that so?" said the Ed. "Well, here's one more question before you hop off to lunch. What's spearmint made of?"

"Spearmint is a plant," said I, "with tapering spikes of flowers on it. It grows all over the place in America, wherever there is any moist waste ground. Fine stuff for strengthening the jaws, believe me. And now if you don't mind," I added, "I'll get on with my lunch. I've got a nice steak-pudding in my bag." The old Ed. had a look at the steak-pudding, and then grinned.

"Mind you don't overdo it," he said. "I don't want you to sleep all the afternoon. There's heaps more office work to be done."

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SLICK DOLAN

"WHARF RAT"

CHAPTER 1.

Slick Dolan Bolts!

SLICK DOLAN scowled a little as he looked gloomily out through the sitting-room window into the suburban garden. He was thinking of the strange change in his fortunes. Only a few days ago he had been a friendless waif, a hanger-on to crooks and the scum of the underworld. Now he was well-fed and well-clothed, and living with Detective-Sergeant Brent, of the C.I.D., in the latter's cosy rooms in Wesley Street.

He knew he ought to feel grateful to Brent—and he did feel grateful. Slick had saved Brent's life when he had fallen into the hands of his bitter enemy, Gat Lesparri, crook and gangster. And Brent had taken Slick home to his rooms, believing he would be safe there from Gat's vengeance. But Slick knew also that Brent had befriended him because he had a curious liking for the boy.

Yet Slick, though grateful, was not quite happy—though he knew he ought to be. For one thing he was bored, having little to do save odd jobs, such as pasting news-cuttings into a book. In his view the busy detective ought to take him out with him on his various "jobs," instead of leaving him at home with nothing to do, and only the old landlady for company.

And Mrs. Simpson, the landlady, was Slick's chief grievance.

She was kindly enough, but she knew Slick's somewhat unsavoury earlier history, and she could not quite get over her suspicions of him.

Slick knew that she carefully locked up her spoons and things when he was about, and often made quite unnecessary visits to the living-room on his account. Slick, in point of fact, was far more afraid of Mrs. Simpson than he was of Gat Lesparri and his vengeance.

He was still thinking of these things when the door opened, and Mrs. Simpson entered. Slick coloured at her glance, and he moved about nervously as she started to lay the table for dinner. She brought in the dinner, and finished at last.

"There you are, my boy," she said, with an obvious effort to speak kindly. "You get your dinner, as Mr. Brent won't be home till tea-time. And," she added severely, "mind you don't upset that soup like you did the day before yesterday!"

"Y-yes, ma'am!" gasped Slick.

He dragged up his chair, catching the leg in the carpet in his nervousness, and upsetting the scuttle of coal over the floor.

Mrs. Simpson shrieked and started forward. Expecting a box on the ears, at least, Slick dodged away, and collided with the table. So violent was the collision that it caused

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a huge tidal wave in the soup tureen, and the soup slopped over the clean white tablecloth fore and aft, as it were.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Slick. "I—I say, missus, I'm sorry—"

He did not finish. Mrs. Simpson, with another shriek of wrath, rushed at him just then. Whether to box his ears or not, Slick did not wait to discover. He tore out of the room, snatched his cap from a peg in the hall, wrenched open the front door, and bolted out into Wesley Street.

Once again he had upset the soup, not to mention the coal. He would face a dozen gangsters rather than face Mrs. Simpson after that!

"Oh crikey!" he groaned. "That's done it! I knew I'd have more trouble with that old girl afore long, blow it!"

He ambled along dismally, realising he had missed a good dinner, and made it distinctly awkward for him to return to No. 220, Wesley Street. Then the old desire to visit Porter Street and his old haunts came to Slick, and he was just deciding to make for that unsalubrious locality, when something happened.

A rather dilapidated taxi drew alongside the pavement. Slick did not even glance at it, nor did he look round when a heavy step sounded behind him. But he woke up suddenly when a heavy, rough grasp fastened on him, and he was lifted off his feet.

Before he had even grasped what had taken place, he found himself bundled into the smelly interior of the taxi, and he felt the cab in motion with jerky suddenness.

He struggled dazedly, and opened his mouth to yell, but a cloth was whipped round it and tied fast, while a harsh voice—a voice he knew well—spoke in his startled ears.

"No good kickin', Slick, old son! We got you, and we ain't lettin' you go!"

Slick lay back, and panted. Looking up, he recognised the evil face of Luke Morse—and he knew at once what it meant. Gat Lesparri had got him! Luke was one of Gat's lieutenants! There was another man in the taxi, but Slick did not know him. None the less, the sight of Luke was enough.

"Lemme go!" he panted, lapsing into his old, usual defence. "I ain't done nothing, Luke!"

"Oh, no, you ain't, have you?" grinned Luke, shifting a heavy knee from the boy's chest. "You haven't mucked up the whole gang, and made even Gat run for it, have you—leastways, you and that durned cop, Brent? Jest you wait until Gat talks to you, Slick!"

"You—you takin' me to him now?" gasped Slick, going pale.

"You bet! We was waitin', hoping to get Brent hisself," grinned Luke. "But I reckon Gat'll be jest as pleased to meet you, Slick! It was you as squealed to that cop about the Westbury Street job, wasn't it, kid? And you got Gat's home raided, and got Gurney nabbed as well as the bloomin' loot!"

He tightened the cloth round Slick's mouth again.

"Gat's got to run for it, and he ain't at all pleased about it, Slick," went on Luke, his tone mocking and cruel. "He's so durned pleased, in fact, that when he sees you I guess he'll tear your blinking eyes out, you snivelling, squealin' little rat!"

Slick could not answer Luke Morse, for the cloth was tied tightly over his mouth, effectually gagging him. But as Luke and his accomplice started to bind him hand and foot he struggled desperately, though he knew it was useless.

He gave it up at last, and the two men bundled him on to the floor and left him there while the old taxi bumped and rumbled on. He guessed from the traffic noises and the

BRENT BRINGS HOME THE BACON!

smells that they were travelling East, and at last the taxi drew up, and he was bundled out.

One glance he got of a wharf, and of derricks against the skyline. Then a warehouse loomed before him, and he was carried swiftly through a doorway and along a passage.

The door closed behind them, and he heard the rumble of the taxi as it drove away, obviously driven by one of Gat's gang. And now, here he was, in the gangster's clutches at last! He was dropped down on to a dusty floor at last! Then his gag was torn away, and he drew in a deep, gasping breath of relief.

"Here we are, Slick," grinned Luke Morse. "Safe in your old boss' new home! I reckon— And here he is now," he added swiftly, changing tone and expression.

There was a quiet step and Gat Lesparri himself entered the room. But he was not the Gat Lesparri of old, neatly dressed and smart. His clothes were dusty, and he looked haggard and worn. His curious shiny, black eyes glittered as they rested on the boy on the floor.

"So you're lookin' old pals up again, Slick!" he said in his soft, silky voice. "I'd rather it had been Brent, but you're welcome none the less, kid!"

He eyed Slick, and the hapless boy shivered at the cold, cruel vindictiveness in Gat's eyes. When Gat Lesparri talked softly like that, he was dangerous as a tiger.

"You oughtn't to turn on old pals like this, Slick!" added Gat reproachfully. "See what you done now, kid! You got Gurney nabbed; you got my garage raided, and heaps of stuff found by the cops, as well as information as I didn't want 'em to get. You messed up that Westbury Street job properly, too, kid! And now," he added, a frightful gleam of savage hatred in his eyes, "you and Brent between you have got me inter this state—hunted by the cops; a warrant out agen me at last, and I got to leave the country, all my plans ruined, and me about ruined, too, lad! Got anythin' to say, Slick?"

Slick hadn't. Indeed, he was too terrified just then to speak. All Gat had stated was true, and he could understand the bitter, savage desire for vengeance in the gangster's cruel, stony heart. But he was surprised at Gat's next question.

"You can write, I reckon, kid?" he said.

Slick nodded.

"Has Brent seen your handwriting yet?" asked Gat again.

Slick hesitated, but an impatient movement from Gat decided him. After all, what harm was there in answering such a question?

"No!" he panted. "Not as I knows of!"

"That's all right, then," said Gat, nodding. "I'll just send him a note from you, saying as you want him here soon as possible. I guess that'll fetch him, and then I'll have you both where I want you. You see, kid, I'm goin' abroad to-night. Things are a bit too hot for me here. I got a tug waitin' at the wharf outside, and I'm takin' you and Brent with me. And I'm going to drop you overboard outside the Thames estuary in weighted sacks. Then we'll be square—see?"

And with that Gat Lesparri strolled out. He had said what he wanted to say, and with a groan of dismay Slick Dolan realised that he meant every word he had said.

But he had to catch Detective-Sergeant Brent yet!

CHAPTER 2. The Message!

"WHERE'S the boy, Mrs. Simpson?"

Brent asked the question as he was sitting down to tea that evening. The landlady flushed and looked a trifle uneasy.

"He—he went out just before dinner, Mr. Brent," she stammered. "You—you see—"

She paused, and then she explained the unfortunate accidents at noon. Brent smiled at first, and then he frowned.

"Went off without any dinner—eh? And not returned yet," he remarked grimly. "I'm afraid—"

"But there's a note for you, sir," said Mrs. Simpson hurriedly, reaching a scrap of paper from the mantelpiece. "Looks as if it might be from the lad," she added.

Brent took the note. It was on a single sheet of grubby paper, and the writing on it was sprawling and illiterate. It ran as follows:

"Dear Boss,—I got to know where 'G' is hiding, and I'm keepin' tabs on him, so you come to Tecker's warehouse about seven. You knows it, just off Roker's Wharf. Mind you ain't spotted.—SLICK."

Brent's brow knitted as he read that strange message. Certainly, it might easily have been written by Slick Dolan,

Yet as he read it again his face showed alarm, and then grim determination.

He knew Tecker's warehouse, and he knew Roker's Wharf. Both were in the immediate vicinity of Porter Street, and near to Gat's old garage—the garage he and Yard men had been searching only that day. But though Slick might have sent it, he felt almost certain that he had not. Slick, for one thing, had never called him "Boss." He always addressed him either as "Mister Brent" or "Guv'nor."

Moreover—and this brought the grim, hard look to Brent's steely eyes—it was fairly clear now that Gat Lesparri had "got" Slick in his clutches, or, at least, he knew where he was, and that he was not with Brent.

It was a trap, of course; simple, yet but for the manner of addressing him, might easily have been accepted as genuine. Brent felt sure of that as he rapidly thought it over.

He soon reached a decision. Slick Dolan was in deadly danger, as he himself would be if he went to Roker's Wharf that evening at seven.

Nevertheless, Brent was determined to go. But he would go with his wits about him for all that. Slick had to be rescued, and quite possibly Gat Lesparri would find himself the one to be trapped.

Without finishing his tea the detective hurriedly changed into dingy sailor's garb, and got to work with a make-up box. When he left his diggings a few minutes later few would have known him for the smart C.I.D. man.

Well within twenty minutes Brent was in dockland; but he was unusually cautious. He was puzzled. It was not like the crafty Gat to bait such a simple, obvious trap for anyone. He felt quite certain that neither Slick Dolan nor Gat Lesparri himself would be at Tecker's warehouse that evening. And before visiting that place Brent had



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A heavy, rough grasp fastened on Slick, and he was lifted off his feet and bundled into a taxi.

a quiet conversation with the constable on the Porter Street beat.

He had reason to be thankful for the precaution. For the constable was a keen, alert young fellow, and he dropped a hint which put the detective on the track of the mystery.

"By the way," he added, as Brent was leaving him, "I suppose you know that Pete Walton's hanging round here again?"

Brent didn't know, and his eyes gleamed. Pete was the skipper of a certain ancient tug on the river, and he was a member of Gat's gang of river thieves.

"He's got the Jane Postles moored off Roker's Wharf with steam up," said the constable. "Shouldn't wonder if he's takin' some stuff across Channel to-night, sir. Thought I'd mention it—"

"Glad you did, by James!" breathed Brent. "Maybe taking passengers as well as stuff, Jones. Well, you can get busy any time. I want Teeker's warehouse surrounded and searched at eight prompt. I'm interested in the Jane Postles. And if I don't report to you by nine, and she sails, you might pass the word to the Thames force, and get 'em to stop her lower down river."

"Right, sir!"

Brent lit his pipe, passed the borrowed matches back to the constable, and shuffled on his way to Roker's Wharf. Five minutes later he was snugly ensconced in the shelter of a pile of timber on the wharf, his keen eyes fixed on the Jane Postles.

She was a rather dilapidated sea-going tug, and sure enough she had steam up. The Jane Postles did other work in addition to tugging barges and lighters, as the police well knew, but could never prove.

For half an hour Brent kept patient observation on the vessel, and then things began to happen. Two men came

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on deck and seated themselves on the iron side, smoking and talking. As one lit his pipe Brent recognised the weather-beaten, drink-sodden features of Pete Walton, in the glow of the match.

Several minutes passed, and then two figures hove into view on the dimly lit wharf. As they passed under the yellow glow of a wall lamp Brent stiffened as he recognised the slim, alert figure of one; the other he did not know.

"Gat Lesparri!" breathed Brent, his eyes glinting. "So Pete is taking passengers!"

It was as Brent had half suspected. Hunted by the police, Gat was making his getaway by Pete's tug, probably making for Amsterdam or some other Continental port. And both Gat and his companion carried bulky bags. Gat was fleeing, but he was not fleeing empty-handed.

They reached the tug. Pete and his mate went to meet them, and they stood talking, every word reaching Brent clearly.

"You're runnin' it durned close, Gat!" growled Pete. "Sooner we're off the better, don't I keep on tellin' you!"

"That kid all right, Pete?" was Gat's answering question.

Brent scarcely knew the voice. Obviously Gat was in an agitated, bitter mood, and his usual cool, smooth manner had deserted him.

"Kid's all right—yes," snarled Pete. "Get aboard, and let's get off! What you want hang about—"

"We're not going yet, Pete!" snapped Gat. "Hasn't Hook reported anythin' yet?" he added, with a curse. "Looks as if that blamed cop hasn't fallen for it, after all!"

"Durn the cop! Let's get off, I tell you!"

"I'm not leavin' until I've got that cop, if I have to go to Wesley Street myself and smoke him up!" snarled Gat, his voice vibrant with passion. "I owe all this to him, and that young brat! I've got the kid, and I'm goin' to get Brent!"

"You blamed fool!" snarled Pete.

"Aw, don't spill your mouth, Pete!" was the savage reply. "You do as you're told, or, by heck, I'll—"

He was interrupted by the hard clatter of running feet on the cobbles. Round the corner of a warehouse, and then under the wall lamp, a man came racing, and he pulled up breathless and panting by the tug.

"It's Joe Hook!" rapped out Pete Walton. "Suthin' gone—"

"Cops!" panted Hook, interrupting him abruptly. "Game's up, Gat! They've raided the warehouse, and got Peck and Turner. I only jist got clear. That blamed tee must 'ave tumbled!"

"Then that settles it!" snarled Walton, jumping aboard again. "Come on, Gat, you fool!"

"You puttin' yourself up agen me, Pete?" snarled Gat, his voice trembling with rage. "You're hangin' on here until—"

"Hangin' on—nothin', blame you!" almost shouted the half-drunken skipper. "On you get, Gat, you thunderin' fool, or I'll leave you, blowed if I won't! Let go there, aft, Sam!"

The tug hand jumped to obey. Pete himself had jumped ashore again, and was throwing off the forward rope. It swished over the wharf edge, and Pete leaped aboard and jumped up into the covered-in wheelhouse. All but Gat boarded the tug swiftly.

For an instant the gangster hesitated, swearing savagely. He half-drew something from his pocket, and then he hurriedly replaced it and jumped aboard. The tug began

to move, and Brent realised it was now or never for him. He could not afford to take the chance of the Thames Police failing him.

Like a shadow he slipped over the edge of the wharf, dropping on to the dark stern of the tug just as she moved away, foam hissing under her stern.

Sam had run forward again, and was hauling in a rope there. Gat, with his companion at his heels, had climbed up into the wheelhouse, while the other men had gone forward. But Brent knew that the hand would be back to haul in the stern rope in a moment, and like a flash he slid under a heap of tarpaulins, and lay still.

He panted his relief as no outcry came and he knew he had not been seen. The tug was moving fast now, her engines throbbing and rattling violently. Possibly he had acted rashly, but he knew that Slick Dolan must be aboard the boat somewhere, and it was of the boy Brent was thinking now. He lay, scarcely breathing, as he heard the scrape of heavy boots and the scratching of the rope and the thud as the coiled end was hauled aboard and dropped on deck scarcely a yard from him. Then Sam's boots clumped away far'ard again and he breathed freely.

Yet time was precious, and he had to act quickly. He was just about to move from his hiding-place when foot-steps reached his ears again, and voices sounded quite close to where he lay hidden. With a thrill he recognised Gat's voice.

"Let's have a look at the kid, Pete!"

Evidently one of the hands was in the wheelhouse now, for he heard Pete's husky voice:

"He's here, safe enough, Gat—had no time to shove the kid below! I bet he's feelin' bloomin' cold, too," he added, with a cruel laugh.

Brent felt the tarpaulin under which he lay moved and flung back over him. He understood then, and his heart leaped. Slick, bound and gagged, must be lying scarcely a couple of yards from him. Fortunate indeed that he had taken refuge on this side of the tarpaulin. As it was, the danger of discovery was acute, and he scarcely dared to breathe.

A brief silence, and then he heard Gat's voice, quiet and gloating.

"You can shift his gag now, Pete. I want to talk to him!"

Another pause, and then he heard a faint panting as the

unfortunate Slick Dolan drew in deep gulps of air. Then Gat spoke again.

"Well, how you feelin' now, Slick?" he asked. "Ain't you sorry as you backed that cop instead of standin' by your pals? You know, I feel I oughter thank you real and proper for what you've done for me. Sure, I do!"

"No, I ain't sorry!" came a gasping voice stoutly. "You can do what you likes to me, Gat Lesparri! I—I bet you ain't got Mister Brent, anyway. He'll lick you yet!"

There was desperate triumph in the plucky Slick's voice, and Brent's eyes tightened. It was all he could do to hold himself in and remain still. Gat went on, unmoved.

"You ain't sorry yet, eh, kid?" he said softly and pleasantly. "But you will be soon, Slick! Pete here's going to skin you with a rope's end as soon as we're clear of the river, and then you're going overside in a nice weighted sack. As for Brent—well, I'm comin' back some day and I'll get him then. Now what about some grub and a drink, Pete?"

Brent felt the tarpaulin jerked again, and then he heard the two scoundrels tramp away, and silence reigned, save for the thudding tremble of the engines and the swish of Thames water.

CHAPTER 3.

The Last Lap!

BRENT lay silent for a full minute. He could hear Slick Dolan wriggling as if he were struggling with his bonds, and he could hear the boy's low gasps of pain. He could stand it no longer, and his voice, low and vibrant with warning, spoke at last.

"Slick—quiet! I'm here, young 'un—scarcely a yard away from you! Keep still and I'll soon have you free, kid!"

He heard a half-smothered gasp from Slick, a gasp that thrilled with joy.

Brent cautiously peered out from the tarpaulin. The night was black as ink, and he caught a swift glimpse of tossing, black water, and of distant, twinkling lights ashore. The hoot of a tug's siren scarcely a hundred yards across the water came to him.

But nobody showed on the deck, and in a moment he was at Slick Dolan's side, cutting cautiously at the boy's bonds. It was soon done, and the detective waited in silent sympathy as Slick twisted in agony, while the blood rushed once again through his cramped limbs.

"Now, listen, Slick," said Brent softly. "When you're fit we'll make a move! There are at least half a dozen of the gang aboard, and they'll be armed. We're two, and unarmed. It's for us to go while the going's good. I fancy Gat and his friends won't get far."

"But—but I couldn't swim, guv'nor—not all that way!" gasped Slick, glancing at the distant lights ashore.

"No need," said Brent. "There's a dinghy astern; they've not dared to stop and haul it aboard yet. When I give the word, just slide over the stern after me. I'll haul it alongside now."

He rose to his feet slowly, eyes scanning the lighted wheelhouse and the glowing skylights above the engines. But he never reached the stern, for just then a shout came from the



"By heck, it's Brent!" yelled Pete Walton, as the detective's fist crashed into his face.

wheelhouse and he glimpsed the head of Sam as he shouted:

"Skipper, ahoy! Come on deck, quick! Cops!"

Thames Police! The constable had not failed him.

Brent ducked down again. Pete, Gat, and another man were up on deck now. Pete gave vent to a savage volley of imprecations as he sighted the police launch.

"The police, by heck!" he snapped. "We're durned well done, Gat!"

A clear hail came across the water.

"Heave-to, there! Heave-to, skipper!"

"Heave-to be durned!" snarled Gat Lesparri. "Run the thunderin' scum down, Pete! Sink 'em and get on, you fool!"

"And how far d'you think we'd get?" snarled Pete. "They'd have us stopped afore—"

"If we gave 'em the durned chance—yep!" said Gat, his voice savage and tense. "But we won't! What's wrong with leavin' the blamed tug lower down and gettin' clear in the boat, Pete? Better than a few years in the stone jug, I reckon!"

"By heck! You're right, Gat!" yelled Pete Walton, "We'll run 'em down, and chance it!"

He raced off and leaped into the tiny wheelhouse.

Brent breathed hard and fast. There was not only the risk of their own capture, and the escape of the crooks, but if the launch was run down in that wide waste of tide water, it was death to the police. He had to act, and act swiftly.

With a muttered word to Slick, ordering him to lie low, Brent ran forward and leaped up into the wheelhouse, heedless of the odds. Gat Lesparri, Walton, Sam, and the other man were there, and Brent's sudden appearance brought sudden and utter stupefaction to the rascals.

"By heck! It's Brent!"

Pete Walton just had time to yell when Brent's right smashed into his face, sending his head crashing clean through the glass behind him.

In a moment confusion reigned in the tiny wheelhouse. Gat had a gun out, but he hadn't the chance to use it before Brent was flying at him. Sam, Walton, and the third man were jammed in a struggling, cursing heap by the wheel. Before they could interfere Gat and Brent, struggling together in a terrible embrace, went flying out through the narrow gap, down the three short steps on to the deck, where they went on fighting.

Then Pete Walton took the wheel as the other three charged out after Brent and Gat. Pete's eyes were on the police boat, and his jaw was set in ruthless determination as he spun the wheel, leaving Brent to the others.

And it was just then that Slick Dolan took a hand in the game again.

Slick leaped for the wheelhouse, and, as luck would have it, he crashed right into a burly form that emerged just then from the small engine-room.

It was a black, oily faced fireman, and he had rushed on deck armed with a spanner.

"Here, what the blazes—"

The man's startled yell was choked in a yelp of pain as Slick lowered his head, and butted the fireman with terrific force in the waistcoat, or where his waistcoat usually was. He staggered back, slumping on the open skylight hatch, the spanner flying from his hand.

Slick leaped madly for the wheelhouse.

But his intervention there—could he have managed it—was not needed, for suddenly from the engine-room below came a horrible grinding, and then a crash of jamming, grating machinery.

The next moment the engines stopped, and the tug lost way instantly. As she moved sluggishly to a stop the police launch ran alongside, and trim, blue-uniformed men in peaked caps swarmed aboard the tug.

From the wheelhouse Pete Walton leaped, yelling in his fury, Slick luckily jumping away in time. The boy ran forward to where Brent was almost at his last gasp. But by now Gat's accomplices realised the police were aboard, and they made a mad rush round to get to the dinghy—a rush that was seconds too late, and soon all three were down and handcuffed.

But their flight had given Brent his chance, and he scrambled up, to face the wicked blue tube of an automatic in Gat Lesparri's hand. The gangster's pallid face was terrible in its baffled fury. But the C.I.D. man was used to tight corners, and he acted like lightning, flinging himself desperately at Gat's gun arm, and forcing it upwards.

And as he did so Gat pulled the trigger.

Brent gasped and leaped backwards. He knew instantly where that bullet had gone. Gat Lesparri, his evil career ended, slumped backwards over the tug's low side, and vanished in the swirling tide.

It was not until Brent and Slick Dolan were seated before a cosy fire late that night in Wesley Street that Brent got the chance to talk.

"You put the lid on it all, Slick," said Brent soberly. "But for you we should have lost, and goodness knows what would have happened to the men in the launch! Pete Walton was out for murder, lad! If you hadn't butted that fireman—well, it was the fireman's spanner that did it. The thing dropped down into a vital part of the engine, and smashed it as if a bomb had dropped—wrecked the machinery, and stopped the boat. Anyway, that's that. You've more than proved what's in you, Slick, and I'm looking forward to the time when you'll be my assistant."

"Me, guv'nor?" gasped Slick, his eyes dancing.

"Certainly! I don't mean to stay in the Force much longer, and when I retire it'll be to become a private detective, with Slick Dolan as my assistant," smiled Brent. "That is if you won't run away again from Mrs. Simpson, young 'un. She's really a good soul, and if you'll try not to upset the soup again—"

And Slick Dolan grinned and promised he would try.

THE END.

(Well, chums, they've got Gat at last! Now turn to the great announcement on page 18. Jimmy Silver & Co. are coming to the GEM!)

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The Last Round!

IN a panic Buxton darted to the door of the lounge, obviously with intention to lock it, when the impulse died. To his strained ears came the sounds of a feminine voice:

"Very well, Masters, I will go up. Mr. Buxton won't mind."

Irene Marshall!

Buxton's eyes glinted. His fiance had arrived!

He gazed about him like a hunted animal. Then a sullenness set his jaw in a brutal line. Irene's coming meant a show down. Well, he had come to the end of things. The glint in his eyes became more pronounced.

He stepped back several paces as the girl's light footsteps grew nearer.

"Irene—"

The girl stood framed in the doorway—a pretty picture of dignity and scorn.

"So I find you in, you cur!"

Buxton started back, as if he had been stung at the venom in the girl's voice.

"Why, what—what's the matter?"

"The matter!" said Irene Marshall, her eyes flashing contempt. "I know you for what you are!"

Buxton advanced a pace, but she waved him off contemptuously.

"My brother has told me everything," she said.

Buxton started.

"He's told me how you schemed to get him in your power at the 'Varsity," she said witheringly. "I know all about poor Bill now! You low beast, you made my brother your tool in a scheme to get Bill Hartley disgraced. He never touched the games fund. My brother did; and poor, gallant old Bill took the blame to save him and to save me from disgrace!"

The colour ebbed and flowed in Buxton's handsome face.

He was listening to the truth, and for once in his life

he found it unpleasant. In a feeble attempt to justify himself he babbled incoherently.

The girl had mastered him.

"You cur!"

flamed Irene.

"You low-down

scheming cur!

You succeeded in

estranging Bill

from me; you

succeeded in

separating him

from his father;

you caused his ex-

pulsion from the

'Varsity, and then

a-top of it all, you

have the imper-

tinence to become

engaged to me!"

Buxton stood

humiliated.

There was no

man living who

could have re-

duced him to such

a posture. The

lash of the girl's

tongue tortured

him, brought him

to his knees.

"You cur!" she snapped. "You're nothing more or less than a low-down gangster!"

Why she said it Irene Marshall could hardly have told. Some feminine instinct prompted it as she caught sight of the gleaming jewels sprawled in a heap on the table, and beside them the automatic. But the taunt had a peculiar effect on Buxton. It disposed of his humiliation; it returned him to gangdom—to gangdom's star leader. In a bound he had reached the girl and pinioned her. A rough hand clasped her mouth and stifled her cries for help.

"You're right, Irene," snarled Buxton, "I am a gangster!"

I'm on the run, and you are coming with me!"

AMAZING PARACHUTE JUMP!

Notorious gangster makes heroic atonement!

"Mr. Buxton has just left, sir, and I don't know where he's gone."

Masters, suave and dignified, gave the reply in answer to Ferrers Locke's quick-fire question.

"Thank you! I'll make certain of that myself!"

And, to Masters' indignation, Locke strode past him roughly and leaped the stairs. A quick search of Buxton's chambers told Locke that his bird had flown. Without a word to the disgruntled butler-valet he raced out of the chambers and leaped into the waiting car at the pavement.

At the wheel sat Jack Drake. Behind him, keyed up to expectancy, sat Pycroft.

"Well?" grunted the latter eagerly.

"Gone!" snapped Locke. "Full speed for Filipharm Aerodrome, Jack! I'm taking a chance!"

The car got into gear and shot away like a streak of light. Locke relapsed into silence. Overhead, storm clouds were brewing, and before the car had been eating up the miles for more than ten minutes, the storm broke with almost tropical violence. Vivid flashes of lightning rent

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the heavens. Reverberating roars of thunder well nigh split the eardrums. Then down came the rain like a cloak.

"What a night!" grumbled Pycroft. "What makes you think we'll get our man at Filipham?" he bawled.

He had to repeat the question before Locke replied.

"I've made it my business to know that he's got a private plane kept there. If a man wants to fly the country, what's the quickest way, Pycroft?"

"By air!" came Pycroft's grudging response.

"Well, that's why we're going to Filipham!"

No more was said until the journey was completed. Driving in such conditions was a ticklish business; but Jack Drake was iron-nerved, and he kept the speed-needle flickering in the region of sixty for the major part of the journey.

At the aerodrome, shrouded in the darkness of night and storm, and lit only at intervals by the vicious tongues of forked lightning, another surprise awaited the speeding trio in the car.

At the drome buildings they saw a tall, mud-splashed figure scramble from an overheated motor-cycle. Simultaneously a diminutive figure detached itself from the pillar.

"Corks!" exclaimed Drake excitedly. "That's Bill Hartley and Tich Freeman!"

Locke started.

The car slid to a standstill as Drake jammed on the brakes. Locke and Pycroft jumped out.

"Mr. Locke!" It was Bill Hartley's anxious voice. "Irene— My father phoned me half an hour ago to say that Irene was on her way to see Buxton. I forked over to the rotter's chambers with Tich as fast as I could go. He'd just started out in his car. Irene's with him—I saw her! I followed them here. They've got about two minutes' start!"

The words, bellowed above the roar of the storm, tumbled out like shots from a machine-gun.

"Good heavens!" gasped Pycroft. "He's got the girl with him!"

But Locke was not waiting to hear Pycroft's superfluous ejaculations. He was hastily interviewing the drome manager.

"Mr. Buxton's plane?" he roared.

"On the tarmac!" came the reply. "He's off to the Continent. Madness! Madness, sir, with a lady passenger with him!"

"I want a fast plane!" snapped Locke. "At once!"

The manager threw out his hands in despair.

"I haven't one available!"

"Get one ready at once!" ordered Locke peremptorily, and, without waiting to hear the manager's further remonstrances, he sped off hot foot across the drome.

To his ears came the musical hum of an aero engine being warmed up. A vivid flash of lightning lit up the entire drome a moment later. Through the curtain of rain Locke saw the clear outlines of a rakish-looking monoplane some sixty yards in front of him.

Then the blanket of darkness fell again.

As Locke raced on, gun in hand, he knew that he was too late. The noise of the engine grew to an ear-splitting roar.

Buxton, with Irene Marshall as his unwilling passenger, was taking off!

Biting his lip with vexation, Locke hurried back to the drome manager. He found him in an excited argument with Pycroft and Bill Hartley.

The latter in his impetuous way, was inclined to be unreasonable.

"Why the deuce did you let him take up a lady on a night like this?" he barked.

The manager threw up his hands.

"Haven't I told you that this is a private aerodrome?" he shot back. "Haven't I told you that I am only the manager—a paid servant?"

Bill, concerned only for Irene Marshall, ground his teeth.

"Another thing!" added the harassed manager. "When Mr. Buxton phoned me some time ago and announced his intention of taking the air, he gave me to understand that there would be no passenger. He distinctly told me to put in the ballast—"

Locke arrived in time to hear that final sentence.

"Is the fool of a man flying with ballast as well as a passenger, then?" he asked.

The manager shrugged his shoulders.

"You saw him take off, sir. He certainly had no time to unload the ballast."

Bill groaned, whilst Locke's look of anxiety deepened.

"Well, it would take the best of pilots to weather a storm on a night like this." As he spoke, another vivid streak of lightning opened the heavens. "But with unwanted ballast—"

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He broke off significantly, then faced the manager squarely.

"Look here, this gentleman is a police inspector," said Locke, indicating Pycroft. "At all costs we must have a machine at once—the fastest available."

Again the manager broke into voluble objections, but he was persuaded at last.

"If you commandeer a plane in the name of the law, I am helpless to interfere." He touched a button, and in response a mechanic in overalls appeared. Followed a whispered conversation, and the mechanic departed at a trot.

The manager turned to the party.

"There's an Army machine here—a Bristol. Belongs to Squadron Leader Gillenders—"

Locke smiled.

"The very thing! My pilot's certificate will tell you that the bus will be in experienced hands."

He handed over the certificate in question, and watched the amazed expression creep into the face of the manager as he read the name and description of the pilot.

"Ferrals Locke!" gasped the manager at length. "The detective! But he's dead! I read about it in the newspapers some time ago!"

Inspector Pycroft grunted.

"Well, that was a bit of hokus pokus. This is Mr. Ferrers Locke—I'll vouch for that. But why stand here gassing—"

For once Inspector Pycroft was practical. The manager mastered his confusion and hurriedly led the party on to the drome. The rain lashed down with stinging force; the darting tongues of lightning and the ear-splitting thunder-claps made it as vicious and as wild a night as any of them had ever experienced.

Already mechanics were wheeling out the Bristol biplane on to the tarmac. Another groundman appeared, as if from nowhere, with three flying helmets and goggles. Bill Hartley particularly noted the number, and without waiting to be asked, grabbed a helmet and slammed it on.

Locke was about to remonstrate, but he seemed to think better of it, for he took the remaining helmets, donned one himself, and handed the other to Pycroft.

"All ready, sir!" announced the manager, as, after a final burst of full throttle, the engine was revved down to a mere "ticking over."

The engineer clambered out of the pilot's cockpit and quickly Locke took his place. In the roomy cockpits, behind the detective, Pycroft, with some misgiving, and Bill Hartley took their places. At the touch of Locke's experienced hand on the throttle, the engine burst into a pulsating roar that vied with the thunder, the chocks were dragged away by the mechanics, and the plane began to move.

Bill caught a view of Tich, looking half envious, half nonplussed; of Drake smiling a farewell; then the curtain of darkness engulfed them. As Locke threw the bus into a dizzy climbing turn, Bill found himself shoved down into his cockpit as though by some giant unseen hand, and wondered whether he was on his head or his heels.

A brilliant flash of lightning lit up the whole drome. Three hundred feet below Bill picked out the hangars, and in the same swivel of the eyes he saw reflected in a mirror in the pilot's pit the strained, unrelaxing features of Ferrers Locke.

Gaining height with every passing second, Locke turned the nose of the plane towards the coast, banking everything on that being the direction in which his quarry would make.

The sting of the pelting rain whipped his face mercilessly, despite the stream-lined wind-screen, and he grimaced as he endeavoured to imagine what Pycroft's and Bill's feelings must be on this, their first flight. Accustomed now to the darkness, his eyes searched ahead as if to pick up the trail of Buxton's plane, although it was well nigh a million to one chance against human eyes detecting anything in that black carpet of night.

But the million to one chance transpired.

After being rocketed about in the storm for twenty minutes or more, and gradually rising above it, Locke's keen eyes suddenly picked out the faint crimson stab of an overheated exhaust some distance ahead. With throttle full open, he roared in the direction, wondering whether his eyes had deceived him.

The tiny crimson stab gradually grew larger. The red-hot exhaust had betrayed Buxton's whereabouts almost as surely as a searchlight would have done. Locke knew now that he was not mistaken. And even as the knowledge comforted him, he felt a hefty hand thumping his shoulder, and heard an excited voice raised crescendo above the wind and shrieking and bracing wires.

"Believe I've found a searchlight here!" bawled Pycroft.

Locke censured himself for not having instructed Pycroft, prior to setting out, to connect the telephone that allowed

conversation between the cockpits. But he grasped Pycroft's meaning at length and hurled back a reply.

"Then use it—use it! See that red flash!" He pointed overboard, and Pycroft sensed his intention.

Shivering with excitement and cold—for Pycroft felt the need of a coat—he fumbled with various switches and was at last rewarded. A miniature searchlight suddenly split the darkness, causing Bill Hartley, in the third cockpit, to gasp, for its powerful ray in Pycroft's inexperienced hands, nearly blinded him. The C.I.D. man, however, soon managed to focus the beam, and a whoop of triumph left his lips as its brilliant ray flickered over and finally illumined plainly enough a monoplane staggering ahead.

It was Buxton's plane, without doubt, and even to Bill's and Pycroft's unpractised eyes it was apparent that the low-engined monoplane was in difficulties.

Marchant Buxton looked like a demon possessed as he gripped the controls of his plane. The storm was beating him. He hadn't enough power in his engine to weather it. That much came home to him with painful suddenness after he had fought the fury of the storm for some time.

Of the possibility of pursuit he gave no thought. The dominant desire was to flee from the country that would hang him for the villain he was.

By his side, like one in a stupor, sat Irene Marshall. Terror and fear kept her silent. At the pistol's point she had been compelled to enter the monoplane, although the unsuspecting manager of the drome had seen no sign of the loaded gun savagely gripped in Buxton's coat pocket.

Now, at an altitude of three thousand feet, Irene was beginning to wish that she had chosen death at the pistol's point rather than the fate which threatened the monoplane. The maniacal expression on Buxton's face, the sting of the lashing rain, the lightning, and the deafening thunder, had reduced her to a wreck.

Certainly Buxton had nothing to fear from his passenger, he told himself, as he caught sight of her terror-stricken features in the subdued light from the instrument-board. In any case, all his time was taken up with keeping the plane from hurtling to destruction.

"I'll beat them yet!" he muttered. "Buxton beats the bloodhounds! That's good alliteration!"

A violent gust of wind caught the light plane as he mused thus. Like a cork it was tossed back, despite the roaring of the engine, telling of full throttle. But Buxton put all he knew of flying into his controls, and out of a treacherous tail skid that had promised destruction, he emerged the victor.

He found himself wondering why it was the light plane was so difficult to handle; why the engine at full revolutions seemed to make but little impression on the infinity of space before him. Not for one moment did his thoughts dwell on the iron ballast he had instructed the manager to dump into the bus. And that ballast, coupled with the storm, was to defeat him.

He set the plane on an easterly course. Soon, he told himself, he would be leaving the coastline of England behind. If he could weather the gale over the Channel his get-away was a certainty.

And while the arch-scurdrel mused thus, the eyes of Pycroft's searchlight viciously pierced the velvety blackness and revealed him.

Buxton swore under his breath. The searchlight told him he was being followed. Who his pursuers were he hadn't any definite knowledge, but instinct told him that the police were on his trail.

Again the searchlight stabbed the night; again Buxton swore and threw the plane into a dive, in an effort to elude it; but as he pulled out of the dive with struts and wires screaming a shrill protest, his heart sank. The engine was missing on one cylinder.

With gritted teeth Buxton rocked and swerved his plane. Like a flame of vengeance the searchlight darted hither and thither until it picked him up again. The glare of its penetrating rays dazzled Buxton.

His pursuers were forcing him down!

It was impossible to fly, without any knowledge of direction or balance, with that glaring light boring into him.

Buxton snarled like a wild beast as he realised that the end was near. Yet the end was as neither he nor his pursuers had calculated. Of a sudden the heavens rocked to a thunderous blast of artillery; the storm had awakened with redoubled vigour and ferocity.

Not knowing that he did so, Buxton dived almost vertic-

ally for earth. In the midst of the dive came a blinding sheet of light that illumined the night and the countryside for miles round.

The monoplane shivered and rocked from propeller boss to tail fin as the full force of the lightning caught it. In a flaming mass it plunged earthwards. Frantically Buxton slipped the safety belt that encased him in the cockpit, as the plane, a burning, plunging mass of destruction, rushed like a rocket earthwards. Instinctively he felt for and found the parachute strapped about his shoulders.

He thanked his stars that he had thought of it at the outset of the journey. Then like a douche of cold water came the realisation that Irene Marshall was clinging to him.

Over and over bucketed the plane, the flames almost engulfing the cockpit. Even nearer rushed the earth to take its grim toll. Then for the first time in his life Buxton did a noble thing.

There was one parachute, and he wore it about his shoulders. It was designed to carry one average-weight human being—and one only. For a split second Buxton was tempted to hurl himself clear of the burning wreck and leave the girl to her fate; the next he had gathered her in his arms and plunged out into space.

From above came the snaking light of the searchlight, following the suicidal parachute descent. Yet Buxton saw it not. With set face and reeling senses, he counted a deliberate "three" before he pulled the rip cord of the chute.

It seemed an eternity before the silken sheet opened and checked that breath-robbing dive. Mercifully consciousness had left the terrified girl. She knew nothing of Buxton's temptations to let her go, and thus make certain of saving his own skin; knew nothing of Buxton's ordeal, of his straining muscles—of the speed of that drop.

And Buxton, for that matter, did not know what impulse it was that prompted him to hold on. The rate of progress terrified him. Both of them would be pulped into eternity at the speed the parachute fell—if the straining chute held out against the double burden until then!

The rate of the descent checked. A strong wind blowing off the ground steadied and counteracted the forces of gravitation, and in a gasping, sobbing heap Buxton, still grasping Irene, crashed to the ground that rushed out of the night to meet them.

Buxton felt a violent pain in his legs, and knew that both were broken; but before his senses left him he cut the chute free and collapsed on the rain-sodden ground.

The staring eye of the searchlight picked them out a moment later, and Locke shut off his engine and planed down. In a body the two tore across the ploughed field.

The detective's torch found what the trio sought. In a moment he was on his knees beside Irene Marshall, his keen eyes and attuned ears eager to read the signs and transmit them to the anxious Bill.

"A marvellous escape," said Locke at length. "I believe she's fractured a shoulder, that's all."

Bill breathed a sigh of heartfelt relief. As in a dream he watched the detective make Irene as comfortable as circumstances permitted, what time Pycroft was huddled over Buxton. The gangster was still unconscious.

Locke surveyed him critically.

"Badly smashed," he confided to Pycroft. "Both legs broken, by the look of it, and dangerous internal injuries, too, if I'm any judge."

"He must have taken the full shock of the landing," said Pycroft reflectively, and without any trace of emotion. "Saving that poor girl is the only decent thing he's ever done in his life."

Locke was not listening. His eyes had sighted a motor-car advancing along the road that skirted the farm land.

"Stop that merchant, Pycroft!" he said harshly. "We shall want his car to take these poor devils to hospital!"

"BUXTON GANG SENSATION!" glared from the newsbills.

The raucous shouts of newsboys echoed and re-echoed in the streets of the metropolis.

It was a fortnight since Buxton's dramatic attempt to fly the country and its sensational climax. Tried before a judge and jury in the historic precincts of the Old Bailey,

SEE HOW IT'S DONE?

AFTER TEA
YOU SEE
COMPANY

XIX

Answers to Puzzles on page 13.

the "Buxton Gang," as the case had come to be known, had provided the sensation of the century.

With equal sensation had the news of Ferrers Locke's return been greeted. In the pages of the "Daily Recorder" was given the full story. Lynx-eye Collins, as promised by Locke, had been given every facility to "spread" himself in return for "services rendered," and the obliging news-reporter had made the most of the opportunity. To a startled world had been told the result of the trial of the gang at every stage of the proceedings, but the "Recorder" distributed the tit-bits. It was due in the first place, they announced, to Bill Hartley's rivalry for the hand of Irene Marshall that Buxton had been discovered and denounced for what he was, namely a gang leader with the pick of gangdom obedient to his beck and call. And that was correct in every detail.

Buxton's implacable hatred of Hartley had resulted in the poisonous plot to get him disgraced at the 'Varsity. In that Buxton had scored a triumph, but that very hatred had led to his undoing. In his eagerness to humiliate his enemy still more, Buxton and his gang had contrived the fake robbery at Eaton Square—a sinister plot that would have placed Bill behind prison bars but for the timely intervention of Ferrers Locke. It was proved at the trial that the fingerprints of the mysterious burglar of the house in Eaton Square compared identically with those of Adolph Haverswood. The smiling dude, debonair to the last, had admitted the fact. He had not even paled when the brutal murder of Inspector McDougall had been traced to him and Buxton and the stern-faced judge had passed sentence.

The Chakenham twins, to save their skins, as they thought, had turned King's evidence. Between them they accused Buxton, Haverswood, and Sir Raston Billenter of robbery with violence and murder. But the result of the trial saw them all, the twins included, with their days numbered.

The conclusive evidence to Ferrers Locke's quietly uttered sentences in the witness-box was supplied in the two drums of films he had filched from the studios, which were shown in the court. Stage by stage the judge, jury, and officials had watched an improvised screen that reflected every rehearsed movement of the raid on Stapleton Castle. And when Ferrers Locke finally stepped down from the witness-box a murmur of applause went round, which the ushers could not quell. Truly the Buxton gang had worked on novel and audacious lines.

During the trial Buxton had been accommodated on a stretcher. His injuries were such as to make learned

médical men wonder whether he would live long enough to hear sentence passed on him.

Occasionally his feverish eyes roamed the witnesses ranged against him, but always they smouldered with hate when Bill Hartley's massive figure filled the witness-box. To Locke, strangely enough, he turned a face that was undeniably friendly.

"You've beaten me, Locke," he said with difficulty, when the warders had conducted him to the prison hospital after the trial. "But I don't mind being beaten by a better man."

Bill's rancour had evaporated to a point of extinction. He felt only compassion for the man who had schemed so relentlessly to break him. With Irene Marshall, now making rapid strides to recovery, as his promised fiancée, and a complete reconciliation with "old man Hartley," red-headed, happy-go-lucky Bill felt himself to be in the seventh heaven.

When he turned out for the Cashton Rangers on the Saturday following the trial of the Buxton gang, ninety thousand people acclaimed him from the stands and terraces. The ordeal of facing that cheering, enthusiastic crowd almost unnerved him, but a reassuring smile from old man Hartley, watching a football match for the first time in his life, heartened him to such an extent that he played like one inspired.

Four times Bill and Tich Freeman broke through the ranks of the opposing team with bewildering passing and scientific ball control, and four times the net swished to a volleying shot that left the despairing goalkeeper hopelessly at sea. That game Bill will always remember, so will his team-mates, Major Carstairs, and old Sandy, the trainer, to say nothing of the ninety thousand football fans who beheld it. And as the voluble crowd streamed away after the finest display of football seen on that ground, the newshoys of the "Daily Recorder" made the air hideous with their cries.

"BUXTON GANG SENSATION!"

The "sensation" was nothing more or less than the suicide of Marchant Buxton in the prison hospital. He had defeated justice in his own ruthless fashion. But that sensation was a minor one in comparison with the news stories that appeared in the Sunday papers featuring Bill Hartley, the Rangers' recruit!

THE END.

(Hasn't this been a magnificent serial, boys? I'm sure you're sorry it's over. But there's another ripping serial starting next week! Don't miss "THE ISLAND CASTAWAYS!")

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