

"THE FAITHFUL FAG!" STIRRING ST. JIM'S STORY OF GRIPPING HUMAN INTEREST— INSIDE.

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The **GEM** 2^d



One of the Lively incidents from **"BRAND BLOTTERS OF KICKING MULE!"** FRANK RICHARDS' Great Yarn of School and Wild West Thrills **WITHIN.**

The Faithful Fag!



When Joe reached the back of the Green Man he stopped outside the french windows and peeped in. A murmur of voices came from within, and the fag saw three persons in the room. One of them was Langton, the prefect, whom he had come to warn of danger!

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy in Trouble!

BUMP! Bump!

Tom Merry paused in the Form-room passage in the School House at St. Jim's. He was passing the door of the Third Form Room when the sound of disturbance came to his ears from within.

Bump!

And following the third bump, came a voice. Tom Merry knew well—the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form.

"Ow! Weally, you young wascals, I—"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Gussy in trouble again!" he remarked cheerfully.

Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's chums in the Shell Form, stopped, too. The Terrible Three had just finished their preparation, and were coming down to the Common-room for a chat with the fellows before going to bed, when the sound of bumping in the Third Form Room arrested them.

Monty Lowther looked at his watch.

"Quarter past nine!" he said.

"More than time the Third were in bed. It's bed-time in a quarter of an hour for our noble selves. What are

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those blessed fags doing up at this time of night?"

"Bumping Gussy, apparently."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better give them a look-in!" said Manners. "Some giddy prefect ought to have seen them to bed a quarter of an hour ago. Perhaps Gussy has taken on the duty for him."

"Hence these tears!" grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry opened the door of the Form-room. Although it was a quarter of an hour past their bed-time, the Third Form had evidently not gone to bed. Two-thirds of the Form, at least, were there, and they were apparently in an unusually lively frame of mind. At St. Jim's, bed-time for all Forms below the Fourth was at nine o'clock. The Fourth and the Shell went at half-past nine. The rule was generally strictly enforced, it being a prefect's duty to see that the juniors went up to their dormitories at the right time. But on this special evening it was clear that some prefect had forgotten the Third.

The Terrible Three looked into the Form-room. In the excitement, there, they were unobserved for the moment. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form was struggling vainly in the

grasp of the fags. Chief among his assailants was his own minor, Wally D'Arcy, and Wally was ably backed up by curly Gibson, Fane, Hobbs, and Joe Frayne, and a crowd more of inky-fingered youngsters.

"Give him another!" Wally was saying.

"Bai Jove!"

"Bump him!"

"Wally, you young wascal—"

"I'm sorry, Gussy!" said Wally solemnly. "This is a painful duty—painful to both of us. But as your minor, I feel bound to bring you up in the way you should go. We can't have Fourth Form chaps coming into our Form-room jawing us! It wouldn't do! Give him one more!"

Bump!

"Ow! You young wascals—"

"Now, Gussy, are you going to be good?"

"Weally, you fwithtful young wuffian!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "You awfully wuffianly young wascals!"

"Give him another!" roared Hobbs.

"Bump him!"

"Ow! Wescue!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"You are spoilin' my twousahs, you young wascals! Ow!"

—GREAT YARN OF ABSORBING HUMAN INTEREST!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

The fags paused for a moment in the punishment of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and stared round at the chums of the Shell.

"What do you Shell bounders want here?" demanded Wally.

"Clear out!" said Gibson.

"Outside, you bounders!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Isn't it time you kids were in bed?" he demanded.

Wally snorted.

"Gussy came in to ask that question," he said. "We're answering it. Do you want to be answered the same way?"

"We can bump a Shell bounder for his cheek just as easily as a Fourth Form duffer!" said Curly.

"I don't think you'd find it easy if you started," grinned Tom Merry. "You'll get into a row if you're found out of your dorm, you young asses!"

Arthur Augustus jerked himself free from the fags. The usually elegant swell of St. Jim's was in a very dishevelled state. His trousers were rumpled and dusty, and his collar was torn out, and his necktie hung over his shoulder. His eyeglass streamed at the end of its cord. He gasped for breath, and, in fact, his manners and his appearance had quite lost the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"You—you uttah young wottahs!" he exclaimed. "Bai Jove, I—I—I—"

"What's the trouble, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"I came in here to warn Wally that it was time to go to bed," D'Arcy explained. "Langton of the Sixth ought to see the Third to bed to-night, but he has apparently forgotten them. As Wally's majah, I am bound to see that he goes to bed at the wopah time."

"As Gussy's minor, I am bound to see that he doesn't play the giddy goat," Wally explained. "These chaps are helping me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to bump Gussy till he promises to go away quietly and behave himself," said Curly Gibson.

"Weally, Gibson—"

"Now, are you going?" demanded half a dozen of the Third.

"Certainly not!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "As your majah, Wally, I am bound to look aftah you."

"Rats!"

"I shall be sowwy to thwash you, Wally—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "You look more like getting the thrashings at the present moment, Gussy. You'd better let the fags alone. If Langton doesn't see them off to bed, let them stay up."

Arthur Augustus shook his head. Arthur Augustus had a very strong sense of duty towards his minor—a sense of duty which was not in the slightest degree appreciated by Wally.

"Impos, my deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "I am bound to look aftah Wally. I wegard him as bein' in my charge. He must go to bed at the wight time."

"No fear!" said Wally cheerfully. "If a prefect forgets bed-time, we're going to make the best of it."

"You will wuin your health with these weekless ways, Wally!"

"Rats!"

"And young Fwayne, too; I wegard

him as bein' undah my care," said Arthur Augustus. "You ought to be in bed, young Fwayne!"

"Oh, I'm all right," grinned Joe Frayne. "I used to stay up till midnight often enough, Master Gussy, when I was in London. Don't you worry your 'ead about me!"

"Weally, Fwayne—"

"Now, are you going, Gussy?" demanded D'Arcy minor.

"Certainly not! I am goin' to see you to bed—you and Fwayne!"

"Outside!" roared the Third, exasperated.

"Weally, you young wascals—"

"Oh, bump him again! He hasn't had enough!"

The fags closed upon the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy began to hit out, but they were too many for him. In a moment he was whirled over in the grasp of many hands, and he descended upon the floor with a loud concussion.

Bump!

"Yawwooooh!"

Bump!

"Ow! Wescue! Tom Mewwy! Wescue, deah boy! Ow!"

The Terrible Three could not resist that appeal. They rushed forward to drag the elegant Fourth Former from the grasp of his tormentors. But the Third were not disposed to be robbed of their victim, neither would they

No sacrifice is too big for great-hearted Joe Frayne, the waif of St. Jim's, as he shows when his fag-master is in danger of the "sack."

dream of brooking the interference of Shell fellows in their Form-room.

"Go for 'em!" roared Wally. "Down with the Shell!"

"Sock it to 'em!"

"Hurrah!"

In a second the Terrible Three were struggling with a crowd of fags. Tom Merry & Co. were great fighting men in the Shell; but numbers were too great for them, and they went down under the onslaught of the fags. The combat was terrific, but the din was more terrific still, and it rang along the Form-room passage and over the whole School House.

In the wild excitement no one heard the footsteps that came hurriedly along the passage. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, stood in the doorway, his brows knitted, and his eyes gleaming with anger.

"Stop that row!" he shouted.

"Ow!" gasped Wally. "Kildare! Cave!"

The struggle ceased.

The Terrible Three and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were sprawling on the floor, gasping; and the fags, with sheepish looks, backed away a little as the captain of St. Jim's strode into the room.

CHAPTER 2.

Where is Langton?

KILDARE stared angrily at the heroes of the Third.

"What does all this row mean?" he asked sharply.

"Ahem—" said Wally.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. scrambled up, looking very red and dusty. Kildare glanced at the clock in the Form-room.

"It is nearly half-past nine!" he exclaimed. "You should have been in bed half an hour ago, you fags! Why haven't you gone?"

"Well, you see—" began Wally cautiously.

"Whose duty was it to see lights out in your dormitory?"

"Langton's."

"Hasn't he been here after you?"

"No."

Kildare frowned. He was head prefect of the School House, and he never failed in his own duties, and had very little tolerance for fellows who did. Langton was known to be a very careless and happy-go-lucky fellow; but a fellow had no right to undertake a prefect's duties unless he was prepared to perform them. So Kildare considered, and his expression showed that he had some unpleasant things to say to Langton when he saw him.

"Well, cut off to bed now!" he exclaimed. "I'll see lights out for you. As it is Langton's fault, I shall not say anything to you about this."

Wally & Co. obediently marched off. Kildare was not to be argued with. The captain of the school followed the Third out of the Form-room and marshalled them upstairs like a flock of sheep.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another.

"Well, I feel rather dusty!" Monty Lowther remarked, with a grin.

D'Arcy gave a gasp.

"Bai Jove! I feel howwid! I feel dusty and wumpled all ovah! I have been tweeked with the gwosset diswesp!"

"You'll know how to mind your own bisney another time!" Manners suggested.

"Weally, Mannahs, I suppose it is my business to see that my minah does not get into weekless ways," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh rats!" said Manners.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Langton will have a warm five minutes when Kildare sees him!" said Tom Merry, as he dusted down his clothes with his handkerchief. "I wonder how a prefect could be such an ass as to forget the Third Form? He might have known that the Third wouldn't go to bed without being told."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gone out, perhaps," Monty Lowther remarked.

"I don't see where he could have gone to at this time of the night," said Tom Merry, as the juniors walked down to the Common-room. "I don't think Langton is a chap like Knox, who break bounds of a night, though I've noticed that he's been very chummy with Knox just lately."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake of the Fourth as they entered the Common-room. "Have you been used as a carpet-sweeper, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed his humorous chum with a scornful stare.

"No, Blake; I have not been used as a carpet-sweeper!" he replied, with dignity. "I have been tweeked with gwoss diswesp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah, Blake!"

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"You can't see yourself, old chap," said Jack Blake blandly. "Look in the glass, and you'll see heaps of reasons for laughing!"

"Weally, you ass——"

"Gussy has been undertaking a prefect's duties," explained Tom Merry. "Langton of the Sixth forgot to see the Third Form to bed, and Gussy sailed in!"

"Good old Gussy! Always shoving his silly nose in somewhere!" remarked Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

Kildare came into the room. He was frowning.

"Time for you kids to go up!" he said. "Does anyone know where Langton is?"

"I saw him go out about half-past eight," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "He was with Knox."

"Gone out?" said Kildare.

"Yes. Anything wrong?"

"Not that I know of!" said Kildare curtly. "Buzz off, you youngsters! Darrell will see lights out!"

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

The St. Jim's captain strode away, his brows knitted.

"Bai Jove, Kildare is watty!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'm wathah sowwy for old Langton. He's wathah an ass, but he's a decent chap."

"Silly ass to chum up with Knox!" growled Blake. "You all know what Knox is!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Fourth and the Shell went up to their dormitories. Darrell saw their lights out, and then descended to the Sixth Form passage to Kildare's study. He found the captain of St. Jim's looking thoughtful.

"Langton not come in yet?" asked Darrell.

"No."

"It's queer!"

"He will have to explain it," said Kildare. "Langton and Knox are both out; but we should never have known about either but for the accident that it was Langton's turn to see lights out for the Third, and the young rascals stayed up as he didn't go to them. I shall see Langton when he comes in."

Kildare had performed Langton's duties for him, and had seen lights out in the Third Form dormitory. He had cautioned the fags before he left them that if there was any more noise they would hear from him.

The Third Form knew Kildare, and they knew he was a fellow of his word, and there was not likely to be any more disturbance.

"My only Aunt Jane!" Wally ejaculated, when the dormitory was left in darkness. "Now I come to think of it, I wish we'd kicked Gussy out quietly instead of bumping him and getting those Shell bounders in!"

"It's all right," said Curly Gibson. "Langton will get a jaw from Kildare, but it really serves him right. Like his cheek to forget us."

Wally chuckled.

"Yes, that's so, Curly. But I don't want to get Langton into a row, you see. He's a good-natured chap, and my belief is that Knox is getting him into rotten ways. If there's any trouble, Knox will get out of it all right. He's as deep as a fox, and Langy will get it in the neck."

"Langton's orlright," remarked Joe Frayne. "'E helped me with my Latin, and 'e's took a lot of trouble over me."

"Taken, you ass!" said Hobbs.

"Thank you, 'Obbs!" said Frayne.

"Hobbs, you fathead! My name is

spelt with an H," growled Hobbs. Hobbs was friends with Joe Frayne, but he had never quite got over his horror of Joe's peculiar English.

"Orlright," murmured Joe.

"Oh, shut up, Hobby!" said Wally. "Don't be so blessed aristocratic. You'll have to chuck it, you know, when you go home to the public-house."

"My father doesn't keep a public-house!" roared Hobbs.

"Well, the coffee-stall, then."

"Look here, Wally——"

"It's orlright, Master Wally," said Joe Frayne. "I don't mind Master 'Obbs tellin' me. It's orlright."

But there was a faint tone in Joe's voice which betrayed that he felt it all the same.

Joe Frayne had been some time at St. Jim's, but the little fellow's history was a peculiar one. In his early days he had been a waif in the streets of London, homeless and hopeless, and from that fate, Tom Merry had saved him.

Tom Merry's uncle paid his fees at St. Jim's, and at first the waif of the streets had had a very hard time in the Third Form.

Hobbs and Fane, and many others had been very much up against him; but Wally had taken his side from the first, and championed him against everybody. And, in the long run, little Joe's pluck and good nature, and really fine qualities, had won upon the Third, and even the most snobbish of them had come to tolerate him, and most of them to like him. And Joe had improved in many ways, though often—especially when he was excited—his old manner of speaking would betray itself, and though Wally did not seem to mind, Hobbs and his friends always seemed to be horrified on such occasions.

And when Hobbs was specially aristocratic and exclusive, it always amused Wally to "chivvy" him on the subject of his people.

Joe Frayne fagged for Langton of the Sixth, and Langton had been very kind to him, in a careless way; and Joe never forgot a kindness. He worshipped Tom Merry, who had saved him from the slums, and he was greatly attached to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

As he lay in bed now, he was thinking of Langton, and of many good-natured things the weak, careless senior had done for him, and he was troubled over the prospects of Langton getting into the black books of the captain of the school.

The fags were discussing the matter without much sympathy for Langton. To many of the youngsters a Sixth Form prefect was merely a natural enemy, and they did not care twopence what happened to him.

"Where the dickens can Langton be?" Hobbs said thoughtfully. "Of course, he's gone out."

"Without permission," remarked Fane.

"Prefects don't require permission to go out," said Wally.

"But they're not allowed out at this time of night. Even the captain of the school would have to explain."

"That's true."

"Oh it's Knox at the bottom of it," said Curly Gibson. "Knox is a black-guard, if ever there was one."

"They've gone down to the Green Man, sure as a gun," yawned Hobbs. "Knox has friends there, I know—Jolliffe and Banks, the bookmaker. Langton has plenty of money, and Knox has taken him in."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Kildare will come down on him heavy!" chuckled Curly.

The fags laughed at the prospect. But Joe Frayne did not laugh.

"Do you really think Langy is at the Green Man, 'Obbs?" he asked.

"I think it most likely."

"Orrid, ain't it?"

"Yes, 'orrid," said Hobbs sarcastically, "in fact, 'orrible! Not to say 'arrowing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe Frayne dropped into silence. Although he had stopped saying "Crikey!" and "Strike me pink!" aspirates still formed a great difficulty in his path.

The fags discussed the matter till they dropped off to sleep one by one. Their last sleepy remarks were to the effect that Kildare would "nail" Langton when he came in, and would bowl him out if he had been to the Green Man, and that Langton would lose his prefectship, and perhaps be sacked from the school. That thought was too troublesome to Joe to allow him to fall to sleep easily.

He remembered that Langton had helped him many a time with his Latin; it was hard for Joe, and his Form-master, Mr. Selby, was very sharp and impatient with him about it. He remembered that Langton had chipped in and saved him when Sefton of the Sixth was licking him cruelly. Joe Frayne remained awake after all the other fellows had gone to sleep; and when the rest of the Third were buried in slumber the little waif rose.

He dressed himself quietly, and stole to the door of the dormitory. The passage without was in darkness; all the junior Forms had been in bed long ago. Joe closed the dormitory door softly behind him, and stole away to the head of the stairs—and crouched there in the shadows—listening.

Langton's fag was waiting for Langton to come in. And there was another fellow who was waiting, in a grimmer humour, for Langton to come in—Kildare.

CHAPTER 3.

Caught!

KILDARE was sitting in his study with the door wide open, and the light streaming out into the dusky passage.

It was half past ten, and the rest of the Sixth had gone to bed. None of the studies showed a light with the exception of Kildare's.

Neither Knox nor Langton had come in yet.

Knox, Kildare more than suspected, was a blackguard; but Knox was too cunning to be caught napping. But Langton he had always believed to be a decent fellow—weak and good-natured to a fault, but decent enough, and not at all the kind of fellow to keep bad company.

If he had an explanation to offer, Kildare was willing to hear it. If he had not, he would have to take the consequences.

No one could come along the Sixth Form passage now without Kildare seeing him. The clock in the tower of St. Jim's had rung out half-past ten when there was a step in the passage, and Kildare listened.

The step came along, and paused, as if the newcomer had seen the light streaming out from the open doorway of the study and was struck by it. The captain of St. Jim's smiled grimly.

He rose to his feet, and his shadow

fell into the passage as he moved between the light and the door. Then the footsteps came on again. The fellow in the passage had evidently realised that it was impossible to pass undiscovered, and that it was useless to retreat, since Kildare had heard him.

"Knox!" said Kildare quietly, as the figure of the senior came into view.

Knox stopped outside the door. His thin, vulpine face looked a little startled, but he had had time to recover his coolness, and he was quite ready for Kildare. He glanced into the study and nodded coolly to the captain of St. Jim's.

"Hallo, Kildare!" he said genially. "Waiting up?"

"Yes."

"For me?" asked Knox, with a smile.

"You and Langton!"

"Langton! Is he up?"

"Yes."

Knox yawned.

"By Jove, is he? I'm in a bit late myself. I was over at Wayland, you know, and I missed the train back. Beastly bore, these rotten local trains!"

"You've been to Wayland?" asked Kildare.

The prefect nodded.

"Yes; it's market day there to-day, you know, and very lively."

"Did Langton go to Wayland with you?"

"He strolled down the road with me."

"But did not go to Wayland?"

"Really, Kildare, it sounds as if you are catechising me!" said Knox, with an unpleasant laugh. "Don't pile it on too thick, you know. I know you are the head prefect of the school, but I am a prefect, too, not a fag in the Second!"

"Did Langton go to Wayland with you?"

"Better ask Langton."

"Have you really been to Wayland?"

"Kildare!"

"I ask you that question because I can't take your word!" said Kildare grimly. "Look here, Knox, it's no good beating about the bush. The Head has told me that he has reason to believe that some of the seniors here are frequenting the Green Man. He has asked me to look out, and to report to him, as is my duty as captain of St. Jim's."

Knox sneered.

"It won't be much use telling tales about me," he said. "I have been to Wayland, and I dare say I could find witnesses to prove it."

"I dare say you could, whether you have been there or not," said Kildare scornfully. "I know you know how to cover up your tracks, Knox, though I think you will come a cropper one of these days. Very well, you can go to bed if you like—I shall stay up for Langton."

"And noble him as he comes in?" asked Knox unpleasantly.

"Yes."

"And take him by surprise, and make him blurt out something?" sneered the prefect. "You don't suppose Langton will be as much on his guard as I am?"

"I shall certainly ask him to account for staying out this evening, and leaving the Third up after bed-time," said Kildare quietly.

Knox started.

"The ass! Just like him to overlook something like that!" he ejaculated. Kildare's lip curled.

"Yes; you wouldn't have forgotten," he said. "But you can get along—I'm going to stay up for Langton. And I'll trouble you to go into your study and close the door—you are not going to make any signal to Langton as he comes in. And I shall see that you don't drop out of the study window, either."

Knox drew a deep, hissing breath, and

his eyes glittered as he looked at the captain of the school.

For a moment it looked as if he meant to defy Kildare, and to measure strength with him. Kildare thought so, too, and he clenched his hands and straightened up. He would not have been sorry. At that moment he would have been glad of a good excuse for knocking the black sheep of the Sixth headlong along the passage.

But if the thought was in Knox's mind he dismissed it at once. He had either to defy Kildare, and face serious trouble afterwards, or to abandon his companion in wrongdoing.

Anybody who knew Knox would have known at once which alternative he would choose. He shrugged his shoulders with an assumption of carelessness.

"I'm going to bed," he said, with a yawn. "Good-night! You're welcome to sit up."

He moved along the passage. Kildare did not return his good-night. He disliked the cad of the Sixth too much for civility just then. If Arthur Langton was in trouble, and had disgraced himself, as Kildare thought, he suspected, too, that Knox was the one who had led him into rascally ways. And it would never be brought home to the cunning prefect; Knox was always too careful in covering up his tracks.

Knox returned in a few moments, and looked into the study again. He made a gesture along the passage.

"Langton's door is locked," he said.

"I know that," said Kildare.

"He may be in his room, asleep," suggested Knox.

Kildare shook his head.

"I have knocked and called him," he said. "If he were there he would answer me. And he was seen to go out with you, Knox, and no one has seen him come in. As a matter of fact, you



Joe Frayne gave a start of surprise as a dark figure detached itself from the shadows, and the light of a torch gleamed upon him. It was Crump, the village policeman! "Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What are you doin' 'ere?" The fag was caught out of bounds!

know as well as I do that he's out of doors, and you know where he is."

Knox shrugged his shoulders again, and walked up the passage.

Langton's door was half-way up the passage, and Knox was nearer to Kildare's study. Kildare stepped into the passage, and saw the prefect go into his room, and heard the door close. A slight sound on the stairs caught Kildare's ears, and he glanced up past the banisters. But there was nothing to be seen, and the sound was not repeated.

In his study, Knox's face lost the assumption of cynical carelessness, and now that he was alone he looked almost haggard with anxiety. The blackguard of the Sixth knew well enough that he was playing a dangerous game. Nothing could make him follow the straight path, and yet he knew that the crooked path was full of danger, and might lead to his being "sacked" from the school.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "And hang him! What an utter fool Langton is! I never dreamed that it was his turn to-night to look after the brats—or—but it's too late to think of that now. He is a fool? He forgot that, and he refused to come home with me, the fool! When he comes in, Kildare will spot him. I can't warn him—he will be trapped, and he'll blurt out the whole story!"

Knox gritted his teeth.

"He won't give me away; he's too decent for that; but the game will be up for him! Kildare will report him—he's bound to, whether he wants to or not. Langton's done for! I—I can't help him without ruining myself, and—that's not to be thought of! It's his own fault, for being an obstinate fool. Why couldn't he come away with me, as I wanted him to?"

Knox moved to the window, and looked out.

Kildare's window was open, and the light streamed out into the dark quadrangle. The prefect could not leave by the window without almost the certainty of being discovered—he dared not risk it. Knox dared very little in any line, except playing the rascal; he was not of the stuff of which heroes are

made, and he was not likely to run the danger of ruin to himself to save a friend, even if he had led that friend into danger and disgrace in the first place.

He remained for some minutes with a knitted brow, thinking. Then, with an oath, he undressed and went to bed. He, at least, was safe, and Langton must take his chance! That was the decision of Knox.

CHAPTER 4.

The Faith of a Fag!

JOE FRAYNE crouched in the shadows on the big staircase, his heart beating hard, his breath coming and going in quick throbs.

He had heard all that had passed between Kildare and the blackguard of the Sixth, and he knew, even more surely than Kildare did, that Knox had lied—that he had left his companion in some questionable company, and it was pretty certain that it was in the back parlour of the Green Man.

More fellows than Knox paid visits to Mr. Joliffe's little back parlour—Frayne knew that. There were Crooke of the Shell, and Levison and Mellish of the Fourth, and Sefton of the Sixth—they all knew that place well.

Joe Frayne knew where Langton was, and he knew that he would come in unsuspecting, and find Kildare waiting for him, and then the whole truth would come out.

The senior would deserve what would happen to him—that was likely enough, but little Joe was not out of bed at that hour to think out ethical questions.

Langton had been kind to him; Langton had stood his friend many times, and had helped him, and Joe's only thought now was how he could help his benefactor.

And, besides, did Langton deserve what would befall him, after all? There were fellows who drifted into wickedness from a natural kink in their nature, like Knox, and there were fellows who took the wrong path through sheer care-

lessness, and too easy listening to evil counsellors.

Arthur Langton would not be the first fellow who had trodden the primrose path of dalliance without any inherent bad in his nature.

Joe Frayne crept back to the dormitory passage, his face pale, his heart beating hard, his thoughts very busy.

How could he save Langton?

That was the thought that was hammering in his mind.

There was but one way. If the absent prefect could be warned, he might escape Kildare's keen eyes, or he would at least be prepared for the coming interview, and would not be taken by surprise and trapped into making dangerous admissions. And there was only one way to warn him—for someone to seek him where he was, and tell him that Kildare was waiting up and watching for him at St. Jim's.

That meant breaking bounds!

It was a fearful risk for the fag to run, but there was a depth of courage and loyalty in the little fellow's nature that few would have guessed.

It required only a few minutes for Frayne to make up his mind. He stole silently along the dormitory passage, and reached the window at the lower end. It looked out upon an outhouse, and fags had used it many a time for leaving the House without permission. That was when some youthful jape made it necessary; but it was no jape that Frayne of the Third was engaged upon now. He realised very clearly how deadly serious the matter was, but he did not hesitate.

He opened the window silently, and clambered out, and dropped softly upon the roof of the outhouse. In a minute more he was upon the ground, and was hurrying round the mass of dark buildings. The quarter to eleven had chimed out. Joe's great fear was that he might miss Langton, and that all his trouble would be for nothing. But as he halted in the shadowy quadrangle, and looked up at Kildare's window, he could see the stalwart figure of the captain of St. Jim's pacing to and fro in the light. Langton had evidently not returned yet.

Joe scuttled away to the school wall, and climbed the slanting oak, and a minute later dropped into the road.

Then he lost no time.

At a swift run the little fag dashed away in the direction of Rylecombe.

The road was very lonely and very dark. There were few stars in the clouded sky, and only at long intervals a dim lamp shed a glimmer of light upon the shadowed road. Joe's hurried footsteps rang with startling clearness upon the hard road in the silence of the night.

The fag's heart was beating hard as he ran.

Suddenly Joe Frayne gave a start of surprise as a dark figure detached itself from the shadows of the trees, and the light of an electric torch gleamed upon him.

It was Crump, the policeman of Rylecombe! The glare of the torch fell full upon the fag, and the constable uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Hallo! What are you doin' 'ere?"

A heavy hand dropped upon Joe's shoulder, but the fag, hardly knowing what he did, dashed it aside and dodged the portly constable and dashed on at frantic speed.

The policeman pursued him for a few paces and then stopped. He might as well have chased a will-o'-the-wisp as the panting, fleet-footed junior of St. Jim's.

Frayne tore on, his heart thumping

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against his ribs. The torchlight and the heavy footsteps died away behind him. He was in no danger of being caught, but he knew that the village policeman must have recognised him as a St. Jim's fellow. Doubtless, in the brief instant, P.-c. Crump had not seen his face clearly, but he would know that he was a junior from the school. And Joe knew only too well that Crump would consider it his duty to report the incident to Dr. Holmes on the morrow. It was his duty, there was no doubt about that, for he must know, of course, that the boy was out of school at that hour without permission. There would be an inquiry, and Joe's heart sickened within him at the thought. What if it came out that he had been out of bounds?

The lights of the Green Man gleamed before him. Joe, panting, paused at the dark lane that led along the side of the public-house to the gardens at the back, sloping down to the river.

The fag turned into the path beside the house, and skirted round the building and reached the gardens. At the back of the house was a wooden veranda, with french windows opening upon it—curtained windows, from which a light shone.

Joe hesitated a moment, and then firmly ascended the steps of the veranda and stopped outside the french windows. A murmur of voices came from within, and through the window Joe saw three people in the room, one of whom was Langton.

Joe moved along to the door and knocked. In the silence the knock was loud and startling. The voices in the room died away instantly. Joe pushed the door open and entered.

CHAPTER 5.

The Only Chance!

MR. JOLIFFE, the landlord of the Green Man, and Mr. Banks, the bookmaker and racing tout, were in the room. Arthur Langton of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's was the other occupant.

The trio seemed petrified as the breathless fag, panting for breath, stepped into the room.

Mr. Joliffe was the first to spring to his feet.

"Who—who's this?" he asked harshly. Joe Frayne did not reply. He could not for the moment. He was exhausted with running, and the scene that his eyes beheld in the back parlour of the Green Man almost stunned him. He had feared the worst for Langton, but his imagination had not painted anything so bad as the reality.

There were cards on the table, and money, and ash-trays, and glasses. A glass that evidently contained something stronger than water was before Arthur Langton, and he held a cigarette between his fingers. His face was flushed, not only with the heat of the close and stuffy room. His eyes were heavy and strained, and his mouth strangely set. The cards dropped from his fingers as he looked at Frayne, and the cigarette fell to the floor.

"Frayne!" he muttered. "What are you doing here?"

"Friend of yours, Langton?" asked Mr. Banks.

"My fag at the school."

"Master Langton!" gasped Joe.

"I—I—"

The prefect rose to his feet. His face was more deeply flushed now, and his eyes were gleaming with rage.

"You little hound!" he muttered

thickly. "So you have come here spying on me!"

"Master Langton! I—"

Frayne had no chance to say more. The angry Sixth Former rushed upon him and grasped him by the collar.

"You spying hound!" he shouted.

"I ain't, Master Langton!" gasped Joe. "I came 'ere to 'elp you—to warn you."

"What's that?" demanded the Sixth Former sharply.

"Master Kildare's waiting up watching for you, sir," panted Joe. "I slipped out to come and tell you, so you wouldn't be caught going 'ome."

"Oh!"

"My 'at!" said Mr. Joliffe. "That's a 'orse of another colour! Is the young villain telling the truth, do you think, Langton?"

Langton nodded.

He released Frayne and staggered to the wall, his face white and scared.

"Kildare waiting up for me?" he panted.

"Yes, Master Langton."

"How do you know? Why should he wait up?"

"You forgot about the Third—"

"The Third?" repeated Langton.

"Oh, I remember! And—"

Frayne explained hastily.

"Good heavens!" muttered Langton.

"I'm ruined!"

Joliffe and Banks did not speak. They knew enough of Kildare of St. Jim's to know that Langton in all probability told the exact truth. He was ruined so far as St. Jim's was concerned if his conduct was reported to the Head.

The wretched boy covered his face with his hands. The cards, the drink, the smoking, the wretched pleasure—so-called—that had enticed him from his duties were forgotten now. He had lost money—lost more than he dared to think of—as was only natural when he was playing with old hands like Joliffe and Mr. Banks, who knew every trick that was to be known in the cardsharper's line—and he had played on desperately in the hope of retrieving his luck, careless of the flight of time.

And, as was to be expected, the more he lost the more deeply he plunged, and the two rascals held his paper for larger sums than he could afford to pay. And, as a matter of fact, Mr. Joliffe and his friend had little more use for their dupe now.

They had drained him dry, and, so far as they were concerned, he could go.

"What shall I do? What can I do?"

"Better get back to the school," said Mr. Joliffe carelessly.

"But—but—"

"Well, you can't stay here all night," said Mr. Joliffe.

"You can fix it up with Kildare, somehow, I dare say."

"I'm ruined!"

"Master Langton!" It was Joe who spoke, quickly, eagerly. "There's a chance, sir."

Langton gave him a dull look.

"There's no chance left for me! Oh, what a fool I've been—what a mad

fool! I deserve this—it serves me right!"

"Which ought to be a comfort for you!" said Mr. Banks, with a sneer.

Langton did not hear him.

"There's a chance!" repeated Joe. "I 'eard Knox say as your study door was locked—"

"Yes; I locked it before I came out, so that if I was missed it would be thought that I had gone to bed," muttered Langton. "I forgot about the Third."

"If you was to get into the room somehow, Master Langton, they couldn't prove as you wasn't there all the time," said Joe eagerly.

Langton started.

"But—but if Kildare is watching—"

"He's watching the Sixth Form passage, for you to come along the usual way," said Frayne hurriedly. "If you was to get in at the back window—same way as I got out—you could come up the passage from the other end in your stocking feet, unlock your door, and slip in, perhaps without Master Kildare 'caring—"

Langton's eyes gleamed.

"By Jove! It's a chance!" Then his handsome face clouded over again. "But Kildare will hear—he's sure to hear!"

"Not if I stop him, sir."

"You? How can you prevent him?"

"I'll draw his attention to the quad, sir, by making a noise of some sort there, and while he's looking out of the window you can sneak into your study."

"By Jove!"

Langton said no more. He put on his coat and hat hurriedly. He nodded good-night to the two scoundrels of the Green Man, and went with Joe out on the veranda.

The fag led the way down the wooden steps to the garden and along the path into the street. Save for the glimmer from a lamp-post, the street was in darkness.

"Can't go 'ome by the road!" muttered Frayne. "We shall 'ave to take the short cut across the fields—"

"But why—"

"Crump—the perliceman, you know—'e's there. 'E nearly spotted me!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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muttered Frayne: "You mustn't risk meetin' 'im, Master Langton."

Langton shivered.

"Good heavens, no!"

"This way—across the fields."

Joe Frayne led the way through a dim gateway. He seemed to have to do all the leading—Langton followed him like a child. Unfailingly the fog led him on through fields and by-lanes, till they came out into the road near St. Jim's, and the grey old walls rose dimly before them in the darkness.

CHAPTER 6.

Langton Lies!

ELEVEN o'clock had struck and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came to his study window and looked out into the dim, silent quadrangle.

From only one window beside his own was a light streaming out—the window of the Head's study. He stood looking out into the dimness with knitted brows.

Where was Langton?

It was useless to question Knox—he knew that. And the captain of St. Jim's was beginning to feel alarmed as well as angry about the absent senior. He had begun to fear that there might have been an accident. It was not so long since a gang of cracksmen had been at work in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, and footpads were not unknown in the lonely lanes at night. It was quite possible that some mischance had befallen the careless Sixth Former.

A quarter-past eleven chimed on the still air of the night.

Kildare gave a start.

In the radius of light that fell from his window into the quadrangle a shadow moved for a moment. There was a sound as of footsteps grinding heavily upon a grave path.

Was it Langton at last?

Who else could be out in the quadrangle at that hour?

Kildare strained his eyes into the gloom. He could see nothing—nothing but the dim old elms rising like shadows in the deeper gloom of the buildings.

"Who is there?" Kildare called out softly.

There was no reply.

The chime of the clock had died away, leaving deeper silence. Again a sound broke the stillness—the sound of footsteps.

Kildare wondered.

If Langton was there, why did he not come into the House, and why was he making so much noise? Was it Langton, or some junior out of bounds—some New House fellow engaged upon a House raid? It was a late hour for such a jape, but it was possible. Kildare looked, listened, and wondered.

Silence!

While the captain of St. Jim's was standing at his window, looking out and listening, he kept one eye, as it were, on his open door—no one could have passed down the Sixth Form passage from the landing without being observed.

But it there was a faint sound along the corridor, from the back of the House, Kildare did not notice it. He could hardly suspect that Langton was getting in at a back window, while these sounds were audible in the quadrangle in front of the House, for,

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of course, he had no suspicion that the senior was not alone.

But now the silence was deep and unbroken.

No sound came from the quadrangle till the half-hour chimed out.

Kildare turned restlessly back into his study.

His ears might have been deceived in fancying that the faint sounds he had heard were the sounds of footsteps. Langton had evidently not returned after all.

What was to be done?

The captain of St. Jim's was now seriously alarmed. Surely the most reckless fellow could not intentionally have stayed out till midnight.

Where was Arthur Langton?

"I'll wait till twelve," Kildare muttered. "And then, if he isn't back, I'll speak to Mr. Railton. He will have to be searched for!"

It seemed a long time before twelve rang out on the stillness. But the deep boom of the hour came at last. Kildare listened to the twelve deep strokes as they came dully in at the window.

Midnight!

He quitted his study, and went to Mr. Railton's room. The Housemaster of the School House was long since in bed. Kildare knocked at his door, and after a moment or two the voice of Mr. Railton replied:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, sir—Kildare!"

"What is the matter, Kildare? Is anything wrong?"

"I am afraid so, sir! Can I speak to you?"

"Wait one moment!"

There was a sound of the Housemaster getting up. A light glimmered under the door. Mr. Railton, in dressing-gown and slippers, with a very startled look upon his face, opened the door, and met Kildare's glance.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Langton is out, sir. I've waited up for him, and he hasn't come back. I'm afraid that something has happened to him."

Mr. Railton started.

"Langton out at this hour!"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure, Kildare?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"This is extraordinary!" said Mr. Railton.

Kildare explained the circumstances quietly. Mr. Railton's brows grew very dark.

"There may have been an accident," he said. "Have you looked in his room?"

"No, sir; the door is locked!"

"May he not have gone to bed, then?"

Kildare shook his head.

"No, sir. Early in the evening I knocked and knocked, and there was no answer. It's pretty clear that he locked the door to give the impression that he had gone to bed. If it hadn't been for seeing the Third to bed, of course I should never have missed him. It came out because he forgot about that."

"I understand. But, in order to make all sure, we will examine his room first."

"As you think best, sir."

Mr. Railton made his way to Langton's room, followed by Kildare. Kildare was quite certain that Langton was not there, and Mr. Railton had little expectation of finding him. But it was, of course, necessary to make quite certain of the fact, before commencing a search.

Mr. Railton knocked sharply at the

door, and tried the handle. The door was locked, and it did not open.

Mr. Railton knocked again, louder than before. There was a sound of movement in the room, and Kildare started.

"Someone is in there," said the School House master.

Kildare looked amazed.

"I cannot understand this," he said.

Knock, knock!

"Are you there, Langton?" Mr. Railton called out sharply.

A sleepy voice replied:

"Hallo! Who's that?"

Kildare almost staggered. It was Langton's voice. Mr. Railton looked curiously at the captain of St. Jim's.

"He is there, Kildare!"

"Ye-es!" stammered Kildare. "I—I don't understand it!"

"Open the door, Langton!"

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Open the door!"

"Very well, sir!"

The key turned in the lock, and the door opened. Langton, in his pyjamas, stood there in the dark, only a glimmer of light from the passage falling into the study. The prefect rubbed his eyes, and stared at the Housemaster and the captain of the school.

Kildare was silent. He was so overcome with amazement that his voice had left him. He had kept watch and ward, and he hardly believed that Langton could have obtained entrance into the House without discovery. Even if he had climbed in at a back window, how had such a window come to be unfastened? Kildare knew that Knox had not quitted his room after entering it. But if Langton had been in bed all the time—

Mr. Railton switched on the light in the room. The prefect blinked in the light. He looked sleepy and a little flurried, as any fellow might have looked at being awakened suddenly in the middle of the night.

"Is there anything wrong, sir?" he asked again.

"I wish to ask you a few questions, Langton. How long have you been in bed?"

"I don't know, sir. What's the time now?"

"Ten minutes past twelve."

"Must be nearly four hours, I should think."

"You went to bed early?"

"Yes, sir. I had a bad headache, and I thought I was catching a bit of a cold, and I meant to sleep it off. I have been reading rather hard lately."

"Have you forgotten that it was your duty to see lights out for the Third Form this evening, Langton?"

Langton started.

"By Jove, sir, I had! But I suppose one of the other prefects did it. I would have asked Kildare or Darrell if I had thought of it. I suppose my beastly headache drove it out of my mind."

"Were you asleep when Kildare knocked at your door?"

"Did he knock?"

"Soon after half-past nine," said Kildare, speaking for the first time. "I knocked and knocked, and there was no answer!"

"I'm sorry!" said Langton. "I suppose I was fast asleep. As a matter of fact, I couldn't sleep when I went to bed, and my head was simply racking me, and I took a sleeping-draught. I took it to get off to sleep, and I suppose it made me sleep soundly. I certainly don't remember hearing any knocking at the door or waking up."

The prefect's manner was perfectly natural.

If he was not telling the truth, he was

certainly a good actor, though with so much at stake, he had every motive for doing his best in that line.

Mr. Railton looked at him searchingly. He had always known Langton to be decent, and he could not suspect him of standing there telling a succession of lies without flinching at one of them.

The Housemaster turned to Kildare. "It seems that you were mistaken, Kildare," he said. "I suppose you put faith in Langton's statement?"

Kildare nodded slowly. "Yes, sir. I suppose it's as he says," he replied. "But—but Langton went out with Knox. He was seen to go with him, and when Knox came in, he certainly gave me the impression that Langton was still out of doors."

Langton's lips quivered for a moment, but he was perfectly cool.

"I didn't tell Knox I was coming in," he said.

"It is very unfortunate," said Mr. Railton. "You have had your vigil for nothing, Kildare. It is certainly very unlucky that you did not make sure that Langton was not in his room before sitting up for him. But I suppose you could only conclude that he was absent from failing to get any reply to your knocking. Don't think that I blame you in any way; you have only done your duty."

Kildare looked at Langton, red-denying.

"I'm sorry, Langton!" he said. "I suspected you of doing rotten things, and it seems that I was wrong. I don't quite understand all the matter, but I don't doubt your word. I shouldn't wonder if Knox purposely let me go on in error; it would be like him. But I'm sorry I thought badly of you; and I can say quite truly that it was a bad shock to me to think that you were doing anything rotten. I had always thought better of you than that. I'm sorry! I can't say more."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Langton. "Only don't jump to conclusions so quickly another time, Kildare, old man! It's jolly easy to be unjust."

"Yes, I know that, and I'm sorry!"

"The matter is over now," said Mr. Railton. "I am only too glad that it has turned out so well, without a stain upon Langton's character. Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Railton returned to his room, and Kildare followed his example. Langton closed his door, and stood for some moments in thought. Knox would have laughed at such a success in trickery; but it did not seem a laughing matter to Arthur Langton. He had always been a fellow of his word; he had scorned a lie as much as Kildare himself. And now he had lied and lied—He was amazed at the facility with which he had lied. What change had come over him? Where was this leading him? How would he ever be able to look Kildare in the face again, after putting him in the wrong by cunning and sheer force of falsehood?

"Good heavens!" muttered Langton miserably. "I never knew before that I had the makings of a scoundrel in me! But—but I couldn't own up! I couldn't face being sacked from the school! I had to lie or go! And—and how could I face the people at home if I were sacked for dishonourable conduct? What would the mater say? I couldn't face it!"

He sat upon the edge of the bed, pale and miserable. One sin led to another, and each was worse than the last. He realised that. From recklessness to real wrong; from careless neglect of duty

and breaking of small rules, to gambling, lying, and endless wretched deceit—the path was easy! He was amazed at himself. But he was saved, and there was a chance for him now. No more of the Green Man; no more breaking bounds at night! He would pay somehow his debt to Mr. Joliffe, and he would never touch a card again! If only he came clear of this, he would never run such a fearful risk again! As he sat there he made that resolve.

It was long before he went to bed, but when he went he did not sleep; there was no sleep for Arthur Langton that night.

CHAPTER 7.

Unlucky for Joe!

TOM MERRY sat up in bed as the rising-bell pealed out on the crisp morning air.

The March sun was shining in at the windows of the Shell dormitory in the School House. Tom Merry, generally the first up in the Shell, jumped out of bed. Monty Lowther sat up and yawned.

"Any of you fellows wake up in the night?" he asked.

"Yes, I did!" said Manners. "There was somebody knocking somewhere in the middle of the night, and it woke me. Did you hear it?"

"Yes," said Lowther.

"I thought I heard something, too," said Tom Merry. "I only half-awoke, though. Of course, I knew it couldn't be the giddy cracksmen again; they wouldn't knock to be let in!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

Several of the Shell fellows had heard the knocking in the night, and had wondered what it was. The Terrible Three quitted the dormitory, and looked in at the Fourth Form quarters as they went down. Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were about to come out, and the other fellows were all up.

"Any of you chaps hear the knocking last night?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I heard it!" grunted Blake. "That ass Gussy woke me up to hear it! He wouldn't listen to it alone; he's too fond of my company!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I heard it, too," said Levison.

Blake gave another grunt.

"Yes; and Levison found out what it was, of course!" he said. "You can always trust Levison for knowing what's going on!"

Levison flushed angrily.

"Why shouldn't I?" demanded the cad of the Fourth. "Anyway, you asked me what it was when I came back into the dorm."

"Yaas, wathah! Upon the whole, I do not wegard Levison as havin' acted in his usual spyin' and dishonourable way on this occasion, Blake."

"Oh rats!"

"Well, what was it?" asked Monty Lowther. "If you know who was kicking up the row, you may as well tell us."

"Railton and Kildare were knocking at Langton's door," said Levison. "They made him open it. It was about a quarter past twelve."

"Then he was in?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Oh, yes! I saw him over the banisters. I couldn't hear what he said—"

"You tried, I'll bet a hat!" grunted Jack Blake.

"Yes, I tried," said Levison coolly.

(Continued on the next page.)



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"Look here, my man!" stormed the colonel. "Don't you know I am your colonel?"

"Oh, are you?" said the recruit. "Then you ain't 'arf in for it! The sergeant's been lookin' for you for over an hour!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Hill, 8, Liberty Street, Wavertree, Liverpool, 15.

* * * HIS OWN BACK!

First Man (proudly): "The other day I told the village bully just what I thought of him."

Second Man (astonished): "And what are you doing here?"

First Man: "Oh, before he could do anything I hung up the receiver!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Glover, 54, Woodhead Road, Birches Head, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent.

* * * THE MILKMAN'S MISTAKE.

Mrs. Jones: "Are you sure your milk is pure?"

Milkman: "Madam, every week our milk is paralyzed by the local anarchist!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss D. Burgess, Ardara, Galwally, Belfast.

* * * JUST SO!

Sambo: "I hear tell yo' is gwine to pay me dat dollah yo' owes me. Is yo'?"

Rastus: "I ain't saying I ain't."

Sambo: "I ain't askin' yo' is yo' ain't; I'm askin' yo' ain't yo' is!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Clews, Boot Hall, Horton, nr. Leek.

* * * A BREATHLESS BUSINESS!

Customer: "Why do you have your complaints department on the sixth floor?"

Shop Manager: "By the time customers have climbed six flights of stairs, they're too breathless to complain!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Langdon, South Western Hospital, Lander Road, Stockwell, London, S.W.9.

* * * SKIMPOL'S LATEST!

Skimpole: "You said last night, D'Arcy, that deep breathing would kill microbes."

Gussy: "Yaas, deah boy, that's twue. What about it?"

Skimpole: "Well, how do you make microbes take to deep breathing?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Gilham, 97, Church Lane, Mill End, Rickmansworth, Herts.

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"I don't see why I shouldn't know what's going on. I couldn't hear a word; but it's pretty clear that Kildare had believed that Langton was still out, and had called in Mr. Raiton to see whether he was in his room."

"Lucky for him they didn't find him out!" said Tom Merry. "It would have meant the sack for poor old Langy, and he's too good to be sacked."

"He'll get it in the neck!" said Levison. "I can guess where he was, and I fancy Kildare was waiting up for him, though he dodged in somehow without being seen. And there was somebody else up, too."

"Good old Sexton Blake!" growled Blake. "And who else was up?"

"I don't know, but somebody was, for I'll swear that somebody passed me in the dark!" said Levison. "I couldn't very well call out, and he was gone in a flash, and my impression is that he whisked into the Third Form dorm."

"Some kid who got up to see what the knocking was about," Tom Merry suggested.

"More likely somebody who had been out on the tiles!" said Levison. "Of course, it's no business of mine—"

"Has that only just occurred to you?" asked Blake unpleasantly.

"I twust that it was not that minah of mine playin' some wotten twick!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "My minah is a feafuhl wowwy to me!"

"Not so much as you are to him, I expect!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

The Terrible Three strolled down the passage with Blake and D'Arcy and two or three other Fourth Formers who had finished dressing. Tom Merry paused near the door of the Third Form dormitory with a sudden exclamation.

"My hat! Look there!"

"Footprints, by Jove!" ejaculated Blake.

The juniors looked at the marks curiously. It was not exactly a footprint, it was a cake of mud that had evidently been dropped from a boot in the passage the previous night.

There were other marks along the passage, too. Someone who had been tramping through muddy fields had plainly come up the dormitory passage, and he had left traces behind him. It looked as if Levison's statement was correct. And the muddy marks ceased at the door of the Third Form dormitory.

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"Some kid has been out by the back window!" he muttered. "Some young rascal. I hope it was only a jape, and nothing of the kind that Levison indulges in."

Levison scowled.

"Look here—" he began.

"Better smudge these marks away," said Blake. "No good letting the ass get into a row, whoever it was. Shove your hoofs along here."

The juniors willingly lent their aid. The muddy marks were trampled away into dust that was undecipherable, and would disappear entirely when the maids came along with their brooms. And then the juniors looked into the Third Form dormitory.

The Third Form were all up, with one exception. That exception was Joe Frayne. He was sitting up in bed and yawning, and listening to emphatic oburgations from D'Arcy minor.

Wally had a cricket stump in his hand, and was explaining to Frayne that if he didn't turn out at once the cricket stump would descend upon him.

"You blessed slacker!" said Wally

indignantly. "What on earth are you sticking in bed for? Up you get!"

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

"I'll yaw-aw-aw you if you don't get up!" said Wally. "Now, are you getting up, or are you having this stump on your napper?"

"All right, Master Wally," said Frayne meekly. "I'm sleepy, that's all!"

"Well, what bisney have you to be sleepy after rising-bell?" demanded Wally.

The juniors in the doorway looked at one another. Frayne was generally lively and bright enough in the morning, and his being unusually sleepy that particular morning, when it was pretty certain that someone in the Third had been out overnight was a curious coincidence, to say the least.

"Hallo, young shaver!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "What makes you so jolly sleepy this morning? Have you been out on the tiles?"

"You clear out, you blessed Shell-fish!" said Wally.

Levison uttered an exclamation.

"So it was Frayne!"

"What was Frayne?" demanded Wally.

"Frayne was out last night."

"Rats!"

"Look at his boots!"

Levison pointed to a pair of boots visible under the edge of Joe Frayne's bed. All eyes were directed on them at once. They would not have been noticed, probably, if Levison had not pointed them out, but they attracted general attention now. The boots were smothered with mud.

Wally stared at them blankly. The boots were generally collected by the boot-boy, and brought back to the dormitory for the juniors in the morning; but most of the fellows, of course, had extra boots in their boxes or lockers. It was pretty clear that Joe Frayne had worn boots since going to bed, and that he had been out in them.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally, stupefied. "What does this mean, Frayne?"

Frayne grew crimson as he looked at the boots.

He did not speak, but his crimson face told its own tale.

Tom Merry's brow grew stern.

"Did you go out last night, Joe?" he asked.

Frayne was silent.

Levison laughed maliciously.

"Of course he did!" he replied. "I should think it was plain enough. You might have expected this sort of thing, considering where he comes from, only you were always so jolly certain that he was all right. What are you to expect from a whelp dragged up in the slums?"

"Hold your tongue, you cad!" roared Wally.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"The young rotter's been out, goodness knows where!" he said. "I said from the first that he would bring disgrace on the school. Oh!"

Biff!

A sponge, heavy and dripping with water, caught Levison full in the mouth, and squelched there. Wally, who had hurled it with unerring aim, glared at him.

"Ow!" gasped Levison.

"Now get out, you cad!" shouted Wally. "By George, if you don't clear, we'll chuck you down the stairs! Collar him, you fellows!"

Levison whipped out of the dormitory.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him more slowly. The discovery was a shock to

them. That Joe Frayne had been out during the night was certain, and he seemed to have no explanation to offer. It was certainly not a House raid, or any harmless jape that had taken him out; so much mud could not have collected on his boots within the school walls. And he made no attempt to explain.

Tom Merry's brow was darkly clouded as he went downstairs. Joe Frayne was his protegee; he had been responsible for bringing the waif of the slums to St. Jim's. If it turned out badly for Frayne, or for the school, it would not be pleasant for Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 8.

Joe Frayne in a Funk!

IT was a half-holiday that afternoon at St. Jim's, and there was a footer match between the juniors of the School House and the New House.

After dinner Tom Merry's thoughts were all given to the footer, and he had no more time to think about Joe Frayne. Tom Merry was the junior captain of the School House, and Blake & Co. of Study No. 6 and Kangaroo and Glyn, and the Terrible Three themselves, were all in the team.

Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to the junior football ground. Among the crowd of juniors who watched the match Joe Frayne could be seen, standing with his hands in his pockets, and looking glum enough. He was in disgrace with Tom Merry, and he felt it very deeply.

Levison and Mellish of the Fourth strolled past the ground, and looked on at the game as it started with sneering faces. Football was not much in their line. Smoking in the woodshed or out in the fields was more to their taste.

"Blessed asses, fagging about after a ball on a warm afternoon!" yawned Levison. "Let's get out, Mellish!"

"Right you are!" said Mellish.

And the cads of the Fourth Form walked down to the gates. Joe Frayne glanced after them. Levison and Mellish were what Tom Merry suspected him of being, and he sighed as he thought of it. He started as he was clapped on the shoulder, and looked round to see Wally. Wally gave him a cheerful grin.

"I've been looking for you," he remarked.

"Have you?" said Frayne.

"Yes. Where were you last night?"

"Oh, do let that drop, Master Wally!" said Frayne. "I ain't got nothin' to say. Please don't ask me about it."

"It wasn't a jape, then?"

"No," said Frayne.

"You don't mean to say that you've been up to any rotten tricks, like Levison?" asked Wally, staring at him.

Frayne shook his head.

"And you won't explain?"

"I can't!"

"Oh, rats! Never mind—keep your rotten secret, if you want to!" said D'Arcy minor huffily. "Are you coming to play footer?"

"I—I'd rather not just now."

"Feeling seedy, I suppose, after missing your beauty sleep," said Wally sarcastically. "Well, you can go and eat coke for all I care."

And Wally stalked away.

Frayne walked away towards the School House. Langton of the Sixth had just come out, and Frayne wanted to speak to him. He had not had an opportunity that morning, and he was



There was a general exclamation of surprise from the juniors as Levison was marched in, with the policeman's hand upon his arm. "What's the matter, Crumpey?" asked Monty Lowther, as a crowd gathered round and marched with the policeman and his prisoner. "What's he been doing?"

anxious to know how the senior had fared.

Langton gave him a friendly nod. He had had time to think over the matter, and to realise what a terribly narrow escape he had had, and he was grateful to the fag.

"Hallo, kid!" he said kindly. "I haven't had a chance of thanking you for what you did last night. But I haven't forgotten it."

"That's all right, Master Langton," said Joe. "Did it go off all right?"

Langton nodded, his face clouding a little. The falsehoods he had told weighed very heavily upon his mind still.

"Yes, kid!" He lowered his voice as he spoke. "I got in as we arranged, on the stroke of quarter-past. And I suppose you kept Kildare at his window all the time—at all events, he didn't spot me."

"I shuffled my feet on the gravel," said Joe. "He heard me—I saw 'im lookin' out of the window—but 'e didn't see me—it was too dark in the quad. I'm jolly glad it worked out all right, Master Langton."

"They believed that I'd been in my room asleep all the time," said Langton, flushing. "I am very grateful to you, Joe. You saved me. And—and I shall take jolly good care nothing of the sort happens again. That's my last visit to the Green Man."

"I'm werry glad to 'ear you say that, Master Langton."

"I mean it, Joe. I don't mean to have a scare like that again a second time—and I don't know that I ever cared for that sort of thing much, anyway. If it hadn't been for another chap, I shouldn't—" Langton paused. He wouldn't lay the blame of his own misdeeds upon another. "Never mind, it's all over now, anyway. And—and I don't think that the policeman last night could have known you were a St. Jim's

chap, Frayne, when he spotted you in the lane. He hasn't been here."

"I was afraid he would come," said Joe slowly.

"Well, even if he does come, he can't have recognised you—and you must keep a stiff upper lip, and say nothing," said Langton.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Mind, mum's the word."

"Yes, certainly, sir!"

Langton walked away.

Joe remained alone; he did not feel inclined for company just then. He had been in a state of terror all the morning lest P.-c. Crump should come up to the school. If the constable came and informed the Head that he had seen a St. Jim's boy in the lane at night there would certainly be an inquiry.

How could Joe face it?

True, the constable could hardly have recognised him in that instant of sight. He had had his cap pulled down over his face, and the torch had gleamed upon him only for a moment.

The most the constable could have known, surely, was that a St. Jim's junior had passed him, running; and if he came to St. Jim's, how was he to pick the culprit out amongst hundreds of boys?

Joe felt that he was in little danger, and yet he was uneasy—unquiet. In the old days, in the London slums, he had often felt that dread of a policeman, and it was strange to feel it returning upon him now.

He threw himself upon a bench under the elms, alone, thinking despondently enough. He had stood by Langton in the hour of need, trying to repay any kindnesses he had received from his fag-master. He had not guessed that it would bring all these difficulties upon him—though he would not have faltered, even if he had foreseen all. But it was cruelly hard that he should have fallen in Tom Merry's good opinion—

that he should be burdened with a secret that he could not tell even to his nearest chum, Wally of the Third.

He was plunged in gloomy thought, and he did not hear footsteps behind. A hand dropped upon his shoulder, and he started with a cry of terror. It seemed to his startled imagination for the moment that it was the hand of P.-c. Crump.

"It wasn't me!" he gasped. "Leggo! It wasn't me!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who stood there, with his eyeglass in his eye, regarding the waif of St. Jim's in blank amazement. The football match was over, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had changed again into his usual attire.

"What's the mattah with you, Fwayne?" he demanded.

"Oh!" gasped Joe.

"I certainly did not mean to throw you into a fluttah. But I weally fail to see why you should be frightened in this way by a tap on the shouldah!"

"You—you see—"

"You have been wuinin' your nerves by stayin' up late," said the swell of St. Jim's severely. "If you had gone to bed when I told you last night, and stayed there, you would be all wight now."

"Yes, I dare say, Master-D'Arcy!"

"Have you explained to Tom Mewwy where you were last night?"

Joe groaned. It was beginning over again. He wondered whether he would ever hear the end of it.

"No, Master D'Arcy," he said.

"I suppose you are weservin' your explanation for me?"

"N-no!"

"Do you mean that you wefuse to explain?" demanded Arthur Augustus, with his most stately air.

"I wish you wouldn't ask me, Master D'Arcy."

"Vewy well, Fwayne, but I must remark that I do not considah you

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conduct quite cwicket," said Arthur Augustus. "I considah that you are playin' the giddy goat. I am shocked at you, Fwayne!"

"I—I'm sorry, Master D'Arcy—" "Pway don't mention it," said D'Arcy, with great dignity.

And he walked away with his aristocratic nose at a higher elevation than usual. Joe Frayne flung himself down upon the bench again in a gloomy mood. It seemed as if he were fated to be misunderstood and suspected by every fellow at St. Jim's whose good opinion he cared for.

CHAPTER 9.

Too Clever of Levison!

"GOT a match?" asked Levison. Mellish felt in his pocket. The two black sheep of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's were in the village street, and just turning into the lane leading back to the school.

Levison had taken a cigarette from his pocket with a swaggering air.

"Better chuck it here," said Mellish. "Wait till we're out of the village."

"Oh rot!" said Levison. "It's all right. We're not likely to be spotted by a prefect here, I suppose?"

"It's not safe."

"Rats! Gimme a match!"

"Oh, here you are!"

Levison took the match, and struck it upon his boot with quite an experienced manner. He put the cigarette into his mouth and lighted up. It was bravado more than anything else on Levison's part, and it was destined to cost him dear. He blew out a puff of smoke with a great air of enjoyment.

"Have a fag?" he said.

Mellish shook his head.

"Not here."

"Rats! Don't be a funk!"

"I'm not funking, but—"

"Well, light up, then!"

Mellish hesitated, and then accepted the cigarette. He was about to light it when there was a sudden exclamation, and a portly figure swooped out of the hedge.

"Caught you, have I?"

Mellish dropped the cigarette and ran for his life.

Gladly enough Levison would have followed his example; but he could not, for the heavy grasp of Police-constable Crump was upon his collar.

Levison wriggled in the grip of the portly policeman.

P.-c. Crump grinned with satisfaction. It was not often that he was able to make an arrest of any sort. There were no burglars to speak of in Rylcombe, and although there were poachers in the woods, they never ran any risk from the efforts of P.-c. Crump to effect their capture. A smoking schoolboy was better than nothing; all was grist that came to the mill of P.-c. Crump.

"Got you!" he remarked, with a grin of satisfaction.

"Owl Leggo!"

"Not much!" said Mr. Crump.

"Don't you know that smoking is agin the lor?"

"Groogh! Leggo my collar!"

"I'm going to take you up to the school!" said Mr. Crump severely. "You can thank your lucky stars I don't take you to the station!" He held Levison at armslength, and scanned his face closely. "You're the same young rascal, I don't doubt!"

Levison stared at him.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" he said sulkily.

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"You're the fellow!"

"What do you mean?"

"Course you don't know!" grinned P.-c. Crump. "You didn't run by me in the lane last night—oh, no!"

"I certainly didn't!" said Levison savagely. "And you'd better let me alone! There's no harm in smoking a cigarette!"

"It's agin the lor!" said Mr. Crump. "Blow the law! I—I mean, look here, take this bob, and call it square!"

"Trying to bribe and corrupt the perlice, are yer?" said Mr. Crump, who was pretty certain that the Head of St. Jim's would reward him with a larger gratuity than a shilling if he took the trouble to report the delinquent at the school. "You'd better be careful wot you say, young man, or it will be used in evidence agin you! Kimmerlong!"

"Look here, Crump—"

"Kimmerlong!"

And, with P.-c. Crump's heavy hand upon the shoulder, and the half-burnt cigarette in the constable's other hand, to be produced in evidence against him, Levison was marched along the lane.

The cad of the Fourth was white with alarm now.

He pleaded, expostulated, and struggled as P.-c. Crump led him to the school. But all was thrown away on the constable; he was quite obdurate.

"You're the young rascal who was outer bounds last night!" said Mr. Crump. "I recognise you agin now!"

"I wasn't!" howled Levison.

"You can tell that to the 'Ead!" grinned the policeman.

"I tell you—"

"Nuff said!" interrupted Mr. Crump.

"Ere we are!"

There was a general exclamation of surprise from the fellows in the quadrangle of St. Jim's as Levison was marched in, with the policeman's hand upon his shoulder. The junior was white with rage and humiliation.

"What's the matter, Crumpey?" asked Monty Lowther, as a crowd gathered round, and marched with the policeman and his captive towards the School House. "What has he been doing?"

"Yaas, wathah! What twicks has he been up to, Cwump, deah boy?"

"What's the horrid crime?" asked Lefevre of the Fifth.

"Smoking!" said Mr. Crump, in tones of horror. "I caught 'im smokin' in the hopen street. 'Ere's the cigarette!"

"Awful!" said Blake. "What do you mean by smoking in the hopen street, Levison?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that's the rotter who talks about young Frayne being a disgrace to the school!" ejaculated Wally, in disgust. "I hope he gets a licking!"

"Not much doubt about that!" grinned Kangaroo.

Levison was marched into the House, and right into the presence of the Head. Dr. Holmes looked in astonishment at Mr. Crump and his prisoner.

"What ever is the matter, Crump?" he asked.

"Caught, sir, in the hact!" said Mr. Crump solemnly.

"What—what?"

"Smoking, sir, in the hopen street!" Dr. Holmes turned a frown upon the wretched Fourth Former.

"Levison, how dare you!"

"I—I—I was only just trying how it tasted, sir!" stammered Levison. "I—I've never smoked a cigarette before, sir!"

"Nonsense! I cannot believe that

statement, Levison! You will be handed over to your Housemaster to be severely caned!"

"That hain't hall, sir!" said P.-c. Crump, with due solemnity. "That hain't hall, sir! While I was on dooty last night, sir—about midnight it was—a feller passed me in the lane, running 'ard! It was one of your boys, sir!"

"What!" exclaimed the Head.

"It's jest as I say, sir, and I thought it my dooty to report the circumstances to you, but I wasn't sure about which boy it was. I honly seed 'im for a flash. But now I feel purty certain that it was this feller, this Levison, now I come to think of it."

"Were you out of bounds last night, Levison?"

"No, sir."

"Can you assure me that this is the boy, Mr. Crump?"

"To the best of my belief it were, sir," said Mr. Crump. "He was suttingly the same size; and since I caught this young rip, sir, in the hact of breaking the lor—"

"Quite so. It is presumptive evidence, Mr. Crump. Pray wait a moment." Dr. Holmes touched a bell, and Toby, the House page, appeared. "Request Mr. Railton to step here, please."

"Yessir!"

Mr. Railton entered the study in a couple of minutes. He glanced in surprise at the portly, important constable, and the pale and trembling Levison. Levison had been caught for what he had done, and he was in great danger of being punished for what he had not done, and he realised that there was only one way to save himself—by betraying Frayne. But that would be sneaking; and Levison, though he had no inward objections to sneaking, knew how heavily such a thing would be punished by his Form-fellows when they came to hear of it afterwards.

The cad of the Fourth was in a decidedly difficult position, and he wished very fervently that he had not lighted up that unlucky cigarette that afternoon.

"Kindly repeat to Mr. Railton what you have told me, Mr. Crump," said the Head.

The police constable did so.

Mr. Railton listened with evident interest to the statement that a boy who undoubtedly belonged to St. Jim's had passed the policeman in Rylcombe Lane late the previous night. The thought of Arthur Langton came to his mind at once.

"Levison denies the accusation, and Mr. Crump cannot positively declare that it was him," said Dr. Holmes.

"What do you think, Mr. Railton?"

"Are you sure that it was a junior boy?" asked Mr. Railton, addressing the constable. "It was not a senior—one of the Sixth Form?"

Mr. Crump shook his head.

"Suttingly not, sir; 'e wasn't big enough for that. In fact, I almost think that it was a bit smaller feller than Master Levison, only I think he was the feller."

"It was a smaller fellow than I, sir," blurted out Levison.

"What do you mean?" asked the Head. "Do you mean to say that you know who it was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Indeed! Who was it?"

Levison hesitated and turned red.

"I know who it was, sir, and a good many other fellows in the School House know, too," he said. "But if I tell you, the fellows will call it sneaking,

and I shall be ragged by the whole House."

"There is something in that, sir," said Mr. Railton quietly. "But this may be a cunning trick of Levison's to blind our eyes. He is not a truthful boy."

"I swear—" began Levison.

"Silence!" said the Head. "This matter must be investigated. Mr. Crump, you declare that to the best of your belief this was the boy who passed you in the lane last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you cannot positively assert it?"

"Well, no, sir," said Mr. Crump hesitatingly. "You see, it was very dark, and I got the torch on 'im only for a second before he dodged and ran."

"Quite so! Quite right of you to hesitate to affirm if you have any doubts whatever," said the Head. "But you are certain that it was a boy belonging to this school, and a junior boy?"

"Oh, quite certain, sir!" said Mr. Crump confidently. "He wore a St. Jim's cap, sir, I know that; and he was in Etons, and he was too small to be a senior boy."

"Thank you, Mr. Crump!" said the Head, slipping something into the policeman's practised hand. "I am very much obliged to you. You may leave the matter in our hands now."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mr. Crump.

And he bowed himself out.

CHAPTER 10. The Blow Falls!

DR. HOLMES fixed his eyes upon Levison. The Head's face was usually kindly and benign in its expression; but it had grown very stern now.

Dearer to the Head than almost anything else was the honour and reputation of St. Jim's. A fellow who did anything to disgrace the old school had little to hope from the mercy of the Head.

And more than once of late rumours had reached Dr. Holmes' ears of St. Jim's fellows being seen at night in the village. More than once he had had reason to fear that certain seniors had connections with the set of betting rascals at the Green Man, and he had lately cautioned both Housemasters and prefects to be on the alert.

It looked as if the culprit had been caught at last—at least, one of the culprits.

And if Levison's guilt was proved there was but a short shrift for him. He would be given justice—strict justice. But once the charge was proved, he would be publicly and summarily expelled from the school.

The cad of the Fourth shivered under the stern gaze of the Head. He felt that he was in for it now. To save himself, he was ready to "sneak," but he shrank from that alternative if it could possibly be avoided.

Mr. Railton was also looking hard at Levison, and wondering. The thought had crossed his mind that Langton might have lied the night before—that it might have been the senior whom Mr. Crump had seen. But the policeman, upon whatever other point he might be doubtful, was at least certain that it was not an Upper Form boy he had seen. He could hardly have mistaken the stalwart Langton of the Sixth for Levison of the Fourth, who was not even a well-grown lad for his age.

Mr. Railton acquitted Langton in his mind. Whether Langton had been out

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling



Hallo, everybody! It's Greek to me. What is? Athens. What do the Chinese do with their banana skins? Throw them away. It's not worth twopence. What isn't? Three-ha'pence. Gosh, you're slow to-day! "Does music help people to move more quickly?" asks a reader. Yes—think of motor-horns! The city is slowly sinking, states a report. Pressure of business? "Wayland constables in boxing contest," reads a local headline. Police "force"! "Do you know a good motto for motorists?" asked Blake. Yes—pedestrians should be seen and not hurt. Mellish is anxious about his financial resources. Dear me, he has nothing to worry about! An airman met a friend. "I hear you've been ill," he said. "Flu?" "Yes," granted the friend, "and crashed!" We hope cricket will

of bounds or not, it was not he whom the policeman had encountered in the lane; and that was the question which had to be settled now.

Levison waited in miserable anxiety for the Head to speak.

Dr. Holmes broke the silence at last, and his tones were very deep and stern.

"Levison!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"You deny that you were out of bounds last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"You declare that some other boy was?"

"I know at least one was, sir."

"Senior or junior?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Junior, sir—a fag in the Third Form."

"The Third Form!" repeated the Head, in amazement. "A mere child! Take care what you say, Levison!"

"It's the truth, sir. A dozen other fellows know it."

"Give me some of their names."

"Merry of the Shell, sir, and Manners, Lowther, Blake and D'Arcy, and D'Arcy minor—and a lot more, sir."

"Very well. Call in some of the boys he has named, Mr. Railton, please."

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Railton stepped from the study. Dr. Holmes' glance was very penetrating as he fixed it again upon Levison, but it was less stern. He began to believe that the wretched junior was telling the truth in this instance, at least.

Mr. Railton returned in a few minutes, and he brought with him three juniors—Tom Merry, and Jack Blake, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The trio were looking a little alarmed. They did not yet know what was the matter, but they had a natural diffidence about entering the Head's study. That apartment had many painful associations for them.

"You may be at ease, my boys," said the Head kindly. He easily read the thoughts of the juniors. "I have merely sent for you to ask your evidence upon a certain matter."

be free from "squealing" this summer. Remember the good old rule, "No bawl!" Of course, you heard of the big business man who was so busy that the only time he had for exercise was his sleep-walking? Taggles, the porter, says he is a self-made man. We don't know whether he's boasting or apologising! Some japer tarred the nice white Belisha crossing in Wayland High Street. Dirty work at the cross-roads! Instead of "lines," several juniors were set to help fell a big elm in the school grounds. Youth at the (helm)! "I had a great audience when I played Hamlet," sighed the actor at the Wayland Hippodrome. "Were they complimentary?" I asked. "No," replied the actor, "but most of their tickets were!" Then there was the conscientious baker who baked his bread so light that it took three of his pound loaves to weight sixteen ounces. You "dough" n't say so! "Are you fond of the radio?" asks Noble. Well, I get "waves" of interest. "Mellish is always up and doing," says Crooke. Doing who? Must tell you—Gore's uncle, reviewing his report, said: "This is bad—Latin, poor; French, indifferent; Maths, weak." "Yes, but look at that: Health excellent!" urged Gore.

Good health to all!

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, considerably relieved.

"I have received some startling information from P.-c. Crump," said the Head. "He informs me that while on duty last night in Rylcombe Lane at a very late hour, a junior belonging to this school passed him."

Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy all started. Their looks were enough to betray them, and they realised it the next moment and turned very red.

"Mr. Crump states that, to the best of his belief, the boy he saw was Levison, but he's not prepared to affirm this with certainty, and Levison emphatically denies it. It appears, however, that he is aware that a certain junior of the school was out of bounds, and he declares that you are acquainted with the fact."

"If this be so, you are bound to speak, in fairness to Levison. Levison is now to be caned for smoking; but if it is proved that he was guilty of breaking bounds at night, his punishment will be more severe. You will see, then, that it is your duty to your school-fellow to speak."

The juniors were silent.

"I will ask you first, Merry, as the eldest. Do you know whether a boy of the Third Form was out of bounds last night?"

"I—I think so, sir!" stammered Tom Merry.

"And you, Blake and D'Arcy—you believe so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know whether Levison was in the House between ten and eleven last night, Blake? He was in your dormitory?"

"He was in, sir—I can prove that for him," said Blake. "We were woke up in the night—some of us, sir—and I know Levison was there."

"Indeed! And what woke you up?"

Blake hesitated.

"Pray be frank, my boy," said the Head, kindly enough.

"It was a row of knocking down-stairs, sir, and Levison got up to see

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what it was. There was no harm in his doing that, sir, was there?"

"Well, no."

"I can explain the circumstances of the knocking, Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Railton quietly, and he concisely explained the circumstances of his visit to Langton's study.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Thank you, Mr. Railton. It appears certain from Blake's evidence that Levison was in the House at the time."

Levison drew a deep breath, and for a moment he felt almost grateful towards Jack Blake.

"I can corroborate Blake's statement, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I was awake at the time, too, sir."

"Then Levison is acquitted of having broken bounds last night," said the Head gravely. "But it is undoubted that some boy did so—Mr. Crump's evidence is unmistakable on that point—and it appears that it was a boy in the Third Form, the portion of that Form belonging to the School House. And you boys are aware of his identity?"

The juniors were silent.

"I will not ask you to give the name," said the Head gently. "But the matter will be thoroughly investigated. You may go, my boys. Mr. Railton, will you kindly order all the boys of the Third Form belonging to the School House to come here?"

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, and Levison quitted the study. Levison turned an anxious glance upon the chums of the School House in the passage.

"I—I say, don't think I've sneaked about young Frayne!" he muttered. "I—I haven't said a word. Old Crump spotted him in the lane, and it was his own fault."

"I dare say you haven't sneaked for once!" said Blake gruffly.

"Look here—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake, turning his back on the end of the Fourth. "I say, this is rough on young Frayne, you fellows. If the Head examines the whole crowd of them, it's bound to come out."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Well, I suppose so," he said. "But Frayne has only got himself to thank; he shouldn't do these things. If he has done anything to disgrace the school he ought to be punished for it."

"Ye-es; but—"

"As a matter of fact, deah boys, I can't think that Fwayne has done anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I wegard that kid as bein' the wight stuff. You can always depend upon the opinion of a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

Tom Merry was silent.

The juniors moved restlessly about the passage, while the Third Formers, in a state of unconcealed alarm and trepidation, were marched into the Head's study. It was impossible for them to convey a word of warning to Joe Frayne—Mr. Railton took care of that. They saw the little waif going in with the rest, and they could read the alarm in his face.

Joe Frayne's alarm was not only for himself, though they were not aware of that.

Frayne had seen P.-c. Crump come in—he had known that he was with the Head—and he felt that the blow had fallen. The fact that he was not called in immediately, and individually,

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showed that the policeman was not certain of his identity; but the fag knew that the whole of the Third were to be questioned now; and he felt a miserable conviction that he would not be able to maintain an air of indifference under the stern eyes of the Head and the School House master.

But whatever happened to himself, he was determined to keep his word, and not utter a syllable to incriminate Langton. To keep his word—to keep faith and never to sneak—that much he had learned from Tom Merry, and he would show that that lesson had not been lost upon him. But his heart was very heavy when he entered Dr. Holmes' study.

CHAPTER 11.

The Culprit!

A CROWD of Third Form fags gathered in the room with alarmed faces. Most of them had seen P.-c. Crump arrive at the school, but they did not connect that visit with themselves.

Joe Frayne had told no one but Langton of his meeting with the policeman in the lane on the previous night. The Third wondered what was up; and as most of them had plenty of little sins to answer for, they all felt extremely uneasy. What surprised them most was the fact that only the School House portion of the Form had been sent for.

Whatever was the matter, it was evident that it was something which did not concern the portion of the Third that boarded in the New House.

The fags were cudgelling their brains for an explanation as they filed into the Head's study, and crowded there, in an inky-fingered swarm. There was a frown upon the Head's face, and that frown struck more terror to the fags than the Head himself realised.

Dr. Holmes was a kindly old gentleman, and he never quite knew what a truly awful personage he was to the little fags of the Second and the Third.

Mr. Railton followed the dismayed fags into the study, closed the door, and stood by it. Just as if he was afraid some of them would bolt, as Wally whispered to Curly Gibson. Wally was almost the only one who was keeping perfectly cool. So far as Wally was aware, none of his pranks could have come to general knowledge, and none was serious enough for a calling together of the Form in this way.

"My boys," said Dr. Holmes, as the Third stood before him, with flushing faces, "I have sent for you for a most important purpose. I have a question to put to you which you must answer frankly. One of you was out of bounds last night."

"Oh!"

There was a general murmur from the fags. They knew what was the matter now. Every eye turned involuntarily upon Joe Frayne, and Frayne flushed crimson.



It was as Joe Frayne was bidding good-bye to his friends held down by miserable selfishness and fear, asserted "Master Langton," said Joe's friend.

Mr. Railton's eyes met the Head's. They did not need to look further for the culprit.

The Head's voice grew sterner as he went on.

"One of you left the Third Form dormitory, and left the school, and went to Rylcombe last night. P.-c. Crump has given me information."

Dead silence.

"I call upon the boy who was guilty of this conduct to step forward and own up to the truth," said the Head. "Mr. Crump is doubtful about identifying the boy. But if not otherwise discovered, I shall parade the Third Form before him and ask him to pick out the boy. I think in that case he will be able to resolve his doubts. And a most searching investigation will be made; it is impossible for the culprit to escape detection. I call upon him to speak up."

There was no reply.

"I shall now question you separately," said the Head. "Frayne, you will come first. Stand forward."

Frayne's limbs almost refused to obey him. But he dragged himself out of the ranks of the Third, and stood before the Head.

Dr. Holmes' glance ran over the faces of the fags. They did not mean to give Joe away, by any means; but their ex-



leaving St. Jim's that Arthur Langton's better nature, "Stop! You shan't go!" "At the end, "don't say a word!"

pression was quite enough to show the Head that he had found the culprit, and that they all knew it. The fags were not adepts at hiding their thoughts.

The Head's glance grew very stern as it was fixed upon Joe Frayne.

"Frayne!" he said in his stern voice.

"Ye-es, sir?" faltered Joe, his eyes on the floor.

"I am going to put to you a direct question, and beware how you answer it. Did you leave the Third Form dormitory in the School House last night?"

Frayne was silent.

"Poor old Joe!" murmured Wally. "It's all up! No good lying to the Head—and he can't lie for toffee, either! Poor old Joe!"

The silence in the study was oppressive.

Frayne seemed to be struggling for his words, but they would not come. His lips moved, but no sound was uttered.

"Come, Frayne!" said the Head. "I'm waiting for an answer to my question!"

Joe trembled.

What was he to say? Before that awful glance, he could not lie. Even if he had thought of answering untruthfully, the falsehood would not have come under the stern eyes of the Head.

He knew that if he spoke he would have to speak the truth; if he told a lie, it would be a miserable, faltering one that would have no chance of carrying conviction.

But Joe would not have lied, even if he could have succeeded in deceiving thereby. He had learned that much from Tom Merry; to tell the truth and face the music. If he spoke now, it was only the truth that would come from his lips.

"If you do not answer me, Frayne," said the Head quietly, "I can only conclude that you cannot deny this."

Joe's lips moved again, but he did not speak.

"I command you to answer, Frayne. Did you leave your dormitory last night?"

"Yes, sir!"

Frayne's voice was almost a whisper.

"You did! You left the School House?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You went to Rylcombe?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You passed Police-constable Crump on the road?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You were, then, the boy whom Mr. Crump saw, and whose absence from the school at a late hour last night he has reported to me?"

"Yes, sir!"

Joe's words were barely audible now.

The fag seemed hardly able to speak. His eyes were on the floor, his face was pale as chalk; he felt the glance of the Head burning upon his face, as it were, but he dared not meet it. Every reply was extracted from him, as it

were, against his will; but he felt forced to answer. Of what use, indeed, was silence? His guilt was clear enough, whether he answered or not.

There was a brief pause. The fags were almost looking sorry enough for Joe, but greatly relieved that their own ordeal was over. They pitied the culprit; but they were glad there was no chance now of the wrong fellow being picked upon.

"Now, Frayne," said the Head. "You have answered me frankly so far. You will kindly tell me why you went to Rylcombe last night?"

Joe's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He might have known that that question would follow—in fact, he had known it, and that was a question he was not able to answer. He could not betray Langton. Whatever happened to himself, he could not betray his protector in the Sixth Form to disgrace and ruin! It needed only a word from him to bring the reckless prefect before the Head, to be condemned, expelled from St. Jim's. Frayne knew that well! And he would never have spoken the word, if he had been tortured to utter it.

"Answer me, Frayne."

"I can't, sir."

The Head's look became very ominous.

"You cannot tell me why you went to Rylcombe last night?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

Joe was silent.

"You went to some place, I suppose, Frayne?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir."

"If it was a place of harmless character, you will not suffer by telling Dr. Holmes. It will make matters better for you."

"Certainly," said the Head.

Frayne did not speak.

"Give Dr. Holmes the name of the place you went to, Frayne."

No answer.

"Was it the Green Man?"

"I—I can't tell you, sir."

"Why not?"

Silence.

"Very good!" said the Head, compressing his lips. "You are aware, Frayne, of course, that if you do not tell me where you went last night, I can only conclude that it was some place specially forbidden, and that you were engaged in disgraceful conduct that you dare not report to me."

"I—I wasn't, sir."

"Then why did you go—and where did you go?"

Silence.

"That senior boys of this school have sometimes been guilty of irregular conduct, I know," the Head went on gravely. "That is bad enough, but that a junior should be guilty of such faults—and a junior, too, only in the Third Form—is extraordinary as well as disgraceful. I am ashamed that such a boy has ever entered the walls of this school. I feel that the blame is partly mine for having allowed such a boy to enter."

The Head's voice faltered a little. The fags stood silent, and Joe Frayne's face went very white.

He could hardly realise that these scornful, cutting words were addressed to him—words that cut and stung him like lashes upon bare skin.

He had venerated the Head—almost worshipped him as an awesome being of a superior mould—and it was the Head who was now delivering sentence upon him in words that made him shiver and tremble.

The Head despised him—regarded him with contempt and disgust—and he had not a word to say in his own defence. The lips that he had tightly set were as white as chalk now; his eyes were on the carpet, and he dared not raise them. He felt that he was lost; he only prayed inwardly for the ordeal to be over. When would it end?

The Head's voice was going on—deep, wounding, lashing. The fags were as silent as the culprit. They felt that it was all deserved. If Frayne did not like it, he should not have done what had provoked it. What had he gone to the Green Man for, if not to disgrace himself and the school he belonged to? Even Wally felt that there was no excuse for the little waif he had always, hitherto, defended.

"I should have known," the Head was saying, "that a boy trained as you have been was not fit to enter a school like this. I should not have made the experiment. I can see now that it was a mistake, but I hoped that the influence of good and manly boys—boys like Merry and D'Arcy—might make you understand what a decent life was, and give you a chance of taking a decent place in the world."

"Instead of making you good, it appears to have made you only

hypocritical. You have made a good impression upon me, upon the masters, upon most of the boys, I think, and now suddenly I find that you have remained addicted to the worst habits of the slums—to late hours, to visiting public-houses, to gambling and drinking, for all I know—for why should you visit a low public-house at night, otherwise? I cannot excuse you by saying that you know no better, for since your training at St. Jim's you do know better. You have sinned with your eyes open. You have chosen the wrong path deliberately, knowing that you were disgracing yourself, and bringing your school to shame."

Frayne writhed.

"Oh, sir!"

"You will leave St. Jim's this evening," said the Head, his voice rising a little. "If it were any other boy here, I should flog him and expel him in public. I make allowances for the vices of your early training. I shall expel you from the school, but I shall make some attempt to save you from the life of vice and crime upon which you seem determined to enter. The gentleman who has befriended you, who paid your fees at this college, will be communicated with, and arrangements made for your future. The future that might have been yours you have sacrificed; but you will be given a chance elsewhere to learn a trade, and to grow up to be useful and honest, if you choose. But at St. Jim's you cannot remain. You are a disgrace to the school. Go!"

Joe tried to speak, but his lips were trembling; no words would come. He turned silently to the door and left the study.

The rest of the fags filed out.

Dr. Holmes was left alone with the Housemaster. The Head's face was sombre.

"An experiment that has utterly failed, Mr. Railton," he said.

The Housemaster nodded, and slowly followed the fags from the study, and the Head of St. Jim's was left alone.

CHAPTER 12.

A Last Minute Sensation!

TOM MERRY was very miserable and restless that evening. The fate of the waif of St. Jim's weighed upon his mind, for all the school knew now that Joe was going. In a few hours the school would have seen the last of him.

Tom Merry could not help thinking of the old days, when he had been down on his luck himself, and had left St. Jim's; and in those days of poverty and trouble Joe had been a good friend to him—as good a friend as he knew how to be. Tom Merry had repaid him as well as he could. He had brought the waif of the slums to St. Jim's, and a new life had opened before Joe Frayne. And now it was all over!

Tom's chums understood his gloomy feelings. They shared them. But they could say little to comfort him.

"He's brought it on himself, you know," said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I know that," he said. "But—"

"The poor little beggar isn't so much to blame as any other chap would have been," said Manners. "But then, he isn't getting it so thick, you know. Any other chap would have been publicly expelled, and very likely flogged."

"I know. But—well, I suppose it's no good worrying about it," said Tom.

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Merry restlessly. "But I can't help thinking that there's something wrong somewhere. Perhaps Joe is telling the truth when he says that he didn't go to the Green Man for any rotten reason. Yet he says he wasn't forced to go, or anything of that sort. I don't see how any excuse can be made for him."

"There isn't any," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of his head.

"I suppose not; but it's rotten!"

There was another fellow who felt worse about it than Tom Merry.

It was Langton of the Sixth.

His first thought had been for his own safety. But his safety was secured now, and he had leisure to think of other matters.

He had leisure to think of his conduct—of the baseness of letting the faithful fag sacrifice himself—and he groaned in spirit over it. He paced his study in miserable thought. He knew that he ought to speak out and save Frayne. He knew that he would despise himself for ever if he did not.

But he did not—he dared not. He could not face it. If the alternative had been less terrible, he might have taken it. But to be expelled in shame and disgrace, to go home and face his people—he shuddered at the mere thought.

He could not do it.

He tried to think that, after all, it would not be so bad for Joe—perhaps the kid was tired of the restraints of the school. He had been born in the freedom of the slums, and might be glad to be free again. But in his heart Langton knew that he was trying to deceive himself with mere sophistry.

In his heart he knew how bitterly Frayne was feeling this disgrace—as bitterly as he would have felt it himself.

"Poor little beggar!" muttered Langton, again and again. "Poor little beggar! But he will have to stand it now."

Langton left his study at last.

There was a crowd of fellows in the big passage in the School House—some of them fellows from the New House. Both Houses of St. Jim's were keenly interested in this matter.

Langton observed the excitement, and he saw that Taggles, the school porter, was bringing a box downstairs.

The time had come.

"He's going?" Langton muttered, as he stood outside Darrell's door.

Darrell nodded.

"Frayne—yes."

"Poor little wretch!"

"I don't see it," said Darrell. "He brought it on himself. I'm sorry enough for any chap who's down, but no fellow need be a blackguard unless he chooses."

Langton winced. Darrell did not know how deeply his words cut the fellow he was speaking to.

"Yes, I—I suppose so!" muttered Langton. "But I—I wish the Head would give him another chance."

"I don't!" said Darrell dryly.

Joe Frayne came downstairs after the porter.

The waif of St. Jim's walked with a firm step, though his face was very pale. He did not look in Arthur Langton's direction.

Langton's face went very white.

The boy was going. Outside, in the gloom, the station cab was waiting, and Taggles, the porter, was to take him to the station.

Langton set his teeth hard.

He had to go through with it now. He wished he had stayed in the study.

There was a murmur from some of the juniors as Frayne appeared in the Hall.

Wally came out from a knot of Third

Formers, and stopped him. Frayne looked at him mutely and miserably.

Wally held out his hand.

"Give me your fist, old son," he said. "I can't say I hold by what you've done, but I'm jolly sorry you've come a mucker. Give me your fist before you go!"

"Thank you, Master Wally," he said, as he pressed D'Arcy minor's hand. "Thank you! Perhaps you'll find out some day that I ain't such a rotter as you think!"

"Good-bye, Joe!" said Tom Merry.

"Good-bye, Master Tom."

Joe walked after Taggles to the door.

It was then that Arthur Langton's better nature, held in thrall by miserable selfishness and craven fear, rose to assert itself.

He sprang forward.

"Frayne!"

Joe turned involuntarily.

"Stop!" said Langton, white to the lips. "Stop! You shan't go!"

"Master Langton!"

"You shan't go, I tell you!"

"What do you mean, Langton?" demanded Kildare sharply. "Of course he will go! Are you off your rocker?"

"He shan't go!"

"Don't be an ass! Get out, Frayne!"

"Stop!"

Langton's voice rang out sharply. Joe hesitated. He saw Langton's meaning in his face, and he shivered.

"Don't, Master Langton!" he said appealingly. "Don't! I can't stand it! Don't!"

"I will—and must!"

"Don't say a word!"

"Hold your tongue, Joe!" Langton was calm and cool now, with the coolness of despair, but he was glad that he had spoken. It was better than the mental tortures he had endured since he had heard that Joe was to be expelled.

"Taggles, you can put that box down. Master Frayne is not going to leave St. Jim's!"

Taggles set the box down in sheer amazement.

"Are you dotty, Langton?" asked half a dozen voices.

"No," said Langton. "Joe Frayne isn't going to leave St. Jim's. I know why he came to the Green Man last night, and I'm going to tell the Head. Frayne isn't going to be sacked from St. Jim's. I am!"

"You?"

"What—"

Mr. Railton came striding forward. "What does this mean, Langton?" he asked sharply.

Langton looked him full in the face. "When you came to my room last night, sir, you found me there," he said; "but when Kildare knocked earlier, I was not there."

"What?"

"You lied, then?" said Kildare.

"Yes, I lied, like a coward, as I was! I was at the Green Man!"

There was a sensation in the crowded Hall.

Joe gave a groan.

"E's done it now!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, aghast. "Are you aware of what you are saying, Langton?"

"Yes, sir," said Langton steadily.

"You were at the Green Man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you deceived us?"

"Yes, sir; I deceived you. I came in by the back way, and crept into my room and locked the door, and pretended to be asleep when you knocked. I should have come straight back and been found out, only—"

(Continued on page 23.)



**Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farrington Street, London, E.C.4.**

HALLO, chums! The tread of a fly or the falling of a piece of tissue paper are sounds that it is possible for the ordinary microphone to magnify and, with the aid of a wireless transmitting set, render audible over many miles. That seems wonderful enough to us. But even more wonderful is the "mike" that can intensify sound ten million million times! It is the recent invention of the New York University, and so sensitive is this instrument that it can make the sound of grass growing audible to the naked ear. And did you know that the goldfish yaps? It does. This amazing invention has proved it. It would seem, then, that anything in the world that makes a sound can be heard with this super-sensitive "mike." But it is to be wondered whether the noise—if any—of a microbe could be made audible with it! And one wonders, too, what would happen if the roar of a football crowd was intensified ten million million times. If the instrument could stand the strain the roar would probably be heard all over the world.

"HIS CONVICT BROTHER!"

Changing from fanciful impressions to concrete facts, next Wednesday's great St. Jim's yarn is one that will undoubtedly be read the world over. It is a powerful, pulsating drama of human school interest and exciting detective adventure. The story introduces the famous investigator Forrers Locke, and Arthur Lynn, the St. Jim's Fourth Former, and his brother, Convict 79. Around these three characters, together with all our old St. Jim's favourites, Martin Clifford has woven a stirring yarn that will grip and hold every

reader's avid interest; and if you will take my advice, you won't leave the getting of your GEM to chance. Order in advance, for our next programme, which also contains another grand Wild West school yarn, entitled:

"THE BULLY'S REVENGE!"

is much too good to risk the danger of missing.

Frank Richards has hosts of schoolboy and schoolgirl admirers throughout the world, and since this favourite author has been writing for the GEM, it is undoubted that he has considerably increased his tremendous popularity.

The next story of the Packsaddle pals features Big Steve Carson, the bully of the cow town school. When Big Steve gets a well-deserved quiring from Bill Sampson, the six-gun schoolmaster, it rankles in his mind and a scheme of revenge occupies his thoughts. The form his revenge takes and the ultimate outcome of it makes a highly entertaining yarn.

To complete this next grand number of the GEM, there are, of course, further full-of-thrills chapters from our super serial, "The Secret World!"—in which you will read more about the exciting raid of the St. Frank's rescue party in Gothland.

Then there will be all our other popular features, setting the seal on the week's best programme of school and adventure stories, bar none.

PEN PALS COUPON

16-3-55

PEN PALS.

So large is the number of "Pen Pals" notices I am receiving that there is bound to be some delay before a reader's notice appears in print. I don't want you to think, chums, that any of your notices have been lost or mislaid. Each one, I can assure you, will be published in its turn, in due course.

It is gratifying to see the number of GEM chums who are keen to get in touch with other readers. From all parts of the world come the notices, and I should like to know how many letters pass between readers, and how many new friends are made, as the result of notices appearing in the GEM! The numbers must run into many thousands.

THE MONSTER.

Another mysterious monster, which made its presence known not so long ago near Buenos Aires, has proved a myth. The people of Santo Vincente were awakened one night by the eerie and nerve-tingling croaking of some unknown creature. For several nights the croaking continued. Many searchers sought the monster in the daytime, and a lake was dragged for it, but nothing could be discovered. It was a fisherman who eventually solved the mystery. He came upon the "monster" just as it was croaking, and what do you think it was? A huge frog!

A WAY WITH WOLVES.

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Certainly not a giant peasant living near Skopje, Yugoslavia. For the people of the town were treated to a unique sight one day when they saw the peasant leading by a chain through the streets—a wolf! The animal had a sack over its head and a dog's collar round its neck. The man was followed by a crowd as he calmly led his "pet" along to the zoo, where it was added to the collection. The peasant, it appears, had spotted the wolf entering a mill, and had promptly followed it in and captured it as if it was all part of a day's work!

TAILPIECE.

First Artist: "We must go to nature for our subjects."

Second Artist: "That's easy. But who on earth can we go to for our customers?"

THE EDITOR.



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Tony Baylis, Whitehall, Alcester, Warwickshire, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

Ronald Downing, The Farm Cottage, North Lane, Guestling Green, Sussex, wants a pen pal interested in cricket, football, and stamps; age 11-14.

John P. Coulton, 29, Jersey Road, Woollahra, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors. Amateurs' Stamp Club.

Miss Rhoda Bernstein, 275, Struben Street, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; age 18 upwards.

Peter Rantenbach, P.O. Box 56, Belfast, Transvaal, South Africa, wants correspondents; age 14-16.

Miss Danette Duggan, P.O. Box 23, Graaff Reinet, Cape Province, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; South America, China, etc.; stamps, photos, curios.

David P. Williams, Ispeed, Pendonlan, Colwyn Bay, North

Wales, wants correspondents; age 12-14; South of England, Australia, U.S.A., South Africa.

Thomas R. E. Atkins, 15 Bennett Street, Lewisham Road, London, S.E.13, wants correspondents; Canada and the States; age 16-19; exploring, codes, newspaper cuttings.

K. Munn, 40, Duke Street, Kingston, Jamaica, wants correspondents in Australia and New Zealand; age 13-15; stamps, swimming.

Desmond Wilcox, 24, Stockport Road, Streatham Vale, London, S.W.16, wants pen pals; age 14-16; Canada, U.S.A., South America; films, stamps, autographs of film stars.

Douglas Gordon Cotton, 98, Newstead Street, Chatterlands Avenue, Hull, Yorks, wants a correspondent in Canada.

Ronald Williams, 2, Streatham Hill, Streatham, London, S.W.16, wants a pen pal; England or U.S.A.; age 16-18; swimming, films, roller skating.

James W. Cook, 21, Rook Street, London, E.14, wants to hear from readers who are keen on the old "Nelson Lees."

Alan Bennett, 175, Edward Road, Walthamstow, London, E., wants pen pals in Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand; age 11-13; stamps.

J. Dorking, 26a, West Street, Prittlewell, Southend-on-Sea, wants correspondents keen on the companion papers.

Miss Maureen Keane, 9, Barandon Street, Notting Hill, London, W.11, wants girl correspondents; age 13-15; preferably Girl Guides.

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The PACKSADDLE BUNCH!



Trouble in School!

"PACK it up!" grunted Steve Carson.

And the Packsaddle bunch repressed their chuckles.

Small Brown, the Packsaddle teacher, was about to enter the school-room. Mr. Brown was rather a suspicious guy. His experience of the rough and tough bunch at the cow town school had made him so. And if he had seen them all grinning and chuckling, Steve figured that he would have been put on his guard—which was not what Big Steve wanted.

The door from the porch was half-open. Small Brown, in the porch, was rubbing his horn-rimmed spectacles before jamming them on and coming in to take his class again. On top of the door Steve had perched a heavy wooden stool.

They were a tough bunch at Packsaddle. When that heavy stool came down on the head of a man entering, somebody was going to be hurt. Dick Carr, the new boy and tenderfoot, knitted his brows. A booby-trap was all very well with a can of water or a sack of soot. But the crack on the head that Small Brown was going to get was too thick, in the tenderfoot's opinion, though the rest of the bunch did not seem to think so.

"Look here, Carson—" began Dick.

"Can it, you!" snapped Big Steve.

"Yep! Pack it up, big boy!" said Slick Poindexter. "Don't you spill the beans and put Brown wise, you geek!"

Dick rose from the rough pinewood desk at which he sat. There was a gleam in his eyes as he stepped towards

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the door. He did not like Small Brown, and Small Brown did not like him. But he was not going to see a guy's nut cracked.

"Let up, you gink!" hissed Steve, leaping from his place.

Needless to say, Bill Sampson, the headmaster of Packsaddle, was nowhere at hand. When Bill was around the Packsaddle bunch, tough as they were, walked warily. But Bill had saddled up early that morning to ride out to the Kicking Mule Ranch. Brand blotters had been at work on the Kicking Mule

friends or his enemy. He simply was not going to see Small Brown's head cracked by that stool falling on it. There was an angry murmur from the whole bunch. Steve whipped after the tenderfoot, and grabbed him by the shoulder before he reached the door.

With blazing eyes, Steve dragged him back. Dick Carr's eyes blazed, too, as he turned on Big Steve.

The bully of Packsaddle was older than Dick and half a head taller. They had scrapped once, and the tenderfoot had knocked him out, all the same. He was ready to knock him out again, if it came to that.

"I'm shouting to you to let up, you big stiff!" hissed Steve.

And he wrenched at Dick, dragging him back towards the desks.

Dick wrenched in his turn, and dragged Steve on after him towards the door. They had nearly reached it when Big Steve rallied and bore him back. All the bunch were on their feet, watching. Panting and struggling, the two reeled and staggered. Small Brown, in the porch, became aware that a rookus was going on in the school-room. He put on his horn-rimmed glasses and blinked through the half-open doorway.

"Be quiet, there!" squealed Small Brown. "Go to your places! Carr, I shall report you to Mr. Sampson for this!"

That was Small Brown all over. He was afraid of Big Steve, and he was not afraid of the tenderfoot.

Mick Kavanagh chuckled.

"Leave him be, Dick, you geek!" he called out. "Ain't the little baste howling for it, and so he is!"

BRAND BLOTTERS

OF

KICKING MULE!

By

FRANK RICHARDS.

ranges, and Bill was riding with Barney Bailey and the punchers in quest of them. He had been away all the morning, and while Bill was away, Small Brown did not enjoy life.

"Can it, you, Carr!" exclaimed Mick Kavanagh in a shrill whisper, as Dick ran towards the door.

The tenderfoot did not heed either his

—FRANK RICHARDS' SUPER TALE OF THRILLING TEXAS ADVENTURE.

Dick did not heed. He plunged towards the door again, and as Big Steve would not let go, dragged the bully of Packsaddle with him. Close by the door, visible to Small Brown through the half-open space, they struggled fiercely. But Big Steve was grinning now as he struggled with the tenderfoot. For the tussle in the school-room was bringing Small Brown to the spot: he was coming across the porch, and in a few moments more he would be pushing the door open. And then—

Dick knew that as well as Steve. He made a tremendous effort to tear himself loose and get to the door in time. Steve clung to him like a cat, and whirled him back. Another effort Dick made, swinging the gunman's son right at the door. This time they reached it.

Steve crashed on the door from the inside just as Small Brown was putting a hand to it from the outside. Steve's crash shut the door on Mr. Brown.

As the door shut, the stool perched above came crashing down. It landed on Steve's head.

Crash! He gave a fearful yell as the heavy stool crashed. That yell echoed from the bank of the Rio Frio to the cow town of Packsaddle. Big Steve relaxed his grasp on the tenderfoot, spun over, and crashed on the floor. He sprawled there, half-stunned.

From the bunch came a roar of mirth. Dick Carr stood panting.

The door was pushed open from outside, and Small Brown horned in, blinking angrily through his glasses.

"Carr, how dare you!" squealed Small Brown. "Carson, get up at once! Why, what—"

Small Brown's watery eyes almost popped through the horn rims of his spectacles at the dazed and dizzy Steve and the pinewood stool.

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

Steve staggered to his feet. He put his hand dizzily to his head. A big bruise was forming there under the thick, untidy hair. He glared savagely at the tenderfoot, panting with rage. Small Brown, grasping how the matter stood, waved excited hands.

"Go to your places! Go to your places at once! I shall report—"

Unheeding him, Big Steve grasped the pinewood stool, swung it into the air in both hands, and leaped at Dick Carr.

There was a gasp of alarm from the bunch, the laughter suddenly dying away. Every guy expected to see Dick stretched on the floor, stunned and senseless. Big Steve, in his rage, was utterly reckless, and did not care a boiled bean if he cracked the tenderfoot's head.

But the tenderfoot was on his guard. A swift leap back, and he escaped the crashing blow, the stool missing him by a bare inch as it swept down. Steve had no time to lift his weapon a second time. Dick Carr was springing forward again, and his clenched fist drove full in the face of the bully of Packsaddle School.

Crash! went the falling stool to the floor. Crash! went Steve backwards, landing hard on the pine planks.

"Gee-whiz!" exclaimed Slick. "I'll say that was a sockdolager!"

"You said it!" grinned Mick.

Small Brown waved frantic hands.

"Go to your places! Sit down! I order you to sit down!"

Dick Carr, rubbing his knuckles, badly barked on Big Steve's features,

went to his place and sat down. Steve staggered to his feet. He dabbed dizzily at a streaming nose. The bunch watched him breathlessly. Small Brown's presence would not have stopped Big Steve from carrying on. But that sockdolager on the nose did. He gave Dick Carr a glare of savage fury and went to his place, and sat dabbing his nose.

Small Brown had an unruly bunch to handle that morning, as usual when Bill was not around. But he had no more trouble from Steve Carson. With a bruised head and a swollen nose, Big Steve had enough trouble on hand without hunting for any more.

Tricked!

"DOGGONE it!" growled Big Steve, bending beside his bronco in the gateway of the corral.

Dick Carr had been feeding his pinto pony, Pep. He glanced round at Steve. It was the day following the row in the school-room, and class was over at Packsaddle. Steve had been leading his bronco out of the school corral, when he stopped and grunted angrily.

Dick would have asked any other guy what the trouble was. But he did not

When Dick Carr, the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, falls into the school bully's trap to get him a licking, it proves just too bad for a couple of cow-thieves!

care to speak to Carson. Rather to his surprise, Carson looked round and called to him.

"Say you, Carr! Bill's given me a message to take over to Kicking Mule, and my cayuse has sure gone lame. You go?"

Dick hesitated one brief moment. He was willing enough to oblige Steve, enemy as he was, and still more willing to oblige Bill Sampson. But he was not keen on hitting Kicking Mule Ranch.

Barney Bailey, foreman of the Kicking Mule, had a deep grudge against him. Barney had promised him a quirt-ting if he ever met up with him on the prairie. And Barney was the man to keep a promise of that sort.

"Say, I guess Bill wants Barney to know," said Steve, "and your pinto is sure the fastest critter in the place. You don't want to be feared of Barney, bringing him a message from Bill."

"I'll go!" said Dick. "What's the message?"

"Tell Barney not to wait for Bill; he can't ride with the outfit to-day," answered Carson.

"Right!"

Dick saddled and bridled Pep, led him out of the corral, and rode away on the prairie trail. Carson stood watching him go, with a savage grin on his face. When the tenderfoot was lost to sight, Steve led his bronco back into the corral—with no sign of lameness about the animal now.

Never dreaming that the bully of Packsaddle had been "stringing" him, and that Bill Sampson had sent no message at all, Dick put his pinto to a gallop, and covered the miles rapidly in the direction of Kicking Mule.

A well-worn trail led to the ranch,

and Dick was not likely to miss it. But he was still miles from the ranch when he sighted a horseman sitting his bronco on the trail. As he drew nearer he recognised Barney Bailey. The foreman of the Kicking Mule sat in the saddle, looking towards Dick as he came, as if in expectation of someone arriving from the school. The expression on his rugged, bearded face was dark and grim. He set his horse in motion, and came up the trail to meet the schoolboy.

His quirt was in his hand, and Dick noted that he took a hard grip on it, a grim grin spreading over his rugged face. Dick waved a hand to him.

"Message from Bill!" he called out.

"Message, nothin'!" grunted Barney.

"Light down, you young geck!"

"Bill says—"

"Aw! Can it!" snarled Barney. "Ain't you wise to it that you been sent here to take what's coming to you? Light down." He rode straight at the schoolboy, his quirt cracking in the air.

"Oh!" gasped Dick.

He understood now. There was no message from Bill. It was a trick to bring him within reach of Barney's quirt.

The Kicking Mule foreman grinned at him savagely.

"I guess you're getting yours now, you young gink!" he snapped. "I'll say I'm taking some skin off, and then some more! 'Yep! Light down!'"

Dick dragged his pinto away from the trail. A word, and a shake of the reins, and Pep burst into a gallop again. The whistling quirt of the Kicking Mule foreman swept the air, but Dick swung over the side of his horse and missed the slash.

Dick grinned breathlessly, and rode hard. He had fallen to the trick, but he was not caught in the trap. He galloped hard, heading back to the school, and, well-mounted as Barney was, he dropped behind the pinto's racing heels. From behind him Dick heard the sudden roar of a gun.

Bang!

His heart thumped for a moment. But he knew that Barney was not firing to hit him. Rough and fierce as the Kicking Mule foreman was, he was not the man for that. The bullet flipped the schoolboy's stetson as it whizzed by.

Bang, bang!

Twice the ranchman fired again, and the bullets whizzed close, Dick feeling the wind of them. But he rode on, harder and harder, and Barney realised that he could not scare him into stopping. Barney swore savagely, thrust the gun back into his holster, and spurred.

Suddenly, from a belt of mesquite and dwarf pines by the trail, a puncher pushed out into view. He was directly ahead of Dick, and Barney yelled and waved to him frantically.

"Rope that guy in, Mesquite!"

It was a Kicking Mule puncher, and as he saw the chase and heard his foreman's shout, he dashed at Dick, swinging his lasso.

Dick set his teeth.

He was between the two of them, and cut off from Packsaddle. He spun Pep round, and galloped off into the open prairie, in the direction of distant Squaw Mountain.

The circling rope whizzed and dropped, but the loop hit the prairie a couple of yards behind Pep's whisking tail. Bending low in the saddle, Dick rode his hardest, heading into the sunset. How and when he was going to get back to the school he did not know, or, at that moment, care; his thoughts were

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concentrated on getting clear of the Kicking Mule men.

Behind came the crash of pursuing hoofs. Dick glanced breathlessly over his shoulder. Mesquite, the puncher, had dropped behind, and was almost lost in the waving grass. But Barney Bailey, fierce and determined, was riding at the utmost speed of his bronco, quirt in hand.

Dick half-turned, and waved a mocking hand at him. Barring accidents, he knew that the speed of his pony would see him safe.

Barney shook a furious, clenched fist. Dick laughed, and waved again, and the Kicking Mule foreman, with an oath, dragged the gun from his holster. Bang!

The bullet cut a rag from Dick's shirt as it flew. In his rage, the Kicking Mule foreman was taking risks of laying him out.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped the tenderfoot of Packsaddle.

And he rode harder and harder. Thud, thud, thud! came the hoofs behind, and again and again the revolver roared. But the lead, though it went perilously close, did not hit, and Dick was drawing farther and farther away from his pursuers.

When he looked back again, Barney had almost dropped from sight in the high grass, though still spurring his sweating bronco.

Dick dashed on, and the Kicking Mule foreman's stetson dropped out of view. Dick Carr laughed breathlessly. The sun was deep in the west, sinking behind Squaw Mountain to the Staked Plain; he had a long, long ride back to school. But he had escaped the trap laid for him by Big Steve in cahoots with the Kicking Mule foreman—and he laughed as he eased down his pony and trotted on.

The Brand Blotters!

THE curl of blue smoke, rising from the depths of the prairie hollow, was invisible from the open prairie. The hollow was deep, like a great saucer sunk in the plain, and the smoke dispersed before it floated up to the level of the llano. Dick Carr spotted it, and wondered what it meant, as he led Pep down the slope.

He had distanced his pursuer, and he doubted whether Barney Bailey was still hunting him, once lost to sight. But he was cut off from Packsaddle. To ride back to the school, while the daylight lasted, was to risk being caught. It was not long to dark, and Dick resolved to wait till the sun was gone before riding home.

But he did not want to remain a conspicuous object on the landscape, when fierce eyes might be scanning the plain for him. He dismounted, and led his pony down the grassy slope into the prairie hollow. Pep needed a rest after that wild chase, and in the hollow both of them were out of sight of searching eyes.

The curl of smoke rose from the middle of the hollow. Thick and tangled bushes interposed, and Dick could not see the fire from which it rose. But fire spelled the presence of men. If it was a camp of Kicking Mule punchers, the Packsaddle schoolboy did not want to hit it.

He stopped as soon as he was below the prairie level, tethered Pep, and left him.

On foot, and treading with caution

among the thickets, he descended deeper into the hollow. If men of Barney Bailey's outfit were there, he did not intend to linger near the spot. It was easy enough to ascertain, keeping in cover of scrub oaks and mesquite.

A ruddy glimmer caught his eyes through the thickets. A smell of burning came to him and the squeal of an animal.

He started. He could hear the sound of a struggling cow, and a muttered curse in a hoarse, husky voice.

His heart beat fast.

He had heard of the brand blotters. Only the day before Bill Sampson had been riding with the Kicking Mule outfit in search of them.

Like a flash Dick knew that he had come on the cow-thieves at their work. With beating heart, but with more caution than ever, he crept on to the edge of the open space in the middle of the hollow.

Lying there, hidden in the thickets, he had a clear view of the scene before him.

A small fire burned, from which the curl of smoke rose. A rough-bearded man, in a red shirt, was stooping beside it, thrusting into the embers the branding-iron he had just used on a big-tied cow, to heat it again for blotting another brand.

A second man, a swarthy Mexican, was leading away the cow that had been branded. At a little distance was a bunch of cows, hobbled to prevent them from stampeding.

The Mexican turned loose the branded cow, and roped another, and led it towards the fire. There it was thrown down, and hog-tied, to receive the brand. The man in the red shirt turned from the fire, with the glowing iron in his hand.

Dick watched breathlessly. He knew the man with the iron by sight; he had seen him in the streets of Packsaddle. The Mexican was a stranger to him. He knew now that he was watching the brand blotters—and he knew that Barney Bailey would have given much to be in his place, seeing them at their work.

The Kicking Mule brand was a big "K." The cow-thieves were branding a big "O" beside the "K" on the left of it.

By that simple trick, the brand was changed from K to O.K. Once the brand was on the cow, even a Kicking Mule puncher could not have said that it was a Kicking Mule cow. Its brand proclaimed it as belonging to the O.K. Ranch, wherever that was. Dick had never heard of it, but he had no doubt that it was within driving distance of Kicking Mule ranges, and that after nightfall the stolen cows would be driven there to mingle with O.K. herds.

Again a smell of singed hair and burning skin. Again a terrified squeal from the cow.

"That's four, Diego!" said the man with the iron.

"Si, si!" answered the Mexican. "Ten more, amigo Euchre, and the light will soon be gone."

"I guess we got time. Git another cow."

Euchre thrust the iron into the fire again. Diego led the cow back to the bunch and roped another. A twig snapped under Dick's knee, and the sound, slight as it was, startled him and made his heart thump.

Evidently it reached the keen ears of the Mexican. He turned his head, his dark face and glittering black eyes searching in the direction of the thicket that hid the schoolboy, and his dusky hand dropped on a knife in his belt, half-drawing it.

"Say, hump it, Diego!" called out Euchre. "The iron's hot!"

"Did you hear—"

"Only a gopher in the chaparral!"

The Mexican stood listening with bent ear for a long minute before he turned to the cows again and led another one to the fire.

Dick Carr had seen enough.

Slowly, cautiously, with intense care, he crawled away through the thickets. Another sound, and the brand blotters might come searching through the chaparral, and that meant the end of all things for the Packsaddle schoolboy, under the knife of the Mexican or the revolver of his confederate.

The perspiration was thick on Dick's brow as he crawled. It was only minutes, but it seemed hours, before he reached the spot where he had left the pinto tethered.

He soothed the pinto, fearful that some sound from the horse might reach the ears of the brand blotters below in the hollow. Then he led Pep cautiously up the rugged slope to the plain. Barney Bailey did not matter much now—if he chanced on the Kicking Mule foreman. There was death behind him—and once on the upper plain the Packsaddle schoolboy mounted and rode for his life.

Putting Barney Wise!

WAAL, ejaculated Barney Bailey. "I swear!"

Barney gripped his quirt, his eyes glinting under his heavy, knitted brows.

What the Packsaddle tenderfoot's game was Barney did not know. But he knew that he was going to quirt him good and hard.

Barney had given up the hunt for the elusive schoolboy, but the ranchman reckoned it likely enough that he might show up on the skyline, heading for Packsaddle, before dark. Barney did not expect too much hoss-sense from a doggoned tenderfoot!

And he looked as if he was right; for a rapidly riding figure came into his sight in the waving sea of grass, and with fierce satisfaction he recognised the tenderfoot.

It was Dick Carr, riding not for Packsaddle, but for the spot, as near as he could calculate, where he had lost Barney.

Little as Barney guessed it, the schoolboy he wanted to quirt was now anxious to meet up with him.

The Kicking Mule foreman figured at first that Carr did not see him, or did not recognise him if he saw him. But when Dick waved a hand from a distance Barney knew that the schoolboy knew him. Yet, knowing what Barney had in cold storage for him, he came right on, at full gallop.

"Great gophers! Is that young gink loco?" muttered Barney. Sitting his horse, he watched Dick galloping up. "I'll say he's sure howling for it, and I'll tell all Texas that he's going to get what he's howling for, and then some!"

Grimly Barney watched the breathless tenderfoot ride up. Dick was a scora



Hidden in the thickets, Dick had a clear view of the scene before him. A bearded man was stooping beside a fire, thrusting into the embers a branding-iron, while a swarthy Mexican was leading away a cow. In a flash Dick knew he had come on the cow-thieves at their work!

of yards away when Barney, fearful that he might change his mind, spurred his bronco and dashed right at him. Barney's lasso was in his hand now—and a leap of his bronco brought him within roping distance.

Dick reined in his pinto, shouting: "Stop that, Barney Bailey! I've come—"

Whiz!

The riata flew. Dick threw himself out of the saddle barely in time. The loop struck on the saddle a split second after he dropped in the grass.

"Doggone my cats!" snarled Barney. He had not expected the tenderfoot to be so spry as all that.

He dashed on, gathering in the slack. Dick, his eyes flashing, shouted to him breathlessly.

"You fool! Chuck it, I tell you! I've come here to tell you—"

Barney leaped from his plunging bronco. He dropped the riata, no longer needed, as the schoolboy was making no attempt to escape. He rushed down on Carr and grasped him.

"By the great horned toad, I got you!" panted the Kicking Mule foreman. "Doggone my boots, I guess you're getting yours now, you pesky young gink. You ain't got Bill Sampson around now, you geek, to lambaste a guy what's going to quirt you!"

There were still the marks of Bill's knuckles on Barney's rugged face to remind him of the day he had visited the cow town school to quirt Dick Carr. Grasping the schoolboy with his left hand, Barney whirled the thick, heavy quirt in his right.

"You fool!" yelled Dick. He had not reckoned that Barney would give him no time to explain, before he waded in with the quirt. "I tell you—"

But there was no time to talk! Barney was getting going, grinning with fierce satisfaction now that he had the tenderfoot in his grip.

Dick made no attempt to wrench himself away from that brawny grip. It would have been useless; he was like an infant in the hands of the Kicking Mule foreman. But, with desperate speed, he lowered his head, and suddenly butted Barney just over his gun-belt!

Barney was not looking for that! That sudden butt in the stomach almost crumpled him up.

His swipe with the quirt missed as he sagged and crumpled, gurgling for wind. Dick jerked loose from his relaxed grasp.

"Gurrrrrggh!" gurgled Barney. Dick sprang away, panting.

"Wurrrrrgh! Doggone my e-c-cats!" stuttered Barney, pressing a hand to his suffering stomach. "Urrgh! Great gophers, I'll sure take all the hide off'n you! Gurrrgh!"

He staggered after Dick Carr. Dick jumped out of reach again. The winded foreman stumbled over a root and awayed. It was too good a chance to be lost. Dick leaped at him, drove both fists at his brawny chest, and sent him toppling over.

Barney crashed down in the grass.

A split second, and Dick's knee was planted on him, and he had torn the big Colt from Barney's holster and jammed it into the bearded face. That was an action that Barney could understand!

He gurgled and blinked up at the tenderfoot as the muzzle of his own gun ground into his bearded cheek.

"Urrgh! Doggone my cats—"

Dick grinned down at him. He had not the remotest intention, in any circumstances, of pulling trigger. But Barney's experience of guns was long and too exciting for him to dream of handing out trouble with a gun jammed in his face. Barney lay as quiet as a lamb.

"Now listen to me, fathead!" said Dick breathlessly.

"You got the goods on me!" gasped Barney. "I'll tell a man!"

"Do you want to rope in the brand blotters?" roared Dick Carr. "I've spotted them, and that's why I came back. Got that?"

Barney blinked at him.

"Say! What guff you giving me?" he panted.

"I'm telling you the truth!" snapped Dick. "I've seen them at it, in a hollow about three miles from here—a man I've seen in Packsaddle named Euchre, and a Mexican he calls Diego blotting the brands on Kicking Mule cows! Now do you understand?"

Barney gazed at him.

"Carry me home to die!" he ejaculated. "Say, if that's the how of it, you let up on a galoot."

Dick chuckled and rose to his feet. Barney heaved himself out of the grass, still gasping, and Dick handed his gun back to him. With a rather shame-faced look, the Kicking Mule foreman thrust it into his belt. He eyed the tenderfoot very curiously.

"You spotted them brand blotters, and you beat it this-a-way to put me wise?" he asked slowly. "And me arter you with a quirt! Kid, I'll say you're a genuine white article! I'll say that Bill Sampson has sure got a

prize packet in his bunch at Packsaddle, meaning you!"

"Here's your quirt, Mr. Bailey!" said Dick, picking it up and handing it to the Kicking Mule foreman.

Barney grinned sheepishly as he took it. He no longer had the intention, or the wish, to lay it round the tenderfoot of Packsaddle.

The Kicking Mule foreman questioned Dick closely and quickly. In a very few minutes he knew all that the tenderfoot could tell him. He clambered on his bronco.

"Aren't you going to the ranch for help?" exclaimed Dick Carr.

"Help nothin'!" rapped Barney. "I guess I got to cinch them brand blotters afore they burn the wind with Kicking Mule cows. Ain't I got a gun, and you figure I'm skeered of a couple cow-thieves? Forget it!"

He put spurs to his bronco and dashed away. Dick Carr leaped into the saddle and dashed after him on his pinto.

Barney looked back at the clatter of hoofs.

"Say, bo, you ride clear!" he shouted. "I guess there's going to be shooting when I meet up with them cow-thieves."

"I'm going to help!"

Barney laughed and dashed on at a gallop. Dick Carr rode on with him, and the Kicking Mule foreman said no more.

Gun Talk!

RED in the west, the sun sank down, Squaw Mountain a black mass against the glowing western sky. In the hollow where the brand blotters worked, it was dark, but on the open prairie the light yet lingered. But the work of the cow-thieves was done; every cow in the bunch of fourteen had been falsely branded, ready for driving away. The fire had been stamped out, the branding-iron packed, and Euchre and Diego stood by their broncos ready to ride and drive. They waited only till the last of the light should be gone. The new brands on the stolen cows were too fresh to bear inspection, and the cow-thieves did not want to risk being seen during the drive.

Thud, thud, thud!

The beat of horse's hoofs came ringing from the upper plain.

The two cow-thieves started and listened. Euchre loosened the gun in his holster.

"Caramba!" breathed the Mexican. "A rider—"

"I guess no doggoned puncher will spot us here!" muttered Euchre. "They sure ain't wise to us, Diego! Quiet!"

Down into the dusky hollow came the thundering hoofbeats. There was crash on crash as a horseman rode through the thickets.

Euchre's gun was in his hand now. Whoever was coming was "wise" to the brand blotters, that was clear, for he was heading direct for the open space in the middle of the hollow, where they stood beside their broncos with the bunch of branded cows.

Through the gloom a dim figure on horseback burst into view—a cowman in ten-gallon hat, revolver in hand.

Bang! roared Euchre's revolver. He fired at sight. The dimness, the swift leaping of the horse, saved Barney Bailey. But his answering shot was

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guided by the flash of Euchre's gun, and it did not miss.

Bang!

A fierce yell rang through the wooded hollow, and Euchre crumpled and sank to the ground, the Colt falling from his hand.

Bang! Bang! roared the foreman's revolver again and again as he came galloping on. But the Mexican was dodging away in the chaparral, and he escaped the whizzing lead.

Barney Bailey reined in his bronco and leaped to the ground. He peered at the figure in the red shirt, crumpled by the dead embers of the fire.

"I guess you got yours, Euchre!" muttered Barney grimly.

He glared round for the Mexican.

Bang! Bang! Bang! He emptied his revolver into the thickets, in the hope of getting the greaser as he ran.

"Doggone him! He's vamoosed!" snarled Barney, lowering the smoking revolver. "But I guess he won't get far without a cayuse, and—"

He broke off as a shadowy figure leaped from the chaparral. The Mexican, as well as Barney, knew that he was not likely to escape on foot. He had counted six shots from the six-gun, and now, like a tiger, he leaped, striking with his knife.

Barney barely warded the slash of the long, razor-edged cuchillo with the barrel of his revolver, and it knocked the Colt from his hand. He leaped back desperately from a savage lunge, stumbled over the body of Euchre, and fell, and before he was fairly on the ground the Mexican was on him.

Barney Bailey grabbed the descending wrist, and stopped the slash again. But the burly Mexican was on him, pinning him down, struggling fiercely to drag his knife-hand free.

"Say, you gink, Carr!" roared Barney.

Dick Carr was following him down the rugged, tangled side of the hollow, leading his horse by the bridle.

Barney had told him to keep clear, figuring that a tenderfoot schoolboy was no use in a gun-fight. Now, however, as he struggled wildly under the Mexican desperado, barely keeping the murderous knife from his throat, Barney hoped that the tenderfoot schoolboy was at hand. For, unless help came, and came pronto, the Kicking Mule Ranch was going to want a new foreman. If that doggoned tenderfoot was not on hand—

But the tenderfoot was. As he heard Barney's desperate roar, Dick Carr dropped the bridle of the pinto and dashed on at a run. In the deep gloom at the bottom of the hollow he could hardly see a thing, but he heard the

panting, the scuffling, of the men who struggled on the earth near the bunch of startled, plunging cows. He caught the gleam of the long, keen cuchillo in a dusky hand. He came leaping up just as Diego tore his wrist free from Barney's clutch, and threw up the knife to strike.

Two hands grasped the Mexican by his neck-scarf and dragged him over as he struck. The knife, missing Barney, grazed Dick's shoulder. The next moment Diego was on his back, spitting like a cat, and Barney was free. He bounded up and hurled himself at the brand blotter. One crash of a brawny, clenched fist, full in the dusky face, and Diego stretched senseless on the earth.

Barney panted.

"I'll say this is our game!" he drawled. "We got 'em—we sure got 'em! And I was aiming to quirt you, kid!" Barney blinked at the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. "Say, you want to forget that, kid! I guess I'm asking you to forget it! You ever get a hunch to ride out to the Kicking Mule Ranch, and this here ornery galoot, Barney Bailey, will sure be powerful glad to see you, and I guess that goes for all the outfit—sure!"

The Packsaddle tenderfoot had made an unexpected friend!

The Packsaddle bunch were turning in the school bunkhouse when Dick Carr rode home. They heard Bill Sampson's voice, and were surprised not to hear it raised in wrath. They expected to hear the sound of Bill's quirt on the late corner. But they heard nothing of the kind; and when Dick came into the bunkhouse his face was cheery and smiling.

"Say, ain't Bill bided you for staying out that-a-way?" exclaimed Slick Poindexter.

Dick laughed.

"No!"

"Ain't he mad with you?" asked Mick.

"No; he's pleased!" grinned Dick.

"Plazed!" roared Mick.

"Well, he was rather glad to hear that I helped Barney Bailey to put paid to the brand blotters on Kicking Mule," answered Dick carelessly.

The bunch stared at him.

Steve Carson stuttered.

"Didn't that geek Barney quirt you?"

"Sorry, no!" chuckled Dick Carr.

"Barney and I are great friends, and you'll have to find another man to do the quirting—unless you'd like to try it on yourself?" added Dick.

Which Big Steve did not seem disposed to do.

"Now,—then, bed!" squealed Small Brown, his horn-rimmed glasses glimmering in at the door.

Dick turned into his bunk, glad to get there after his hard riding. But he was not allowed to sleep till he had told the tale of what had happened on the Kicking Mule range. And when he had finished, Slick Poindexter remarked:

"I guess when you hit Packsaddle I figured you was the world's prize boob! Now I'll tell all Texas you're a whole team, and a cross dog under the waggon!"

"You said it!" grinned Mick.

And Dick chuckled and went to sleep.

(Next Wednesday: "THE BULLY'S REVENGE!"—another gripping yarn of the pals of the Texas cow town school. Look out for it, chums.)

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THE ST. FRANK'S RAIDERS ARE TRAPPED IN GOTHLAND!

The SECRET WORLD!



The rescue party came to a halt as scores of horsemen in armour appeared from a belt of trees ahead. "By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "These Gothlanders don't waste much time, Lee! Quick—give us the word! What's to be done?"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handforth Asserts His Authority!

LORD DORRIMORE, Nelson Lee, and a party of St. Frank's boys, to prove their allegiance to Northestia, a secret and ancient land in the Arctic where they are stranded, are sent on a raid into Gothland, the enemy country of Northestia, to rescue Prince Oswy, the young brother of Princess Mercia, the girl ruler. The rescue party is being escorted by soldiers to the great lake that divides the two countries, when Nelson Lee suddenly thinks of the speedboat aboard the Titan, the airship which stranded the St. Frank's adventurers in Northestia. It would be just the thing for a quick raid into Gothland! But the officer of the escort refuses to let them get it. Meanwhile, however, Edward Oswald Handforth, the St. Frank's junior, who has been made captain of the Northestrian guard for saving the princess' life, has obtained permission to go with the rescuers, and dashes on horseback to overtake them.

"HALT!"

Handforth roared out the order, and there was a note of satisfaction in his voice. The bodyguard pulled up on the rough road, a few paces from the foot soldiers. And Egburt the Fair looked on with a rather startled expression in his eyes.

He was not accustomed to seeing such activity as this. Life had always been so quiet and uneventful in Northestia.

"What's the idea?" shouted Handforth, as he rode alongside the others. "You're pretty slow, aren't you? I thought you'd be half-way across the lake by now!"

"You've just come in time, Handy!" said Nipper eagerly.

"In time for what?"

"We want you to gallop to the castle—"

"Oh, do you?" interrupted Handforth coldly. "Well, you've made a bloomer! I've come along to join you! I'm going on this expedition into Gothland, and don't you forget it! Thought I was going to be left out in the cold, didn't you?"

"Thou art coming, thou warrior?" shouted Umlosi.

"Yes, rather!"

"Wau, N'Kose, this is good news!" exclaimed the African. "The young white master is of the type we need. He is a wondrous fighter, and—"

"Just a minute, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "Handforth, I admire your determined spirit, but there is something you can do for us. Egburt the Fair has declined to let us use our own motor-boat for this adventure. He even refuses to send a messenger to the court—"

"Half a jiffy, sir!" said Handforth. "Who's Egburt the Fair?"

"I am he!" said the man, standing forward.

"Then, Egburt the Fair, you can go and eat coke!" said Handforth curtly.

"Thy words are of a strange character—"

"And my actions will be stranger, my lad!" said Edward Oswald. "I'll biff you one on the nose if you start any of your rot! I'm boss here! Understand? B-O-double-S—Boss! I'm captain of the bodyguard, and if you want to challenge my authority, just say so!"

Egburt the Fair was taken aback.

"I am but obeying orders—"

"That's all right, then—I'm in charge now," said Handforth. "So you can take the rest of your orders from me! I'm here by her Majesty's command. So you'd better look out!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"What-ho! Absolutely in the nick of time, dash it!"

Handforth dismounted, and a great deal of his arrogance vanished as he glanced at Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore. He instinctively felt that it was hardly the thing to use the same tone to them—although, without any question, he was in supreme command here, and could do practically as he liked.

"Sorry, sir," he said apologetically. "But it's the only way to treat these chaps, you know. They're walking about as though they'd been drugged—half-dead, you know. You can't make 'em move unless you yell!"

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"Well, Handforth," said Nelson Lee, "you have certainly come at a most opportune time."

In a few words he explained what was required.

"And a jolly good idea, too, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "By George! You mean, go in our own motor-boat, instead of using this slow old tub of a Northestrian ship? It's as good as done, sir."

"Can you make these men obey your orders?" asked Dorrie wonderingly.

"Just watch me!" said Handforth.

"Wait a minute, young 'un," said his lordship. "These fellows belong to Athelstane Castle—"

"That doesn't make any difference, sir—they're all lower than I am, when it comes to a question of authority," said Handforth. "I'm the commander of the Royal bodyguard—and that's the highest military force in the country. They daren't try any tricks with me!"

He turned, and strode up to Egburt the Fair, who was looking very doubtful and worried.

"The matter is now in my hands, old son," he said genially. "You can withdraw your escort, and trot back to your quarters and have a nice afternoon nap."

"My orders are to convey the captives—thy friends—to the waiting ship—" began Egburt.

"That's all right—I'll see to it," interrupted Handforth briskly. "Get thee hence, varlet, and go and chop chips! In other words, vamoose! From this minute, I'm in full command, but if you like to hang about with your escort, looking on, that's your affair!"

"'Tis a strange youth thou art, by my faith!" muttered Egburt.

But he knew that Handforth was the princess' favourite. Every soldier knew it, in fact—and none dared to disobey. With such power as he possessed, he could make things very unpleasant if he chose to complain to the fair princess.

"All right, that's settled, then," said Edward Oswald, with a nod. "As for the boat, we'll have her detached from the airship Mr. Lee, and I'll get my men to carry it down to the water. It's a good job I brought the whole bodyguard—"

Within a very few minutes, feverish preparations were afoot. It was Nelson Lee who suggested the orders, and Handforth who gave them.

The whole body of men entered the valley, and approached the wrecked airship. They were reluctant to do so at first, for they regarded this great mass of strange material with suspicion.

However, there was no question of mutiny. Orders had to be obeyed, and many hands helped to detach the motor-boat and place it on the ground.

It was no light task, either.

The huge body of the airship was lying half on her side, and the motor-boat had been clamped securely to the hull. It was a ticklish operation to get it down, and a full hour had elapsed before the task was satisfactorily completed. Small as the motor-boat had looked when attached to the airship, she now revealed herself as a craft of considerable size when on the ground.

Two of the chosen twelve were engineers belonging to the airship, and they lost no time in getting busy with the motor-boat's engines, examining every part. Petrol was obtained from the main tanks, and a full supply was taken on board.

In the meantime Lord Dorrmore had made a bee-line for the half-wrecked

passenger quarters. The saloon, the lounge, and the state-rooms were all grouped in the very centre of the giant aircraft, and in the crash they had come off lightly. It was the stern of the dirigible which had crumpled up and reduced itself into a mass of twisted girders and torn fabric. The rest was battered but by no means destroyed.

And Dorrie, climbing through one of the saloon windows, looked round eagerly. Nelson Lee had followed him.

"By glory, I'm all for this medieval stuff, but it does my old heart good to see something modern again," said his lordship, as he gingerly picked his way across the saloon and grasped a box of cigars. "By the Lord Harry! Coronas, old man! You simply can't refuse one!"

He held out the box, but Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Later on, Dorrie," he said. "There's no time to smoke now."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Lord Dorrmore blankly.

Surprising the Natives!

NELSON LEE hurried off along the main corridor, and Lord Dorrmore was left to himself.

The airship had settled down with a decided list to starboard, and all the floors, in consequence, were at a sharp angle, and walking was rather difficult. Not that Dorrie minded this—for he wasn't walking. He leaned against the built-in sideboard and lit up.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he murmured dreamily.

The first few puffs of that cigar were sheer joy, and Dorrie forgot all else in the ecstasy of the moment. Then he pulled himself together, and went on a hunt for further supplies. He wasn't going to be left smokeless again!

And presently, when he emerged into the open, he carried a huge bundle with him—cigars, tobacco, and cigarettes. Many shouts arose from the Northestrian soldiers as Dorrie appeared.

"What mystery is this?" gasped Wynwed the Jovial. "By St. Attalus! The man is afire! The smoke doth appear from his very mouth!"

"He is bewitched!"

"Water! Fling water—"

"Dry up!" said Handforth, looking round. "It's only Dorrie—he's having a cigar. Oh, I'd forgotten!" he added, with a grin. "You people don't smoke, do you? Oh, well, you'll soon get used to it!"

"'Tis a madness!" muttered Egburt the Fair.

And all the other soldiers were of the same opinion—and so, if it came to that, was Nelson Lee.

"Dorrie, you're asking for trouble!" he said severely.

"My dear old man, where's the harm?" asked Dorrie blankly.

"This is an airship!" retorted Lee. "And it's still half-full of gas!"

"By glory!" breathed his lordship, throwing the cigar upon the ground and stamping on it. "I was so keen on a smoke that I'd forgotten the usual precautions. What's all that stuff you've got there?" he added.

"It's something that may come in useful—and there will be plenty of work for us during our journey across the lake," replied Nelson Lee.

Handforth came bustling up.

"All ready now, sir?" he asked.

"The engineers report that the motor-boat is fit, and some of my men are getting restive. The sooner we're off the better. The fact is I'm afraid old

Ethelbert might come nosing about, and we don't want to take any chances."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"You're quite right, Handforth," he replied. "We'll move."

Following Handforth's orders, a great crowd of his men lifted the boat and hoisted it upon their shoulders. With so many men the task of carrying the motor-boat was a simple one.

And so, in due course, it was carried straight down to the waters of the lake and launched. This lake was smooth and peaceful, with scarcely a ripple upon its limpid surface. A short distance away, and a hundred yards from the shore, a fairly big ship was anchored—a quaint vessel with a high stern. Great sweeps were standing out from it, with men ready at them.

But this vessel was not needed now.

For the modern motor-boat was a much handier craft for the purpose in view. With its powerful racing-type engine it was capable of forty or fifty miles an hour, and would be able to cross this inland sea in less than an hour.

There were throngs of people on the beach—crowds who had come down to see the departure of this ship, with its twelve adventurers. By this time most of the inhabitants of Dunstane had got word of the princess' decree, and those natives who had enough energy had brought themselves to the beach to witness the start.

They saw something they had never expected to see.

Nelson Lee was in command now, although Handforth tried to maintain his authority for the edification of the general public. But it was Lee who ordered them all into the boat, and it was Lee who gave the engineers the word to start the powerful motor.

Handforth had already instructed Wynwed the Jovial to take the bodyguard back to the castle at once. He had added that he would see Wynwed again within an hour or so. Handforth was a great optimist.

And now the boat was ready for departure.

It contained sixteen souls—for Handforth & Co. and Willy had now been added to the original twelve. Nelson Lee had very careful instructions, and he knew exactly what landmarks to look for on the Gothland shore.

"Right away, guard!" said Dorrie cheerily, as the powerful engine roared into life.

Within a second it was creating a terrific din from the open exhausts. The engineer had deliberately opened the cut-outs, and the motor was running sweetly and powerfully.

Shouts of consternation arose from hundreds of throats. A craft that made a noise like this was a novelty indeed. But the consternation changed rapidly to bewilderment and amazement; for the motor-boat sped off with a triumphant roar, leaving a bluish trail of smoke behind it.

Round she swung, and raced alongside the shore for a matter of two or three hundred yards. And the Northestrians, civilians and soldiers alike, stared, and then fled with one accord.

"What-ho!" grinned Archie Glen-thorne. "The absolute stuff to whack out to the good old troops, what? I mean to say, observe the populace, laddies!"

"They've had the shock of their lives!" chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"They'll have a bigger shock when we come back, bringing Prince Oswy with us," declared Nipper. "Somehow, you

fellows, I've got an idea that we're going to be successful. I expect we shall have to fight for it, but we'll win."

"Rather!"

"St Frank's for ever!"

"Not so much crowin', my lads," said Lord Dorrmore. "It's never wise to count one's chickens before they're hatched. I seem to have heard something to that effect before, anyhow."

Handforth was looking supremely happy.

"It's a cert, sir," he declared. "If those Northestrian people were ready to bolt just because we started off in this motor-boat, what are the Gothlanders going to do when they see us arriving? It'll be as easy as falling off a form, sir."

"I'd like to believe you, Handforth," smiled Nelson Lee. "But, by all accounts, the Kassker tribe is of a somewhat more aggressive breed than our gentle friends, the Northestrians. We must take nothing for granted—and we must make every preparation we can. There's work for all of us during this brief voyage. Remember, we're not on this lake for pleasure."

"Well, it's better than being in that slow old tub they'd prepared for us, sir," said Reggie Pitt. "We've got to thank Handy for all this, too. Who in the world would have thought that he could be so useful?"

"Wonders," said Dorrie, "will never cease."

"Well, I like that!" began Handforth indignantly.

"I was only chippin' you, old man," chuckled his lordship. "But, I say, Lee, we're a pair of piecans, aren't we?"

"If you are speaking for yourself—"

"Why didn't we think of usin' one of the aeroplanes?" went on Dorrie. "They're just as ready to take the air as this craft was to take the water."

"I did think of the aeroplanes," said Lee quietly. "But you must remember that this is a test for twelve of us, Dorrie. We are on trial, as it were. We have been chosen to raid Gothland—all of us. So, in order to prove our worth, we must all go."

"If only we can rescue the young prince, our standing in Northestria will be established. It's worth the trouble, Dorrie—and I am beginning to think that we shall stand a good chance of success. This motor-boat makes all the difference. We've just got to come back with Prince Oswy."

"Hear, hear, sir!"

"And, to tell the truth, I'm rather keen on this visit to Gothland, too," went on Nelson Lee. "So far we have only heard the Northestrians' story. I want to see Kassker's subjects closely with my own eyes, and then I can form a much better judgment of the true position."

Then Lee suggested many active preparations, and while Lord Dorrmore contentedly sat at the wheel of the speeding motor-boat, the others worked.

Kassker the Grim!

HUNRIC CASTLE was a great, forbidding pile of stone, with towering battlements and grim-looking walls. It stood some distance inland, on the Gothland shore, but commanded a clear, uninterrupted view of the great lake.

Not far down the shore nestled the

little village of Vertilla, with its quaint houses, and with forests descending almost to the water's edge.

There was a river here, too. It was only a small one, but it penetrated inland, and the current was fairly strong as the water came tumbling down from the hills.

The entire Gothland landscape was very similar to that of Northestria. The feudal castles were of precisely the same type; the towns and villages were the same, too. But, somehow, Gothland lacked the neatness and clean-looking aspect of its rival country.

Both races spoke the same tongue, and this, of course, was only natural. Many, many centuries had elapsed since the ancestors of Kassker's subjects had been trapped in this mysterious oasis of the Arctic. These people were descendants of the ancient Goths, and the blood was still comparatively pure.

For when the forbears of the Northestrians had arrived—Anglo-Saxons all—these Goths had been a kind of wild, savage tribe. And for centuries they had been held in bondage—serfs and slaves. Intermarriage had been strictly forbidden, for the Goths were looked upon as a low-grade race.

And so this surprising little community had developed. Hundreds of years earlier the Goths had been cast out by their masters after revolts and rebellions. They had been banished to the other side of the oasis. And here they had developed and multiplied, becoming stronger and stronger as the years had gone on.

And at last they had become a rival

race—speaking the same language, and with the same customs, and using all the ideas of their former masters. Commerce had even been established, and for many years peaceful trading had gone on.

But then, with the advent of the ambitious Kassker, an arrogant spirit had arisen in Gothland, and the airship party had apparently arrived at a critical period—when Kassker was almost ready to declare war upon his unprepared rivals.

Trading relations had already been stopped, and the Northestrians knew of what might come. But their inborn lethargy was such that they made no efforts to protect themselves. The Gothlanders were regarded as inferior beings. They were held in contempt. What was there to fear from such savages?

That was the general spirit in Northestria—the root cause of the present unpreparedness. The Princess Mercia had something to do with it, perhaps, too. Just when the people needed a strong, vigorous ruler, they had this gentle princess, guided by the dull, deliberate, slow-minded Ethelbert the Red.

With no actual leader, the country's sleepiness was hardly surprising. But in Gothland it was very different. For Kassker the Grim was a man of vast power, the absolute lord of life and death.

Practically every able-bodied man in Gothland was a soldier. The country was a military camp. For years these preparations had been going on. And although the Gothlanders were far less

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in number, taking population for population, Kassker's armies were infinitely superior.

On the battlements of that grim castle there were men on duty. One of them was an officer named Attawulf the Terrible. His name fitted him, for he was a tall, savage-looking brute, with fierce, baleful eyes. His features were coarse, and his beard was dark and bushy. He was, indeed, one of Kassker's chief military advisers.

"What is yon moving object?" he growled, as he pulled a sentry to a halt, and pointed out across the water. The soldier looked, his eyes widening.

"I know not, master!" he replied. "'Tis a strange object, by my soul! A thing which moveth with great speed—"

"Ay, and it cometh nigh these shores!" broke in Attawulf, his tone becoming alarmed. "What is't? By my beard! Mayhap 'tis some devilry of those strangers who dwell within the domain of Northestia! Thou call'st to mind what befell a few days ago, fool?" he added.

"Ay, master, right well I do," said the man nervously. "Is not all Gothland still talking? A vast thing of the air which did float over our land! I like not the looks of this strange object which moveth so speedily—"

"'Tis connected with those people, by my sword or I know not what I speak!" muttered Attawulf. "I must acquaint Kassker with this information."

He hurried from the battlements and blundered heavily down a flight of circular stone stairs. Once out of the tower, he burst in upon the private chamber of Kassker the Grim.

"Well, knave?" thundered a coarse, enraged voice. "What meaneth this blundering intrusion? Marry, but thy head will pay the penalty—"

"Thy pardon, my lord," panted Attawulf, startled.

"'Tis thine, my good soldier!" interrupted the other. "Well, speak! What meaneth this clumsy entry? Hast news?"

Kassker the Grim was even bigger than Attawulf—a hulking great mass of a man with villainous features, and a vast black beard. All in all, he was hardly the kind of man one would care to meet on a dark night. His arrogance was patent in every line of his features, in every word of his speech. The lives of men meant nothing to him. He sent them to the chopping-block with utter callousness.

His apartment fitted him, too—a great, untidy barn of a place with a bare floor, and uncouth wooden benches and stools. Rough earthenware plates were on the table, and the remains of a meal.

"Well, Attawulf, art thou dumb?" boomed Kassker.

"A strange thing hath appeared upon the lake, my lord," said Attawulf the Terrible. "Perchance it is caused by the strangers who are within the Northestrian—"

"Let me see!" interrupted Kassker harshly.

He hurried up the stone steps to the battlements and stared out across the waters of the lake. There were other soldiers gazing out, too—many of them below, on the castle walls. All were fascinated by the strange sight which was to be seen. A small and extraordinary craft—a boat which sped through the waters without sweeps or

oars, and which created a loud, throbbing noise as it moved.

"By the bones of Sarus!" muttered Kassker, with a start. "Thou art right, Attawulf! This is no Northestrian craft. It bringeth some of those dangerous strangers we have heard about."

He swore hard, and Attawulf was looking alarmed. Spies had brought word of Northestia's peculiar visitors—those people who had arrived from the air. And news had come, too, of Handforth's activities, and of the manner in which many of Kassker's men had been captured and flung into dungeons.

"Ay, these bold strangers are like to land upon our soil," continued the overlord of Gothland. "Marry, but I will make them welcome!"

"Welcome?" echoed Attawulf, aghast. "'Twas the word I said."

"But these men are possessed of demons' powers!" exclaimed the other fearfully. "How else could they make this craft rush through the water in this mad way? Kill them, my lord! They are a menace! Bestrew them for the dogs they are!"

Kassker nodded.

"I agree with thee, good Attawulf!" he replied. "But 'tis necessary that we should be cautious. Mayhap these men have weapons of which we know naught. I have heard strange and wondrous stories concerning them, stories which I ridiculed. But, having seen this, I bethink me that perchance they are true. I must go warily, my Attawulf."

Kassker, it seemed, was craftier than the sleepy Northestrians.

"Go thee hence," he continued, turning to Attawulf the Terrible. "Take men with thee, and bid these strangers welcome. Tell them that Kassker the Grim desireth to greet them with friendly salutes."

"Art mad, my lord?"

"Nay, fool!" roared Kassker. "Obey my orders. Take a hundred men—nay, two hundred. Escort these strangers into the castle. In the meantime, preparations shall be made. Their heads will drop from their shoulders ere an hour hath elapsed!"

"Ah!" breathed Attawulf with relief.

"There shall be no delay!" vowed Kassker the Grim. "The block will be ready—and the axe sharpened! But, first, get these strangers within the gates. Go, Attawulf, and fail at thy peril!"

Kassker, without doubt, was essentially a man of action!

Trapped!

LORD DORRIMORE tossed his cigarette-end away and compressed his lips.

"Well, I don't think much of it," he remarked, as he inspected Hunric Castle through his powerful binoculars. "In my considered opinion, Lee, it's a nasty-looking place."

"Yes, we don't want to find ourselves bottled up behind those walls," agreed Nelson Lee. "And yet we must land in this vicinity, I imagine. There is the village of Vertilla," he went on, pointing. "And the fortress must, therefore, lie inland, and almost immediately ahead of us."

"And that means landing almost beneath the walls of this place, sir," said Nipper. "Well, we're ready for the beggars if they try to attack us. It's rather a pity there's no darkness in this land—it hardly gives us a chance."

"A quick rush, sir, that's the idea," declared Handforth. "I think we ought

to dash straight for the door, and then make a rush for the fortress."

"Exactly!" grinned Church. "Mr. Lee suggested that ten minutes ago, in just the same words."

"Well, it was my idea," said Handforth calmly. "There's some talk about leaving a few of us in charge of the boat. Well, I'm not going to be left here, and that's flat!"

"As I have some regard for those who will be left, I shall take you with me, Handforth," put in Nelson Lee dryly. "I don't want any arguments over this matter, either. Several of you must remain in charge of the boat. I think four will be sufficient. One of you engineers, and three of the boys."

"Which of us, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt anxiously.

"You, Gunby, will be in nominal charge," said Nelson Lee, looking at one of the engineers. "As for the others, in order to save all argument, I will name them—Boots, Glenthorne, and De Valerie."

"Oh, sir!" said the three juniors in dismay.

"This may be a little disappointment to you, but this task is every bit as responsible as the actual mission," continued Lee. "At all costs, this boat must be held in readiness. It is possible that we shall make a wild dash for the shore, and the speedy handling of the boat may make all the difference between life and death. Moreover, it must be guarded constantly. There is a machine-gun here, and at all costs the enemy must be held at bay."

"Leave it to us, sir," said Gunby, the engineer.

"A frightfully sad blow, laddies, but Mr. Lee knows best," said Archie philosophically. "My visions of dashing to the rescue are not merely bent, but absolutely shattered, dash it!"

"Orders are orders, and we've got to obey," said De Valerie.

Everybody was full of enthusiasm. They were all tired of being held as captives. One swift dash, and they would prove to all the Northestrians that they were people to be relied upon and trusted. And then, instead of being shut up within a castle, they would be showered with honours.

And it was liberty they needed.

For, without liberty, they were unable to make any experiments with the airship's wireless apparatus. They wanted to get the wireless into working order to communicate with the outside world. But nothing could be done while this present state of affairs lasted. So there would be something more than honour in the balance when they started on this wild dash into the enemy country.

The motor-boat shut off her engines and glided towards the beach. And then the twelve adventurers leapt out and waded ashore. They were led by Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore and Umlois—and the latter now had his beloved spear. With that in his hand he feared no man, or no hundred men, if it came to that.

"Keep all together!" shouted Lee, as they ran forward. "And if there is any sign of danger, Dorrie and I will make the first move—"

"By the Lord Harry!" shouted Lord Dorrmore. "These beggars don't waste much time, Lee! There's a pretty good sign of danger already! Quick—give us the word! What's to be done?"

They all came to a halt. From a thick belt of trees, two hundred yards ahead, scores of men were appearing on horseback. All were in armour, and all held long, dangerous-looking lances. In front rode a standard-bearer and the entire body of men looked impressive.

"H'm! We've got to make up our minds swiftly!" muttered Nelson Lee. "I hate giving the order to retreat during the first minute of our—"

"Hold on!" said Nipper. "They're friendly, sir."

"By jingo, so they are!" exclaimed Church.

"Look!"

All the horsemen in armour were holding up their right hands in token of salute. There was no sign of hostility. The Gothlanders swept up in stately formation, but they proved to be a grim-looking body of men. They had none of the peaceful, gentle appearance of the Northestrans.

"We'll see it through!" muttered Lee. "In any case, it is too late to retreat."

It was, indeed.

Even Nelson Lee had not suspected the abrupt appearance of so many soldiers. It was clear enough that they had been waiting, hiding in the shelter of the woods until the party should land. And now they had swept out without a second's warning.

"Welcome!" shouted Attawulf the Terrible, in cordial tones.

He was riding in advance of his men, and as he came up he repeated his salute, and he did his utmost to look pleasant. But Nature had given him such repulsive features that this was hardly possible.

"Welcome, good strangers!" he said, as he drew rein, and held up a hand to his men. "Thou art the wondrous people who have come mysteriously into our lands from some unknown region? We have heard of ye."

"To whom do ye speak?" asked Nelson Lee.

"I am Attawulf, an officer of the great Kassker's court," replied the other. "My lord hath bid me make ye welcome. With his own eyes did he see the approach of your strange vessel. 'Tis his desire that ye should be met with friendly greetings."

"That's very nice of Mr. Kassker," said Dorrie, nodding. "I'm sure we're only too willin' to be on friendly terms."

"Does Kassker send any other message?" asked Nelson Lee.

"It is his desire that ye should accompany us into the hospitable walls of Hunric Castle," replied Attawulf. "A feast is even now being prepared in your honour. Ye will come, good strangers."

It was more of a statement than a query. And, indeed, there was no alternative, it seemed. For they were fairly surrounded by the mounted soldiers. And so, without any delay, they marched off, watched in dismay by those who had been left in the motorboat.

It was a period of swift tension. Were these Gothlanders really friendly, or was this a trick? The adventurers soon received an inkling of the truth.

For when they reached the castle drawbridge and marched over it into the great courtyard, a clanging of metal sounded behind them. They looked round and saw that a great metal grille had descended, barring all possible exit!

Kassker's Treachery!

"O H, my goodness!"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "They've shut us in!"

"Did—did you see that?"

asked another.

"We're trapped!"

Most of the fellows murmured some such remark—for the shutting of that metal grille was grim and significant.

The Glyn Challenge Cup—Semi-Final Round.

SAINTS AND 'FRIARS AT GRIPS.

Last-Minute Win.

By Harry Manners.

Played at Rookwood, so that neither side should enjoy ground advantage, this match between St. Jim's and Greyfriars teemed with thrills. Greyfriars took a risk in playing their sometimes brilliant goalkeeper, Hazeldene. The bigish crowd made every man of us "jumpy," but the football was good. Wharton opened the scoring with a flashing long shot. Tom Merry equalised, but Bob Cherry headed through for the 'Friars and Peter Todd neatly hooked in another. Our attempts to beat Hazeldene were fruitless, Hazel the moody giving one of his most dazzling displays. Luck was with us, however, in the second venture, for Hazeldene had an inexplicable lapse of form. Over-anxious to make sure the 'Friars kept their lead, he let Lowther through, and going from bad to worse, allowed Blake to level the tally. But he pulled himself together and kept out many great shots until Tom Merry netted a grand goal in the last minute, enabling the Saints to pass into the Final.

Nelson Lee noticed that Lord Dorrimore was glancing at him, but the detective only gave a slight nod. He appeared to be quite calm and serene.

"It doesn't seem very cheery, old man," murmured his lordship. "I'm not sure we've done the right thing."

"I want to meet Kassker," said Lee smoothly.

There was something in his manner which restored a good deal of confidence among the others. They realised, of course, that action could have been taken earlier. For example, if a number of revolvers had been fired when they had first been surrounded, every Gothlander's horse would have stamped. And no doubt their riders would have been in a panic, too. But Nelson Lee had not chosen to take such a course. He was deliberately entering the trap, it seemed.

But Nelson Lee knew what he was doing!

If an escape could have been made earlier, it would be just as possible to make it now. True, he had not foreseen the grille, but it was not likely to prove much of an obstacle, for he had noted that it was operated by clumsy great levers out in the open.

The party found itself in an enclosed courtyard. It was very different from the courtyard of the princess' castle in Dunstane. There was nothing picturesque. Everything was grim.

On all sides rose the massive walls, immense and forbidding. It was almost like a great hall without a roof, for it was practically square, and after they had entered, a door clanged. All the horsemen had remained outside. Here there were other soldiers on guard, and there was another spectacle, too.

Exactly opposite the freshly arrived visitors stood a giant of a man—an enormous fellow, between six-foot-six and seven feet. In his hands he held a cruel-looking axe, and immediately in front of him stood a great wooden block.

ST. FRANK'S "CRACK" ABBOTSFORD "TOUGH NUTS"!

By Clarence Fellowe (The Rhyming Reporter).

Though lowly in the League they stood, 'twas said that when in fighting mood, Fane and his men from Abbotford, were simply not to be ignored! Thus in the semi-final draw, Nipper exchanged a friendly paw with Fane—and then the fun began! Gosh, how the Abbot's forwards ran! Like ferrets, they besieged our goal—e'en Handforth, in heroic role, could not keep out their stinging shots. They netted three—it looked like lots! The pace, however, was too hot—St. Frank's had "wind," their foes had not! Abbotford faltered, and it seemed an avalanche over them streamed. Both sides on terms, the battle waxed, till Abbotford, their powers taxed, gave up the ghost. St. Frank's got two decisive goals—the "Final" through!

FULL RESULTS.

ST. JIM'S	4	GREYFRIARS	3
Merry (2), Lowther,		Wharton, Cherry	
Blake,		Todd,	
ST. FRANK'S	4	ABBOTSFORD	2
Nipper (3), Pitt		Fane (2), Champ-	
		neys,	

"My only hat!" murmured Pitt, with a start.

"The—the chopper!"

"We're going to have our heads lopped off!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Handforth looked at the executioner with defiance.

"He'd better try it on, that's all!" he muttered. "Mr. Lee wouldn't have calmly walked in here if he had suspected—"

He broke off, for Kassker the Grim had appeared, coming from behind a number of his soldiers. The overlord of the Gothlanders was gorgeous in his chainmail and massive headdress. He made an imposing figure, but, at the same time, a repellent one. There was something about him which told the adventurers all they wanted to know. The Northestrian stories, far from being exaggerated, had been remarkably inadequate. These Gothlanders were brutes all, and Kassker the Grim a super-brute.

They were men of a low type, with bestial features and coarse habits. If they were anything like the normal inhabitants, then Gothland was indeed a place to be avoided.

"Remain quite calm, all!" murmured Lee warningly. "I had anticipated this. I have seen these people, and I am satisfied."

"But how the deuce are we going to get out?" murmured Dorrie.

"Let me wield my spear, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlozi eagerly. "Is not my blood afire to commence this battle? Wau! Sustain not this suspense!"

"Wait, old friend—wait!" whispered Lee.

Kassker came forward with exaggerated slowness.

"Welcome, good friends!" he said, his voice filled with sarcasm. "'Tis not my way to dally. Which of ye would prefer to have his head removed from his carcase first?"

"Is this the way you greet us, Kassker?" asked Lee smoothly.

"By my soul!" roared Kassker. "Thou shalt be the first! Darest thou to address me thus? We have heard of thee, stranger, and thy companions. 'Tis my custom to deal swiftly and drastically with those to whom I take a dislike. Ere twelve minutes have sped, twelve heads will roll in the dust."

The man's arrogance was amazing.

"You are very sure of yourself," said Nelson Lee grimly. "But we are not such fools, Kassker. Do you think you can bully us as you wish? We have come here to verify our suspicions. We have been told that you Gothlanders are a brutal race. We have been informed that you are of a low, savage type. We have received the proof we needed."

Kassker the Grim let out a tremendous roar.

"I faith, Attawulf, didst hear?" he thundered. "Methinks I will reserve this fool, and put him to the torture!"

"Ay, 'tis an excellent suggestion," agreed Attawulf.

(What will happen to the St. Frank's raiders? They are in a tight corner. Don't miss next week's big-thrill chapters.)

The Faithful Fag!

(Continued from page 16.)

"Only what?"

"Frayne came to the Green Man to warn me?"

"Oh!"

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry. "Joe, why didn't you tell me?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Frayne came to the Green Man to warn you?" repeated Mr. Railton, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"Yes, sir," said Langton firmly. "Don't blame him for doing that. He knew I was in a horrible fix, and he's my fag, and he felt bound to do it. And—and the little chap thought he ought to do it because I've been kind to him at times. Poor little beggar!"

"Frayne, is this true?"

"Yes, sir!" muttered Joe.

"Why did you not tell us?"

"'Cause I ain't a sneak, sir!"

There was a murmur.

"Silence! Frayne, you did wrong in leaving the school after lights out; but if this was your motive—"

"It was his motive, sir," said Langton. "He wasn't going to say a word, and—and I wasn't going to, either. Only—"

"And why have you spoken now?" demanded the Housemaster.

"Because—because I—I couldn't see him go!" said Langton desperately. "I couldn't be such an awful rotter! I couldn't do it! I know this means the sack for me, but I shall have to stand it!" He groaned. "It's better than ruining that poor kid, and having my conscience hammering at me all my life! I—I suppose I'd better go and pack my things?"

Mr. Railton looked steadily at him.

"You had better come in and see the Head first," he said quietly. "Whatever your conduct has been, Langton, this action, at least, is a noble one, and you cannot be all bad. As for Frayne, I think I can undertake to say that the Head will pardon him; and certainly he will not be expelled. Come, Langton!"

The prefect, with bowed head, followed the Housemaster to Dr. Holmes' study.

As soon as the Housemaster was gone there was a roar in the Hall. Fellows crowded round Joe Frayne from all sides.

Wally was the first, and he seized Joe's right hand and worked away at it as if it were a pump-handle. Tom Merry secured the other and shook it. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clapped him on one shoulder and Blake on the other. Shouting and cheering juniors swarmed round him.

"Bai Jove! Isn't he wipin'?"

"Plucky little beggar!" said Kildare.

"You ought to be licked for interfering in matters that don't concern you, Frayne; but you're a plucky little hero!"

"Didn't I say he was true blue all through?" roared Wally.

"No; you jolly well didn't!" said Hobbs.

"Shut up, Hobbs! He's worth fifty of you!" said Wally belligerently. "Let me hear anybody say anything against him, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should give such a person a faithful thwashin'!"

"You little ass!" said Tom Merry.

"If you ever get into a scrape like this again, Joe, I'll hammer you! But—but I'm proud of you, kid, and I think the whole School House will be proud of you!"

"Oh, Master Tom!" gasped Joe.

"And the New House, too!" said Figgins. "Hurrah!"

Joe Frayne was almost overcome with the ovation. Certainly he had very little breath left by the time the juniors had finished shaking hands and clapping him on the back. And while that scene was proceeding in the Hall, Arthur Langton, with bowed head and despair in his heart, had followed Mr. Railton into the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes heard what Mr. Railton had to tell him in amazement, and when the Housemaster explained, the Head turned a very grave look upon Langton. "You know what this confession means, Langton?" he said.

Langton nodded wretchedly.

"Yes, sir. I know I shall be expelled, but—but I couldn't see that kid sacked in my place! Will you get it

over as soon as possible, sir? I feel as if I can't face the fellows again!"

The Head was silent and very thoughtful.

"You spoke out like this simply to save Frayne, Langton?" he said.

"I had to, sir!"

"Yes. Knowing what it meant to you?"

"I don't know that I stopped to think. I didn't mean to speak out, but I did it somehow."

"Because you were not so bad as you had supposed yourself to be, I think," said the Head gravely. "It is a great shock to me, Langton, to make this discovery regarding your conduct. Yet the way in which it has come to light reflects so much credit on you that I cannot help thinking there is much good in you. Were you let into this? Have you had an associate in these reckless actions?"

Langton was silent.

"I will not press that question," said the Head, kindly enough. "If I were to give you another chance—"

Langton gasped.

"Oh, sir!"

"Could I expect you to play the game, Langton—to have no connection with anything of the sort in the future?"

"Oh, sir, I had already resolved that it was all over, anyway! I had broken off with it—after last night! The scare was enough for me! I had never realised clearly what it meant till then—"

Langton broke off.

"Very well," said the Head quietly.

"I shall give you another chance, Langton. You will stay—nothing more shall be said about this—and I will trust you to keep your word!"

Langton tried to speak, but he could not. He felt a lump rise in his throat.

Langton did not leave St. Jim's, and Joe Frayne remained Langton's faithful fag, and from that day no one was likely to think that Tom Merry's protege would ever be other than a credit to St. Jim's.

(Next Week: "HIS CONFLICT BROTHER!"—a great story starring Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke, the famous detective.)

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