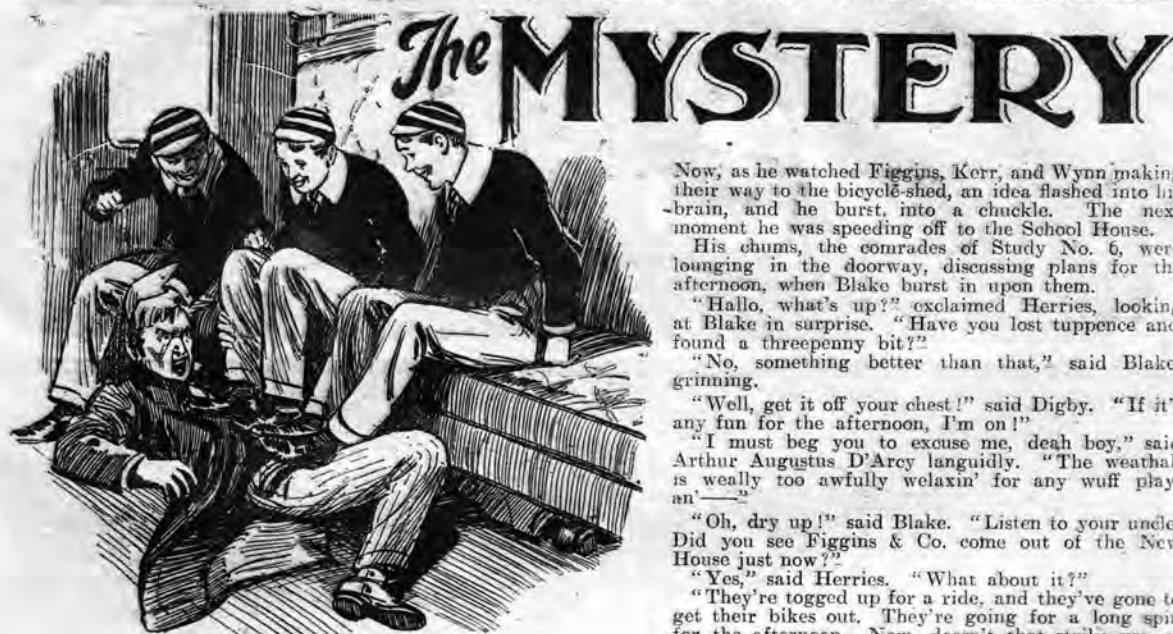


"THE MYSTERY MASTER!" Ripping Complete School Yarn WITHIN!

The GEM 2^D





CHAPTER 1.

A Capture from the Enemy!

FIGGINS & Co. came out of the New House at St. Jim's looking very well satisfied with themselves and things generally. They were nicely arrayed in blazers and shorts, and looked very fit and well.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Figgins & Co. were evidently about to start on a little outing. Figgins, the long-legged chief of the New House juniors, cast his eye upwards to the sky, which was blue and serene. There had been a threatening of rain earlier in the day, but it seemed to have passed off entirely.

"Good luck," said Figgins, "it's going to be a jolly fine afternoon, and we shall have a ripping ride! Now to get out the bikes."

"Hallo!" said Kerr. "There's that bounder, Blake! What does he want?"

Figgins & Co. looked suspiciously at the junior, who came strolling over from the direction of the School House.

Blake had his hands in his pockets, and a straw hat on the side of his head, and looked the picture of lazy carelessness. He stopped and surveyed the New House juniors as they came down the steps, with a grin.

"Hallo, Figgy!" he exclaimed. "Whither bound? How nicely we're got up!"

"Oh, go and eat pancakes!" said Figgins.

"By the way, Figgy, where are you taking those pipe-stems?" asked Blake, fixing an interested and curious glance upon Figgins' calves.

Figgins turned red with wrath. The chief of the New House juniors was decidedly long and lean, and his calves were certainly not plump, and the tight stockings showed up their lean proportions very plainly.

"But perhaps I'm mistaken," continued Blake; "perhaps they're not pipe-stems, but walking-sticks. I'm open to correction."

"You'll be open to getting a thick ear if you don't buzz off!" said Figgins wrathfully. "We're going for a spin, you School House bounder, and I've got no time to waste on you. Come on, chaps!"

And Figgins & Co., with their noses in the air, marched off towards the bicycle shed, and Blake stood looking after them with a peculiar expression upon his face.

Blake had nothing special on that afternoon, and he had been trying to think out some plan for taking a rise out of his ancient enemies, the juniors of the rival House at St. Jim's. Since the coming of Tom Merry at St. Jim's, Blake had been put upon his mettle to see that his laurels as leader of the School House juniors was not won from him.

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A PARROT TO THE RESCUE!

When Tom Merry & Co. are booked for trouble, their talking parrot "gives evidence" on their behalf!

Now, as he watched Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn making their way to the bicycle shed, an idea flashed into his brain, and he burst into a chuckle. The next moment he was speeding off to the School House.

His chums, the comrades of Study No. 6, were lounging in the doorway, discussing plans for the afternoon, when Blake burst in upon them.

"Hallo, what's up?" exclaimed Herries, looking at Blake in surprise. "Have you lost tuppence and found a threepenny bit?"

"No, something better than that," said Blake, grinning.

"Well, get it off your chest!" said Digby. "If it's any fun for the afternoon, I'm on!"

"I must beg you to excuse me, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy languidly. "The weather is weally too awfully welaxin' for any wuff play, an'—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Blake. "Listen to your uncle. Did you see Figgins & Co. come out of the New House just now?"

"Yes," said Herries. "What about it?"

"They're togged up for a ride, and they've gone to get their bikes out. They're going for a long spin for the afternoon. Now, doesn't that strike you as a jolly way of spending a half-holiday?"

"Well, yes, rather! But we can't do the same, Blake."

"Why can't we?"

"Jolly good reasons. My bike is busted; yours has a variety of pictures that it would take a dog's age to mend; and Dig has sold his to Percy Mellish. If they're not good reasons for not taking a spin, I've never heard of any!"

"My dear chap, I wasn't thinking of going on our own jiggers."

"What the dickens were you thinking of, then?"

"Figgins & Co.'s jiggers!" said Blake coolly. "It seems to me to be silly rot that those New House wasters should go for a spin, while we young gentlemen of the School House hang around the quad with our hands in our pockets. Don't you think so?"

"Rather!" said Herries and Digby together. "Jolly good wheeze if we can raid the jiggers. What's the game?"

"Figgins & Co. have gone to get them out of the shed. We're going to make them leave them in the quad and go up to their study. While they're gone—"

"I don't see how you can fix it."

"My dear kid, do you ever see anything till I have explained it to you?" demanded Blake. "Don't interrupt, but listen to your uncle."

"Oh, go on; cut the cackle and come to the horses!"

"That's what I'm trying to do, but you will interrupt. Now, when Figgins & Co. come back, if they find that the enemy are in their fortress—that is to say, that we have raided their study—you'll bet they'll come up to turn us out before they leave the school. What?"

"That's true enough," said Herries. "But if we're in their study, and they come and start fighting us there, how the dickens are we going to collar the jiggers?"

Blake gave him a pitying glance.

"Herries, old man, why don't you wait patiently till I've finished, instead of trying to think things out? You'll get a pain in your brain-box soon. We're not all going to be in the study. Adolphus is going to be there."

"Oh, dear boy, weally!" protested Arthur Augustus.

"Didn't you say that you didn't feel inclined for any rough play, Gussy?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Well, then, that's how considerate I am to you. Herries, Dig, and myself are going to collar the jiggers and take all the risks, and all you've got to do is to stick in the study and draw the attack."

"That's all vewy well, Blake; but when they see you take the bikes away they'll have me to themselves, an'—"

"Oh, some people are never satisfied!" said Blake

MASTER!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



impatiently. "Do you want me to wrap you up in cotton-wool, and keep you in a giddy band-box?"

"No, deah boy, weally; but—"

"Then don't say any more. I'm giving you the easy part of the job. You can go to bed afterwards, if you like, or, if Figgins & Co. hurt you, you can go into the sanny. It's been made very comfortable lately, and they've got some ripping books there for the patients."

"I weally won't want to go into—"

"We can't have all we want in this world. There are only three bikes, so three of us are enough to do the collaring business. We're going to save you the fag of pedalling a bike around all the afternoon," said Blake.

"Yes, by Jove!" said Digby. "You seem to be very unreasonable, Gussy!"

"Unreasonable isn't the word!" exclaimed Herries. "Here's a chance of taking a glorious rise out of the New House, and getting a fine afternoon's spin into the bargain, and D'Arcy doesn't want to do even the easiest part of it! I call it unpatriotic!"

"You see, the majority's against you, Adolphus," urged Blake. "Don't be selfish! If there's anything I hate in a chap it's selfishness and a want of regard for the comfort of others. I do, really!"

Thus assailed on all sides D'Arcy gave in.

"I am quite weady to do my best," he said; "so long as you give me time to change my waistcoat first, I don't mind. This is a special new waistcoat, an' I can't wun the risk of havin' it spoiled."

Blake seized the swell of St. Jim's by the collar as he was turning into the House.

"Blow your confounded waistcoat!" he shouted. "There's no time to attend to your beastly waistcoat! Figgins & Co. will be back in a jiffy. There's no time to lose. What do you want to wear a rainbow waistcoat for? If Figgys puts some ink on it, it will make it a little less startling. Come on!"

D'Arcy was not quite persuaded, but Herries took him by one arm, Digby another, and Blake helped him from behind with his boot, and thus he was propelled at a breathless pace towards the New House.

The House was deserted, all the boys being out in the fine sunny weather, and the coast was clear for the carrying out of Blake's plan.

"Mind, you're to let Figgys see that you're there, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "Make him think we're all with you. Knock things about and smash 'em up generally. I can leave all that to your judgment. You're an awfully clever chap."

"Yaas; I believe I am wathah clevah, Blake, but—"

"When they see we've got the bikes they'll come after us, and you'll have a chance to slither away," went on Blake. "But don't forget, you must get them to come up to the study if it costs you a leg!"

"Yaas, I quite understand, deah boy, but—"

"In you go, then!"

And D'Arcy was propelled into the porch of the New House. He stumbled into the Hall, and then, being fairly committed to the adventure, he hurried up the stairs to the study belonging to Figgins & Co.

"That's settled!" exclaimed Blake gleefully. "Now to take cover, chaps."

"Buck up, or those bounders will be back and spot us! Where shall we hide?" said Digby breathlessly.

"Just round the corner."

The juniors dashed round the nearest corner, and remained there, close against the wall, waiting for the return of Figgins & Co.

Blake ventured to take a peep out, hardly showing more than an eyebrow, in case it should meet the suspicious eyes of Figgins.

"Hallo, here they are! Quiet, now!"

And the chums of the School House almost held their breath in their anxiety. Figgins & Co. were coming back, wheeling their bicycles from behind the New House. It was usual to wheel the machines out of the gates of St. Jim's before mounting. Figgins cast a glance round, expecting to see Blake in sight, and to get a volley of chipping from him. But there was no Blake to be seen.

"Come on, chaps!" said Figgins. "It's going to be a jolly afternoon! I— Scott, what on earth's that?"

Crash!

A milk jug descended from a study window, and smashed to fragments only a few feet from the astounded cyclists. Figgins stared at the fragments, and then looked up at the window of his study. It was open, and he caught a glimpse of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy inside, with his eyeglass screwed into his eye, and a serious expression upon his face. There was a loud crash from the study. It sounded like a table laden with books and fishing-tackle and cricket paraphernalia crashing over on the floor. As a matter of fact that was just what it was.

Figgins & Co. were petrified for a moment. Then Figgins gave a yell of fury.

"The—the bounders! They're wrecking our study! They thought we were gone, I suppose, and— Come on!"

He stood his bicycle up against an elm, and went up the steps of the New House three at a time. Kerr and Wynn promptly followed his example.

On a recent occasion Figgins had raided Blake's study in the School House, and wrecked it in the owner's absence, and it immediately occurred to him that the School House chums were at this precise moment returning the compliment.

Figgins' long legs made rapid work up the stairs. Kerr bounded behind him like a shot, and Fatty Wynn laboured last of the three. The moment they were in the New House the ambushed juniors round the corner came running out.

"The coast's clear," giggled Blake. "Here we are, three jolly good jiggers to be had for nothing! Any takers?"

"Rather!" chuckled Herries. "Buck up!"

"Here we are! Once aboard the lugger and the girl is ours—I mean, Figgys won't be able to catch us in a month of Sundays when we've started!"

And the clutch of the raiders was quickly on the bicycles. Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. had reached their study, and burst into it like a hurricane. They expected to find four foes there, and they were only three, for Marmaduke was away from St. Jim's just then. But they did not care. They would as soon have faced forty as four at that moment.

Figgins kicked the door open, and dashed in.

"Caught you, you rotters!" he roared. "Sock into 'em, kids! Why—what—there's only one! Never mind, collar him!"

D'Arcy had certainly made a wreck of the study. The floor was strewn with all sorts of things, and Figgins & Co. had a great deal of sorting out to do before they got their quarters to rights again. In the midst of the wreckage was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, engaged in casting the books out of the bookcase in various directions.

Blake had hardly meant his faithful follower to make such an exceedingly clean sweep, but D'Arcy was anxious to please, and so he had done things thoroughly.

Figgins & Co. rushed upon D'Arcy as one man. In a twinkling they had him down on the floor in the midst of the havoc he had wrought, and D'Arcy squirmed helplessly in so many hands.

"Don't be so wuff and wude!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't be so beastlay wuff, deah boys! You are spoiling the cwease in my twousahs!"

"I—I'll spoil your face!" howled Figgins. "I'll squash you! I'll—"

He broke off suddenly.

The New House trio released Arthur Augustus as though he had suddenly become red-hot. A shout from the quadrangle rang in at the open window.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whom do the bikes belong to?"

"Figgins & Co."

"Who's going to ride them?"

"We are!"

Figgins & Co. staggered weakly to the window.

Blake and Herries and Digby were in the saddle, holding to each other's shoulders, to keep the machines upright, but had not started riding yet.

Figgins glared out speechlessly at the raiders.

"Get off our bikes!" yelled Kerr. "We'll come down, and—"

Blake let go with one hand, and kissed his fingers to the infuriated juniors at the study window.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" he trilled. "Sorry and sad we go from thee! I say, Figgy, who's Cock House at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" yelled Herries and Digby.

"Who's top of the School House?"

"We are! We are!"

"Who've licked Figgins & Co. hollow?"

"We have!"

"Come on!" muttered Figgins desperately. "There's a chance yet. Buck up!"

He turned from the study window and rushed out. Down the stairs he went like a roebuck, and Kerr and Wynn came leaping and tumbling after him. In their anxiety to recapture the bicycles Arthur Augustus was completely forgotten.

Figgins & Co. burst from the New House. Blake and his chums were pedalling away down the path to the gate, careless of rules at that critical moment. The gates of St. Jim's were wide open ahead.

"Stop!" howled Figgins, darting after the riders. "You beasts, stop! I'll—"

The cyclists put on a spurt, still holding each other's shoulders and keeping abreast. They went down to the gate with a whizz, and Figgins & Co., on foot, laboured behind in vain.

As they dashed through the ancient gateway into the road, and turned to the left towards Rylcombe, Blake glanced back and kissed his hand again at the furious three.

Figgins & Co. stopped, panting and breathless, in the gate. The three cyclists were disappearing in a cloud of dust, far down the road.

The New House juniors did not say anything. Their feelings at that moment were too deep for words. They turned and hurried back to the New House, with a faint hope that Arthur Augustus might still be there. But when they reached the study it was empty. D'Arcy had made good the chance of escape.

"Well, my only hat!" said Figgins, forcing a laugh. "We're done—foiled, diddled, dished, and done, and there's no getting out of it!"

And the Co. had to admit it.

CHAPTER 2.

A Hot Chase.

BLAKE, Herries, and Digby went whizzing down Rylcombe Lane, leaving a cloud of dust behind them, still close abreast, and roaring with laughter as they rode. It was not till they were a mile from St. Jim's that they slackened down, and dropped into a gentler pace.

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"Well, my only hat!" said Blake, forcing a laugh. "Figgy, and no mistake! They can go for a little walk this afternoon, while we take their bikes out for a run."

"Ha, ha, ha! Figgy will be wild. I hope Arthur Augustus got out of the study before Figgins & Co. got back, that's all!" said Herries.

"Trust him for that! Now, which way are we going?"

"What do you say to a run round Wayland, and back by the North Road? It's good going, and we shall get in nicely for tea."

"Good enough! Come on!"

"Wait a bit!" said Blake. "This bike of Figgy's is a jolly good one, but it's a bit too high for me. Stop a bit while I put the saddle down a trifle."

Figgins' toolbag was on the machine, so it did not take Blake long to lower the saddle a little. Kerr and Wynn's bikes suited Herries and Dig to a hair. They were really good machines. The triumphant juniors of the School House were in for an enjoyable spin.

Blake remounted, and the chums rode on through Rylcombe. Suddenly Blake uttered an exclamation.

Outside the tuckshop three bicycles were standing against the kerb, and Blake knew those machines at a glance. They belonged to three School House juniors, none other than Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, known at St. Jim's as the Terrible Three, and the deadly rivals of Blake for the supremacy among the School House juniors.

The Terrible Three were evidently in the tuckshop, having ridden down to Rylcombe from the school, and they had left their machines outside while they sampled the good things within.

"Slow down!" commanded Blake. "Do you see those jiggers?"

"What about them?" asked Herries.

"You know whom they belong to—Tom Merry and his lot. Just keep your eyes on me, chaps, and do as I do."

Blake pedalled ahead, and as he passed Tom Merry's machine, he skillfully caught it in the centre of the handlebars, whisked it away from the kerb, and rode on, wheeling the bike beside his own.

His chums chuckled, and lost no time in following his example.

Herries caught hold of Lowther's machine, and Digby captured Manners', and they followed Blake, pedalling on and wheeling the captured bikes.

There was a shout from the tuckshop door. Manners had caught sight of the raid from the window, happening to glance out into the street, and he had immediately given the alarm.

"Hallo, there!"

"What are you doing with our bikes?"

"Stop, you horrid bounders! Stop!"

Blake glanced back. The door of the shop was filled by three juniors, stricken with rage and consternation at the sight of this raid under their very eyes.

Tom Merry had a half finished glass of lemonade in his hand, Manners half a jamtart, and Monty Lowther a packet of toffee.

The sight of Study No. 6 and their daring raid had interrupted the Terrible Three in the midst of an enjoyable feast in the tuckshop.

Blake grinned as the three came tumbling over each other from the tuckshop out into the street. Tom Merry broke into a run.

"After them, chaps!" he exclaimed. "They've got our jiggers! We'll have to walk home if we don't get them back. Sprint for all you're worth!"

The three dashed into the road, and ran their hardest after the three cyclists. But Blake and his comrades, though encumbered with the captured bikes, made good speed, and the Terrible Three never looked like capturing them. The village was left behind.

"Follow on! Follow on!" exclaimed Blake. "This will do you good, my infants. Nothing like a little exercise on a warm afternoon! We'll leave the bikes for you in the ditch at Wayland. Trot, now!"

Tom Merry knew that the chums would not damage the machines, but he made desperate efforts to overtake the raiders. The cyclists turned into a country lane and scorched on.

"The horrid bounders!" gasped Tom. "They're riding Figgins & Co.'s machines, I can see that, and now they've collared ours. This is Blake's day out, and no mistake."

"We've got to stop them somehow!" panted Manners. "If somebody would only get in their way, and make 'em take a tumble! Good! Look there!"

The Terrible Three gave a gasp of relief.

A huge market-cart was lumbering towards the village, and there certainly wasn't room for the inmates of Study No. 6 to pass it wheeling the machines. The cart filled

the lane almost from side to side, leaving less than a foot on either side between the wheels and the hedges.

Blake saw the danger at once, and slackened down. "Oh, rotten!" he exclaimed. "Look out there, chaps! We can't get past without letting the bikes go! The game's up!"

It was certainly true. If they stopped, the Terrible Three would be up with them before they could get past the cart, and the promised afternoon's spin would end in a free fight, and they could not ride on without abandoning the captured machines.

"Never mind!" panted Herries. "We've given the boundaries a little run for their jiggers, anyway. Stick 'em against the hedge!"

"Right-ho!" Blake rode closer to the side of the lane, and allowed Tom Merry's bike to fall gently against the hawthorns, where it rested without damage. Herries and Digby did the same with the other machines, and then followed Blake.

It was rather a close fit, riding between the lumbering cart and the high, stiff hedge; but the juniors were good cyclists, and they were soon past the obstruction. Then, in the clear road, they were pedalling on.

A couple of minutes later Blake looked back and uttered an exclamation. Three cyclists were coming up the lane, leaning over their handlebars and scorching in determined style.

"The Terrible Three!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "Look out for squalls! They're on the track, by Jove! Ride for your lives, old dears!"

The Terrible Three evidently meant business. They were scorching furiously to overtake the juniors. Blake and his companions put on a spurt, and went flying ahead. Away they went at full speed, with the avengers close behind.

"Good!" grinned Blake. "This is just what I want, a nice little race, and we'll show the Terrible Three—three terrible duffers, I call 'em—that they can't touch one side of us when it comes to cycling! Put the steam on!"

The juniors pedalled away merrily. Close on their track Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther rode their hardest.

Under ordinary circumstances the two parties would have been about equally matched, being much of a size and age, but now the Terrible Three had been eating pastries and drinking ginger-pop in the tuckshop, and so they were far from being as fit as they might have been. And they were hard put to it to keep up with the juniors.

Blake looked back and grinned gleefully. "We're gaining ground!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry is puffing like a grampus, and Manners is wheezing like an old trombone with a hole in it. Monty Lowther looks as if he wants to go to sleep on his handlebars. Put your beef into it, my sons, and make the fur fly. We'll soon drop those bouncers behind. It's not so hot as it was, is it?"

The afternoon had certainly become suddenly cooler. Blake uttered a sudden exclamation as he felt a drop of wet upon his flushed and heated face.

"Hallo! Rain, by jingo!"

He looked up at the sky. Rain had threatened in the morning, but the clouds had cleared off. Now they were driving darkly over the woods from the west, and bringing rain with them. There was a spattering of drops in the dusty road.

"My hat!" said Herries. "This will be pretty muddy when the water comes down!"

"Rather! How lucky we're not riding our own bikes."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes. But I say, it's no fun riding in the rain if it comes on thick, and we haven't our ponchos with us. Shall we stop in Woodford?"

They had dashed into a narrow village street, and passed a little country railway station. Blake did not slacken.

"Oh, rats!" he said. "We're not going to let those fellows catch us because we're afraid of a few drops of rain!"

"It won't be a few drops," said Herries seriously: "there's going to be a regular downpour, if I'm any judge of the weather."

"Well, perhaps you're not," said Blake. "I dare say you're not, when you come to think of it. Anyway, buzz on, and don't waste your breath!"

They went through the village street at full tilt, scattering screaming chickens and quacking ducks on all sides. Then out into the country road again, and onward to Wayland. High hedges were on both sides now, and above the hills glowed purple, soon changing, however, to a dim greyness as the rain came down thicker and the landscape swam in mist.



Riding through Wayland Blake skidded violently on the wet tram-lines, and sat down with an enormous splash in a deep puddle!

Down came the rain, and the juniors turned up their collars and pulled their caps over their ears. The glorious sunny afternoon had turned out shockingly. They dashed on through the rain, with their heads bent over their handlebars. Blake looked back over his shoulder. The road was clear as far as he could see. The rain was pelting down, but it pelted only on the bare road; there were no cyclists in sight. And the chief of the School House juniors gave a chuckle of triumph.

"We've done 'em! They're hung up in Woodford, chaps!"

Herries and Dig looked back. It was the truth. The Terrible Three had undoubtedly stopped in the village the juniors had just passed through, to escape the rain.

"They've stopped!" said Blake. "I admit it's wet, but—"

"We ought to have stopped, too!" grumbled Herries. "Hang it, we shall be wet through to the skin! Blow this rain, I say!"

"Blow it as much as you like, my son. I wish you could blow it away. It's only a couple of miles now to Wayland, and we can hold up there till the rain blows over."

"I don't believe it will blow over this side of midnight."
 "Oh, you're a croaker! Get a move on, you, or we shall be drowned!"

The rain was coming down more heavily every moment. The three juniors scorching on through the thickening mud of the country road, splashed over with it, while the rain soaked through their thin jackets and ran down their necks. If Figgins & Co. could have seen them then they would have felt themselves avenged.

"Wayland!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

The outlying houses of the country town had come in sight. The chums rode into the street, looking and feeling like drowned puppy dogs, and made for the railway station. They had to slacken down now, in spite of the pouring rain, for the tram lines in Wayland made the street dangerous on a wet day. Even Blake's cheerfulness was damped when he skidded on a tram line and sat down on Figgins' bicycle in a deep puddle.

"Ow!" ejaculated Blake. "Don't stop!"

Herries and Digby rode on. Blake remounted, and, riding more cautiously now, he followed his chums. The welcome shelter of the railway station was reached at last.

As they wheeled their machines, dripping with rain and mud, into the station, a good many curious glances were cast at them. They did not look as if they had enjoyed the spin. Blake went to the booking office.

"What's the next train for Rylcombe, please?" he asked.

The man in the office stared at him.

"Hallo! Have you been out collecting mud, young shaver?"

"You mind your own business, John," said Blake severely. "I shall have you discharged if you are familiar with me."

The man stared. He had never been answered quite like that before, but he recognised that he would not get much change out of Jack Blake.

"Next train Rylcombe?" he said. "It's coming in now."

"Then we're just in time. What a bit of luck!"

"Oh, there's lots of time!" said the man, with a grin. "It doesn't start till the London train gets in, which won't be for twenty minutes."

"Oh, blow your old railway!" said Blake crossly. "What's the good of a railway if you never have any giddy trains? Think I'd better walk it. I shall get in first!"

"Much better," agreed the man in the booking office. "If you go by train we shall have to charge you extra for all that mud you're carrying about!"

Blake gave him a withering look.

"Give me three thirds, Johnny, and tickets for the bikes," he said, "and don't you try to be funny! Nature made you funny enough to look at, and there's no need for you to do anything more!"

He got the tickets and left the office.

"Twenty minutes to wait for a beastly train," he announced. "Nice, sticking about in a draughty old station in wet togs, isn't it? Still, there's one comfort!"

"What's that?" growled Herries, who was squeezing the water out of the legs of his trousers and could not see much comfort in anything just then.

"Why, these trains run only once in a blue moon—once an hour, to be exact—and so it's this train that Tom Merry will have to catch. He'll have to wait longer at Woodford than we have here. Ain't that a comfort?" demanded Blake.

"Ye-es," said Herries. "Let's get the bikes down on the platform and into the train, and then look for something to eat."

"That's a good idea."

The local train was already waiting for the London train to arrive. The three bicycles were delivered to a porter to be placed in the luggage-van, labelled for Rylcombe. Going home by train was a sorry ending to an afternoon's spin, but there was no help for it.

Having disposed of the machines the chums found the refreshment-bar, where the girl in charge lighted the gas-stove, around which they were allowed to stand to dry their clothes. A perfect cloud of steam rose from them as they stood there, drinking hot coffee.

"This is a little better," said Blake. "I do hope you don't mind us standing here and making all this giddy steam, miss?"

"Not at all," replied the girl good-naturedly. "I hope you won't catch cold."

"Thanks so much! This is jolly! Hallo, chaps, there's the London train coming in!"

The clanking of the train from the city sounded through the station.

"Still five minutes before the local starts," said Blake lazily. "No hurry; may as well finish steaming ourselves."

A minute later a stranger entered the room. He had evidently just arrived in the train from London, for he was quite dry. He wore a travelling coat and cap, and

carried a leather-strapped bag, upon which were the initials "A. K." He was looking the reverse of amiable as he came in.

"This is a shocking line!" he exclaimed. "The London train has come in five minutes late, and now I am informed that the train will not start for Rylcombe for seven minutes. A hot coffee, please, miss."

He turned a frowning countenance upon the three juniors, who were steaming away merrily.

"What are you doing here?" he commanded. "You have no right to come into a public-room in such a state. I insist upon you leaving it!"

Blake stared hard at him. He didn't like the stranger's look from the first. He had a hard face and little, keen grey eyes that looked like flints, and very tight lips.

"Excuse me, sir," said Blake politely, "but we've got wet, and we're trying to dry ourselves. We really can't clear out, you see."

"Do you want me to box your ears, boy?"

"Not particularly."

"Then do not be impertinent. You should not be so careless as to become wet. If you were in my charge, I should cane you severely! Stand aside!"

As Blake did not budge very quickly, the stranger pushed him out of the way, drew up a chair, and sat down with his coffee.

The juniors surveyed him with deep disgust.

"I didn't know hogs were admitted here, miss," said Blake to the lady behind the counter, loud enough for the stranger to hear.

The man's eyes gleamed, and he gave Blake an expressive glance, but he did not speak. Blake laid half-a-crown on the counter.

"Let me see, I think I'll have a siphon of soda-water, please," he remarked in a thoughtful way.

Herries and Digby stared at him.

"What the dickens—" began Herries.

"My dear chap, don't you start asking questions; you'd never get finished. Thank you, miss. Now I wonder how you work these things?"

"Why, you know as well as—" began Herries, again mystified.

"Let me see," murmured Blake thoughtfully. "If you hold the thing like this, and press it so, and— My hat! Look there, now!"

The nozzle of the siphon was pointing directly towards the back of the stranger's neck, and as Blake pressed a stream of soda-water shot out and caught the unfortunate man just above his collar.

He gave a sudden, startled yell, and sprang to his feet. His hot coffee went with a splash over his knees, and the cup smashed into a thousand pieces on the floor. He gave a yell of rage.

"You young demon!" He whirled round on Blake like a cat. "I'll— Oh! Ooooh!"

As he started saying what he would do, a fresh stream from the siphon caught him in the face, and he broke off, gasping and gurgling.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Blake. "I seem to have nothing but accidents!"

The girl behind the counter was laughing hysterically. Herries and Digby were doubled up, as much at Blake's expression of innocent surprise as at the disaster which had befallen the ill-mannered stranger.

The man, gasping for breath, drenched with soda-water, made a mad rush at Blake. The junior promptly dodged him round one of the little refreshment tables, and at the same time caught him under the chin with a fresh spurt of soda-water. The man staggered into the table, and sent it over with a crash, and as there were cups and saucers standing on it there was a smash of china.

"You—you young demon! I'll—I'll—"

Swish!

The last drops from the siphon came over his chest, and then Blake dropped it and bolted. Herries and Digby hurried after him, yelling with laughter, leaving the ill-tempered passenger more ill-tempered than ever, and stamping about the room like a maniac.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Blake. "I think we gave that chap as good as we got—eh? But we'd better give him a wide berth till the train starts."

"Ha, ha, yes! He won't be safe at close quarters for some time, I fancy!" gasped Herries.

The chums lay low till the train was on the point of starting, keeping out of sight on the stairs leading from the platform, and not till they heard the guard's whistle sound did they dash across the platform to board the train.

Blake tore open the door of the first carriage he came to and scrambled headlong in, and his chums piled in after him anyhow. The carriage door slammed and the train started. Blake picked himself up, gasping.

"That was a close thing!" he exclaimed. "But we're all

right now. anyway. We—why— Oh, my Aunt Sempronia! That's the chap himself!"

It was too true!

Glaring at the unlucky juniors from the other end of the carriage was the man Blake had treated so unceremoniously in the refreshment-room. Instead of escaping him, the juniors had bundled into the same carriage with him!

CHAPTER 3.

At Close Quarters.

BLAKE quickly recovered his coolness. He raised his cap politely to the man who was glaring at him from the further end of the carriage.

"How do you do, sir? I hope you weren't made very wet by that—little accident to the soda-water?"

"You young rascal!"

The man jumped up and picked up his walking-stick. He looked as if he meant business, but the three sturdy juniors were not afraid of him.

Blake eyed him warily.

"I know what you're thinking of doing with that stick, sir," he remarked calmly. "But if it comes anywhere near me, there will be ructions!"

"I will thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"If you start, my dear chap, I think somebody will get hurt," said Blake, wagging his forefinger at the irate passenger in an extremely aggravating way. "I wouldn't be disrespectful for worlds—I'm such a quiet, respectful chap. Do stop that cackling, Herries—but one must draw a line somewhere. I draw it at being whacked with a walking-stick. Now, don't be a giddy goat!"

The three juniors were ready for war, and after looking at them doubtfully for some moments, the passenger seemed to think that it was not good enough. He sat down in his seat again, with a black scowl upon his face. The train thundered on through the rain, and the passenger scowled out of the window into the driving wet.

Blake sat down next to the window on his side.

"Keep your little peepers open, my children," he said. "It's only a few minutes to Woodford, and Tom Merry and his lot will be there as large as life. If they see us they are pretty certain to try to get into this carriage."

The passenger gave a sudden start, and looked across at Blake. Blake noticed it, and wondered what interest the name of Merry could have for him. He thought the man was going to speak for a moment, but instead he turned his gaze again out of the window to the driving rain.

"No good their trying to get in," said Herries, who had noticed nothing. "We're on the safe side of the door, and we'll keep them out easily enough."

"Rather!" said Dig.

The rain was still coming down hard. It was certain that the Terrible Three, who had taken refuge from the wet in Woodford, would return to Rylcombe by train, and Blake knew that they would have to wait for this train. So the juniors were on their guard as the Woodford signal-box appeared in sight, and the train ran into the station.

Blake uttered an exclamation.

"There they are!"

Three boyish forms could be seen upon the platform waiting for the train. Three cycles, labelled for Rylcombe, were in charge of a porter. The Terrible Three were evidently waiting for the train, and by the way they ran along it, peering into the carriages, it was equally evident that they were searching for Blake, Herries, and Dig.

"They're on the warpath!" exclaimed Blake. "Look out!"

By the time the train had clanked to a halt, the Terrible Three had discovered which carriage held their foes. Tom Merry caught hold of the handle of the door. Blake held it tight from inside, and smiled sweetly at them through the glass.

"No entrance!" he said. "Puppies and bounders not admitted!"

"Open this beastly door, Blake!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry made a desperate effort to turn the handle;

(Continued on page 8.)



"Fine Score that!"

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but Blake held it fast, and it hardly budged, and the three juniors within grinned triumphantly at their enemies without.

"Now go!" said Blake. "Go into the guard's van, that's where dogs have to be carried, and it will suit you three bounders. You can't come in here!"

"We're coming in!"

"You may be right, Merry, old son, but I fancy you're not. How are you going to get in?"

"I'll give you a thundering licking for this, Blake!"

"All right; I hope I shall be there when you do it."

"Hurry up, there!"

It was the porter's voice.

"Hurry up, can't you?"

"Better hook it," said Blake. "You can't come in. I'm sorry, but we're rather particular what company we keep."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. He hated being beaten, and he was determined to get into that carriage by hook or by crook. He glanced quickly round.

A young man was standing by, a walking-stick in his hand, and looking on with a grin at Tom's vain effort to turn the handle. An idea flashed into Tom's brain.

"Excuse me," he said. And, with a jerk, he took the walking-stick away from the amused spectator.

"Here, I say, what the dickens—"

Tom Merry paid no heed. He passed the walking-stick through the loop of the carriage door-handle, and seized one end, while Manners gripped the other.

Blake saw the little game, and hung on inside for all he was worth; but it was in vain, for the stick gave Merry and Manners such a purchase that the door-handle went round in a flash, in spite of Blake's efforts. The door came open in a twinkling.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Here, I say, give me my stick, you young—"

The astonished owner of the stick was rushing at Tom Merry. Tom tossed the stick back to him, and unfortunately the young man stumbled over it as it caught him on the legs, and went down on the platform in a heap.

"Thanks, very much!" said Tom. "I'm much obliged!"

"You rascal!" howled the infuriated stranger, staggering to his feet. "I'll—"

But it was too late for reprisals. Tom Merry had bundled headlong into the carriage. Blake, Herries, and Dig closed up to stop him, but Tom charged through them like a Rugger three-quarter, and all four went sprawling in the carriage.

Manners and Monty Lowther came bundling in just as the guard ran along to hold them back, for the train was in motion.

The door slammed shut. Away went the train, and in that carriage the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were mixed up in an almost inextricable heap.

"Gerroff me neck!" came Blake's gurgle from the bottom of the heap.

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped Tom Merry.

The half-dozen of them struggled and scrambled and sorted themselves out. In the process, Tom Merry came in contact with the ill-tempered passenger who was surveying the scene with a scowl on his face. Tom plunged against his knees, and was rewarded with a savage kick.

Tom caught that kick with his ribs, and it surprised him. It hurt him, too. He was not the kind of boy to take a kick in the ribs from anybody, and he promptly hit out in return, and the passenger, who was glaring down at him, received a fist like a lump of iron fairly upon the nose. His head went up with a jerk, and he gave a yell.

"Sorry," said Tom; "tit for tat, you know! Hallo! Hellup! He's dangerous!"

The passenger had seized him, and was boxing his ears furiously. Tom struggled, but, of course, he was no match for a grown man, and he would have fared badly if the other juniors had not come quickly to the rescue.

Blake was the first to grasp the situation. The next moment he grasped the passenger. With both hands on the irate man's collar, he dragged him away from Tom Merry, and jammed him forcibly back into his seat.

The next moment Blake reeled away from a spiteful blow, for the passenger was in a fury now, and he hit out with all his force. But the odds were against him. Manners and Lowther piled on him at once, and flattened him down on the seat, and before he could wrench himself loose, Herries and Digby were upon him.

The passenger gasped and yelled, with four sturdy juniors sitting upon him, and struggled furiously; but Blake, quickly recovering himself, grasped his wrists and held them fast, in spite of his efforts to free them.

"My word!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What a savage beast! Let me get hold of him!"

And he gripped the passenger by the hair, which was

really about the only part left of him for anybody to get hold of. He had almost disappeared under the half-dozen juniors.

The man, although a strong, powerful fellow, and in a raging temper, was helpless with so many against him, and as he found that he could not rise, he began to break into a torrent of bad language.

The boys, though they had been considerably hurt in the struggle, had taken it humorously till now; but as the passenger began to fume wildly, Blake's brow darkened.

"Here, enough of that!" he said sharply.

The irate passenger took no notice, and continued, growing worse, if anything, and Blake jammed a handkerchief into his mouth and stuffed it well in. The fellow gurgled now and gasped, but his flow of eloquence was cut off, and he glared in speechless rage at the juniors.

"Well, this is a nice giddy specimen of a blackguard!" continued Blake, panting. "He's dressed like a decent man, but he could give any hooligan points in language. No, I'm not going to take that out, you rotter! I've had enough of your talk!"

The man made a terrific effort to hurl the juniors off, but it was in vain. He was pinned down by the weight of numbers, and helpless.

"What are we going to do with him?" said Tom Merry. "If he can't act like a civilised human being we can't let him loose."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Oh, stop making that noise!" said Blake. "You make me tired!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"Isn't it like a giddy bulldog? I know. The proper place for him is under the seat, and that's where he's going!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good idea!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"It's no use you gr-r-r-r-ing," said Blake. "You're going under the seat, my beauty, and you're going to stay there until we get to Rylcombe!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"Now, all together, chaps, down with him! It doesn't matter if you hurt him a bit!"

The juniors gripped the unfortunate passenger, and dragged him off the seat. He went down on the floor of the carriage with a thump. There he made a desperate effort to wrench himself loose, but he was more at a disadvantage than ever, and he could not do it. Blake gave him a shove to get him under the seat.

"Now, under you go, my man!" said Tom Merry. "It's no good being obstinate. Get under!"

But the passenger was obstinate. He refused to move.

"Oh, very well!" exclaimed Blake, with a wink to the others. "If you won't go under the seat we'll jump on you! I'll take his face, and you his neck, Merry. Herries can jump on his chest, and you others on his legs. Now, all together!"

The passenger squirmed under the seat like an eel.

"Ha, ha, ha! I thought that would move him! Now, my fine fellow, you're to stay under there, do you hear, till we get to Rylcombe? Any part of you that comes out will get stamped on!"

The man had got the gag out of his mouth by this time, and he was starting again with a flow of language Blake objected to so much.

"Are you going to shut up," demanded Blake, "or shall I backheel you?"

The language continued, and Blake, who was in deadly earnest, back-heeled, and the passenger received a clump on the chest which stopped him.

"I'll thrash all of you within an inch of your lives!" he yelled.

"That's all right," said Blake serenely. "You can say what you like, so long as you don't say naughty things."

"You young rascal!"

"Go ahead!"

"I'll smash you when we get out of the train!"

"Keep it up!"

"I'll skin you! I'll flay you!"

"Any more coming on?"

"I'll—I'll—I'll—Oh!"

Words failed the infuriated man, and his flow of threats ceased. They made no impression at all upon the grinning juniors.

"Now he's safely housed," said Blake, "we can have a little peace. What a bad-tempered person! I'm not sure that I shan't have him given in charge at Rylcombe for causing us annoyance in the train. He ought not to be allowed out alone."

"Rather not!" said Tom Merry. "The beast has made my ribs ache with that kick he gave me. He's in his proper place now. I say, we came into this carriage to scrag you you bounders! It had slipped my memory."

Blake laughed.
"We'd better make it pax, I think, till we get to St. Jim's."

"Right-ho! It's a bargain!"

There was a gasping voice from under the seat.

"Do you boys belong to St. James' College—all of you, I mean, besides Merry?"

"Yes, we do, old son. And what the dickens do you know about Merry?" asked Tom, surprised to find a perfect stranger familiar with his name.

The man did not answer that question.

"You are all boys of St. James'? Then I command you to instantly release me from this ridiculous position!"

"Really, I don't see what our being Saints has got to do with it," said Blake. "Anyway, you're booked till we get to Rylcombe."

"You will be severely punished for this outrage."

"Who started the outrage, old hoss? Anyhow, rats!"

"I am going to St. James' College."

"Are you? Then you can save your time. We don't employ a chucker-out there, old pippin, and there's nothing given away to tramps."

"You young fool, I am the new master!"

Blake laughed.

"Why don't you say you're the Prince of Wales, old hoss?"

"I tell you I am the new master!" howled the passenger.

"My name is Keene—Mr. Amos Keene, and I am the new master of the Shell."

"Rats, and more rats!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Don't you believe me, you young fool?"

"No, I don't—not one side of you!"

"Innocence, and no mistake," said Herries. "Fancy expecting us to believe that a chap who used such language would be a master at St. Jim's."

"He's off his rocker!" agreed Tom Merry. "He might tell us something a little less steep. If he said he was the new school porter, we might swallow it."

"I am the new—"

"Oh, don't keep it up!"

"The new master of the—"

"Ring off! Back pedal!"

"Shell—"

"My dear chap, we know you're romancing, so why don't you shut up?" exclaimed Blake, getting exasperated. "You can't scare us with a tale like that. Now, do be quiet, like a good little boy. I don't want to have to back-heel you again! We shall soon be in Rylcombe now, and I'm sure you might be very comfy where you are if you made up your little mind to do it."

Rylcombe, indeed, was already in sight.

Through the falling rain the train rushed on, the passenger still under the seat. The boys had not attached the slightest credence to his statement. The train slackened down in the station, and Blake opened the door of the carriage.

"Now you can get out, Mr. Amos Keene, master of the Shell!" he chuckled. "Come on, kids! Hallo, there's Mr. Kidd!"

The Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's was walking slowly along the train. He seemed to be looking for somebody, as if he expected to meet someone there. He glanced at the boys as they crowded from the carriage. The juniors raised their caps.

"Hallo!" said the Housemaster genially. "Caught in the rain, my lads?"

"Yes," said Blake ruefully. "We trained it home, sir. Got wet."

"You look it. As soon as you get to St. Jim's, undress immediately and go to bed," said Mr. Kidd. "The consequences may be serious if you neglect such a wetting. Leave your bicycles here, and take the cab to the school."

"Yes, sir. But about going to bed—"

"You will do as I tell you," said Mr. Kidd. "I know best, Blake!"

"Yes, sir, of course!" said Blake submissively.

Mr. Kidd's glance turned to the train again.

"I was expecting to meet a gentleman who was to arrive by this train," he exclaimed. "Have you seen a—"

He broke off abruptly.

His words had struck a chill of horror to the juniors. But Mr. Kidd did not observe them. His gaze was fixed upon a figure that emerged from the carriage.

A man with his collar torn out, his necktie dangling, his shirt crumpled, his clothes in disorder and smothered with dust, his nose smeared with red, his face horribly dirty and black with fury.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Kidd. "Who can this be? It is not possible that—"



Herries, Digby, and Blake seized the bikes of the Terrible Three and started to ride away with them. There was a shout from the tuckshop door as the Shellites discovered what had happened!

"It is possible!" howled the terrible-looking object. "I am the new master, sir, whom you have just come to meet! I have been the victim, sir, of an outrage!"

Blake staggered back weakly against Herries.

"My hat!" he murmured. "Carry me home to die! We've put both feet into it this time, and no mistake!"

CHAPTER 4.

The New Master of the Shell.

MR. KIDD stared at the strange apparition with his eyes nearly starting out from his head.

"Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "Is it possible that you are Mr. Keene?"

"I am Mr. Keene!"

"The new master of the Shell?" asked the Housemaster faintly.

"Yes, the new master of the Shell."

"But—but how—goodness gracious—how did you come into that dreadful state?"

"I have been the victim of a brutal assault, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Keene furiously. "These boys, sir, attacked me in the railway carriage like a set of hooligans, and—"

"These boys—Blake—Merry? Impossible!"

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"I—I—!" The Housemaster passed a hand over his brow. Curious passengers were already collecting to gaze with smiling wonder at the figure the unfortunate Mr. Keene cut. "This is no place to investigate into this matter," Mr. Kidd broke off abruptly. "Come into the waiting-room,

sir, for goodness' sake, and try to get yourself a little more presentable!"

"I insist—"

"Come, come, lose no time! Boys, I shall see you at the school."

Mr. Kidd hurried the new master into the comparative privacy of the waiting-room, there to make some attempt at improving his appearance before taking him to St. Jim's.

The juniors looked at each other in dismay.

"He was telling the truth, after all!" groaned Blake.

"He's really a new master at St. Jim's!"

"How were we to know?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He certainly didn't talk like one."

"My hat, no! What are we going to do?"

"Well, my opinion is that we're going to get a licking."

"A nice ending to an afternoon out!"

"Can't be helped," said Tom, his usual saying when matters looked bad. "Can't be helped, old son. Let's get to the school. Mr. Kidd told us to go to bed like good little boys, and we'll obey orders—rather! If the row is postponed till to-morrow morning, the new master may have got over it a bit."

The boys left the station. The bicycles were left there to be sent on, Blake giving directions for the property of Figgins & Co. to be delivered at the New House at St. Jim's. Then the six juniors crammed themselves into the station cab and rolled off to the school. They saw the Head's carriage waiting outside the station. Mr. Kidd had evidently come in it to meet the new master.

"This is rotten!" said Blake. "We've made an enemy, my pippins, and that chap looks a spiteful beast, too. He'll make us feel it!" Then his face broke into a smile. "But it was funny, wasn't it?"

And all the juniors laughed. Nothing ever depressed

their spirits for long, and, as Blake said, the happening had certainly been comical from one point of view.

The station hack rolled in at the gates of St. Jim's, and stopped before the School House. Three youthful figures were ambushed in the porch—the figures of Figgins & Co.

"That's them!" said Figgins in a vengeful whisper. "I knew they would get hung up by the rain and would have to get home without the jiggers."

"Keep out of sight," muttered Kerr. "We've got to take them by surprise."

The juniors alighted, and Blake paid the cabby. The six came together into the porch, and then there was a sudden commotion.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "The enemy! Look out! Sock into them!"

The luck of Figgins & Co. was out that day. They had expected to have an equal number of foes to deal with, and they suddenly found that the enemy were six to three.

They attacked gallantly. But the School House boys were all over them in a minute.

Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three made common cause, of course, against the New House. They had their little disputes at home, but against the common foe they were as one. Figgins & Co. were hurled forth into the cold, cold rain, and they sat down in the wet, looking the reverse of happy.

Blake kissed his hand to them from the top of the steps.

"Don't you find it wet out there, Figgy?" he said.

The New House juniors jumped up. For a moment Figgins was inclined to charge up the steps to attack, reckless of odds; but six juniors were waiting for him to do it, and prudence prevailed. He made the signal of retreat, and the three heroes of the New House turned away across the quad towards their own quarters.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Figgy, hear me smile!"

Figgy heard him smile, but would not turn his head, and the three New House juniors disappeared into the rain.

"That was rough on old Figgy," grinned Blake. "It's hard cheese, laying a giddy ambush and falling into it yourself."

The door opened and the juniors walked in. They lost no time in obeying the Housemaster's instructions, thinking it safer to be in bed when the new master arrived.

"This afternoon hasn't been exactly what you'd call a success," said Blake, as he tucked himself in, in the dormitory. "We've saved Figgins & Co. from getting a drenching on their bikes. Still, they must have got pretty wet just now in the quad, and that's some comfort. Hallo! That's the bell downstairs!"

"It's the new master," growled Herries. "I'm going to sleep. I shouldn't wonder if they come up here to talk to us."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good wheeze. I wonder if Tom Merry will have sense enough to do it? We have, anyway. Mind, all three of us are fast asleep if anyone comes in!"

"Sound as a bell," agreed Digby.

The three Fourth-Formers listened intently. They were alone in the big Fourth Form dormitory—dusky now with the shades of cloudy evening. Some time passed quietly, and then the sound of footsteps was heard.

"Cave!" whispered Blake.

The door opened. Two men came in—Mr. Kidd, the Housemaster, and the new master of the Shell, Mr. Amos Keene.

They came straight towards the three occupied beds.

Mr. Kidd was looking worried, and the new master spiteful.

"Blake," said Mr. Kidd.

Blake snored.

"Blake, I want you to explain—"

Snore!

"He is not asleep," said Mr. Keene savagely. "It is absurd to suppose that he is asleep so early. He is pretending, Mr. Kidd."

The Housemaster did not reply. He came closer to Blake's bed.

"Blake, are you asleep?"

Snore!

Mr. Kidd turned to Herries' bedside. Herries appeared to be sleeping the sleep of the just. His face was half-buried in the pillow; one eye was visible, and that was closed tightly—so tightly that Mr. Kidd was suspicious.

"Herries, are you asleep?"

Snore!

"Herries, I say—"

Snore!

Mr. Kidd, with a faint smile, turned to Digby's bed; but Dig, anticipating questioning, gave a tremendous snore to start with. It was a good deal too loud to be natural, and Blake smiled involuntarily.

"There, you see," exclaimed Mr. Keene, spitefully, "the boy is grinning at us! He is only shamming!"



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"What rot!" exclaimed Blake, forgetting himself for a moment. "I was only smiling in my sleep! Oh, Columbus!"

He had given himself away. The two masters turned towards him; but Blake was not beaten yet. His eyes were closed tightly.

"Blake, as you are awake, I wish you to explain——"

Snore!

"Blake, you must tell me——"

Snore!

Mr. Keene's hand was outstretched to shake the boy, but the Housemaster put it aside.

"After all, Mr. Keene, to-morrow morning will do as well," he said. "I really do not see where the great hurry is, and you must be in need of refreshment yourself."

Mr. Keene set his teeth hard.

"These boys," he said, "were not the worst. The worst of the boys was the one called Merry—Tom Merry."

"Very well," said Mr. Kidd resignedly, "we will go to the Shell dormitory."

And the two masters left the room. Blake sat up in bed and grinned genially.

"Kidd's a genial old sort," he exclaimed. "But that new master is a bundle of rubbish, and I can foresee ructions in the School House, my infants. I wonder how he will get on with the Shell? Queer, isn't it, how down he seems to be on Tom Merry? He knew his name in the train. And, as a matter of fact, old Tom wasn't so rough on him as I was. I wonder if he knew anything of Merry before he came to St. Jim's?"

Perhaps there was something in Blake's surmise. The face of the new master was very dark and spiteful when he entered the Shell dormitory, and stopped beside Tom Merry's bed. The Terrible Three had gone promptly to bed, but they were sitting up, talking cricket, as it unfortunately happened, when the masters came in.

"Merry," said Mr. Kidd, "this gentleman is the new master of your Form—Mr. Keene."

Tom bowed as well as he could.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir," he said politely.

Mr. Kidd went on hastily:

"Merry, Mr. Keene lays a very serious complaint against you and Manners and Lowther, and also against Blake, Herries, and Digby. Unless you can explain the matter, I shall have no alternative but to send you before the Head."

"I hope not, sir."

"Do you deny," exclaimed Mr. Keene, "that you assaulted me in the most outrageous way in the train coming to Rylcombe, Merry—you and the others?"

"We didn't know you were coming to St. Jim's, sir."

"I told you distinctly that I was a new master coming to this school."

"Yes; but—but——"

"But what, Merry?" said the Housemaster. "You had better speak out frankly."

"We didn't believe him, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Merry, what right had you to doubt a gentleman's word?"

"He wasn't talking like a St. Jim's master," said Tom Merry demurely. "We—we thought we were dealing with a hooligan, sir."

Mr. Keene turned scarlet with rage, and the Housemaster coughed.

"I don't understand you, Merry. Do you mean to say that you assaulted Mr. Keene because you did not like the way he talked? Anything more absurd——"

"Oh, no, sir! We shoved him under the seat because he assaulted us. He won't deny that he started the row, though, of course, we're very sorry. And we were a bit rough with him, sir, because of what he said."

"I don't understand you. What did he say?"

"What did he say, Manners?"

"I couldn't repeat it," said Manners. "Lowther will tell you."

"No, I won't," said Lowther. "I've been properly brought up. Besides, I don't know half the words Mr. Keene used."

The new master changed colour. For the first time it occurred to him that the juniors also had something to complain of. In his rage he had forgotten that.

Mr. Kidd looked from the new master to the boys, and from the boys back again to the new master. Perhaps he guessed a good deal, for his brow grew very stern.

"Merry, you are making a serious allegation. Do you mean to say that Mr. Keene used language unfit for boys to hear?"

"Mr. Keene can tell you best what language he used, sir."

The new master broke in hastily:

"I may have used some angry expressions. It all seems to be a mistake. If Merry assures me that he did not think I was a master at the school——"

"Honour bright, sir! I mean it, I do assure you!"

"Then I am willing to overlook the matter," said Mr. Keene, speaking as if the words were wrenched from him. "I do not wish, if it can be helped, to signalise my coming to this school by the infliction of a punishment. Mr. Kidd, if you are agreeable, I am willing that the matter should be passed over."

The Housemaster gave a stiff nod. He had his own thoughts about the matter, and it was pretty plain that his opinion of the new master was not a high one.

"Certainly, Mr. Keene! Boys, the matter ends here. I hope you will try to get on better with your new master in the future."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Kidd walked to the door. The new master of the Shell followed him. He gave Tom Merry a dark look as he followed the Housemaster out of the dormitory.

"We're well out of that!" chuckled Tom Merry. "It will be good news for Blake in the morning. I say, chaps, I don't like that chap a little bit, and if we've got to put up with him in the Shell, there will be ructions."

And Tom Merry's predictions proved to be correct.

CHAPTER 5.

Pets—and a Parrot!

THE new master at St. Jim's did not become popular. Boys are sometimes very keen, and the boys of St. Jim's did not take to Mr. Amos Keene. They did not know exactly why they did not like him; but, at the same time, they were quite, quite sure that they did not like him a little bit.

To the other masters he was very pleasant and suave, and he got along with them pretty well, except perhaps Mr. Kidd, the master of the School House. The Housemaster was always polite to Mr. Keene, but he did not like him.

The boys of the Shell disliked him from the top boy to the lowest. And the Fourth Form, whom he took in English history, disliked him equally.

Mr. Keene boarded in Mr. Kidd's House, and so the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 saw more of him than their fellow-Formers in the New House. And the more they saw of him the less they liked him.

Mr. Keene did not go in for sports of any kind, for one thing. That was the head and the front of his offending, in the first place. Then he was spiteful, and would sometimes rap knuckles with a ruler in a way that was exceedingly unpleasant to the recipients of those little favours. Whenever he imposed lines, he never forgot them afterwards, as some of the other masters did, and he imposed more than any other two masters in the school.

His nature was hard and cold, and such a nature was not likely to pull well with boys. It was noted from the first that he had a peculiar dislike for Tom Merry. It could not have been wholly due to the adventure in the train, for on that famous occasion Jack Blake had certainly been more to the fore than Tom Merry.

It seemed almost as if he had known Tom in the past, and had saved up a dislike for him, as it were. Yet, as far as Tom knew, he had never seen the man before he met him in the train at Rylcombe.

There was, in fact, some slight smack of mystery about the new master, which probably added to his unpopularity. But a couple of days after the arrival of Mr. Amos Keene the boys had other things to think about, more important than the new master.

Tom Merry brought the news to his chums of the Shell, bursting into the study with an excited look. Manners and Lowther were entertaining Study No. 6 to tea, peace having been made between the rivals of the School House for a time.

"Hallo!" what's the row?" asked Blake, looking up from his teacup. "Any news?"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "You can give me a cup of tea, Manners. I say, what do you think? You know the new building they've been rigging up in the rear of the Head's house?"

"Rather!" said six voices together.

And there was a general grin. Not long ago, Herr Schneider had been shut up in the cellar under that building, and the juniors were not likely to forget it.

"Well, we wondered what it was for," continued Merry. "I've just found out. The Head himself said so."

"Said what?"

"We are going to be allowed to keep pets in the school."

now, and that's where they're to be kept. You remember that pets were barred when—"

Blake giggled.

"When Mellish's badger got into Mr. Lathom's bed-room, and nearly scared him out of his wits? Rather! They cleared us all out of them then, and I had to part with my white rabbits. They pretended it wasn't hygienic to keep them in the studies."

"Rot, of course!" said Digby.

"Well, the Head says we shall be allowed to keep pets in the new building," went on Tom Merry. "It's been put up for the special purpose. I'm going down to Rylcombe to-morrow to old Salmon's to get some white rats."

"And I'll get my rabbits again," said Blake, with a look of satisfaction. "And—my hat!—that parrot that Salmon showed us last week!"

"A parrot!" said Tom Merry. "Good wheeze! You can teach it to talk."

"It knows as much already about talking as I do," replied Blake. "It's a wonderful bird, and it will repeat things you say after you've said 'em. The worst of it is Salmon wants such a thundering big price for him. We shall have to club together, chaps."

"Well, we'll all go down to-morrow afternoon and see the giddy parrot," said Tom Merry. "If it's as good as you say we ought to be able to get some fun out of it."

On the morrow afternoon, which was Saturday and a half-holiday, the juniors set off for Rylcombe in high spirits. They reached Salmon's, the naturalist's shop in the village, where the wants of the Saints who had a predilection for natural history were usually supplied. It was a little, old-fashioned shop crammed with stuffed birds, fishing-tackle and rods, bats, and nets, and all kinds of paraphernalia dear to boys' hearts.

Mr. Salmon, a little, old-fashioned man, greeted the boys politely. He could see that they had come bent on making purchases.

"What can I do for you to-day, young gentlemen?" he asked, peering at them over his glasses.

"You can show us that giddy parrot!" said Blake promptly. "I've brought these chaps to hear him talk."

Mr. Salmon lifted down a round cage, and set it on the counter. A sleepy-looking green parrot inside opened his round, red eyes and blinked at the juniors.

"Polly like sugar?" said Blake, producing a lump. "Poor old Polly! Like sugar?"

"Blow me tight!" said Polly. "Shiver my top masts!" So natural was the voice that for a moment the juniors could hardly believe that the parrot had spoken.

"I say, that bird has belonged to a sailor!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I hope he doesn't use any of the words they use sometimes in the fo'c'sle?"

"No, he's quite a respectable bird," said Mr. Salmon. "He'll talk to you sometimes like a Dutch uncle, and sometimes for hours he won't talk at all. Then he'll come out with something you've been saying, that you'd never have thought he noticed. Oh, he's a queer bird, he is! And I'm offering him cheap at the figure I've named, Master Blake."

Blake made a grimace.

"Cheap, he may be, Mr. Salmon, but I'm not a giddy millionaire. What do you say, chaps? Shall we club up and buy him? He's a funny looking freak, anyhow!"

"He's a funny looking freak, anyhow!" quoth the parrot.

"Here, Polly old dear, you're getting personal!" exclaimed Blake. "Where are your manners, you bounder? But I say, chaps, he picked that up awfully quick. I think we must have him."

The juniors, after some discussion, agreed that they must. None of them was very flush at that particular moment, but there were seven of them, and between them they raised the required amount. As the parrot could not be kept in their own quarters there was no difficulty likely to arise owing to common ownership of the bird.

Having completed the purchase the cage was wrapped up, and Blake took possession of it.

"I'll carry him to the school myself!" he declared. "You chaps ready?"

They were not ready. They had other purchases to make. It was an hour before they left the old naturalist's shop, and when they went they were laden with all kinds of queer cargo—white mice and rabbits, canaries and tortoisés; and D'Arcy carried a globe of gold fish.

Figgins & Co. met them as they came into the quadrangle. "Hallo, here's funny old Figgins!" said Blake. "Hallo, Figgy, how do you do? Have you got all that mud cleaned off your bike yet?"

Figgins pretended not to hear the question.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"Pets, my kid—pets to be kept in the little wooden hut," said Blake. "Tom Merry started by keeping a fat German in the cellar, you know, and now we're going to keep a parrot and other things. Like to see Polly?"

"Rather!" said Figgins, interested.

Blake uncovered the cage. Polly blinked in the light and stared at Figgins.

"Measly looking wretch!" said Figgins disdainfully. "Do you call that a parrot?"

"Yes, and a jolly good one!" said Blake wrathfully. "What do you know about parrots? You should hear him talk!"

"Talk!" sniffed Figgins. "I don't believe he can talk!" "He can say all sorts of things!" exclaimed Blake indignantly. "Can't you, Polly? Pretty Polly! Say something to the bounder!"

Polly remained solemnly silent.

"Talk, Polly!" said Blake coaxingly. "Talk, old Polly! Pretty Polly! Polly like sugar?"

The parrot gave a cackle.

"Yah!" said Figgins. "He can't talk for toffee. Rats!" "Hallo, here's funny old Figgins!"

Blake gasped, and Figgins turned crimson.

"My very words," said Blake. "Can't he talk now?"

"Why, you horrid brute——" began Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha! Can't he talk? Go on, Polly!"

"Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins!"

The parrot, having once started, went on at a great rate, and the juniors howled with laughter at the expression upon the face of the New House chief.

"Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins!"

Blake chuckled as he dropped the cover on the cage again. "That's enough, Polly. Think he can talk now, Figgy?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins.

Potts, the Office Boy!



A muffled voice came from under the cover.
"Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins! Here's funny old Figgins!"

The School House juniors laughed as they marched on. They entered the little building and began to unload themselves. The parrot was soon the centre of attraction for a crowd of interested juniors.

"We'll teach him all sorts of things," said Blake, with a grin. "Now, Polly, you've got to learn to say, 'Schneider, how you vos?' Do you hear?" "Schneider, how you vos?"

But Polly had become silent, and not a word would she utter, and at last Blake had to give it up.

"Obstinate boulder!" said Blake. "Never mind, he'll pick it up. We want to fill him up with nice things like that to say, and get Herr Schneider to come and look at him. Chaps, I think that bird will help us to dig up a lot of fun!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "And we must teach him some compliments to pay Mr. Keene when—Oh crumbs!"

He broke off as Mr. Keene entered the room.

"Merry!"

The master of the Shell spoke in the hard, harsh tone he usually used in speaking to Tom Merry.

Tom touched his cap.

"Yes, sir?"

"I gave you an imposition this morning, I believe?" said the master of the Shell.

"Yes, sir. A hundred lines from Virgil, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Have you written them out?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Did I not tell you to do so before you left the school?"

"I—I believe you did, sir. I quite forgot."

Mr. Keene smiled sarcastically.

"Then you must learn not to forget, Merry. You will write them out and bring them to me before tea, and another hundred lines, as well."

Tom looked dismayed, as well he might. The imposition would fill up every minute that was left of his half-holiday.

"Oh, I say, sir, wouldn't it do if I did them this evening?"

Mr. Keene glared at him.

"It would not do, Merry. When I say a thing I mean it. It would not do. You will bring me the two hundred lines before tea, or I shall double the imposition and report you to the Head!"

"I will do them, sir," said Tom quietly, but with a glint in his eyes.

"You had better, Merry! If you forget again, the consequences may be serious for you!" said Mr. Keene, clicking his teeth.

And he walked out.

"The beast!" said Blake, looking at Tom sympathetically.

"What has he got such a down on you for, Tommy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom. "He seemed to dislike me from the first. He gave me the impot this morning for next to nothing. I just whispered to Manners. Fancy a hundred lines for that! Any other master wouldn't have given twenty."

"Keene is a beast!" said Blake.

"Keene's a cad!" said Manners.

"Keene's a rotten outsider!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"I wish we could get the brute kicked out of St. Jim's!"

"I wish we could!" said Tom, with a sigh. "Well, I suppose I'd better cut off and do that impot. I don't want to be reported to the Head."

"I'll come and help you," said Blake generously.

Tom shook his head.

"Thanks, Blake, that's good of you, but it's no go. Old Keene is as sharp as a needle. Monty did some of my lines for me yesterday, and he detected the difference in the handwriting at once, and he made me write out the whole imposition again—what I had done myself, as well as what Monty had done."

"The horrid boulder! What a howling cad!"

"So I'd better cut off. Ta-ta!"

And Tom Merry went away to his study to work through the imposition. It was a long and hard one, and, though Tom set to work with a will, the lines seemed endless before him. He commenced with the familiar, "Arma virumque cano," and went on slowly through the first book of Virgil weary of his task before it was half over. Manners and Lowther came into the study while he was still hard at work.

"Nearly done, Tom?" asked Manners, looking over his shoulder.

Tom grunted.

"Another sixty to do," he replied.

"Then you'll never do it, old kid. The tea bell goes in ten minutes."

"I shall have to take them in unfinished, then," said Tom. He finished the line he was doing, and rose from his chair.

"There'll be a row, I expect."

"Try and soap him over," said Manners. "You mustn't have any more this evening. Blake is going to smuggle the parrot into his study, and he wants us to go there and help teach him to talk."

"Not much good trying to soap over old Keene," said Tom, and he took up the lines he had written, and went to the study of the master of the Shell with them.

Mr. Keene was there, and he looked up sharply as Tom came in, with his black, ferret-looking eyes, that always had an unpleasant glint in them. He had been reading a letter, and he laid it on the table as Tom entered.

"Well, Merry, have you done your lines?" he asked pleasantly.

"I've done all I could, sir," said Tom respectfully. "I haven't had time to do the whole two hundred. I have been doing them ever since you spoke to me, sir."

"Indeed! It would have been better if you had not forgotten them in the first place, Merry, would it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have not finished them, then? Very good! Hold out your hand!"

A deep flush came into Tom's face as the master of the Shell picked up a cane from the table. He had had it there all ready, evidently anticipating that the junior could not get the imposition finished in time.

"Hold out your hand, Merry!"

"You are going to cane me, sir?"

"Yes, I am going to cane you!" snapped Mr. Keene savagely. "Hold out your hand!"

Tom slowly held out his right hand. The cane came down upon it with a slash that made him wince.

"Now the other!"

A second slash made the left palm feel as if it had been burned.

Inside Information!



"Now the right hand again!"

Tom put his hands behind him, his eyes sparkling.

"You're not going to cane me any more now!" he broke out passionately. "If you touch me again I will complain to Mr. Kidd!"

The master of the Shell stared at him for a moment, as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"Merry!"

Tom did not speak, but his hands remained behind him, and his clear, blue eyes met the master's steadily.

Mr. Keene seemed to be at a loss for a moment. He was inclined to take Tom by the collar and thrash him without mercy; but he felt that it would not do. Punishment was rarely inflicted by the under-masters at St. Jim's, serious cases being dealt with by the Head himself. Mr. Keene had never looked for resistance, but he knew that if his conduct was made known to the Housemaster, he would find himself in trouble. And the new master was already not on the best of terms with Mr. Kidd.

There was an awkward pause. It was broken by an unlooked-for incident. The study window was open, and the wind at that moment blew the letter Mr. Keene had been reading off the table, and it fluttered to Tom Merry's feet.

Tom stooped to pick it up, as a matter of course. The new master muttered something, and sprang forward to snatch it from him. To Tom's amazement Mr. Keene's face had gone quite pale, and his eyes were startled, almost, scared.

His hand knocked against Tom's, and the letter fell to the floor again. It was impossible for Tom to avoid seeing the writing then. It was a thick, black writing, which showed up heavily on the thin, foreign notepaper. It was a hand he knew!

He did not touch the letter again, but allowed Mr. Keene to pick it up. The new master thrust it hastily into his pocket. Then his ferret eyes searched Tom's face.

Tom's look was startled, amazed.

Mr. Keene saw that he had seen the handwriting of the letter, and that he had recognised it. He bit his lip hard. Then, with a wave of his hand, he dismissed the boy.

Tom, glad enough to escape, hurried from the room, and hastened back to his study, where Lowther and Manners were waiting for him.

"Got off all right?" said Manners. "Hallo, what's happened."

Tom's startled look caught his attention at once.

"A giddy mystery," said Tom. "I don't know what to think. Keene was reading a letter when I went in. The wind blew it off the table, and I picked it up."

"Nothing particularly startling about that, that I can see."

"I saw the writing by accident, and recognised it. It's the writing of my cousin, Philip Phipps, in India."

Manners and Lowther stared at him.

"You're dreaming!" exclaimed Manners. "What could your cousin want to write from India to a master at this school for?"

"I don't know; but I'm certain of what I say."

"Then it looks fishy," said Manners, shaking his head.

"How do you get on with that cousin of yours—chummy?"

"I haven't seen him for years, but we never pulled very well together. He's ten years older than I am, you see, and not a bit like me."

"We said that Keene acted as if he knew something about you before he came to the school," said Manners thoughtfully. "If he knows your cousin that would account for it. But why he should be down upon you, Tom, is a funny mystery. Hallo, there goes the tea bell!"

The three hurried down to tea. The matter was certainly mysterious, but for the time they dismissed it. Amazed as they were, they did not dream of the strange developments that were to follow the coming of the new master to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

A Row in Study No. 6.

BLAKE hurried into Study No. 6 in the School House. The parrot-cage was in his hand, with a cloth wrapped round it. He set it down upon the table with a gasp of relief.

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were awaiting him eagerly. The excitement of their new possession had not passed off yet. In spite of the rule that all the schoolboys' pets were to be kept in the building devoted for that purpose, Blake and his chums saw no reason why they shouldn't have the parrot in the study if they liked.

They only wanted to teach it to talk, and certainly there was no harm in that. Other pets kept by the juniors were not so harmless, and so the general rule was made that no pets should be kept in the studies. But, as Blake said,

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what was the good of a rule without an exception to it? Study No. 6 were prepared to supply the exception.

"Got it?" said Herries, D'Arcy, and Dig, in one voice.

"Yes!" gasped Blake. "But I had a dickens of a job getting it here. Taggles was nosing around the place, and I had to square him with a bob to let me get away. Horrid, greedy, old blackmailing bounder, that Taggles. Then I met Kildare in the quad, and I was only just able to dodge him, and he called after me. He wondered what I was carrying, but I don't think he tumbled. Then, as I came into the School House, there was the Keene beast coming downstairs."

"Oh crumbs! Did he spot you?"

"I don't think so, as I dodged into a study pretty quick. He passed the door, anyway. I was in a mortal dread that Polly would begin to cackle and give me away. But she didn't, bless her little heart!"

"All's well that ends well," said Dig. "Let's see her."

Blake removed the cover from the cage. The green parrot blinked solemnly in the light.

"Now, old lady, begin," said Blake persuasively, as if the parrot could understand him. "Go hon! Talkez-vous!"

"Hallo, here's the guests!" exclaimed Herries, as the Terrible Three came in.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther entered the study, and Tom closed the door.



As Mr. Keene grabbed at Blake, Tom Merry shot out his foot and tipped up the table, shooting books and in-

"Here's the parrot!" said Blake cheerfully. "Hallo! What are you listening for, Merry?"

Tom's head was bent towards the door.

"I saw old Keene standing in his doorway," he said. "He was sniffing up and down the corridor like a terrier. Do you think he spotted you bringing the cage in?"

"Oh dear! I hope not! Hang him! Why can't he let good boys like us rest in peace, and not keep on chivvying us?" exclaimed Blake. "Lock the door, and if he comes along we'll pretend not to hear him. I've got some food for Polly, and it's about time she was fed."

Tom Merry turned the key and the juniors surrounded the table upon which the parrot's cage was standing. Blake opened the door of the cage.

"Now, Polly, don't flutter about; you're not going to get out. Talk, you bounder! I didn't pay through the nose for you to keep as silent as an Egyptian mummy!" exclaimed Blake, rather indignantly.

"Keene's a beast! Keene's a cad! Keene's a rank outsider!"

Blake staggered back in surprise. The parrot blinked and winked, and whistled and cackled, and the sentences it had picked up in the afternoon, and had doubtlessly repeated many times since, came out in a vigorous stream, in the midst of cackling and whistling.

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a beast! Keene's a rank outsider! Here comes funny old Figgins! Ha, ha, ha! Schneider, how you vos? Keene's a cad! Blow me tight! Shiver my topgallants! Ha, ha! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Blake stared at the eerie bird in amazement. "Well, my only trilby hat!" he exclaimed at last. "Did you ever see such a bird! If Keene should come along and hear her talking—"



... brought the master crashing to the floor. Digby immediately had inkpot on top of the fallen master.

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!" The word Keene on Blake's lips had started the parrot off again.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "What a stwango bird! Weally, if Mr. Keene should heah that, I am afwaid there would be wuctions."

"Ructions!" said Blake. "I should say so. I say, Polly—"

Knock!

The juniors stared at each other in dismay. It was a sharp knock at the locked door, and the handle was tried the next moment.

"Keene!" whispered Blake. "He's spotted us! There's no way of gettins rid of Polly! My hat!"

"Open this door!"

It was the voice of the master of the Shell.

"The cupboard!" said Dig hastily. "Shove her in there!"

"If she talks—"

"Perhaps she won't in the dark. Anyway, it's a chance."

Blake shoved the cage into the cupboard in a twinkling. He closed the door and stood with his back against it.

Knock!

"Open the door, Merry!"

Tom Merry unlocked the door and threw it open. The master of the Shell strode into the study, his brow dark and his face flushed.

He cast a quick glance round the room, evidently in search of something. The juniors tried to assume expressions of innocence, but the attempt was not very successful.

"How dare you lock the door of this study?" demanded Mr. Keene, in a low voice. "What mischief was brewing here that you were so afraid of interruption?"

"We weren't brewing anything, sir," said Blake innocently. "We were going to have a study brew to-night, but the funds ran out."

"Blake, tell me instantly why the door was locked!"

"Certainly, sir. We locked the door because—because—"

"Instantly!"

"Because we thought some meddling bounder might come along and shove his long nose into the study, sir," said Blake meekly.

Mr. Keene turned purple.

"Blake! You dare to apply such expressions to me—to me—"

"Certainly not, sir," said Blake, in surprise. "I said we were afraid some meddling bounder might come along and shove his long nose into the study. So we were, sir. I wouldn't dream of calling you a meddling bounder, sir. I respect you too much, sir."

Mr. Keene was speechless. His experience of Jack Blake of St. Jim's had, as yet, been a short one, and he did not know the chief of Study No. 6 very well yet. He was not prepared for Blake's coolness and nerve.

"Blake!" he gasped at last. "This impudence—this insolence—"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Blake, looking shocked. "I couldn't be impudent to you, sir. We all respect you so much. Don't we, chaps?"

"Rather!" said Herries. "We respect you, sir, as much as if—as if you were our grandfather, sir. We do, really."

"We wouldn't call you such a thing as a meddling bounder for worlds!" said Dig. "We are always glad to see you in the study, sir. You make it look quite home-like!"

"Wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, deah sir, we wespsect you so much—Gwoooooh!"

A sudden box on the ears had cut short D'Arcy's expression of respect.

"This impertinence," said Mr. Keene, breathing hard, "will not serve you. I have reason to believe that you have some pet in this study, against the rules."

"A pet, sir?" said Blake. "What kind of a pet do you mean, sir? A monkey?"

"I don't think there's a monkey here, sir," said Tom Merry, looking round. "There wasn't before you came in, sir."

Blake could not help giggling.

Mr. Keene's countenance assumed a beautiful purple tint. "I believe there is a parrot in this study," he shouted, slapping the table with his hand. "If there is such a bird here, produce it at once!"

"Is there such a bird here, Dig?" asked Blake.

"I can't see it," replied Digby, looking into the grate.

"Is there a parrot here?" demanded the master of the Shell.

"I can't see one, sir."

Mr. Keene said no more, but began to look round the study. Blake was standing with his back to the cupboard door, and Lowther was beside him. Between them they hid the cupboard, and Mr. Keene did not notice it.

A baffled look came over the master's face. He had been so certain of catching the juniors in an infraction of the rules—and he had failed.

"Very well," he said, clicking his teeth in the unpleasant way he had—"very well—"

He broke off suddenly as a screech came from the cupboard behind Blake and Lowther. It was, followed by words, awfully distinct:

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

The master's face was a study.

"Keene's a beast! Keene's a cad! Keene's a rank outsider! Ha, ha! Keene's a cad!"

Blake gave an inward groan.

"My Aunt Sempronia! The fat's in the fire now, with a vengeance!"

He was right. Mr. Keene stood for a few moments speechless, and then he rushed forward and hurled Blake and Lowther away from the cupboard and wrenched the door open. A green parrot fluttered out into his face and made him stagger backwards.

Blake had forgotten to close the door of the cage in his

haste when he thrust it into the cupboard. Polly was out of the cage now, and the opening of the cupboard set her at liberty.

"Ha, ha, ha! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

The words seemed to have some kind of relish for that dreadful parrot, for Polly kept on repeating them almost without a break.

The juniors, dismayed as they were, could not resist the humour of the situation. They were simply doubled up with laughter. The expression upon Amos Keene's face was, as Blake said afterwards, by itself enough to make a mummy chuckle.

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

"You young rascals!" shouted the master of the Shell, too infuriated at that moment to care what he said or did. "You young rascals! I'll break every bone in your bodies, you confounded whelps! I'll half kill you!"

"Nice, pleasant language for a master!" murmured Blake. "I wish Mr. Kidd or the Head were here to hear this little lot!"

The new master rushed at Blake. The junior dodged round the table. The new master looked dangerous to meet at close quarters just then. Mr. Keene was after him like a shot.

Blake would certainly have been caught had not Tom Merry thoughtfully put out his foot and caused Mr. Keene to fall and bury his features in the hearthrug. Then, with great promptness, Digby tilted up the table, shooting a heap of books and papers on top of the new master. And before he could get up, the juniors had crowded out of the study.

"Come on!" gasped Blake. "There'll be a fearful row over this, I expect. But it can't be helped. Buzz along!"

They heard Mr. Keene growling in the study, but did not wait to hear what he said.

"Hallo, there's the parrot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The green parrot, the cause of all the trouble, was fluttering along the passage, and it went flapping down the stairs as Tom spoke.

Blake made a dash for it.

"I say, we must catch it!" he exclaimed. "Quick! Lend us a hand!"

The juniors dashed after the parrot. But Polly seemed to rejoice in her newly found freedom, and did not intend to relinquish it in a hurry. The juniors chased it down the

stairs, the parrot fluttering and dodging as if possessed by the spirit of mischief. An open door in the hall below, from which the light was streaming, attracted Polly, and she went hopping into it and vanished.

Blake gave a gasp of dismay.

"My hat, the horrid thing's gone into Mr. Kidd's study!"

"Scissors!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I wonder if he's there? He can't be, or we should hear something!"

The juniors leaned over the banisters, listening. It was certain that the Housemaster was not in his study. They could hear the parrot fluttering about and whistling, but there was no sound of anyone moving.

"Kidd's gone out for a bit," muttered Blake. "Come on! We may be able to nab the beastly bird before he comes back."

Rather dubiously the juniors followed Blake's lead. Mr. Kidd was not in his study, but he had probably only stepped out for a few minutes to speak to someone, as his door was left open and the light burning.

But it would never do for the Housemaster to find the parrot in his quarters, and so the juniors made the venture. Blake looked into the study. Polly was seated upon the table, gravely squinting at the papers Mr. Kidd had been writing, as if she could understand them.

The parrot looked up and saw Blake. The bird watched him as he advanced towards the table.

"Pretty Polly!" said Blake in soothing tones. "Pretty Polly! Nice bird! Polly like sugar?"

His hand was gently outstretched. Once he got within reach a grip would be enough, but he did not care for a peck or two from the beak. But the bird was wary. Blake's hand was within six inches, and he was already congratulating himself upon his success when the exasperating bird fluttered off the table and perched on Mr. Kidd's desk. Blake felt inclined to say things, but he possessed his soul in patience.

"Pretty Polly! Nice old Polly! Come on, then! Polly like sugar? Pretty Polly!"

Pretty Polly eyed him gravely as he persuasively approached. Again Blake was close at hand when the parrot suddenly scuttled away, and this time perched on top of a high bookcase, far out of the junior's reach.

"Oh, you funny beast!" muttered Blake, annoyed. He was on tenterhooks lest the Housemaster should return at any moment and find him in his study.

Polly, as if knowing that she was quite safe now, solemnly blinked at him from the top of the bookcase. Blake tried to frighten her down by "shooing," but the "shoo" had only the effect of making her retreat to the back of the bookcase top, where she was invisible from below.

"Cave!"

It was a sudden, alarmed whisper from the door, and there was a scuttling of feet down the passage. It meant that the Housemaster was coming, and Blake nipped out of the study like lightning.

Mr. Kidd came from the Hall. He had just been to speak to Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. He caught sight of two or three youthful forms vanishing in the distance. He looked after them in some slight surprise, and then walked into his study. He knew that some juniors had been there, and he glanced round the room. Nothing seemed to be out of order. Polly, doubtless scared by Blake's efforts at recapture, was still at the back of the high bookcase, and quite silent and still.

Mr. Kidd sat down at his table again and took up his pen. But barely had pen touched paper when there came a sharp knock at his door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Kidd resignedly. And he laid his pen upon the inkstand again.

The door was thrown open, and the master of the Shell, red with rage, strode into the room.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Keene is Bowled Out.

MR. KIDD started to his feet at the sight of the new master.

"Mr. Keene! What is the matter?"

He stared at the master of the Shell in amazement. Mr. Keene had received a full inkpot in his face when Dig tilted the table upon him, and it had transformed him into something like a Christy minstrel in appearance. He had stopped to clean off some of the ink, but there was still enough left to give him a decidedly mottled and unique appearance.

"What ever has happened, Mr. Keene?"

"I have a complaint to make, Mr. Kidd!" exclaimed Mr. Keene in a voice much louder than the Housemaster was accustomed to hear.

Mr. Kidd knitted his brows.

"Very well. But kindly moderate your tones, please!"



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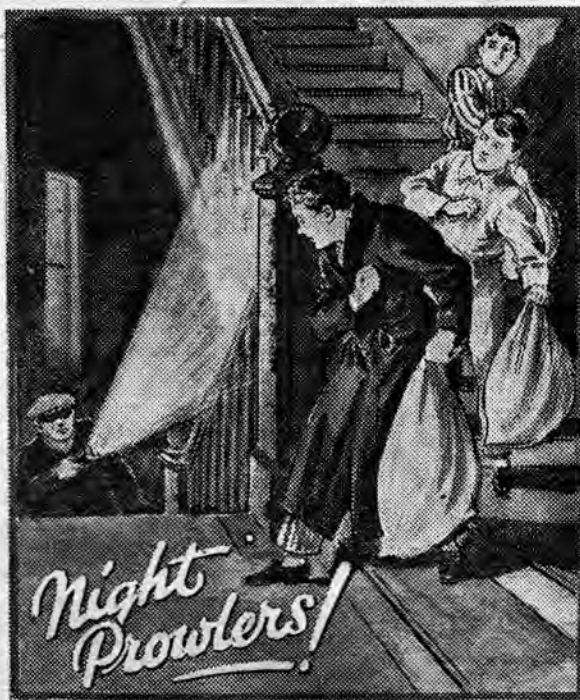
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Mr. Keene clicked his teeth.

"I have to complain of an outrage, and I don't think I need tell you the names of the culprits. They are the worst boys in the school!"

"Indeed! Perhaps you had better tell me their names," said Mr. Kidd quietly. "I do not recognise the boys in question by that description."

"I am speaking of Merry and Blake and their friends."

"Do you call them the worst boys in the school?"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Kidd!"

"Then I must say that I do not agree with you. They are a long way from being the worst boys at St. Jim's. A propensity to fun—perhaps carried too far—is their only fault that I am aware of."

Mr. Kidd spoke warmly. He had reason to know and like the character of the juniors of Study No. 6, and Mr. Keene's aspersions got the Housemaster's "back up" at once.

"Am I to understand, then, that you decline to listen to my complaint?" exclaimed the master of the Shell. "I warn you, sir, that in that case I shall carry it direct to Dr. Holmes, and ask him to deal with the matter as headmaster!"

Mr. Kidd's eyes flashed.

"There is no need for that," he said quietly. "I am perfectly able and willing to deal with questions of discipline connected with my own House. If you have a complaint to make, I am the proper person to hear it, Mr. Keene, and I am ready to do so."

"Then I will speak. To-day, I had occasion to cane Merry for failing to do some lines I gave him, and he had the audacity to threaten to complain to you, as if you would back him up in his insubordination."

"I certainly do not understand that."

"I can only tell you what happened!" snarled Mr. Keene. "Now, I have been to Study No. 6 because I had reason to believe that the juniors there had brought a pet into the House against the rules laid down by the Head on the subject."

"That was certainly wrong of them, but simply a piece of careless, boyish thoughtlessness," said the Housemaster. "Surely that is not all?"

"It is not all. They had taught the parrot to say things about me—to speak my name connected with opprobrious expressions."

Mr. Kidd's face grew very grave.

"If that is the case then, Mr. Keene, I admit that it is serious."

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"No; but I refuse to condemn anybody unheard. Whom do you accuse of teaching the parrot these expressions?"

"I do not know which one it was. I believe they are all concerned in it. Merry and Blake have set themselves against my authority ever since I have been at the school."

"I cannot think so, Mr. Keene."

"But I am certain of it, sir, and I only say what I know. When I heard these offensive expressions from the parrot, I was about to chastise Blake, when Merry tripped me up, and another of them overturned a table and an inkpot upon me."

"You were about to chastise Blake?"

"Yes."

"Why, if you do not know which of the juniors taught the bird these expressions?"

Mr. Keene was nonplussed for a moment.

"I am sure it was Blake and Merry."

The Housemaster gave a dry smile.

"I do not see how you can be sure. However, I will send for the juniors in question, and see what they have to say."

Mr. Kidd stepped to the door, called a fag, and sent him in quest of Blake and Merry, and then returned to his chair again.

In a few minutes Blake and Tom arrived.

Blake glanced up at the bookcase out of the corner of his eye as he entered the study. To his dismay, he saw that the parrot had come forward again, and was perched in full view on the ornamental top of the bookcase front.

If either of the masters glanced up in that direction, the parrot could not fail to be seen at once. And from the bird's look, Blake imagined that it was about to begin to talk again. He fervently prayed that it would not.

Mr. Kidd fixed his eyes upon the juniors.

"Blake, Merry, Mr. Keene makes a serious charge against you!"

"I am sorry for that, sir," said Blake meekly.
 "I am sorry for that, sir," said Tom Merry, in exactly the same tones.

The Housemaster frowned slightly.

"Blake, did you bring a parrot into Study No. 6 against the rules of the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew you were breaking a rule?"

"Ye-es, sir; but I—I wasn't thinking about the rule at the moment. I was thinking about the parrot, sir."

"You did wrong, Blake, and you will take fifty lines for bringing a pet into the School House without the permission of a master."

"Yes, sir," said Blake, wondering whether he was to escape as cheaply as that.

"But that is not all!" said Mr. Kidd sternly. "Is it true that you have taught the bird to use offensive expressions connected with Mr. Keene's name?"

"No, sir!" said Blake promptly.

"You deny having done so?"

"Certainly! I was thinking of doing it, but I haven't had time yet, sir. You wanted me to tell the whole truth, didn't you, sir?" said Blake innocently.

Mr. Kidd coughed.

"Mr. Keene, what expressions do you complain of?"

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Blake and Tom Merry exchanged glances of mutual dismay.

The parrot was at it again.

Mr. Kidd started up in amazement, and looked round the study.

"Who spoke? Who said that?"

"It is the parrot!" said Mr. Keene viciously. "It is in this room. Now you can judge for yourself how much truth there is in this boy."

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Mr. Kidd looked up at the bookcase, and caught sight of the parrot. His brow became very stern.

"Blake, is it possible that you have spoken falsely? How did the bird learn that extremely disrespectful sentence if it was not taught?"

"It's an awfully quick bird to learn, sir," said Blake ruefully. "That's why we bought it. It repeats anything it has heard said only once or twice, sir."

"Keene's a beast! Keene's a cad! Keene's a rank outsider! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake! Then you admit having used those expressions, even if you did not teach them to the parrot?" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"I suppose I must, sir. I spoke hastily. Mr. Keene was very rough on Tom Merry, and we all said the same. Of course, we didn't know that the beastly bird would go and say it all over again to Mr. Keene."

"I dare say you did not," said the Housemaster dryly. "You have spoken of your master in the most disrespectful and reprehensible way. I expect you to apologise to him immediately, before we go any farther into this matter."

"I am very sorry, sir," said Blake. "I wouldn't have said you were a cad, sir, if I had known Polly was picking it up to repeat it to you."

Mr. Kidd tried not to smile.

"That is not an apology, Blake. You must say that you are sorry you used such expressions."

"I'm sorry I used such expressions," said Blake resignedly.

"I expect you to say the same to Mr. Keene, Merry."

"Certainly, sir. I am sorry Blake used such expressions, sir," said Tom Merry innocently.

Blake grinned.

"You must speak for yourself, Merry," said Mr. Kidd severely. "I did not call you here to trifle with me!"

"Yes, sir. I beg to apologise, Mr. Keene, from my heart, that expressions were used by Blake or myself, or anybody else in the United Kingdom, which have caused you any kind or variety of pain, sir," said Tom Merry demurely.

Mr. Keene seemed about to choke as he received this peculiar apology.

Mr. Kidd went on hurriedly.

"That will do, Merry. You will take two hundred lines of Virgil apiece for having used these expressions. Now to come to a still more serious matter. One of you tripped Mr. Keene up in Study No. 6, and some ink was spilled upon him. That amounts to an assault upon a master—a very serious thing, which can only be dealt with by the Head himself. What have you to say, before I report you for a flogging?"

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

Mr. Kidd took no notice of the parrot, though it made Mr. Keene grind his teeth.

"It was I who tripped Mr. Keene up, sir," said Tom Merry.

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Merry diffidently. "I thought he was going to half-kill Blake, sir."

"To—to what? What an expression! How could you possibly have thought such an utterly ridiculous thing?"

"He said so, sir."

"Mr. Keene said so? Be careful what you say, Merry. I cannot believe that Mr. Keene said that he would half-kill Blake."

"It is an absolute lie!" exclaimed the master of the Shell. "Not a mistake, mind you, nor an equivocation, but an absolute lie!"

"You did not say what Merry alleges?"

"I said nothing of the kind."

"Now, Merry," began Mr. Kidd, with a harassed look.

"It is true, sir. He said he would half-kill us, so when I saw him going for Blake like a maniac, of course, I had to stop him."

"Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad! You confounded whelps! I'll half-kill you! Ha, ha, ha, Schneider, how you vos! You confounded whelps, I'll half-kill you!"

The words came in a torrent from the parrot, amid chuckles and screams and whistling.

"I'll half-kill you! Ha, ha! Keene's a cad!"

Mr. Kidd's brow grew as black as night, while the master of the Shell turned quite pale.

"You hear that, Mr. Keene?" cried the Housemaster.

"They taught the bird to say that to back up their tale!" exclaimed Mr. Keene. "Surely you do not believe—"

"You confounded whelps! Keene's a cad! Keene's a cad!"

"Did they teach it to imitate your voice also, Mr. Keene?" cried the Housemaster contemptuously. "I cannot have the slightest doubt that those coarse, brutal expressions were uttered by you."

"I assure you—"

"It is of no use assuring me that black is white, and white black. The parrot is repeating your words, as it repeated those of Blake."

"I did not—"

"You allowed yourself to lose your temper, and to get into a state of fury only fit for a hooligan!" exclaimed Mr. Kidd, forgetting the presence of the boys in his anger and indignation. "You complain that the juniors spoke of you disrespectfully. How can you expect to retain their respect when you act in a way that can only excite their contempt?"

"Mr. Kidd, you are insulting! Remember, we are not alone!"

The Housemaster breathed hard for a moment.

"Mr. Keene," he said quietly, "I refuse to punish these boys. If you choose for the matter to go farther, it may go before the Head, but, in that case, I warn you that those brutal expressions you made use of will be repeated to Dr. Holmes. You can take your choice. Boys, I excuse you from the lines already imposed. The matter ends here. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!" said Blake and Tom together, joyfully enough.

Blake looked up at the parrot on the bookcase.

"May I take Polly, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Kidd. "That bird is hardly a fit pet for you. Considering everything, I think the dealer had better be induced to take it back. Whatever you lose on the transaction, I will make up to you. Now you may go."

The juniors quitted the study. Mr. Keene made as if to follow them, but the Housemaster's voice broke in sharply.

"Remain a few minutes, please, Mr. Keene. I have something to say to you."

"Something pleasant, I expect," chuckled Blake. "Didn't Kidd slang him a treat, Tommy? And didn't he deserve it? My hat! I'm sorry to part with Polly, but a giddy bird like that really isn't quite safe about the House. We've got out of this nicely. We owe Polly something, and no mistake!"

"Good old Polly!" grinned Tom. "He got us out of a scrape! Ha, ha, ha! Keene won't let this affair go before the Head. Depend upon it, we shan't hear of the matter again."

And Tom was right. They did not hear of it again. But the School House juniors had not yet seen the end of their troubles with the new master.

THE END.

(Mr. Keene is certainly strange in his behaviour to Tom Merry! And what was in that letter from Tom's cousin? An amazing mystery is solved in "A GANGSTER AT ST. JIM'S!" next week.)

A COMPLETE NEW ROOKWOOD YARN.

A BURGLAR SAVES THE BACON!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1. Gated!

"HELP!"

"What the thump—" Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome and Raby, the Fistical Four of Rookwood, looked at each other.

They had been discussing a little excursion which had been planned for the following afternoon. Lovell had received an unusually large tip from a munificent relative, and to celebrate the occasion had arranged to "stand" his colleagues the luxury of a hired car to the coast.

Such a special outing naturally demanded a good deal of serious attention, and Jimmy Silver & Co. had found many details needing examination, when their cheerful thoughts became rudely interrupted.

"Help!"

"What is it?" demanded Raby.

"Sounds as if pig-sticking's going on down the passage," remarked Lovell. "I seem to recognise the voice of the victim, too."

"Same here! My hat! If it isn't Tubby!" finished Jimmy Silver. "We'd better look into this, at once, my infants."

"Help!" came another howl from the open doorway of the study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. wasted no more time. With their redoubtable leader in front they quitted the study and hurried along the passage to investigate.

As they had anticipated, the yells were coming from the study of Tubby Muffin, the champion gormandiser of the Fourth.

The cause was soon apparent when Jimmy Silver threw open the door.

Tubby Muffin was bending over the study table, his face pressed well into the top of it, and his fat legs kicking out wildly behind him.

He was occupying that peculiar position not because he felt like doing it but for the reason that someone was standing beside him applying compulsion.

That "someone" was Carthew, the bully and black sheep of the Classical Sixth.

Carthew was holding down his fat hostage with his left hand. Simultaneously, he was wielding a cricket-stump with his right. And Tubby Muffin was getting the full benefit, as his yells testified.

"Help!" roared Tubby, as the Fistical Four tramped in. Then, without pausing to take breath: "Yaroooh! Murder! Whooop! Help!"

When Carthew japed Jimmy Silver & Co., he didn't mean to help them to bag a burglar!

"Kim on!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin was not particularly a chum of the Fistical Four. But they were not going to stand by and see a Fourth man thrashed in this fashion.

They made a combined rush at Carthew.

Next moment a fresh series of yells arose in the study.

"You young brats! Ow-wow! Yoooop!"

Bump!

Carthew went down, with a fiendish howl.

"So perish all bullies!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "All serene, Tubby; you're rescued!"

"Ow! Oh crikey! Fetch a doctor—quick! I'm dying!" groaned Tubby Muffin. "I wished I hadn't touched his rotten cake, now—I mean, I didn't touch it, anyway! I didn't even know he had a cake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out!" yelled Raby, as Carthew jumped to his feet again.

The black sheep of the Sixth was furious. His eyes glittered as he sprang forward. With a swift movement he grabbed Jimmy Silver and Lovell by the scruff of the neck and swung them together, so that their heads met with quite an audible "Crack!"

"Whoop!" sang out Lovell.

"Rescue!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

Newcome and Raby fairly flung themselves at the Sixth-Former. Under their combined assault he hurriedly released his captives and tried to defend himself. But the blood of the Fistical Four was up now, and he stood no earthly chance. For the second time Carthew's anatomy and the floor of the study came into violent collision.

This time Carthew didn't rise. He had no option in the matter, for Lovell sat on his chest, and Raby on his head, while Jimmy Silver and Newcome pinned down his legs.

"Gimme that stump, Tubby!" directed Jimmy Silver.

"We'll see how Carthew enjoys a dose of his own medicine!"

"Good egg!" said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "I say, you chaps, pile into him, you know. I'll hold your coats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthew struggled desperately as he saw the stump in Jimmy Silver's hand.

"You young whelps, I'll—"

"Turn him over, chaps!" ordered Jimmy Silver. "One, two, three—got him! Now!"

Jimmy Silver started giving Carthew a "dose" of the medicine Carthew had applied to Muffin, and the black sheep of the Sixth emitted a wild howl.

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A moment later the door of the study opened, and a horrified face peeped round.

"Boys!"

There was a gasp from the juniors. Jimmy Silver dropped his cricket-stump as though it had suddenly become red hot, and the rest of the Fistical Four jumped to their feet, electrified. For the voice was the voice of their Form master, Mr. Dalton.

Richard Dalton's eyes were almost popping out of his head as he stalked into the study.

"Silver! Raby! Can I believe my eyes? You—you are actually assaulting a prefect!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Amazing!" said Mr. Dalton. His glance went from the Fistical Four to the breathless Carthew, who had by this time staggered to his feet. "Carthew, is there—can there be—any explanation of this outrage?"

Carthew managed to look a little less homicidal than he felt. He realised that his ends would be served best if he gave Mr. Dalton the impression that he alone was the injured party.

"I can only say, sir, that such explanation as there may be is quite inadequate," he said. "I came to this study to punish Muffin for the theft of a cake from my own room. While I was doing so, these juniors rushed in, and without any provocation on my part began a violent assault on me."

"I say, sir, don't you believe him," said Tubby Muffin excitedly. "I wouldn't dream of pinching a cake from Carthew's study. Besides, it wasn't a very good one, anyway!"

"Silence, Muffin!" said Mr. Dalton sternly. "What have you to say to Carthew's statement, Silver?"

"Only that I'm not standing by and seeing Carthew pitching into Fourth men, sir," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Muffin was yelling, and we came to the rescue. That's all there is to it."

Mr. Dalton frowned.

"I do not consider that a satisfactory explanation, Silver. The fact that Muffin was, as you term it, yelling, was surely no proof that Carthew was punishing him excessively. My experience is that Muffin yells at the mere suggestion of punishment!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Please do not interrupt, Muffin! I am willing," went on Mr. Dalton, "to believe that this assault on Carthew was inspired by a mistaken sense of kindness. But in all the circumstances I cannot accept that your intervention was called for."

"Oh, sir!" murmured the Fistical Four, while Carthew smiled with that side of his face which Mr. Dalton could not see.

"In any case," said the master of the Fourth severely, "you must learn, in the interests of school discipline, that an assault on a prefect cannot be tolerated. I am not going to coddle you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"Instead," said Mr. Dalton, "I will detain you in the Form-room to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Fistical Four gasped. Detained on the afternoon of their eagerly anticipated trip to the coast. Better twenty licks than that!

"But, sir—" groaned Jimmy Silver.

"I am afraid I cannot enter into further argument, Silver. Understand, then, you are detained till tea-time to-morrow. Come, Carthew!"

He swept out of the study with the triumphant black sheep of the Sixth, and the Fistical Four were left staring at each other in blank dismay.

CHAPTER 2.

Jimmy Silver's Wheeze!

"OH dear!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Jevver see such rotten luck in your life?" asked Raby. And the rest of the Co. had to admit that they never had.

"And it's all the fault of that rotter Carthew!" snorted Newcome. "If he'd only admitted that he'd exceeded the limit in lamming Tubby, Dalton would have overlooked it."

"Catch Carthew!" said Lovell. "Butter won't melt in his mouth when he's dealing with a beak. The question is, what happens about our trip to the seaside?"

"Not much question about it now," grunted Raby. "It's off. I suggest we take it out of Muffin. It's his fault, anyway. Let's scrag him!"

"Good idea!"

"Lemme alone, you silly asses!" roared Tubby Muffin, backing away in alarm. "Look here, if you want to know THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,226.

what to do about this trip of yours, I've got a really brilliant wheeze."

Tubby Muffin's unhappy rescuers stopped and stared.

"Dashed if I can see how you can help us!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "Still, if you really have got an idea—"

"I have. It's a top-notch," said Tubby enthusiastically. "You've already ordered the car, haven't you?"

"We have. But—"

"All serene, then. It's agreed that you chaps can't go, and it's a hundred to one it's too late to cancel the order for the car. Under the circumstances," said the fat junior, "I suggest that you make the best of a bad job and let me go instead."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Why, you fat, fooling idiot—"

"That's my idea, anyway. Jolly good one, I think," said Tubby seriously. "I shall get the benefit of the sea air, which my delicate constitution needs rather badly at present, and you chaps will have the satisfaction of knowing your money's not being wasted!"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, in measured tones. "So that's your idea, is it?"

"Just that!" smiled Tubby. "What do you think of it?"

Jimmy Silver's answer was brief and to the point. It consisted of a grab at Tubby's collar and a downward motion of the arm, which resulted in the fat junior sprawling on the floor. The leader of the Fistical Four then walked out of the study with his henchmen tramping over Tubby's prostrate body, behind him. And Tubby was left with no illusions as to what Jimmy Silver & Co. thought of his brilliant wheeze.

The Fistical Four, looking not a bit like their usual cheery selves, went downstairs and out into the quad.

It was at the precise moment when their somewhat aimless wanderings had brought them to the gates that Jimmy Silver uttered a whoop.

"Got it!"

"A wheeze?" asked Lovell, almost incredulously. "Well, if it's good enough to get us out of this hole, then you're a giddy miracle!"

"Hasn't your Uncle James turned up trumps before, when we've been in worse holes than this?" asked Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Listen, chaps. Suppose Carthew went to Dalton, after all, and admitted he deserved all we gave him. Dalton would call it off then, wouldn't he?"

"Bound to," nodded Newcome. "But we've already agreed that that's hardly in Carthew's line."

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"It might be—in certain circumstances. We know that Carthew sometimes goes out on the tiles for a little game of cards down at the village. Suppose he goes out to-night."

"Eh?"

"And suppose when he comes back he finds that window at the end of the dorm passage closed so that he can't get in. Suppose, further, that he finds us willing to open the window—on terms. Don't you think it likely he'll agree to any terms to get in?"

"My hat!"

"Plenty of suppositions about it, aren't there?" asked Lovell, rather sarcastically. "Strikes me the chances of all that happening are about one in a million."

"If it rested on sheer chance—yes," grinned Jimmy Silver. "But we can reduce the odds a lot if we jolly well try to make it happen!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"Why not?" asked Jimmy Silver calmly. "Getting down to brass tacks, here's my proposal. I'll ring up Carthew from that public telephone-box down the lane, and pretend to be Ted Beery, the third-rate bookie he hobnobs with."

"My hat!"

"I'll tell him there's a little party at the Bird-in-Hand, and ask him to come along soon after ten. Carthew'll fall all right."

"Shouldn't wonder; but—"

"But nothing," said the leader of the Fistical Four cheerfully. "Carthew'll go; must go, in fact. Later he'll return, expecting, as usual, to get through the dorm passage window, which is always left open for air. We shall be there to give him a helping hand over the sill."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On conditions, of course!" added Jimmy Silver. "Result—Carthew goes and begs us off detention to-morrow, and everything in the garden's lovely! What do you think of it?"

"Great!" yelled Newcome.

"May not work, of course," remarked the more cautious Arthur Edward Lovell. "But it's jolly well worth trying! Let's get along to that telephone-box."

And the Fistical Four marched out of the school gates, looking much more hopeful than before.

CHAPTER 3.

Not According to Programme !

CARTHEW duly "fell."

Jimmy Silver found no difficulty in imitating the thick, coarse tones of Ted Beery, whom he had more than once encountered in the neighbourhood of the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe, and as Carthew had no reason to suspect a practical joke he did not question the identity of his telephone caller.

He very willingly accepted the bogus Mr. Beery's invitation to a little card-party that night.

Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to Rookwood, rejoicing. Carthew was just coming out of the House as they got back. Somewhat to the senior's surprise, they responded to his sarcastic grin with cherubic smiles. Carthew went on, looking quite puzzled.

From the steps of the House the Fistical Four watched him walk over to that corner of the quad on which the window of the Fourth dormitory passage looked. They saw his eyes travel up to that window, then slowly down the ivy-covered wall to the buttress, from which generations of Rookwood lawbreakers had jumped to the ground before setting out on nocturnal excursions.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" said Jimmy Silver as Carthew resumed his walk. "I fancy we're on a cert!"

"Looks genuine enough by the way he's sizing up the emergency exit!" grinned Lovell. "We'll be there, anyway—with bells on!"

"What-ho!"

It was as the last stroke of midnight died away that Jimmy Silver suddenly stood up and peered out of the window.

"Carthew!" he hissed.

Lovell and Newcome and Raby were instantly beside him, looking down into the dim quad.

"My hat! There he is!" said Lovell, with great satisfaction.

They could just make out the dark but unmistakable slouching figure of Carthew hugging the shadows of the gymnasium as he made his way towards the House.

The hearts of the Fistical Four beat a little faster as he drew nearer. Was their plan going to succeed, or had Carthew some other secret means of access to the interior of the school?



The Fistical Four rushed into the study from which the yells were coming and found Carthew in the act of beating Tubby Muffin with a cricket stump!

And they were. The Fistical Four did not undress completely before getting into bed that night, and half an hour after Bulkeley had seen lights-out in the dorm they were out of bed again, donning rubber shoes, Etons, and mufflers in readiness for their vigil.

Whether Carthew had as yet even left Rookwood they did not know. They were determined, anyway, not to leave anything to chance, even though that did involve spending an unnecessarily long period on guard.

They quitted the dormitory, and made their way to the box-room at the end of the passage, from the window of which they could see down into the quad.

The half-hour boomed out from the school clock. The Fistical Four stood or sat around the window, passing time away by eating chocolate and talking in whispers. They heard the three-quarters; then eleven.

Another hour passed by. Newcome and Raby by this time were beginning to doze. Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell had succeeded in remaining more wide awake by indulging in a somewhat warm argument on the subject of whether Lovell should or should not play for the School Junior Eleven when the footer season started.

"All serene, chaps; he's stopped!" said Jimmy Silver. "Now for our stuff!"

He led the way out of the box-room into the passage and peeped cautiously out of the open window.

Carthew was part of the way up, climbing hand over hand up the stout old ivy that covered the walls of the school. The Fistical Four grinned as they silently watched his swift progress.

Soon he was within a foot or two of the sill. Jimmy Silver decided that the time had arrived to act.

Leaning out of the window, he gave a soft whistle.

"That you, Carthew?" he called out in a low voice.

The juniors saw Carthew come to a sudden stop. He looked up, and, dim as the light was, they could see the fear that was written in his face.

"Who the thunder—" they heard him mutter.

"Jimmy Silver speaking," said the leader of the Fistical Four, grinning down on the startled senior. "Thinking about coming into roost, old bean?"

"You young hound—"

"If so, I'm afraid I've got bad news for you," went on Jimmy Silver calmly. "There's nothing doing!"

"You—you—"

"We've just decided we can do without fresh air up here for the rest of the night, you see, Carthew. So we're going to close the window. Sorry, and all that!"

"You—you interfering young rats, you wouldn't dare—"

"Guess again, old chap! We'll dare all that, won't we, chaps?"

"Oh, rather!"

"Look here—" said Carthew, controlling his wrath with a mighty effort as he saw how the juniors held the whip hand over him.

"Fraid we can't spare the time to argue, old bean! But you won't have to stay out all night. Just ring the front door bell; the Head'll be awfully glad to see you!"

"You young demons—" gasped Carthew, looking, as a matter of fact, rather like the Demon King himself at the thought of what the Head would say when a Rookwood man rang the bell for admittance in the small hours of the morning.

"Good-bye, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Pleasant dreams!"

"Stop!" came a hoarse whisper from the prefect. "Perhaps we can fix this, Silver. I'm—I'm awfully sorry about what happened to-day—about Dalton, I mean!"

Jimmy Silver grinned in the dim light.

"Now you're talking? If you make it worth our while, we may possibly decide to let in a little more fresh air after all!"

There was a smothered exclamation from Carthew. The Fistical Four grinned as they heard it. They could imagine the emotions the black sheep was experiencing in his present dilemma.

"Look here, I'll stand you all a spread to-morrow," said Carthew desperately. "A really good one. You can order what you like, within reason, on me, if you'll only stop this fooling. Is it a go?"

"Nix!"

Carthew almost groaned.

"Anything you like! If it's money you want—"

"Cut it out, old bean! We wouldn't touch your blessed money with a bargepole, if you'd like to know! But what we do want may give you more of a pain than parting with oof."

"What is it, then? Hurry, for goodness' sake!"

"We want you," said Jimmy Silver, with great deliberation, "to go to our Form master first thing in the morning, admit that you were all wrong in piling into Muffin like you did, and get Dalton to cancel our detention."

Carthew gasped.

"Why, you cheeky young hounds—"

"What's more, we're going to take good care you keep to your word," added the leader of the Fistical Four. "Before we let you in, you're going to sign a little paper we've drawn up, admitting you've been blagging down at the Bird-in-Hand. You'll get that paper back to-morrow as soon as Dalton gives us the O.K. Savvy?"

"Look out!" said Lovell suddenly.

The warning came just in time. With a sudden movement Carthew scrambled up the foot or so separating him from the window and tried to force his way in.

Jimmy Silver hurriedly closed the window. The prefect's scowling face was flattened against the glass for a second, then it disappeared again.

"And that's that!" remarked Raby. "Looks as if we don't pull it off after all."

Jimmy Silver cautiously opened the window again and looked out.

Carthew was descending the ivy. Evidently the Fistical Four's terms were unacceptable to the black sheep of the Sixth.

The juniors watched him as he got down to the level of the buttress.

Then they jumped. Carthew seemed, all of a sudden, to miss his hold. For a brief second he held on with one hand, then he dropped.

It was not much of a drop. But it seemed to be too much for Carthew. As he touched the ground, the prefect pitched forward. A moment later he was lying in a huddled heap on the flower-bed below.

It all happened so quickly that the juniors hardly had time to weigh it all up. Had they done so, they might have been a little suspicious of the genuineness of the fall. As it was they felt nothing but alarm.

Jimmy Silver threw the window wide open and scrambled out to go to the rescue. The rest quickly followed. In a moment four alarmed and anxious juniors were swarming down the wall.

They reached the ground almost simultaneously.

Then a strange thing happened.

The apparently lifeless black sheep of the Sixth leaped to his feet, made a rush for the wall, and started a desperate climb back towards the window they had innocently abandoned. His pretended collapse had been nothing more than a ruse to draw them away from the citadel!

"Stop him!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

But Carthew, climbing with frantic haste, was already beyond their reach. Jimmy Silver & Co. could only stare up after his retreating figure, speechless with surprise and chagrin.

In a matter of seconds Carthew reached the window.

They saw him climb in.

For a moment he leaned out and grinned on them. Then, with a wave of his hand, he disappeared, and they heard the "click!" of the window-catch.

Carthew, by the cunning for which he was noted, had gained the day. What was worse, they themselves were now locked out for the night.

It was a case of the biters being bit with a vengeance.

CHAPTER 4.

All Serene!

"WELL, of all the fatheads—"

"Of all the chuckle-headed chumps—"

"Of all the fooling, fooling idiots—"

"We're the worst!" finished Jimmy Silver, guessing that his followers' descriptive remarks were really being directed to himself. "Exactly! But that doesn't get us out of the fix!"

"Nothing'll get us out!" groaned Raby. "We might have known such a crack-brained wheeze was bound to end in disaster!"

"Don't grouse!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "Your Uncle James has got you into the mess, and if he can't get you out of it, he'll eat his best Sunday panama! Now, the problem is—"

The leader of the Fistical Four broke off suddenly and motioned his followers back into the shadows.

Wonderingly, they stood back and stared in the direction in which Jimmy Silver was looking.

What they saw made them temporarily forget their troubles. At the other end of the quad the dark figure of a fully-grown man was standing on a window-sill in the very act of prising open the window with an instrument he had in his hand.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Arthur Edward Lovell. "A giddy burglar!"

"Great pip!"

"Quiet!" hissed Jimmy Silver.

Fascinated, they watched. The burglar—for burglar he evidently was—withdrew his hand from the centre of the window, and pocketed the instrument he had been using, then slowly swung up the sash. A moment later he had vanished into the House.

"Well, my hat!" said Raby.

"Solves the problem of getting in, anyway," grinned Newcome. "But what do we do now, anyway?"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"He may be armed!"

"Rats!" said Lovell cheerfully. "Let's do it off our own bat. Not often we get the chance of tackling a real, live burglar."

"Something in that," admitted the leader of the Fistical Four, who was, in point of fact, as anxious as Lovell to tackle the intruder. "Well, if you chaps are game—"

"We jolly well are!"

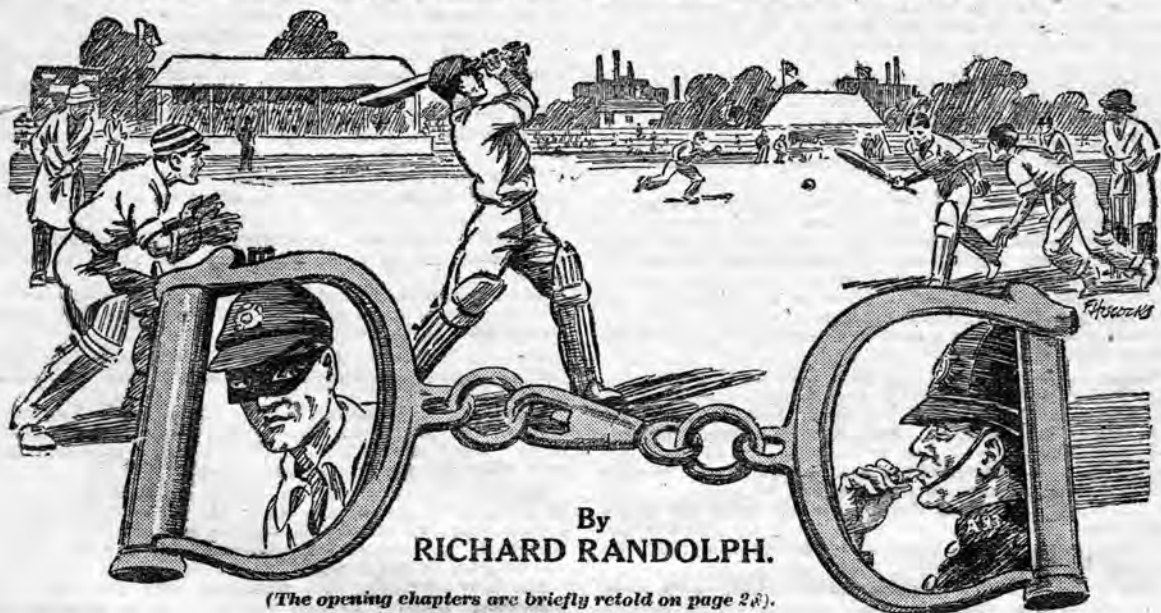
(Continued on page 28.)

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THRILLS IN OUR GRIPPING SERIAL.

THE CRICKETER CRACKSMAN!



By
RICHARD RANDOLPH.

(The opening chapters are briefly retold on page 28.)

Victory!

ALL who heard the words realised that Jerrold had put himself in a false position. Hyde could not take back what he had said. And yet, somehow, not more than two of the dozen or more present but held him in the wrong, and all but those two sympathised strongly with Dick Jerrold.

"Do you take it back?" Jerrold demanded hotly.

He was within striking distance now. But Hyde did not put up his hands in defence.

"I certainly don't!" he answered coolly. "Clear out!"

Jerrold's big right fist smashed him on the jaw and sent him to the boards.

"Dick, Dick! You shouldn't have done that!" protested a grey-haired member of the club, while Hyde was being helped to his feet.

"Shouldn't I, Mr. Allston? Then what was I to do?" returned Jerrold.

That was how Rod saw it—perhaps Roger Rogers also, though he did not say so.

Even Rod, small as was his experience, knew what this must mean.

Hyde might suffer in the opinion of the committee when inquiry was made. But the committee could not choose but find Jerrold the aggressor.

"You've played your last game for Norlandshire, Dick," said Roger, as the two veterans and the colt went out of the luncheon-room together.

"What in Hades do I care?" retorted Jerrold. "Oh, Roger, it was good when I stumped Herby Sutcliffe this morning, for I never did a better bit of work in that way. But it was better when I felt my fist against that bounder's jaw!"

Hyde did not take the field again after lunch. It was reported that the blow had dislocated his jaw. The injury was less serious than that. But he really was not fit to play.

Within half an hour of the restart the news of what had happened was all over the ground. The general feeling was that Jerrold had done the right thing, but was sure to suffer for doing it.

Not until well on in the afternoon did it occur to Rod what Jerrold's dropping out of the team would mean. Ginger Harman's chance! There was no one on the ground staff half as good as Ginger with the gloves.

Yorkshire continued to fare badly. Mitchell and the

captain made some runs well and without waste of time, but for the most part the play was of the stodgy type, and when it came to the tail end no sign was made. Wood, Macaulay, and Bowers were all got out within three overs by Coote. This was after Martin, still skippering, had fairly bowled himself to a standstill.

Never mind! Though expensive, he had done good work, and he was very young yet. His two wickets cost 87. Coote had three for 65. Rod, on almost all through the innings, and never losing length or getting loose, took five for 61. The Yorkshire total was 251—107 behind.

But it seemed that the game must end in a draw. Everyone knew that the White Rose players, with their backs to the wall, were very hard to dismiss, while an early declaration in face of good bowling and keen fielding could hardly be hoped for.

Martin was making out the batting list when a note from Hyde was brought to him. He had kept Red Harman and Beal as the opening pair, and had put down Rod for No. 3, and Deeks after him. The note gave him Harman, Beal, Martin, Deeks, Coote, Rodney, Stanton, Hyde, Willey, Jerrold, Rogers as the order the captain favoured.

The youngster sniffed. He was not long from a big school, where he had been cock of the walk. He had made up his mind that Hyde was not the right sort.

"Thinks he'll be fit to make some runs after other fellows have taken the edge off the bowling!" he muttered to himself.

"But keeping Rodney back! I wonder why? Can't go far wrong by changing places with the boy. I know dashed well he's better value than I am!"

So Rodney's name was No. 3 on the list, and Martin's No. 6.

And Red Harman was out for a duck! Within three minutes of the start of the innings Rod was striding to the crease!

The crowd cheered him. One might have thought that crowd could not raise a cheer, so heavily hung gloom upon it. But the crowd cheered Rod.

It did him good. So did Beal's friendly smile, that was a reminder of what they had done together against Yorkshire Second.

These two colts had what is beyond doubt the biggest asset of all in the making of a first-class batsman.

Neither would ever be out to a name. A half-volley or a full pitch is just as bad a ball when sent down by a famous bowler as in a club game. One does not get so many bad balls, naturally, but those that come can be hit.

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TROUBLE IN THE NORLANDSHIRE TEAM! Captain knocked out by County "keeper"!

And they were hit! Only a little over an hour was left for play, and many experienced batsmen would have pursued safety tactics and made perhaps forty-odd in the time. Rod and his partner went for every possible run. Without ever getting loose, the Yorkshire bowling was never at its best, and 85 runs were on the board when stumps were drawn. Another hour might have seen a hundred more runs added, for the field had grown a bit flurried by the perfect understanding that was already established between these two.

"Might be you and Jack Hobbs, Herby, or Jack and Wilfred, or Jack and Andy Sandham," said Robinson to Sutcliffe as the men went off the field.

"They look good enough for anything on this form," Sutcliffe answered, with the true cricketer's recognition of outstanding ability.

Before the game restarted next morning it was known that Somerset had agreed to what was asked of them, and that John White and one or two other men of the team would make the long journey to attend Arthur Hereward's funeral. It was also known that the committee insisted upon Jerrold's apologising to Hyde as a condition of his remaining in the team, and that Jerrold said he would beg pardon when there was a frost in a most unlikely region for frosts, and not till then.

Roger Rogers and Rod had been called before the committee to give evidence. What they thought was not asked, of course; only what they had seen. Rod did not know how Roger bottled up his feelings and managed to keep his answers to the point, but he knew how he had to bottle up his own. He wanted to say that he held Jerrold entirely justified. But he knew that he could do no good by saying so. Nothing anyone but Jerrold himself could say would help him. And Jerrold would not speak the words asked of him. And they all liked and admired him the more because he would not.

Rod found his hands trembling as he buckled on his pads. That had been an ordeal for him.

"Buck up, pard!" said Beal encouragingly.

But Rod could not respond. Dick Jerrold's outbreak would give Ginger Harman his chance, he felt sure; and Ginger was his pal, and he wanted to see Ginger get that chance. But it all seemed so unfair. Nearly all who had heard and seen—nearly all who had sat in the seat of judgment, he was sure—were at heart on Jerrold's side. But Hyde had been made captain of the team, and rebellion against him must be punished.

At this rate there would not be much of the side left soon, it seemed to Rod—and to others.

He was out without scoring another run, clean bowled by a ball from Robinson that somehow he never saw.

But Beal carried on, and Hyde, having got over the effects of Dick Jerrold's hefty punch, joined him, young Martin retiring into the background. And Beal and Hyde did so well that Norlandshire's innings was declared at lunch, leaving Yorkshire well over 300 to get in the time that remained. Beal had some time before passed his hundred. Hyde looked all over good for his. He was tempted to go on, but realised that the closure would be counted a sportsmanlike move on his part, while the two centuries would only show that he could bat, and nobody doubted that. He realised that his sportsmanship might be in doubt.

To the end of his life Rod will recall the afternoon which followed as the hardest time he ever had on the field. He was bowling most of the time, and had a long journey to make to his assigned place in the deep field after each over. There was thunder in the air, and the heat was oppressive.

Hyde never let up on him, not even when he had taken only one wicket and had had nearly a hundred scored off him. Hyde had his excuse. Rogers might as well have been off the field for all the use he was. Hereward's death and the Jerrold trouble had broken the veteran up. He could not even hold catches.

Hebblewhite was badly needed, for Tommy Coote failed. For a time only Martin and Willey got any wickets, except for the one Rod had taken—that of Sutcliffe, caught by Dick Jerrold off a stroke to leg that the average wicket-keeper could not have reached. But Dick, agile and watchful still, shifted his place, shot out a long arm, and put paid to the account of Herbert the Hero, as Lord Hawke had nicknamed the England man.

Yorkshire looked safe to play out time. Only an hour was left, and there were five wickets still to fall, with Holmes going strongly.

Rod had been given a spell of half a dozen overs or so.

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Now he was called upon again, and there was a sardonic grin on the face of Hyde as he beckoned to him and threw him the ball.

That grin nerved Rod. The fellow thought he was done! He should see!

He was tired, but not tired out. There was still in him that reserve of force that the man with the big heart always has. He put out of his mind everything, but the winning of the match, though it was hard to forget about Jerrold when Jerrold crouched behind the stumps at which he bowled.

Not hard—just impossible! For the catch off his bowling by which the burly stumper got rid of Holmes was a mighty effort.

Never mind! This was Dick's swan-song—in his last match for Norlandshire he was doing as well as ever he had done in his prime, better perhaps.

Greenwood's off-stump went down to a ball that came with Rod's arm, one of those that every left-hander bowls at times.

The whole situation had altered in a few minutes. There had been five men to get out; there were now but three, and Holmes had gone.

Between two overs Jerrold spoke with Rod. Rod said nothing—merely nodded. He understood what was asked of him.

Wood joined Robinson. Rod bowled the Yorkshire stumper one coming in from the off, faster than it looked to be. Wood snicked it; Jerrold shot out a long arm and took what was for him an easy catch.

Macaulay was not dismayed. But it was plain that he saw no prospect of playing out time. He hit as though going for the runs, and carted Rod over the ropes for six. Robinson shook his head at him; the old hand saw that there was no good in this game.

Macaulay shrugged his shoulders, and relapsed into inactivity. Keeping straight bats and risking nothing, he and his partner played through something over twenty minutes for half a dozen runs.

Glances were cast at the pavilion clock by many of the crowd. It was not on the cards now that Yorkshire should win. But could they be beaten?

A mighty shout went up. Rod had got past Macaulay's defence with one of his occasional fast ones. There was only Bowes to come.

But Robinson was still there. The little grey man took command of the situation. In the course of a dozen overs Bowes had not to meet half as many balls; he only had one from Rod, and that shaved his off-stump. Time was drawing near; it looked as though Hyde would have to demand the extra half-hour he had so bitterly grudged to Derbyshire.

But he did not have to do that. Within three minutes of the time at which stumps would have been drawn in the ordinary way, it was "c. Jerrold, b. Rodney" again! And it was not Bowes who fell, but the great little man who had kept up his end so well, Emmott Robinson. By no mere chance, moreover, but by concerted action between the man behind the wicket and the bowler.

Victory! Victory over Yorkshire, keenest and dearest of foes! If only Arthur Hereward could have lived another few days how this would have rejoiced his heart!

Rod had taken all the last five wickets, and the crowd, half-mad with excitement, surged on to the pitch, and would have carried him in. But, tired as he was, more tired than ever in his life before, he raised a gallop and got ahead of them.

Hardly was he under cover before the darkened heavens were split by a jagged streak of lightning, and the thunder followed, like the sound of great guns. The rain swooped down and the enthusiastic crowd bolted for shelter.

"Curse the young bouncer!" muttered Hyde.

It seemed hard to him that the winning of the match should be mainly due to Rod, though its winning was a feather in the cap of the man who led the side, and it would be impossible for anyone to accuse him of not giving the colt fair play this time.

"Same here!" said Ralph Redgrave, by Hyde's shoulder.

And Rod, though he might have hurt Hyde by humbling him, had never done Ralph any injury—had done him nothing but kindness.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

ROD RODNEY, an orphan, who is living with the Redgraves of Norchester, falls foul of ALURED HYDE, captain of the Norlandshire cricket team. They scrap at a boxing saloon kept by HARRY HAM and his son HARRY, and Rod proves the victor. Ralph Redgrave, a crony of Alured Hyde, does his best on every occasion to get Rod disgraced, but despite the underhand plotting which surrounds him, Rod, to his joy, is picked to play for Norlandshire against Yorkshire. His joy is short-lived, however, for Hyde deliberately gets him run out!

(Now read on.)

A Frame-up Arranged!

THE funeral of Arthur Hereward brought about a brief truce in the troubles that beset the Norlandshire C.C.C. It was fast becoming evident to those who cared

most for the welfare of the club that a mistake had been made in the appointment of Alured Hyde to the captaincy.

But to perceive that and to remedy it were two very different things.

Hyde could point to a good record. Of six matches played only one had been lost, while four were outright victories.

But three of the side's best men were not available for the time being. Jerrold would never play again; he was in negotiation with one of the leading schools for the position of coach, and said openly that he had finished with county cricket. He added other remarks—to Hyde's address—that made the committee uneasy, because they knew them not without foundation.

Hebblewhite and Baines were not in quite the same position, though the former, like Jerrold, had put a hefty fist against the countenance of his captain. But no one could see them coming back to the team the men of old—as long as Hyde was skipper.

Yet, on the face of it, the pros, not Hyde, had been the offenders. Had the matters concerned been brought before a law court they would certainly have been held so.

The Norlandshire committee was not a legal tribunal, and saw the case from a more human point of view.

It was impossible that they should ask Hyde to resign—the more impossible because he seemed in first-rate form. And they knew of no one who could well be put into his place. Yet they would gladly have accepted his resignation.

Joseph Hyde knew that well when he suggested to his son at breakfast on the day of the funeral that cricket was not the only thing in life.

"I want someone to go over to New Orleans within the next week or so," he said, "and I'm puzzled as to who can be sent—unless you'd take it on, Alured."

"That means chucking the captaincy!" returned his son hotly.

"Well, yes, it must mean that. But would that matter so much?"

"It would matter so much that I'm dashed if I'll do it at any price!"

"You seem to forget that you've a duty to me, my boy."

"I don't think I've forgotten. I see no great cause to be grateful. I've never had an allowance big enough for my needs."

"Then you must have needs that you oughtn't to have!" retorted the father. "You draw a salary that's all you're worth to the company, though with your brains you might easily make yourself of more value. This trip would give you a chance to prove yourself. In the way of allowance, you won't get a shilling more from me; but if you do well in the cotton deal we are after, your salary could be doubled."

"Nothing doing! It's no better than a dodge to oust me from the captaincy. Oh, I know! Most of the committee are down on me, the dashed old fogies! But it's rough to have one's own pater taking sides with them!"

And with that Alured stalked out of the breakfast-room.

It was the last time father and son were ever to discuss the son's career.

There was a big gathering in the churchyard at Carnton when Hereward was laid to rest. Hundreds of people were unable to get into the church, and waited patiently outside, under the blue sky, till the coffin was brought forth.

It was remarked afterwards that the Norlandshire players gathered into two groups. In one, the smaller, were Alured Hyde and a few of the amateurs who had not yet



"Do you take that back?" demanded Jerrold. "I certainly don't!" replied Hyde. Jerrold's big fist crashed on to Hyde's jaw and sent him to the boards!

found him out—not a single pro. The pros, not only present players, but others of the past, had drawn as far away from these as possible: and there were amateurs with them—the good sportsman who had so quickly seen the promise of Rod Rodney and Conrad Beal, and others of his type. For Hyde they cared nothing; but Roger Rogers and Red Harman and Dick Jerrold were old comrades.

Among the pros there was a feeling that this day marked the beginning of the decline of Norlandshire cricket. How could a team go on prospering under a rotter like Hyde?

None of them guessed then, though soon they were to learn, that in their midst was a youngster who was to be a second Arthur Hereward to Norlandshire.

All over! Sadly they departed, and the next two days seemed very long in passing.

Ralph Redgrave had been with Hyde at the graveside. He had cared nothing about Hereward, but he must keep up his place among the satellites of Hereward's successor.

He knew of the break between Alured and his father, but thought the old man would come round. But on the day after the interment there happened that which caused him to write a note to Alured, who had not put in an appearance at the mill.

"Meet me at Hiam's—important! Any time six to eight," read that note.

Ralph was there on the stroke of six. Hyde did not turn up till nearly half an hour later, though he was very anxious about what might be in the wind. His swank would not allow of his appearing too eager.

"We'd better go downstairs," said Ralph, who showed his nervousness plainly. "Can't talk up here."

They did not go together. Ralph faded out first, Hyde a few minutes later. Neither Geering nor Yankee was in the saloon, and both were rather worried about Yankee's continued absence. So was Geering. That was why he stayed away.

Harry Hiam had seen the two whispering together, and when Hyde stole downstairs Harry followed him stealthily.

Young Hiam was in a queer state in these days. He could not go back on his father, who had always been decent to

him; but he longed with all his heart to be clear of the rascality in which the old man was so deeply involved.

He could never be like Ginger Harman and Rod Rodney, because they had not touched the pitch which defiled him. ~~They had always been on the level. But even if a fellow~~ had gone wrong, he might pull straight if he got the chance. Harry could not see his chance yet, but he waited for it, and, in the meantime, was keen to see that Rod came to no harm through the craft of his enemies. Perhaps Ginger counted more for him than Rod in this; but Rod did count.

He was not quite in time to hear the first words exchanged between the two who hated Rod. But what he missed did not matter greatly.

"Where did you get hold of it?" asked Hyde.

He held a letter in his hand. Only one of the many electric lights in the cellar had been switched on, but the two stood right under it, and Harry could see that. Ralph still had the envelope; he had taken the letter from it.

"Snooped it!" replied Ralph gloatingly. "I was down first this morning, and when I saw the postmark I had a kind of hunch that I'd better see more. I guessed it was from that lawyer fellow, but I never guessed what was in it!"

Hyde read, and his hands shook, and his face took on a ghastly yellow tint. Harry could see all that from his prying-place; the one light made it more easily seen than it would have been had the cellar been fully illuminated.

"Do you get on to what this means?" Hyde asked hoarsely.

"I rather reckon I do! Through the will of this confounded great-uncle of his in the West Indies, the young bouncer comes into over twenty thousand—that's over a thou a year or so, easily. He wouldn't have come back to the mill, anyway; but now—Oh, dash it all, he can play for the county as an amateur, while I haven't a look-in even for the second eleven!"

"What about me? If not before this season ends, then next season, it will be Roderick Rodney as captain of Norlandshire!"

"Why, he's hardly more than a kid, Ally! They couldn't make him skipper."

"Little enough of the kid about Rodney! I'll say for him that he has as long a head for the game as I ever knew—unless it's Fender's, and even to compare him with Fender is to put him in the top class. And the committee know it, and the men know it. They won't care whether he's seventeen or twenty-seven. 'He's our man!' they'll say. And then where do I come in?"

"Everything seems going west!" groaned Ralph. "Looks as though we shall have to stop all this game." He nodded as he spoke, and the gesture conjured up to Hyde and Harry Hiam alike visions of the gang meetings down there, with the masked Boss and Vice. "It's getting too risky for anything. And we haven't done anything like so well out of it as we ought, because of that old shark, Horry Hiam. We—you mostly—do the planning, but he takes the profits. There's nothing left in it."

"Something, I think," answered Hyde, grown cooler now.

He had been tearing into small fragments the letter Ralph had handed him, and he let the fragments fall to the floor.

"Rodney's got to be framed up," he went on. "There's a job planned that may serve the purpose, if only he can be lured to the place. We're best out of it; let's get him in the soup. Then there are those pearls of Lady Jenkins'. Horry hasn't got his clutches on them yet. I have them still. If you can plant them on Rodney—and that ought to be dead easy for you—that will get him deeper in the mud."

Harry Hiam wondered what his worthy sire would say if he could have heard that. His sympathy was rather with the old man than with Hyde, though he knew well that the dealings of Horry with the gang had always been as completely unfair as those between fence and burglar usually are. The fence takes about three-quarters of the profit and a quarter of the risk.

Hyde's bold proposition rather staggered Ralph.

"I shall be in it neck deep, y'know, Ally!" he protested.

"My good ass, you're neck deep already! This is easy—nothing on earth could be easier."

"Who's going to play decoy to him?"

"Well, there you come in again, old bean. You must do it. He's done you one good turn; that means he'll do you another at a pinch, though I don't suppose it will be out of love for you. No, I haven't a definite plan yet, though I begin to feel that there's one coming."

It was plain to Harry Hiam that Ralph did not like this a bit. But he was Hyde's henchman—nothing without Hyde. He had neglected his business chances; he was but a

moderately good cricketer; he could but hang on to the man he had chosen for patron.

"I'm willing to do my bit," he answered tremulously. "But who's going to believe that a fellow who's just come into a thousand a year is mug enough to risk getting copped as a burglar?"

"Nobody, of course—if the fellow knew it! But he doesn't know it, Ralph. We've some days yet. Lawyers are never in a hurry. This chap down south will wait for an answer from Rodney, and will be surprised not to get one by return. But he'll wait—most likely a week at least before he writes again. And, meanwhile, the enemy knows—now!"

"There's that in it, of course," agreed Ralph. "Well, I'm with you, Ally, to the limit! I hate the young beast. My people think no end more of him than they do of me."

They departed, but took care not to re-enter the saloon together.

When they had gone, Harry Hiam crept out of his hiding-place and carefully collected every scrap of the letter Hyde had torn up. Ralph had meant to thrust the envelope out of which he had taken it into his breast pocket, but it had fallen to the floor. Harry put the fragments into that, and sat up for a considerable part of the night with a sheet of foolscap and a pot of paste before him piecing the shreds together.

That must be done; but when that was once done the way was by no means clear for him.

From this abominable plot Rod must be saved—if he could be saved without dragging Harry's father into peril.

There was always that to take into account.

He felt himself weak and helpless. But he was doing his best, anyway.

The sun was fully up before he had pieced the letter together. But he had made a good job of it. Some scraps were dirty through contact with the floor, but nothing was missing.

Without undressing, he flung himself upon his bed. His sleep was not dreamless, but his dreams were pleasant. In them he had become the pal of Ginger Harman and Rod Rodney, his past wiped right out.

He groaned when he awoke from those dreams, for well he knew how his father stood in the way of their realisation, and he could not go back on old Horry!

There was only one change in the Norlandshire team for the match with Surrey on the Saturday. Ginger Harman came in for Jerrold, as all had expected, though Ginger himself had been too anxious to feel sure until he had word of his selection.

On the eve of the match he met Harry Hiam. The meeting was not a chance one, though Ginger did not know that. Harry had been looking out for him.

"Glory!" said Ginger ecstatically. "I'm to play for the county to-morrow, Harry!"

"I know, and I'm jolly glad! I won't even wish you luck, for I'm sure you'll do well. They say Dick Jerrold reckons you'll be as good as ever he was, if not better. But I say, Ginger, I've something serious to tell you."

"Let's get out of the crowd, then," answered Ginger.

They passed down a side street that led to the river. A broad walk ran alongside the stream, and few people were about just then.

"Well, what is it?" Ginger asked, with a touch of impatience.

But Harry hardly knew how to begin.

He had thought of producing the pieced-together letter. But if he did that he would have to explain so much more, and he did not see how to keep his father out of it. Even if he told what he had heard, or part of it, he must tell more.

"You're just as pally with Rodney as ever, I suppose?" he said.

"Rather!"

"Well, you look out for him, that's all. There's some plot against him, and he needs a pal he can depend upon."

"Plot! How do you mean? What sort of a plot? I don't see how I can help it if I'm not to know more than that—not even to know who it is that's at the bottom of it."

"You can guess that, I should think!"

"Hyde—Redgrave—oh, yes! But what can they do?"

"I don't know. I only know they mean to do something. Yes, there's one thing more I can tell you. If Redgrave sends for Rodney in a hurry, don't let him go alone, or if he goes be close behind him, and take a pal with you, if there's one you can count on."

(Will Ginger be able to save Rod from the "frame-up"? It's touch and go for Rod! Don't miss next week's great instalment.)

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Can you find the question that the Oracle can't answer?
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THIS is grand weather for cricket, chums, but I don't play cricket nowadays, worse luck, and when I sit down to watch my young nephews at it the jolly old flies always come along and play hop-scotch on my cranium. Even in the office they won't leave me alone, and this afternoon the office boy was busy with a ruler giving them the k.o. He had just touched the magnificent score of seventeen dead and two disabled, when the old Ed. sent for me and demanded to know what all the noise was about. I explained that it was just the O.B. knocking the flies off my nut.

"Sounded pretty hollow to me," growled the Ed. "Still, I suppose you have got something inside there besides sawdust, or you wouldn't be able to answer all these posers the readers send in the way you do. Let's see, now, if you're wide awake after all those whacks with the ruler. Peter Winch, of Winchelsea, sends us an interesting little query. It's about medals. Our chum, Peter, my lad, is of a serious turn of mind, and he says that he has heard that the sailors who fought with Nelson were not given any medals by the British Government for their bravery. Is that so? Seems to me those fellows deserved a few medals for winning Trafalgar, eh?"

"You're quite right, Ed.," said I. "They were brave fellows, those, and if it hadn't been for them we shouldn't have had any Trafalgar Square in London, or any Nelson Column. But the truth is that the Crown didn't give medals in those days like they do now, to soldiers and sailors who had been in action. Nevertheless, everyone who took part in Nelson's two great victories of the Nile and Trafalgar received medals which were struck for them by private individuals named Davison and Boulton. Davison was a personal friend of Nelson, and he struck the Nile medal for all ranks at a cost to himself of £2,000. Nelson, himself, and his captains had one of these medals each, cast in gold; the other officers had silver or copper-gilt, and the seamen and marines got them in copper bronze."

"What was the Nile Medal like?" asked the Ed.

"Well, one side had a bust of Nelson on it, and the other showed the French fleet at anchor in Aboukir Bay, with the British advancing to attack. As the engagement took place in the evening, the man who engraved the medals showed the sun setting

in the distance, but the funny thing about it was that a mistake was made by the engraver in sinking the die, and when the medals were struck the sun was shown to be setting in the East instead of the West."

"Well I never," said the Ed., chortling. "Why, everybody knows the sun sinks in the West. But I bet you've never seen it rising in the East—you've never been up early enough, Whiskers."

"Perhaps you'd like to hear about the other medal," said I, ignoring the Editor's sarcasm. "The Trafalgar Medal was also struck and paid for privately by a gentleman named Boulton. That also had a bust of Nelson on it, and the immortal words that Nelson used during the battle—you know, sir, 'England expects every man will do his duty.' This medal was struck in gold, silver, and pewter. Many of the sailors on receiving the pewter medals either threw them overboard or sent them back; they thought they deserved something better. Both of these medals were worn suspended by a blue ribbon, and they are the only instance of men in the Army or Navy wearing medals presented by private individuals. The first man to make the presentation of general medals to all ranks in the Army was the Duke of Wellington. That was in 1815, when the Waterloo medal was struck, and given to every soldier who had taken part in that famous battle."

"Well," said the Ed., "you seem to be hot stuff on the subject of medals, I must say. Now, here's a question from Bill Kirby. He wants us to tell him what a droshky is?"

"That's the name for a Russian carriage. It's a light sort of conveyance, uncovered, with four wheels, usually, or else two pairs of wheels joined by a board. The passengers sit sideways on the board and the driver, in front, sits astride. The word droshky comes from another Russian word, drogi, meaning a wagon, and a droshky is a small wagon."

"Fred Appleby wants to know how deep down the sponge divers go for sponges?"

"Tell Fred that the sponge fishers of the Mediterranean work at depths down to 150 feet, and the Australian pearl-divers go down 120 feet sometimes."

"What do they pay them?"

"Pearl fishers and sponge divers are paid by results."

"Fred also wants to know what a diving suit costs?"

"A complete set of diving apparatus would cost from £100 to £200," I told the Ed., and saw that he was diving for another letter.

"Horace Stevens wants us to tell him something about a game called diablo."

"Diablo as we know it consists in running a double cone along a string between two sticks of wood, throwing it in the air and catching it again. The idea of this game came, first of all, from China. In China they used a top made of two pierced wooden cylinders. The cylinders were hollow and often very large, and they were joined by a rod. When they rotated they made a loud hum, which the Chinese pedlars used to use to attract customers. The present style of top was devised by a French engineer in 1906 or thereabouts, and the game was played everywhere a year or so later."

"Peter Watts wants to know how they make those films of Felix the Cat and Mickey the Mouse? Does one man draw all the pictures himself?"

"The making of a Mickey Mouse or Felix film takes about five thousand drawings," I told the Ed. "These drawings are made by a number of artists under the supervision of the inventor, and each drawing carries the action a tiny bit farther. When all the drawings are completed they are photographed and reproduced on a celluloid film. The inventor of the famous Felix the Cat is an Australian artist named Pat Sullivan, who used to draw pictures for comic papers in London. The creator of Mickey Mouse is Mr. Walt Disney, who used to work on papers in Chicago and Kansas City."

"What's a dingo, Whiskers?" fired out the Ed., taking another letter from the pile.

"A dingo, Ed., is the name Europeans give to the warrigal. The warrigal is the native dog of Australia, short-legged, stoutly-built, and sandy in colour. Dingoes can be found both wild and tamed, but nobody seems to know for sure whether the wild dingo was always wild or whether it is a dog that has gone wild after being introduced by man into the country and then escaping from captivity."

"Harry Taylor asks if it is true that horses, years ago, never had horse-shoes?"

"Harry is quite right," I told the Ed. "Horse-shoes were only introduced into England a few hundred years ago, and in Japan, horse-shoeing was not known until the nineteenth century. Before that time, the horses in Japan had their feet protected by straw slippers, which were renewed from time to time. The old ancients used to protect their horses' feet with socks and sandals."

"Does it hurt the horse in any way, fitting it with a horse-shoe?"

"Not if it's done properly. Years ago horses were injured through ignorance, and fitting shoes that were too heavy, or using too many nails, or nails that were too large. Nowadays great care is taken in fitting horses with shoes, believe me. And it strikes me, Ed., I'm going to have a job fitting my head with a hat. There's a bump on it the size of a cricket ball."

"All right," said the Ed. "You'd better buy a pot of vanishing cream, and rub that on it. Perhaps then that bump will disappear."

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"A Burglar Saves the Bacon!"

(Continued from page 22.)

"Kim on, then!"

Their hearts beating fast with excitement, the Fistical Four hurried along in the shadows to the open window. Pausing beneath the window, they saw the light of a torch gleaming on the door of the room which led to the Hall. They waited for a moment, watching the door open and the dark figure glide through the doorway.

When the man had gone Jimmy Silver jumped on to the sill and climbed quietly into the room. The rest followed.

They tiptoed across the room to the door, and halted to reconnoitre. Then they caught the gleam of the torch on some of the valuable plate which was kept in that part of the House.

Jimmy Silver realised the advantage of their position, and made a gesture to his henchmen. Then he rushed forward.

The man was taken completely by surprise. Before he could offer any resistance he was bowled right off his feet. A moment later he was on the floor, with four excited juniors holding on to him like grim death.

"Got him!" grunted Jimmy Silver. Then, at the top of his voice, he yelled out: "Help! In the Hall! Quick!"

There was a sound of scurrying footsteps overhead. In a matter of seconds lights were being switched on, and several seniors, led by Mr. Dalton and Bulkeley, arrived on the scene.

They stared at the juniors and at the struggling figure on the floor almost blankly.

"Silver! Newcome! Boys! What—" gasped Mr. Dalton.

"It's all right, sir," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "We've got him!"

"A burglar!" exclaimed the astonished Form master. "Bless my soul! Phone for the police at once, Bulkeley. The rest of you seniors will kindly take charge of the man."

"Sorry if we startled you, sir," grinned Arthur Edward Lovell. "We had to attract attention somehow."

"Quite—quite!" assented Mr. Dalton. "But—but what on earth are you boys doing up at this hour—fully dressed?"

Jimmy Silver coughed. He had just spotted Carthew join the fringe of the crowd.

"The fact is, sir," he explained, "we had a feeling that someone was going to attempt to break into the school through one of the windows to-night."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Dalton, while Jimmy Silver, out of the corner of his eye, saw Carthew's face go almost green at the thought that his misdeeds were coming to light.

"So we dressed and waited," said Jimmy Silver modestly. "Presently someone turned up."

"It's a lie!" broke in Carthew. "Don't believe him, sir!"

"Carthew," exclaimed Dalton, turning an amazed face to the agitated black sheep of the Sixth, "have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Silver is trying to get his own back because I was the means of he and his friends getting into trouble with you to-day," said Carthew savagely. "If you'll allow me to explain first—"

"Have you any idea what all this means, Silver?" asked Mr. Dalton, turning to the leader of the Fistical Four.

"Not the slightest, sir," answered Jimmy Silver innocently. "What I was going to say was that this burglar turned up and we collared him. Carthew doesn't come into it at all."

"Oh!" gasped Carthew, his face a study in relief and vexation combined.

"That's all, sir," finished Jimmy Silver calmly.

Mr. Dalton regarded Carthew very curiously.

"Your interruption seems somewhat extraordinary, Carthew," he remarked. "If you would like to explain it—"

Carthew choked.

"It's all right, sir. It was really nothing. Just a misunderstanding."

"A most peculiar misunderstanding," commented Mr. Dalton dryly. "However, I can hardly go into that to-night. You juniors will now return to your dormitory."

"Yes, sir."

"As to your detention to-morrow afternoon," added the Form master, "you may consider that wiped out. You have rendered the school an inestimable service to-night, and I should not think of punishing you with that service in mind. Apart from which, there are certain other circumstances."

"Thank you, sir!" chorused the delighted Fistical Four. And they marched past the white-faced Carthew on their way to bed in complete triumph.

They did not need to be told what were the "other circumstances" to which Mr. Dalton had referred. Nor did Carthew. He went into them with Dalton on the following day, and although, naturally, he gave nothing away, he emerged from the Form master's study with quite a fiendish expression on his face. What had transpired at that interview was likely to remain a secret, but, whatever it was, could not have been very pleasing to the black sheep of the Sixth.

The Fistical Four, at any rate, felt that it had been their win. And Lovell's party to the coast turned out to be not a whit less enjoyable from the fact that they had spent half the previous night on the tiles.

THE END.

(Jimmy Silver & Co. certainly had a lucky escape that time! They're after Mr. Manders again in next week's ripping yarn "MANDERS' MAD MISTAKE!")

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