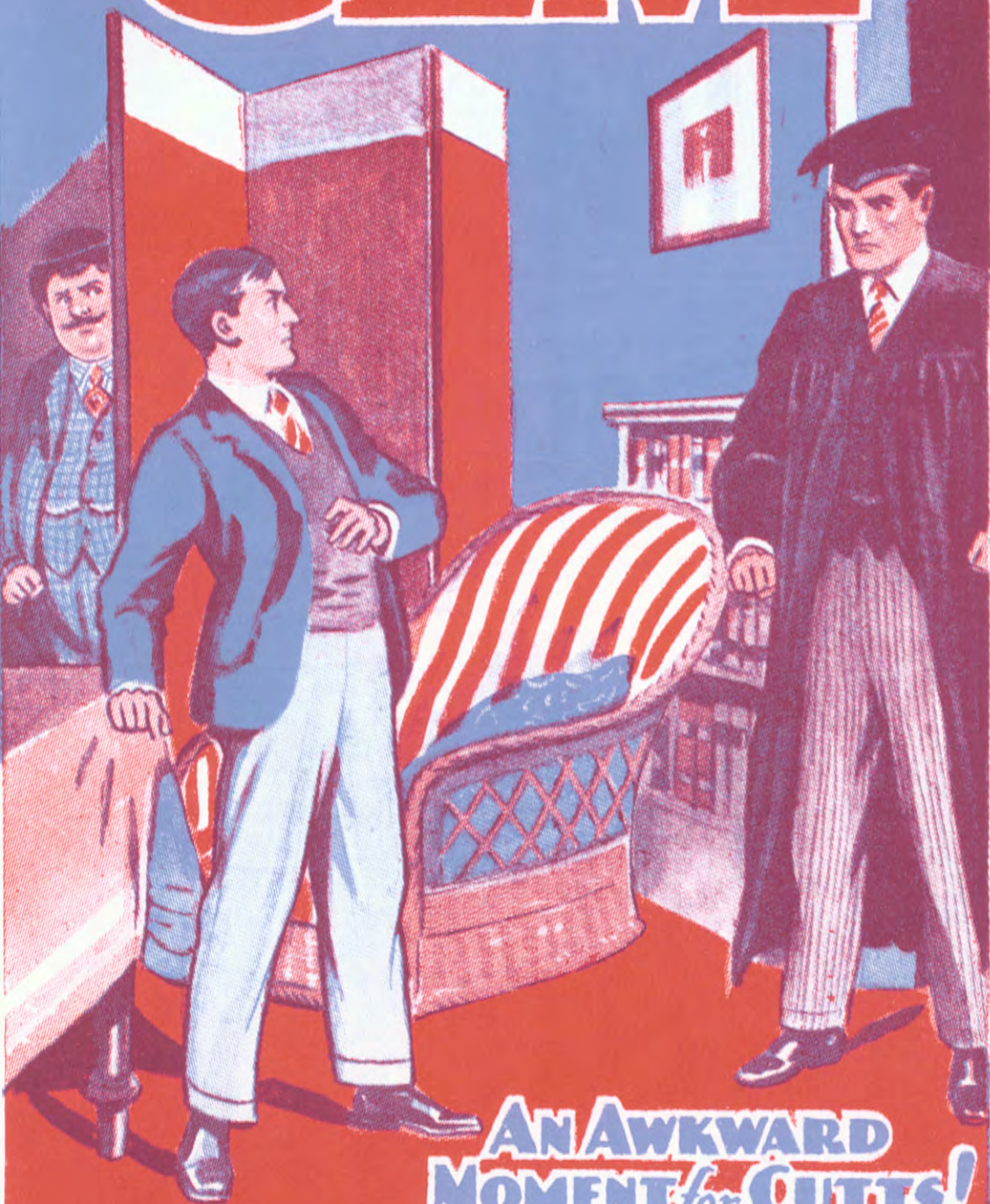


STAR SCHOOL STORIES OF ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS—INSIDE!

The **GEM** ^{2d}



**AN AWKWARD
MOMENT for CUTTS!**

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EXPULSION STARED GERALD CUTTS IN THE FACE—UNLESS HE COULD SAVE HIMSELF AT THE EXPENSE OF AN INNOCENT JUNIOR!



As Cutts dictated the letter Digby wrote it down. The junior little knew how he was playing into the hands of the black sheep of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 1.

Taken to Tea!

DIGBY was sitting on the corner of the table in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's, when Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, his study-mates, came in. Digby had a note in his hand, which he had been reading for the second time, and there was a puzzled wrinkle on Digby's brow.

"It's all right," announced Jack Blake.

"Quite all wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy has come to the rescue!"

"Come on, Dig!" said Herries.

Digby did not get off the table. He glanced at his chums, and then looked again at the note in his hand. Something about that note seemed to puzzle Digby of the Fourth; but he seemed pleased as well as puzzled.

"What's all right?" he asked, a little absently.

Blake looked surprised.

"Why, about tea, of course," he said. "Tom Merry came into the tuck-shop while I was trying to soften Mrs. Taggles' hard heart, and get her to run a little tick until Saturday. Those Shell bouncers are standing an extra-special tea in their study, and they've asked us to come. Hence these smiles. It's all right."

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"Oh!" said Digby.

"Well, come on!" said Blake, still more surprised, and a little indignant. "I should think you'd be pleased. We've been wondering whether we were going to get any tea at all, funds being in such a rotten state, and Gussy having wasted the last guinea in the study in reckless extravagance on new toppers—"

"Weally, Blake, it was only one new toppah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mildly. "I should not be likely to get more than one toppah for a guinea, I suppose. And I was not aware at the time that you chaps were stony—"

"Anyway, we're going to have tea with Tom Merry," said Herries. "So wake up and come along, Dig. What's the matter with you?"

"The fact is—" began Digby.

"The fact is I'm hungry," said Blake briskly. "Come on!"

"I've had an invitation to tea."

"It never rains but it pours," said Blake genially. "Who has been along asking us to tea now, like a good Samaritan?"

Digby coloured a little.

"Not us!" he said. "Only me!"

"Oh, only you!" said Jack Blake, with a sniff. "Don't say you accepted it, or I shall feel bound to bump you for deserting your pals in a time of distress."

"I haven't accepted it," Digby hur-

ried to state. "I was going to ask the chap if you fellows could come, too."

"That's better. You needn't accept it now, as we're going to Tom Merry's quarters. Tell the chap you're much obliged, and you can't come, but you'll remember him next time we're stony."

"I suppose I could go now, as you chaps have got your tea somewhere?" said Digby.

"You can, if you like, of course," said Blake. "If it's some special friend you don't want to disappoint."

"One doesn't get an invitation from the Fifth every day," said Digby thoughtfully.

His chums stared at him. It was certainly rare for Fourth Formers to be invited to tea by the great men of the Fifth. The Fifth were seniors, not quite so awe-inspiring as the Sixth, perhaps, but awfully majestic to the juniors. Between seniors and juniors there was a great gulf fixed.

"Do you mean to say that some Fifth Form chap has asked you to tea?" demanded Blake.

"Yes."

"Well, that alters the case," said Blake considerably. "Perhaps we'll let you go. Who's the johnny?"

"Look at that," said Digby, holding out the note. "Young Frayne of the Third brought it to me ten minutes ago."

The chums of the Fourth looked at the note together. And all three of

Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in breathless, the Shell fellows met them with grim looks.

"Haven't got him!" growled Blake. "He's got away!" said Arthur Augustus. "We went like anythin', but he dodged us, you know."

"Couldn't stay away any longer," said Herries. "Afraid you fellows might be waiting for your tea. Dig will have to take his chance!"

"Well, tea's ready, such as it is!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Dig won't miss much, at all events. There's a loaf and a half and two tins of sardines."

"Bai Jove!"

"Where are the eggs?" asked Blake.

"Spread over our clothes!"

"And the jam?"

"On my trucks!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Blake. "All through that ass Digby! Never mind. Sardines are good enough for me."

"Yaas, wathah! And I'm quite fond of bread-and-butter." "Well, there's plenty of that," said Tom Merry, as he served out the sardines. "And now you seem to be sane again, you might explain what you bumped into us for."

"We were after Dig," said Blake, helping himself to the sardines. "I say, this is all right! A good appetite is better than cream puffs."

"What has Dig been doing?" asked Tom Merry.

"He had the cheek to go to tea with one of the Fifth, after the study had put its foot down on it," said Blake. "Of course, we told him he had to come here to tea—so we were bringing him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But he got away; we couldn't actually chase him into Cutts' study," said Blake. "The Fifth would have dropped on us heavy if we got into their quarters."

Tom Merry started.

"Cutts!" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"He's the chap who's asked Dig to tea?" asked the Terrible Three together.

"He's the pippin!"

"Has Dig come into a fortune?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's exactly what I asked him. But he hasn't; he's stony. Cutts has taken a fancy to Dig—what for, I'm blessed if I know!"

"Cutts is up to no good, you can bet your Sunday hat on that!" said Monty Lowther emphatically. "We know Cutts and his little ways. You remember what Fatty Wynn of the New House says—he heard him scheming to give away the Wallaby match just to win money on it from rotten bookmakers!"

"Kildare didn't believe it, but we did," said Tom Merry quietly. "Cutts must have been awfully hard hit over that. He had a big sum of money laid against St. Jim's, as we all know, and he must have lost as we won the match. If Dig had any money, I should think now that Cutts was after it to get a loan to pay his debts."

"But he's stony," said Blake. "Yes, that makes it queer."

"Only we're not going to let him have anything to do with Cutts," said Blake, with decision. "It's not good enough. I don't trust him a quarter of an inch."

"If Cutts has taken up Digby," said Tom Merry, "it's because he's got some rotten turn to serve. Dig isn't safe in his hands."

"Only Cutts can be jolly agreeable when he likes," said Blake reflectively. "Dig is an obstinate ass, and we'll jolly well stop his getting pally with Cutts."

"Yaas, wathah!"

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"His father knows Cutts' uncle," added Blake thoughtfully. "Cutts has made that an excuse for taking him up, I think. But Sir Robert Digby has known Cutts' uncle ever since they were boys together, so Dig says, and if it made any difference to Cutts, he could have shown it a bit sooner than this. As a matter of fact, it's only for the last few days he's been so keen on Dig."

"It's an excuse," said Tom Merry; "it's not his reason. Look here, you chaps, Dig ought not to be ass enough to be taken in by Cutts; but if he is, he ought to be looked after. And if you fellows are going to look after him we'll help you. The six of us ought to be a match for Cutts, whatever his little game might be."

"Hear, hear!" And over the sardines the chums of the School House discussed the matter, and resolved to back up Digby and save him from the unscrupulous clutches of Gerald Cutts—though exactly how they were to do it they did not quite know.

CHAPTER 3.

Cutts' Young Friend!

CUTTS of the Fifth was in his study when Dig arrived there, a little breathless after the chase.

Cutts' study was one of the largest in the Fifth Form quarters, and it was well furnished. Cutts had an ample allowance from his father, and he spent it freely. He had ways of supplementing his allowance, too—ways that would certainly have earned his expulsion if they had been known to the Head of St. Jim's. Cutts betted on horses and gambled at cards, and his luck was phenomenal. But the knowing ones declared that he was bound to come a cropper sooner or later.

And Cutts had come a cropper. He had played high, and his usual luck had deserted him. He had laid heavy bets against St. Jim's in their match with an Australian team, and, being in the St. Jim's eleven, he had tried to throw the match away.

St. Jim's had won, and Cutts, in his certainty that it was a "good thing," had taken odds of three to one. He had stood to win over thirty pounds, and stood to lose a hundred.

He had lost the hundred!

Well provided as Gerald Cutts was with money, he had not the slightest prospect of raising anything like a hundred pounds, or a half of that sum.

It was ruin, and he knew it.

Yet, after the first terrible shock, Cutts had recovered some of his usual coolness.

He had to fight now to satisfy creditors, to keep his secret, to ward off ruin, and to save himself from being shown up and expelled from St. Jim's.

He had made his bets on credit, and he had to pay, or else be exposed and ruined. But he had not given up hope yet. He was devoting all his cunning to that struggle to save himself.

Two or three of his betting creditors, partly satisfied with small sums on account, had agreed to give him time—a short time—to raise the rest. But one, at least, was at the end of his patience, and that one, Jonas Hooke, had warned him that unless he received a remittance in full on Monday, Cutts could expect him at St. Jim's.

Cutts had sent him nothing; and today was Tuesday.

The mere possibility of a bookmaker paying a visit to the school would

have scared almost any fellow at St. Jim's into a fit.

It had no perceptible effect upon Cutts. If Hooke came and told his story to the Head, Cutts would have to leave St. Jim's the same night in disgrace. It would be the end of his career at the school—the end of his chance of getting the commission in the cavalry regiment upon which his heart was set.

And yet Cutts was perfectly cool with that sword of Damocles suspended over his head. He greeted Digby with a nod and a pleasant smile as he came in.

Digby was looking and feeling a little awkward. It was a great condescension for a Fifth Former to ask a fag to tea, and Digby felt it.

"Glad to see you, Digby," said Cutts affably. "You've hurried—eh?"

Digby turned red.

"Yes, I—I've been in a scrap," he confessed. "Only fun, you know."

"Sit down, kid," said the Fifth Former genially. "Tea's ready. My fag's just finished and cleared out. Lift the toast up from the grate, will you?"

"Rather!" said Dig.

It was an open secret in the School House that Cutts, in spite of his ample allowance, was hard up, and hardly knew where to turn for a half-crown. But, all the same, he always contrived to have a good spread on his study table at tea-time. In some quarters, at least, his credit was still good.

Digby's honest face lighted up as he saw piles of beautifully brown toast, and fried kidneys and eggs poached to a turn. It was one of Cutts' very nice little "brews," and Digby wondered greatly that he should have asked a Fourth Form fag. There were plenty of fellows in the Fifth, and in the Sixth, too, who would have been glad to come.

And Cutts was very friendly and genial over tea. He talked to Digby just as if the junior were a senior like himself, and did not treat him like a fag at all.

There was an expression of great contentment upon Digby's cheerful face, and he felt very friendly indeed towards Cutts. He began to think that fellows had been too hard on poor old Cutts.

When that pleasant tea was finished, Digby made a movement to rise. But Cutts raised a detaining hand.

"Don't go, kid."

Digby nodded, and sat down again, with perhaps a slight, uneasy feeling inwardly. It was whispered in the House that gambling at cards went on in Cutts' study after tea. But, after all, if Cutts wanted him to play cards, he could say so—especially as he hadn't any money. He grinned involuntarily at the idea of Cutts pressing him to play when he was stony.

"Call my fag, kid," said Cutts.

Dig went to the door, and felt very important as he called "Fa-a-a-ag!" down the passage. It was almost as if he were in the Fifth himself.

Curly Gibson of the Third came scudding along the passage. He glared at Digby as he saw the junior in Cutts' doorway.

"You cheeky rotter!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Do you mean to say that you have got the awful nerve to call 'Fag'? Why, you're only a beastly fag yourself!"

"Gibson," broke in Cutts' icy voice, "you'd better be civil to my guest!" Curly's manner changed at once.

"Do you want me, Cutts?" he asked meekly.

"Yes. Clear away those things."

"Yes, Cutts."

Curly Gibson soon cleared away the tea-things, and, when he was gone, Digby waited for Cutts to speak. He was rather nervous that Cutts was going to offer him a cigarette; he knew Cutts' little ways. But the black sheep of the Fifth was gifted with tact. He did not offer Digby a cigarette, and he did not smoke one himself, much to the junior's relief.

"Not pressed for time—eh?" said Cutts.

"Not at all," said Digby, who was a little apprehensive of being ragged as soon as he returned to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

"I really owe you an apology," said Cutts.

"Me?" said Digby, in astonishment.

"Yes. Your father and my uncle were schoolboys together, and they're still great chums. My uncle's often mentioned you in his letters to me."

"Has he?" said Digby.

"I've been going to take an interest in you for a long time," said Cutts. "But it's such a difficulty to see juniors. You understand that?"

"Oh, yes," said Digby.

"And then your study had a bit of a prejudice against me, I think," said Cutts, smiling.

Digby did not reply to that. It was more polite to leave the remark unanswered and smile vaguely. He couldn't deny that Study No. 6 in the Fourth had a decided prejudice against the black sheep of the Fifth.

"I dare say you heard the jaw there was among the fags at the time of the Wallaby match," said Cutts, "about my laying bets against St. Jim's?"

"Ahem!" said Digby.

"That fat fellow in the New House, Wynn, went to sleep behind a haystack, and dreamed that he heard me talking to somebody, or something of that sort," said Cutts. "Of course, he was talking out of his hat."

"Oh!" said Digby.

"You're too sensible a chap to believe all the chatter you hear, I'm jolly sure of that," said Cutts.

"I hope so," said Digby.

"Well, I want to be your friend so far as a Fifth Form chap can be friends with a junior," said Cutts. "What do you think?"

To be offered in this genial way the friendship of the arbiter of elegance in the Fifth—to be taken up by a senior whose regard was esteemed by mighty men in the Sixth! It was so flattering that Digby could only stare in astonishment.

"You're jolly kind!" he managed to say at last.

"Well, I like you," said Cutts. "By the way, my uncle is coming down to the school and you'll see him. He's your father's oldest friend—Major Cutts, you know."

Digby nodded. Cutts had never shown the slightest sign of acknowledging any claim on the Fourth Former's part because his father was the old friend of Cutts' uncle. Never till the last week, at all events. Perhaps Cutts was waking up rather late in the day to a sense of duty. Digby could not quite make it out. He had never supposed that Cutts cared twopence for his uncle or his uncle's friends.

"I shall be glad to see my father's old chum," said Digby at last.

Cutts laughed.

"I suppose you know he's rolling in money," he remarked. "You can be

pretty certain that he'll tip Sir Robert Digby's son a quid at least."

"I say, Cutts, your uncle must be a ripping old sport!" said Digby.

"He is," said Cutts. "Now, kid, will you lend me a hand? I've got some writing to do, and I've hurt my wrist in the cricket; that ass Knox landed a ball right on my wrist. Do you mind?"

"Lines?" asked Digby. Was the secret out at last? Had Cutts taken all that trouble about the junior in order to get him to write out an impot?

"Ha, ha! No, I don't have lines," laughed Cutts. "It's something else—but it's a secret. You can keep a secret?"

Digby became a little more suspicious. A secret of Cutts—that meant something to do with Cutts' wild ways, and the Fourth Former not unnaturally imagined the secret to be connected with betting, or backing horses, or surreptitious visits to public-houses and gambling clubs.

"Oh," said Dig, "I—I'd rather you didn't tell me your secret, if you don't mind, Cutts!"

Cutts burst into a hearty laugh.

"You young ass, do you think it's a guilty secret?" he said good-humouredly.

"It's quite a harmless matter. The fact is, I'm writing a play."

Digby jumped.

"Writing a play!" he exclaimed.

Cutts nodded.

"My hat!" said Digby, and he felt greatly relieved. There certainly wasn't any harm in Cutts writing a play.

"That's the secret," said Cutts. "You see, I've trusted you, but you'll keep it dark. Not a word, you know."

"I'll keep mum," said Digby.

"That's all right. Now I'll tell you

something about it," said Cutts grimly. "It deals with a giddy young spend-thrift who's been plunging and getting himself into an awful hole. He tries all sorts of ways of raising tin, and fails, and finally makes up his mind to shoot himself."

"Oh scissors!" said Dig. "That's rather thick, isn't it?"

"Plays have to be thick," said Cutts. "I've got it done up to the scene where he sits down to write to his father. He tells the old chap that he's in debt; that he owes sixty or seventy pounds, and doesn't dare to ask him to pay it, so he's decided to blow his brains out. Very pathetic and all that. I've been thinking it all out, and I want to get it written down before I lose the thread of it, you see. Only my confounded wrist is so stiff I can't hold a pen."

"I'll do it with pleasure," said Digby. He would have done much more than that to oblige the genial Cutts. That there could be any hidden deception under that frank explanation never occurred for a single moment to him.

"Well, there's a pen," said Cutts. "You'll find some notepaper in that desk—some of the school notepaper. That will do."

Digby found the notepaper and dipped a pen in the ink and waited. Cutts reflected.

"Begin, 'Scene II. Act three,' he said.

"Right!" Dig wrote it down.

"Dear Father—"

"Good!"

"I'm afraid you will be shocked by what I'm going to write," dictated Cutts.

Digby wrote it down in his sprawling, schoolboy hand.



As Blake & Co. rushed Digby round the corner of the passage, there was a terrific collision. They ran right into the Terrible Threes, who were taking in provisions for the study feed. Bump—bump—bump! Crash! Smash! Juniors and provisions were scattered all over the floor!

Cutts remained immersed in thought for some minutes.

"No, on second thoughts, I won't begin like that," he said. "Do you mind starting afresh?"

"Not at all."

"Take a fresh sheet, then. Don't put that in about the scene and act; I'm not quite certain that I shall put this in the third act. Begin it with 'Dear Father.' No; perhaps that's a bit too formal. How do you start your letters home yourself?"

"I always begin 'Dear Dad,'" said Digby.

"Good! That sounds better," said Cutts. "Might as well begin that way. Got a fresh sheet of paper?"

"Yes; I'm ready."

"Well, begin now," Cutts dictated, and Digby started the letter afresh.

"Dear Dad,—I'm afraid you will be shocked at this. I'm awfully sorry. I've got into frightful trouble. I'm so upset that I hardly know what I'm writing. Dear old dad, don't be too upset when you hear what's happened. I've been betting on horses, and I've lost a lot of money. They've been worrying me for weeks and weeks, and I've been going to write you, but didn't dare to ask you for seventy-five pounds. I've been so miserable, I wish I was dead. I can't stand it any longer, and I'm going to drop over the bridge on the Rhyl to-night, and they won't be able to threaten me any longer."

"Good-bye—and forgive me."

"Your miserable son,

"ROBERT."

"That's my own name—Robert," said Digby. "My name's Robert Arthur, you know."

"I named my poor hero after you," said Cutts, with a smile.

"Oh, I see! What about the name of the river? The river here is called the Rhyl," said the junior.

"I'm going to alter that afterwards; the Rhyl will do for the present," said Cutts. "Of course, that is only a rough draft."

"I see," said Digby.

Cutts took the letter and read it over carefully, and nodded with satisfaction.

"I think that will be all right," he said. "Now take a fresh sheet of paper, and we'll go on with the scene. Enter Sir Jasper."

"Enter Sir Jasper," wrote Digby on a fresh sheet of paper.

Cutts folded up the paper and put it into his pocket-book; then he went on dictating to Digby, filling several sheets of paper with the lines of the play. The lines rolled out fast enough from Cutts' fertile brain, and the junior was filled with great admiration.

They were still busy, when the study door suddenly opened and Toby, the School House page, looked in with a startled face.

"Please, Master Cutts—"

"Well, what is it?" said Cutts.

"There's a man says he must see you—a awful man!" said Toby.

"Bring him in at once."

"He says his name is Hooke."

Cutts rose to his feet, and his face went pale. The blow had fallen at last.

"Has anybody seen him, Toby?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Toby, looking scared.

"I—I think not, Master Cutts. But he's speaking very loud, and—"

Cutts slipped a half-crown into Toby's hand.

"Bring him here, and don't let anybody see him," he said.

"Yessir!" said Toby, and he departed on his errand.

Digby was on his feet now, feeling rather awkward. He knew the name of Jonas Hooke, the bookmaker of Abbotsford. That the man should dare to come to St. Jim's was astounding. If the Head discovered that he had come to see Cutts—

"You'd better cut off," said the Fifth Former. "Thank you for helping me, Digby. It's a man I owe some money to. Don't mention about his coming here; I want to keep it dark

if I can. I've been a fool, and I'm in an awful hole!"

Digby's soft heart was full of compassion.

"I'll keep mum," he said. "Rely on me!"

"Thanks!"

Digby quitted the study. In the passage he passed the man Toby was piloting to Cutts' room—a fat, florid man, with bowler hat on the back of his head.

Digby passed on, his face a little clouded. Cutts had been kind to him, and the Fifth Former, at that moment, was very close to being expelled from the school. Digby felt that he would have liked to help Cutts, if he could.

CHAPTER 4.

A Precious Pair!

GERALD CUTTS stood by the table in his study, waiting for his unwelcome caller. His face was quite calm and composed.

He had taken the sheets of the "play" that Digby had written for him, and burnt them in the fire-grate. But the first sheet—the letter which the junior had signed so innocently and unconsciously with his own name—was still reposing in Cutts' pocket-book.

The spider had succeeded in his designs upon the fly, though it would have puzzled anyone but Gerald Cutts to say what use could possibly be made of that letter in Digby's sprawling hand.

The fat bookmaker appeared in the study doorway. His face was flushed with anger and a little drink.

"Ho, ere you are!" said Mr. Hooke. Cutts nodded, with a pleasant smile.

"Yes; come in!" he said.

"Very nice and polite, ain't you?" sneered Mr. Hooke. "You'd rather I'd come in—eh? You don't want 'em to 'ear what I've got to say—eh?"

"Come in and sit down," said Cutts, with undiminished courtesy. "I can give you a cool drink after your walk—and I've got something else for you."

"If you mean to square up—"

"Of course I do," said Cutts pleasantly. "You can cut off, Toby. Come in, Hooke, old fellow!"

Toby departed, while Mr. Hooke grunted and came into the study. Cutts closed the door and pulled an armchair for his visitor.

At that moment Cutts could have kicked his visitor out of the study with the greatest pleasure in the world; but his manner was urbanity itself.

Fortunately, nearly all the fellows were on the playing fields, or else at tea in their studies, and Mr. Hooke had been piloted to the study unobserved—at least, Cutts hoped so. If the man had been seen, all was over. A prefect or a master would certainly come to the study to inquire what he wanted.

Merely having dealings with such a man was enough to get any fellow expelled from the school.

And even if he succeeded in placating Mr. Hooke, there still remained the problem of getting rid of him again unseen.

And yet Cutts did not seem to turn a hair.

"Sit down!" he said pleasantly.

"I ain't come 'ere to sit down!" growled Mr. Hooke.

"Oh, be reasonable!" said Cutts.

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"There's nothing to row about. I owe you some tin—and I'm going to pay you. What is there to be ratty about?"

"Got the money?" asked Mr. Hooke, with a sneer.

"I shall have it on Wednesday."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And 'ow?"

"My uncle is coming to see me—he's lately home from Africa, you know—and he's going to give it to me."

"All of it?" asked Mr. Hooke incredulously.

"How much do I owe you?" said Cutts coolly.

"Fifty quid!" snapped the bookmaker.

"Just so—and twenty-five quid to Griggs," said Cutts. "Griggs is treating me more decently than this, Hooke. He's given me more time; he knows me."

"He can afford to wait, and twenty-five quid ain't fifty," said the bookmaker. "Ain't I always paid on the nail when you've won from me—what?"

"Everybody knows you're a square man," said Cutts.

"That's it," said Mr. Hooke. "When you laid your bets on the Wallaby match, you didn't say you was betting on gas, and hadn't the ready to square if you lost. If you'd won, you'd have 'ad nearly twenty quid in spot cash, and well you know it!"

"I know it," said Cutts.

"You asked for time, and I gave you a week. Then you says you can't pay for another week. I told you I was sick of waiting for it. If you won't pay, there's them that will. I said I'd come 'ere for my money, and I've come!"

"I don't see that will help you much," said Cutts coolly. "You know as well as I do that gaming debts can't be claimed in law. And I'm a minor, too—you could get yourself into serious trouble for betting with a schoolboy."

"Not so much trouble as you'll get into if you don't square!" said the bookmaker significantly. "I know what your 'eadmaster will do if I go to 'im!"

"He would ring for the porter and have you thrown out!" said Cutts calmly.

"P'raps. And you'd foller jolly quick—sacked from the school!"

"Within an hour," agreed Cutts.

"Eh? You don't deny that?" said Mr. Hooke, rather taken aback.

Cutts laughed.

"What's the good of denying it, when you know it's true as well as I do?" he asked.

"Well, you're a cool 'and!" said Hooke. "Why, if I was seen 'ere this minute, you'd get it in the neck, and you know it."

"I know it."

"I don't want to be 'ard on you," said Mr. Hooke, sitting down at last; "but I'm tired of waiting. I've 'ad bad luck myself, and I need the money, and Jonas 'Ooke is a man of 'is word. 'And over 'arf of it, and I'll wait a week for the rest. That's a good offer."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"I couldn't hand you one per cent of it at the present moment," he said, "but to-morrow I hope to square up to the last penny."

"Waiting to win something?" jeered Mr. Hooke.

"No; it's my uncle, as I said."

"Gammon!" said Mr. Hooke. "I



never 'card of an uncle that would 'ad 'is nephew-fifty quid for the asking."

"Mine will."

"And why?"

"Because I'm working it," said Cutts. "I've got a dodge for screwing it out of him—and more, too. I'm not going to tell you what the dodge is. If it fails, you can do your worst; if I succeed, I can square up to the last stiver."

"Well, you're a deep 'un!" said Mr. Hooke. "But I've come 'ere for my money, and I ain't going away without it!"

"I've told you how I'm placed," said Cutts, with a shrug of the shoulders. "If you choose to get me sacked, you can; but it will cost you exactly fifty pounds. If I'm done for here I shan't pay you a penny."

The bookmaker stared at him from under his thick brows suspiciously. It was evident that the Fifth Former had succeeded in making an impression on him.

"There was a short silence in the study. "To-morrow, you say?" said Hooke at last.

"I shall have the money to-morrow. If it's a cheque, I may not be able to get it changed before the bank closes, and in that case I will pay up on Thursday. I'll send you a line to meet me outside the school after third lesson."

"It ain't good enough," said Hooke surlily.

"Very well; then you can do as you like," said Cutts, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes. "If I go under, I'll see that things are made warm for you. You will lose your money—all because you won't wait a couple of days longer. That isn't business, Mr. Hooke."

"If I could trust you—" muttered Hooke.

"You can please yourself about that. I'm playing for my last chance here, and if I save myself you'll get your money. I think it's a dead cert. But you can do as you like."

There was another silence.

"I'll wait," said Mr. Hooke at last. "I'll wait till noon on Thursday, and not a minute longer. If you don't 'ave the money—all of it, mind—by then, I'll go straight to Dr. Holmes!"

Cutts drew a deep breath.

"You'll have it—every penny," he

said.

"Well, see that I do."

The bookmaker rose to his feet. Perhaps in his heart of hearts Mr. Hooke trembled at the thought of an interview with the stately Head of St. Jim's, and was glad enough of an excuse for not carrying out his threat.

"Then I'll travel," he said. "It won't do you any good for me to stop 'ere. I—"

Cutts gave a start.

"Hush!"

He held up his hand to enjoin silence. In the passage there was a steady footstep approaching the study, and Cutts knew that footstep well. It was the step of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's.

For the moment Cutts' heart turned sick within him.

He had succeeded so far with Jonas Hooke, and now he was caught—caught with the disreputable bookmaker in his study!

Mr. Hooke looked uneasy, too.

"Who is it?" he murmured.

"My Housemaster!" groaned Cutts.

"Oh crikes!"

"Quiet! There's a chance yet! Get behind that screen and keep quiet. I'll bluff him if I can. Quick!"

The slow-witted man hesitated, but Cutts grasped him and pushed him behind the screen in the corner. Now that it had come to the pinch the rascal was as unwilling as Cutts that the Housemaster should see him. He had an uncomfortable conviction that if he were found there he would be collared and flung out of the House neck and crop.

He stood behind the screen, breathing quickly. Cutts turned back to the study table. He had just time to open a book and seat himself in the armchair, when there was a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in!" said Cutts, without tremor in his voice.

Mr. Railton entered.

CHAPTER 5.

Facing the Music!

MR. RAILTON strode into the study with a deep frown on his brow.

He gave a quick glance round the room and seemed surprised to find Cutts alone.

The Fifth Former rose respectfully, the book still in his hand.

Mr. Railton fixed his eyes upon him with a sharp and penetrating glance. Cutts bore the scrutiny without flinching. His expression was simply that of respectful inquiry, as if he were waiting to hear what had brought the Housemaster to his study. As Mr. Railton was silent for some moments Cutts' face gradually assumed a natural expression of slight surprise.

"Cutts," said Mr. Railton at last.

"Yes, sir?"

"Has your visitor gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! You do not deny having 'ad a visitor, then?"

Cutts looked more surprised.

"Why should I deny it, sir?" he asked. "I do not understand you."

"Listen to me!" said the Housemaster firmly. "I have been informed as to the identity of your visitor. Do you understand?"

It was as much as Cutts could do to keep back a gasp of relief. Mr. Railton had not seen the man with his own eyes, as Cutts feared. There was a chance yet!

"I understand, sir," said Cutts.

"You deny nothing?" said Mr. Railton.

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"No, sir. Why should I? I have not heard that Fifth Formers are not allowed to receive callers in their studies after lessons, sir."

"Respectable men, certainly! You have received a bookmaker here."

"I, sir?" exclaimed Cutts in astonishment.

"You deny that?"

Cutts smiled.

"I certainly deny that, sir," he said. "I did not know you supposed that I had received a bookmaker here. There is some queer mistake, I think."

"I hope it will prove to be a mistake," said Mr. Railton dryly.

"I give you my word about that, sir. I hope you do not think I am the kind of fellow to have dealings with bookmakers. And if I were, you could hardly consider me foolish enough to let one come here to see me," said Cutts in surprise. "I know what such a thing would mean for me."

"Quite so. There have, as a matter of fact, been rumours about you in the House, Cutts; but I always make it a point to take no notice of gossip," said the Housemaster. "You have not, then, had any dealings with a bookmaker at all?"

"Certainly not!"

"Your visitor was not a man of that character?"

"No, sir," said Cutts, in an amused tone. "I should be glad to know who fancied that he was, and took the trouble to tell you, sir?"

"The man was seen coming into the House, and my attention was drawn to the matter by the porter," said Mr. Railton. "I questioned the page, and learned that he had shown the man to your study."

"That is quite correct, sir. Toby showed him in here."

"And his name?"

"Hooke," said Cutts quite calmly.

Mr. Railton started.

"You are aware that there is a bookmaker of that name, Cutts—a man with a most unenviable reputation—in Abbotsford?"

"I have heard of him, sir," said Cutts, after a moment's reflection. "There was a yarn about his getting some of the Greyfriars fellows into betting, or something. I didn't take much notice of it, but I remember the name."

"That man was not your visitor?"

"It's not an uncommon name, sir," said Cutts. "It happens to be the same in this case. The Christian name is different, however. The bookmaker is called Hiram, I think, or some name like that—"

"His name is Jonas Hooke."

"Well, my visitor happened to be John Hooke, sir," said Cutts coolly.

"It is curious that the names should be the same."

"Yes, isn't it, sir?" assented Cutts.

"And he is gone?"

"Yes; he stayed only a few minutes."

"How long has he been gone?"

Cutts reflected.

"About a quarter of an hour, sir, I think."

"Will you tell me who he was?"

"I have no objection at all, sir. He is a soldier who was discharged from my uncle's regiment for bad conduct, and has taken to tramping. I knew him years ago, when I was a nipper, and my uncle was stationed at Aldershot. He gave me some riding lessons when I was there visiting my uncle, and he remembered me. His tramping brought him to this part of the country, and as he was hard up, it occurred to him to come in here and ask for me."

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"A most improper proceeding," said Mr. Railton, frowning.

"So I told him, sir. He was, as a matter of fact, a little the worse for drink. I told him he oughtn't to have come here; but I was sorry for the poor wretch, and I gave him five shillings, and told him to get out."

Mr. Railton's eyes were fixed keenly on Cutts' face as he made this simple explanation.

Cutts looked perfectly calm and self-possessed, as if the matter was of no importance, and, in fact, bored him slightly.

Inwardly, he was wondering whether Mr. Railton doubted him sufficiently to make a search of the study.

But apparently a search did not enter Mr. Railton's mind. He was not of the spying kind, and he hated doubting anybody's word. And he could not believe that Cutts would be so cool and calm if expulsion were hanging over his head.

"So the man has gone?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir; as I said."

"Taggles certainly had the impression that it was Jonas Hooke."

"Taggles' acquaintance with bookmakers is probably more extensive than mine," said Cutts, with a smile. "I am

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afraid I do not know Jonas Hooke by sight, so I cannot say anything as to a resemblance."

Mr. Railton drew a deep breath.

"I am sorry the man is not still here," he said. "I should have preferred to see him. However, I accept your assurance, Cutts."

"I trust so, sir. I should not like to have my word doubted."

"I do not doubt it. I am glad that you have been able to explain what certainly looked extremely suspicious."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton left the study.

Cutts smiled.

Not until the Housemaster's footsteps had died away did Cutts move. Then he went behind the screen.

"Strike me pink!" murmured Mr. Jonas Hooke. "Ow you rolled 'em out! Blessed if you didn't take my breath away!"

"You'll have to stay here for a bit," said Cutts coolly. "Railton thinks you're gone—so you can't go till the coast is clear."

"But I can't stay 'ere!" ejaculated Mr. Hooke, in dismay.

"You must! I'll see that nobody comes to the study again," said Cutts.

"It was jolly lucky for both of us that you kept out of sight."

"Look 'ere—"

"You'll have to stay here until after dark, and then sneak out somehow," said Cutts coolly. "You've brought it on yourself, and must make the best of it. But it's all right. I can give you some sandwiches, and a whisky-and-soda."

"Well, that sounds alright," said Mr. Hooke.

And Jonas Hooke had to make up his mind to the inevitable—and he stayed. And Cutts had the pleasant prospect of keeping the man hidden in his study for some hours to come—at the risk every moment of some accident revealing his presence there. Cutts was a cool customer, and he had an iron nerve—but he needed all his coolness and all his nerve now. A mischance—one false step—and his days at St. Jim's would be numbered, and he knew it!

CHAPTER 6.

Called Over the Coals!

"**H**ERE he is!" "Behold the deserter!" "Tremble, villain!"

Those exclamations greeted Robert Arthur Digby as he entered Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, after having had tea with the genial Cutts, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, were all there, waiting for him. They looked like a family of judges waiting for the criminal to come in—and now he had come!

Digby was feeling a little uneasy as he came back to Study No. 6. He could explain to the chums that the suspected Cutts had not done him any harm. He hadn't played cards, he hadn't put any money on a horse—he hadn't done anything, except to make a satisfying tea and write out passages in that "play" for Cutts. But that was a secret, of course. He had promised Cutts not to mention that he was writing a play.

Digby felt that his friends were very unjust to Cutts, and very hard on him; but he was afraid that they wouldn't listen to reason when he explained. And he was right in his foreboding upon that point.

"Look here," said Digby warmly, interrupting those hearty greetings. "Don't play the giddy goat, you know."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Have you anything to say why sentence shouldn't be passed on you, according to law?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Digby.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Let's question the culprit," he said. "We must have the facts before we begin the slaughtering. Have you been playing cards, Digby?"

"No, ass!"

"Making bets?"

"No, fathead!"

"Talking races and things?"

"No, idiot!"

"Then what did Cutts want you for?"

"To have tea," said Digby. "I've had it, too. And a jolly good, ripping tea it was! Fried kidneys and eggs, and ripping toast."

"That isn't the question," said Tom Merry severely. "We don't want to know what you had for tea, and you needn't give us all those details, after you've mucked up our feed and reduced us to one sardine each!"

"A single, solitary, lonesome sardine!" said Blake.

Digby grinned.

"There was jam, too," he said. "Strawberry jam."

"There would have been stawbewwry jam for us if you hadn't smashed the jar in the passage, you ass! I do not considah stawbewwry jam a sufficient weason for desertin' your old pals. I am disgusted with you, Dig."

"Same here!" said Herries. "Disgusted!"

"Shocked!"

"Horried!" said Monty Lowther, with due solemnity.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless Digby!" said Manners, with a sigh.

"Let us reason with him gently," said Tom Merry, holding up his hand. "Do you mean to declare, Robert Arthur Digby, on your word of honour as a silly ass, that Cutts was not up to any tricks at all?"

"Of course he wasn't!"

"Now I'll be serious," said Tom Merry. "Has he confided any secrets to you?"

"That's the question," said D'Arcy. "Has he given you any wotten secvets to keep, deah boy?"

"He hasn't given me any rotten secrets to keep," said Digby warmly.

Tom Merry was quick to notice the adjective.

"Not any rotten secrets?" he asked.

"No, I tell you!"

"Any secrets at all?"

Digby flushed. Cutts had told him, as a secret, that he was writing a play. There couldn't be any harm in a secret like that, certainly; but it was a secret, and he couldn't tell his chums.

"Don't ask me such a lot of rotten questions!" Digby broke out. "Blessed if I don't clear out of the study if this goes on."

Tom Merry's face became serious. The half-jesting manner of the other juniors vanished, too. Gerald Cutts had told Digby a secret—that was clear. And the juniors felt that their alarm was well founded. The blackguard of the Fifth had a cunning motive in getting Digby to his study, as they had suspected.

"Oh, don't look like a silly set of boiled owls!" exclaimed Digby irritably.

"Seriously, Dig—Cutts told you a secret?"

"Suppose he has?"

"You mean that he has?"

"Not much good denying it," growled Digby. "It's a harmless secret. You'd laugh if I told you—only I'm not going to tell you, as I promised Cutts."

"Now, look here," said Tom Merry seriously. "I'll tell you something. Dig. Cutts came to me one day, in a difficulty, and got me into keeping a secret with him. The mere fact that I had promised Cutts, and was mixed up in a secret with the blackguard, made trouble between me and my pals. That was how it started, and he jolly nearly got me into his filthy betting. I came as near disgrace as any chap could come, and Cutts kept himself safe all the time. Now you know why I think Cutts is after no good with you. He's started in the same way—giving you a secret to keep—that makes a tie between him and you, and puts a bar between you and your chums, to begin with."

"I don't see why it should," said Digby uncomfortably. "It's a harmless secret. It's nothing whatever about breaking school rules. If the Head knew, he would only grin. All the masters might know without any harm being done."

"Then why is it a secret?"

"I suppose Cutts wants to keep it

dark in case the fellows should laugh about it, that's all."

"Then why did he tell you?"

"He wanted me to help him, you see," said Digby, considering how much he could say without risk of revealing the fact that Gerald Cutts was writing a play. "He hurt his wrist in the cricket to-day, and couldn't write. So I just wrote down a few pages of it for him."

"A few pages!" said the juniors in astonishment. "Lines?"

"No, not lines—but I can't tell you any more," said Dig.

"This is the first I've heard about Cutts having hurt his wrist," said Monty Lowther dryly. "Hurt it in the cricket to-day, did he?"

"Yes. Knox bowled and hit his wrist."

"His right wrist was all right just before tea," said Lowther.

"Rot!" said Digby. "How do you know?"

"Because I saw him cuff young Hobbs, of the Third Form, for bumping into

his eyes open, after Tom Merry's warning."

"Well, my belief is that there's something fishy in it," said Monty Lowther at last. "Either Cutts is trying to fix Dig on to him by giving him some silly secret to keep, or else he's taking him in, and wants something or other in Dig's handwriting for some reason of his own."

"What utter rot!" said Digby.

"Might be a trick to get a specimen of Dig's handwritin' for somethin'," said Arthur Augustus wisely. "Forgahs, do that, you know, when they are goin' to forge a cheque."

Digby laughed.

"I haven't a cheque-book, you fat-head, have I?"

"I decline to be called a fathead, Dig!"

"Look here! I don't care about discussing Cutts like this," broke out Digby. "He's been very decent to me, and I don't want to hear him jawed about as if he were some blessed criminal. He's explained his reason to me. My father and his uncle were old chums, and his uncle is coming down here next week. I suppose Cutts wants his uncle to see us on good terms, that's all. He said his uncle would most likely tip me a quid. He asked me to write to his uncle yesterday, to say I should be glad to see him when he came down here."

"You wrote to Cutts' uncle?" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Why shouldn't I?" said Digby.

"He's my pater's oldest friend. I shouldn't have thought of it myself, but Cutts suggested it. He said his uncle took an interest in me, and that he would be flattered if I sent him a little note, saying that I remembered him, and so forth. So I did."

"You didn't tell us," said Blake.

"You're so suspicious when Cutts is mentioned," growled Digby. "I suppose a chap is called on to be polite to his pater's old pal? I suppose you don't think Major Cutts is going to do me any harm—what? I suppose you know he's a distinguished officer, and only recently home from Africa?"

"I don't quite understand it," said Tom Merry. "It might be that Cutts has been expected to look after you a bit, and now his uncle's coming down, he's going to pretend that he's done it by appearing friendly with you. But I—"

"That isn't all," said Lowther.

"Wather not!"

"Look here," said Dig angrily. "I'm fed-up with this! Cutts has treated me decently, and I won't hear him run down!"

"You won't hear him cracked up here," said Blake tartly. "He's a cad and a rotter of the first water, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Digby flushed red.

"Then I'll get out!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Dig—"

Slam!

Digby was gone, and the study door closed after him with unnecessary force. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another in something like dismay.

"That's the beginning," said Tom Merry quietly. "When Cutts got me into a secret with him, trouble with my pals was the first result. It looks to me like the same game over again. Though, as Dig hasn't any money, I don't see where Cutts is going to score. But he isn't doing it for nothing. It's no good talking to Dig, you fellows."

"Apparently not," growled Blake.

"But there's Cutts. We're all Dig's

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NOT TOOTHsome!



Toothless Castaway: "Gosh, if only I had something to eat!"

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him on the stairs," said Lowther. "He would have biffed him with his left, I fancy, if his right wrist had been hurt. But he didn't."

"Well, that was what he told me," said Digby. "I don't see why he should lie. He could have written the stuff down just as well as I, unless he was lazy."

"You won't tell us what it was you wrote down?"

"I've promised not to."

"Anything that might get you into trouble, if it were supposed to be your own stuff?" asked Tom Merry. "It's your handwriting, you know, as you wrote it."

Digby chuckled.

"No, ass! If you saw it you'd only think it was meant for a contribution to the 'Weekly,' that's all. No harm in it at all!"

The juniors exchanged glances. They did not know quite what to make of Digby's explanation. He was a sensible fellow enough, but why should Cutts have told him a secret? That was the way Cutts had started when he nearly got Tom Merry into trouble, and Tom, in his unsuspicious simplicity, had fallen into the trap. But if Digby fell into a similar trap he would do it with

pals, and we're not going to see him taken in by Cutts. Let's talk to Cutts instead, and tell him plainly that he's got to let our chum alone, or we'll make it warm for him!"

"Good egg!"

The juniors were feeling annoyed with Dig, but they were feeling intensely exasperated with Gerald Cutts. They were willing to leave the blackguard of the Fifth alone; why couldn't he leave them alone? That Cutts meant mischief in some cunning and underhand manner, they were convinced. In their present state of mind, it would be a relief to talk in plain English to Cutts, and let him know what they thought of him. And, without stopping to reflect on the matter, the chums of the School House made their way to Cutts' study.

CHAPTER 7.

Cornered!

THERE was a murmur of voices in Cutts' study as the juniors approached it. They were treading lightly—not because they wanted to surprise Cutts, but because they were on dangerous ground. The Fifth Form passage was sacred to the seniors, excepting when fags were wanted, and a raid on the Fifth would have brought a crowd of fellows out to hurl the juniors forth on their necks.

And half a dozen juniors making for Cutts' study looked like a raid—indeed, if Cutts turned rusty, it was pretty certain there would be a row, and the study might very possibly be wrecked. Tom Merry & Co. were quite prepared to go to that length, if necessary, to save their pal from the clutches of the wily Cutts.

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and turned the handle. The door did not open. It was locked. Inside the study there was dead silence. The murmur of voices had died away instantly at the sound of the knock.

No reply came from within the study. Lefevre of the Fifth came along the passage, and looked at the juniors.

"Hallo, you fags! What do you want here?" he demanded. "That's what I say. What are you up to?"

"Coming to see Cutts," said Tom Merry blandly. "What's he got his door locked for? Smoking, I suppose!"

"Don't you be cheeky," said Lefevre, considering for a moment whether he should chase the juniors along the passage. But as there were six of them, it occurred to Lefevre that he might be the person to be chased, possibly. So he shook a warning forefinger at them instead, and went into his study.

Tom Merry knocked at Cutts' door again. It opened in a few moments, Cutts himself opening it.

He stared inquiringly at the juniors. It seemed to Tom Merry that there was relief in Cutts' face. Perhaps he had expected more troublesome visitors than the heroes of the Fourth and the Shell. "What do you kids want?" asked Cutts shortly.

"Want to speak to you, Cutts."

"I'm busy—"

"Sorry to interrupt the confabulation, or whatever it is," said Tom Merry politely, "but we can't wait. It's important. Your friend can hear what we say—it's not a secret. We don't deal in secrets like you, you know."

"My friend?" said Cutts. "What do you mean? There's nobody here."

"Dropped him out of the window?" asked Lowther, with a grin. "You were jawing to somebody as we came along."

Cutts laughed.

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"I was going over my Homer aloud, if you must know," he said. "But if you've got anything to say to me, you can come in and say it."

He stepped back, and the juniors passed into the study. They did not believe for a moment that Cutts had been reciting Homer aloud. He was so false that they never thought of taking his word unless facts supported it.

But the study certainly seemed to be empty. No one but Cutts was to be seen, and there was an open Homer on the table. Tom Merry looked round the study with a glance that Cutts understood quite well. He did not believe that Cutts had been alone.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Cutts. "I'm rather busy."

"Swotting over Homer?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I should soonah have expected to find you swotting over a racin' papah, Cutts, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Will you tell me what you want?" asked Cutts.

"Certainly, deah boy. You fellows had better leave the talkin' to me. I shall be able to explain to Cutts—"

"Shurrup!" growled Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"This is how it is, Cutts," said Tom Merry. "I haven't forgotten the time when you were trying to get me into your rotten manners and customs. Excuse my speaking plain English—it's a little way I've got. It seems to us that you are trying the same game on now with Digby. We want to stop it."

"Digby came to tea with me," said Cutts.

"Yes. He's not coming any more. We're going to scalp him if he has anything to do with you," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

Cutts laughed heartily.

"For innocent kids, you seem to me to be jolly suspicious," he said. "What do you think I want Digby for? To borrow money of him?"

"We should think so, if he had any," said Herries.

"But he hasn't, has he?"

"Well, no," Herries had to admit that. "But we don't trust you. You've got to let our chum alone. None of your rotten games for Study No. 6."

"Did you come here to ask for a licking?" said Cutts.

"You'd have to lick six of us!" Manners remarked.

"Yaas, wathah! If you cut up wuff, Cutts, deah boy, you will simply be askin' for a feashful thwashin', and you will weceive it."

"I don't mind telling you why I've been kind to Digby," said Cutts. "My uncle asked me to keep an eye on him, on account of the old friendship between him and Digby's pater. They were boys together at Harrow. I want to please my uncle—for reasons that are no business of yours. I feel friendly towards Digby, too—he's a very pleasant little chap, and very obliging. Are you satisfied now?"

"Is that all?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's all!"

The juniors exchanged glances. Cutts' explanation was reasonable enough. His motive for wanting to please his rich uncle was plain—a tip! Cutts, as if the matter was finished, sat down at the table again, and started on Homer.

"Well," said Tom Merry, after a pause, "you can't blame us for not

trusting you, Cutts, considering what we know about you. Will you promise to let Digby alone, and not ask him to your study any more?"

"Yaas, that will be all wight."

"Certainly not," said Cutts. "How dare you think of dictating to me! However, my uncle is coming tomorrow, and he probably won't come to the school again, so very likely I shan't see Digby again after that. I'm not particularly keen on the society of Fourth Form kids. In fact, I'm pretty certain I shan't see him after that, since you must know all about it."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. "Then all this attention to Dig for the last week is simply to make your uncle think you've been looking after him—when you haven't."

"Your perspicacity does you credit," said Cutts sweetly. "It shows what a lot a chap can learn in the Shell if he's really intelligent."

Some of the juniors grinned. Cutts had a very stinging tongue when he chose to let it go.

"Well," said Tom Merry, unmoved, "it seems that you've been telling Dig a secret. He won't tell what it is—quite right, of course, as he's promised. But we suspected some move of that sort, and asked him—and jolted it out of him that there was a secret. That was how you began with me, you remember."

Cutts gritted his teeth for a moment.

"I've had enough of this," he said. "Will you clear out?"

"Not till we've finished. Dig can't give away the secret, as he's promised. But we don't like secrets between Dig and you. It's dangerous. The only way is for you to tell us the secret, too. We don't want to know it—it's for Dig's sake. If there's no harm in it, we shall know what to do, then. I'm not inquisitive—in fact, Manners, Lowther, and I will step outside, and you can tell it only to Dig's study-mates—they can judge whether there is any harm in it. If you can tell Dig, you can tell them."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a fair offah."

"What do you say, Cutts?"

"I say that I shall throw you out of my study if you don't clear out!" said Cutts, rising to his feet.

"Then you won't tell us?"

"I shan't allow fags to come here questioning me, if that's what you mean. Get out of my study, or I'll call some of the Fifth here, and make an example of you."

The juniors drew closer together. They were prepared for trouble. Cutts' refusal to explain what the "secret" was, renewed all their suspicions that had been allayed.

Why couldn't he tell them, if there was no harm in it? They were as much to be trusted with a harmless secret as Digby was. Cutts made a step towards the door, as if to call on the Fifth for aid in ejecting the intruders. Then Monty Lowther's cool and drawing voice broke in:

"Why not call your friend behind the screen, Cutts, old man?"

Cutts stopped dead.

"What—what did you say?"

Lowther laughed lightly.

"Who's your friend behind the screen?" he asked.

"There's no one there," said Cutts. "What do you mean, you young fool?"

The juniors all stared at the screen. Monty Lowther, convinced that there had been someone in the study talking to Cutts, had had his eyes open ever

since he had been in the room. The way the screen was arranged across a corner of the study so that no one could see behind it had drawn his attention. There was nowhere else where anyone could have been concealed—and he had tried a shot in the dark. Cutts startled look showed him that he had hit the mark. There was someone else in the study, and Gerald Cutts was hiding him from view.

"Why don't you go on, Cutts?" asked Lowther pleasantly. "While you're calling the Fifth, I'll peep behind the screen. We've stumbled on quite an interesting little mystery. You chaps remember Reilly mentioning that he saw Toby showing a rough-looking specimen into Cutts' study just after tea? He's still here, and Cutts is hiding his light under a bushel. Won't

"I dare say they'll be interested to see your friend."

Cutts glared at the juniors. He dared not have the Fifth Formers in now; he dared not risk having the hidden Jonas Hooke brought to light. He was at the mercy of the juniors, and they knew it. Whoever his visitor was, they knew that he dared not let him be seen—his actions showed that.

"Better do the sensible thing, Cutts, old man," said Tom Merry. "Trot out the secret, and give leave for Dig to tell us if it's the truth—that's what we want!"

There was no help for it. Cutts had to give in.

"I'll tell you," he said slowly.

"The truth, mind!"

Cutts' eyes glittered for a moment.

"You can ask Digby, and say I gave

chipped about it. That's all. I depend upon you to say nothing, as you've forced it out of me like this."

"Oh, that's right enough!" said Tom Merry. "And Dig's at liberty to tell us!"

"Yes."

"Good enough! Come on, you chaps, and we'll ask Dig," said Blake.

The juniors trooped out of the study. They were relieved. So harmless a secret as that was not a cause for uneasiness. Cutts drew a deep breath as he locked the door after the juniors.

"Hang them!" he muttered. "But the young fools couldn't possibly suspect! Digby didn't—and they can't!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked for Digby at once. They found him in the common-room, and he looked at them rather grimly as they came up.



"The Head would ring for the porter and have you thrown out if you went to him," said Cutts calmly. "And you'd better jolly quick," exclaimed the bookmaker—"sacked from the school!"

you introduce us to your friend, Cutts?"

"Will you get out of my study?" said Cutts, between his teeth.

Lowther made a movement towards the screen. Cutts sprang in front of it in a twinkling.

"Stand back, you prying ead!" he shouted.

"So there's really somebody there!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Mind your own business!"

"I wonder who the johnny is?" murmured Lowther lazily. "Is it Tickey Tapp that you used to play roulette with, Cutts, old fellow? Or is it old Griggs, the bookie? This is getting jolly interesting."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you going?" shouted Cutts furiously.

"No; we're not going."

"Wathah not!"

"Call the Fifth in," grinned Blake.

him leave to tell you. I'm writing a play."

"Wh-a-at!"

The juniors simply gasped at that unexpected revelation.

"Writing a play?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Gammon!"

"Draw it mild!"

"That is the secret I told Digby," said Cutts calmly. "You can ask him, and he's at liberty to tell you."

"And that is all?" Tom Merry asked, in amazement.

"That is all."

"Well, my hat!"

"I don't believe it!" said Herries grimly. "Any silly ass might write a play, of course. But what did you want to tell Dig for, and make it a secret?"

"I told him in conversation—and it's a secret because I don't want to be

"We've been to see Cutts," Blake announced.

"Like your cheek!" growled Digby.

"He's told us of the giddy secret, and he's given us leave to ask you, and you leave to tell us. You're released from your promise," said Blake.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Dig.

"Cutts says that the secret is that he's writing a play, and he doesn't want all the fellows to know, in case he should be chipped about it. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"That's the secret he told you?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, we have been making a mountain out of a molehill, and no mistake," he confessed. "I never thought it was

a harmless thing like that. But I don't trust Cutts."

"I think you've taken a jolly lot on yourself in getting it out of Cutts like that," said Digby sulkily. "I think you might have minded your own business, if you ask me."

"That's all right; we don't ask you," said Tom Merry good-humouredly.

"And that's all there is in it?" said Blake musingly. "Well, I'm beat!"

"That isn't all there is in it," said Monty Lowther coolly. "There's something else behind it all. I know Cutts. There's something else."

"What is it?"

Lowther shook his head.

"Don't ask me; I don't know. But I'll undertake to say that there's something behind it. I don't know what yet. Cutts is too deep for us."

"Rot!" said Digby emphatically.

"Yaas, I must say that it seems to me to be wathah wot, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"We shall see," said Lowther. "Just you wait a bit, and we shall see what we shall see!"

And as that was certainly incontrovertible, no one attempted to controvert it.

CHAPTER 8.

Another Engagement!

THE next day was a half-holiday at St. Jim's. The cricket season was coming to an end, but the remaining matches were being played out with undiminished keenness. That afternoon there was a House match, and many juniors in the School House were eager to know whether they would be playing against Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Tom Merry was known to have the list of players in his pocket, ready to be posted up on the board, and as he came out of the Form-room after lessons many fellows eyed him with interest.

The regular House matches were over, the present one being an "extra" arranged chiefly for practice, the Junior Eleven being hard at practice to get into top form for their final tussle with Rylcombe Grammar School, which was coming off shortly.

Tom Merry walked down the passage, with a crowd of fellows following him, and stopped solemnly before the notice board and pinned up his paper.

There were other papers pinned up there, but the only notice that interested the juniors was the one in Tom Merry's big handwriting. Tom walked out of the School House immediately he had pinned up the paper. He wanted to save argument.

Kangaroo of the Shell—otherwise Harry Noble—read the notice down, and was satisfied with it. Needless to say, the name of Kangaroo appeared there.

Merry, Lowther, Manners, Noble, Dane, Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Reilly, Kerruish.

That was the Junior House Eleven for the occasion.

"Well, that seems all right," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I trust you fellows are goin' to back me up this afternoon in givin' the New House a fearful lickin'!"

"We're all in good form," said Blake. "Study No. 6 is not likely to let the team down. Dig has improved his play a lot this season."

Digby coloured.

"I shan't be playing," he said.

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Herries, Blake, and D'Arcy all turned round at once, and stared at Digby in surprise.

"You won't be playing?" said Blake.

"No."

"Bai Jove! Why not, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I've got something else on."

"Nothing else is allowed on when it's a House match," said Blake.

"Well, this isn't a regular House match," said Digby. "We finished our list of fixtures with the New House. This is an extra—really a practice match."

"You are playing, all the same. What in the name of all that's idiotic do you want to cut the cricket for?" demanded Blake.

"I don't exactly want to," said Digby; "but—but I've got something to do."

"You're not detained?"

"No; it isn't that."

"Then you're playing, my son."

"I can't!" said Digby, looking red and uncomfortable.

"Don't tell me it's anything to do with Cutts," said Blake, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, "because I won't stand it!"

"Hullo, who's talking of Cutts?" said Mellish of the Fourth, joining them.

"You fellows heard?"

"Heard about what?" snapped Blake crossly. He had no politeness to waste on Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth.

"Well, it seems to be a fag in the Third who saw it," said Mellish. "I don't know if there's any truth in it. I thought you fellows might know, as you were with Cutts yesterday just before dark."

"Well, we don't know, whatever it is!" growled Herries. "Has Cutts been found out at last? Is that it? Time he was, anyway."

"Jolly near it!" grinned Mellish.

"The fact is that a fag saw a man dropping out of Cutts' window last evening after dark—from what I can make out, it must have been about half an hour after you fellows were there."

"My hat!"

The chums of the Fourth exchanged quick glances. They remembered the unseen person who Lowther had discovered was hiding behind the screen. They had wondered what had become of him. Evidently he had not succeeded in getting out of Gerald Cutts' quarters quite unperceived.

"I see you know something about it," chuckled Mellish. "It seems to be established that he was seen dropping from Cutts' window in the dark. And a chap says he heard somebody climbing over the school wall, and ran up to see who it was, and heard him drop into the road. He didn't see him. I say, was anyone there when you fellows visited Cutts?"

"Better ask Cutts!" said Blake shortly.

"But, I say, I want to know—"

"Rats!"

The chums of the Fourth turned their backs on Mellish. They had no inclination to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the Paul Pry of the School House.

Digby was very silent as he went out into the quadrangle with his chums. He guessed who that mysterious man was who was supposed to have dropped from Cutts' window after dark and

dodged out of St. Jim's unseen. It could be no other than Jonas Hooke, whom Toby had taken up to the study while Dig was there. Cutts had saved himself from his dangerous predicament, it seemed, and Digby could not help feeling glad that the Fifth Former had escaped discovery. But he did not mention a word of what he knew to his comrades. He had told Cutts that he would not mention it.

"Well, to come back to the subject," said Blake. "Is it anything to do with Cutts, this idiotic idea of yours of not playing this afternoon, Dig?"

"I'm going out for Cutts," said Digby.

"Where? A giddy secret, I suppose?" snapped Blake.

"No. He asked me to go over to Abbotsford for him, on my bike, to take a message to Hallam, at Abbotsford School," said Digby. "It's about a swimming match."

"Why can't he post his letter?"

"He says there's a hurry for it, and I can't refuse to oblige him. I wasn't sure Tom Merry would put my name down; and as it isn't a regular match I don't mind so much missing it. Hammond can play instead. He'll be glad of the chance!"

"Well, I don't know that there's any harm in your biking over to Abbotsford," said Blake reluctantly. "There's nothing but that in it—simply a message to Hallam!"

"That's all," said Digby. "I don't say I'm pleased at standing out of the game; but Cutts asked me to do it as a favour, and I didn't like to say 'No' after he stood me such a ripping tea yesterday. It's little enough to do for a chap, and Cutts says it's important."

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy turned the matter over in their minds. It did not seem possible, deeply as they distrusted Gerald Cutts and all his works, to find fault in this. They had seen Hallam of Abbotsford, and knew that he was a decent fellow. It certainly would not hurt Digby to take a message to him.

"Cutts isn't going with you?" asked Blake finally.

"No; he's going to see his uncle this afternoon."

"But you want to see him, too, don't you? What about the quid Cutts said he would tip you, to say nothing of his being your pater's old chum?"

"That's all right! Cutts says he's staying the evening and going back by the late train, and I shall be back before dark," said Digby.

"Well, I suppose you can go," said Blake grudgingly. "I must say I can't see any harm in it. But I don't trust Cutts, and I wouldn't miss the match for all the Cuttses in the world—Comie Cutts, Gerald Cutts, or any other Cutts!"

"Well, I couldn't say 'No,'" said Dig.

"No; that's the kind of duffer you are!" agreed Blake. "Now, in Yorkshire, where I come from, we can say 'No' sharp enough, I can tell you!"

"Weally, Blake, it would have been wathah ungwacious of Dig to wefuse!" said Arthur Augustus, with an air of deep consideration.

"Rats!" said Blake. "Let's find Tom Merry, and tell him the silly chump is not playing because he couldn't say 'No' to Cutts. Come on!"

Tom Merry frowned when he heard that Digby was standing out of the eleven, especially in connection with Cutts; but his brow cleared when Blake explained.

"Can't see any harm in it, can you?" asked Blake.

"Well, no," said Tom. "I suppose we

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must admit that even Cutts isn't a giddy Machiavelli, with deep-laid plots and schemes in everything he does. I think it's inconsiderate of him. He might have asked Dig whether he was booked for the afternoon first. But it's all right. I'll put Hammond in, and Dig can bike to Abbotsford—or bike to Jericho, if he likes!"

And after dinner, when the School House team went down to meet their old rivals of the New House on the cricket ground, Digby went to the bicycle-shed for his machine.

He wheeled his bike out, and paused to see the match begin before he started off. The School House won the toss, and Tom Merry & Co. batted first, Tom opening the innings with Kangaroo. Figgins & Co. went into the field, and Fatty Wynn took the ball for the first over. Dig watched him bowl, and heard the cheer that went up as the Cornstalk cut away the leather for 2 to start with.

Digby's heart was a little heavy as he wheeled his machine down to the gates and mounted it. He would have liked very much to play in the cricket match; but he could not refuse to oblige Cutts of the Fifth who had been so kind to him, and he made up his mind to it, and pedalled away towards Abbotsford.

CHAPTER 9.

Uncle and Nephew!

MAJOR CUTTS came down the road from Rylcombe with a cavalry stride. He was a tall, square-shouldered man, with a complexion burnt bronze by the African sun, and he had a somewhat grim appearance.

The major was a tough old soldier who had seen service under many skies, and was as hard as hickory—outside, if not inside.

The major had walked from the station. He paused as he came inside the old stone gateway of St. Jim's and glanced in. Taggles, the porter, saluted the major with respect. Taggles did not know who he was, but the major's manner impelled respect. Major Cutts gave him a kind word, in spite of his grim look, and paused to speak to him.

"Taggles—what?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Taggles.

"Glad to see you again!" said the grim-looking old soldier. "You don't remember me? I came here years ago, Taggles, before I went to Egypt, when my nephew was a junior—eh? I suppose Master Cutts is about somewhere?"

"Major Cutts, sir!" said Taggles. "I remember you now, sir. Very kind of you to remember me, sir! Yes, sir. Master Cutts is in the School House. Shall I show you the way, sir?"

"Don't trouble. I'll remember it."

The major passed on, and Taggles looked after him, and wondered what Major Cutts would have thought if he had known that his nephew had had another caller the previous afternoon, and no other than Jonas Hooke, bookmaker of Abbotsford. For, although Cutts had explained the matter away so satisfactorily to Mr. Raiton, Taggles knew perfectly well that Cutts' visitor had been Jonas Hooke, the bookmaker. But it was not his business to say so to Major Cutts, certainly. He felt that he would not have cared to be in Gerald Cutts' shoes if the major had known that little circumstance, however.

The major crossed the quadrangle, and Cutts, looking out of his study window, recognised the broad-shouldered man with the cavalry swagger. Cutts turned to Knox of the

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, everybody! "For sale," says the local paper, "several horses and one odd mule." Few people will be wanting a mule which is any odder than usual.

Two workmen were glaring at each other. "What's the matter with you?" demanded one. "Nothing's the matter with me!" snapped the other. "You gave me a nasty look," said the first. "Now you mention it, you 'ave got a nasty look," said the other, "but I didn't give it to you!"

Have you heard the story of two men? No? He, he! That's it.

"Do you think I could ever do anything with my voice?" asked Gore of the music teacher. "Well," said the music teacher, "it might be useful in case of fire!"

"But the walls are riddled with bullet-holes," protested the prospective lodger. "Yes," said the landlady, "the last gentleman was a gangster, and he was always sweating flies!"

A schoolmaster has written a book in which he says: "You can only become rich by industry and theft." Does he mean thrift?

Third Form flash: "An epigram is a short sentence which means a lot," said Mr. Selby. "Can you give me an

example, D'Arcy minor?" "Take a hundred lines, sir!" replied Wally.

Irish story: "Pat, I'm sorry you're leaving," said the foreman. "Aren't the wages satisfactory?" "The wages are all right," said Pat, "but I have a guilty feeling all the time." "About what?" "Well," said Pat, "I can't help feeling I'm doing a horse out of a job."

"I've just bought a book about cultivating a good memory," said Skimpole. "Tell me what's in it," asked Reilly. "I'm sorry," said Skimpole, "I've forgotten."

A tenant summoned at Wayland Court said the landlord raised the rent, but he couldn't.

They say a donkey and a motor-car are very similar. Both are liable to kick back.

A Wayland man claims to have gone without food for eighteen days. If the waitress does not come within two or three days, it is a good plan to ring the bell!

Quickly, now: Why are the top-most leaves on a tree like a dog's tail? Because they are farthest from the bark. Bow-wow!

As the fat, round prisoner said: "Judge, all I want is a chance to square myself."

Mr. Ratcliff is a chronic sufferer from indigestion. His motto is: "Bismuth as usual."

It was Skimpole who thought brief bags were football shorts.

The school choirmaster gave us a keyboard talk. More key-bored than keyboard!

Last shot: "Haven't they given you a menu yet, sir?" asked the waiter of the famished diner. "Yes, but I finished that half an hour ago," came the reply.

Time for tea, chaps.

Sixth, who was in the study with him, and yawned.

"Here comes my uncle, Knox! I suppose you don't want to see the fond reunion of a dutiful nephew and his uncle?" he said satirically.

"No, thanks!"

Knox grinned and quitted the study.

Cutts sat down at the table, and opened a Greek lexicon, a grammar, and a volume of Xenophon. He took from the bookshelf "Skeggs on the Care of Cavalry Horses," and laid the volume on the table where it could not fail to catch the major's eye.

He was deep in Xenophon when a heavy stride came along the passage. The volume was the "Anabasis—the Retreat of the Ten Thousand," the volume in which Xenophon relates the adventure of the ten thousand Greeks who marched home from the heart of Asia Minor, with the courage and determination only equalled by the courage and determination of modern readers who pursue the narrative to the end.

Tap!

Cutts rose to his feet as the door opened to admit his uncle. Toby was grinning behind the major in the passage. He had shown a very different sort of visitor into the study the previous day, and he could not help thinking of it at the moment.

"Uncle!" exclaimed Cutts.

And he stepped forward to meet the major. Major Cutts shook hands with

his nephew, with critical eyes and some approval.

"You've grown!"

Cutts laughed.

"Yes; I was a nipper in the Second Form the last time you saw me, uncle," he said. "I remember the day you came. I'd had a licking for turning my trousers up. We didn't let the fags do that then. I told you about it."

"You did," grinned the major. "And you didn't blub, I remember. Where are you now—hey? In the Fifth Form, I think."

"That's it," said Cutts.

"You seem to be what we used to call a swot," said the major, glancing at the books on the table.

Cutts shook his head.

"Not a bit of it," he said. "I work hard—I'm not ashamed of that—but I play hard, too. I'm in the first eleven and in the senior eight. But it's no good trying to get on without working, uncle, and I admit I slog a bit. I've taken up Greek, but I'm not neglecting the cavalry exercises, I can tell you. Only don't look on me as a swot, please. I should be playing cricket this afternoon, but I've stayed in for you; and I was just filling up time with another dig at Xenophon."

"That's right," said the major, greatly pleased. "Work hard and play hard. I heard about the school playing the Australian team, the Wallabies."

"I was in the school eleven," said Cutts modestly.

"Good, my boy!" The major de-

posited himself in the easy-chair, Cutts remaining standing. "Sit down, Gerry; I want a talk with you."

"Go ahead, uncle."

"Getting on all right in the school—hey?"

"I think the Head will give you a pretty good report, uncle."

"And still wanting to go into the cavalry?"

"I've set my heart on that. Of course, I know my father made heaps of money as a merchant; but—but, dash it all, uncle, you are in the cavalry! And—and you wouldn't be anything else for heaps of money, would you?"

"Right, my boy—right!" said the major, with a chuckle. "I'll see that your father doesn't put any obstacles in your way. By Jove, sir, if he does, I'll alter my will and leave all my Consols to another nephew, by Jove!"

"That would be hardly fair on me, would it, uncle?" said Cutts, with a smile.

The major laughed.

"Depend upon me to make it all right for you there," he said. "Your father agrees with me about that. Your father looks after you all right here? Plenty of tin—hey?"

"Oh, plenty, uncle!" said Cutts. "And you have been so generous. I spend a good bit on books—I'm keeping Sandhurst in view all the time, you see—and I may have been a bit extravagant in riding horses; but as I'm going into the cavalry that is really a necessity. Don't you think so, uncle? As a matter of fact, I sold my bike to pay a bill at the riding school in Wayland. But I don't mind that; I shan't be in the cycle corps."

"Oh gad! That's too bad!" his uncle said. "You order a new bicycle, and tell them to send the bill to me."

"You're kindness itself, uncle," said Cutts.

He had had an inward hope that the major would lay down the money.

"By the way, there's young Digby—old Bob's son," said the major. "You've been keeping an eye on him, as I asked you?"

Cutts became very grave. He did not reply for the moment, and the major's sharp eyes became sharper.

"Nothing the matter with Digby, is there?" he asked. "Bob Digby was my fag at Harrow, and I should be sorry if there was anything wrong with his boy."

"He's in good health, uncle."

"Slacker at his work—hey?"

"I think not. I help him with his work sometimes," said Cutts modestly. "You see, he is in the Fourth Form, so I don't have anything to do with him unless I look him out specially. I find time to help him a bit with his Form work."

The major nodded approval.

"That's right, Gerry. But what's the matter with him, then? Don't beat about the bush, sir. I can see you've got something on your mind."

Cutts hesitated.

"The fact is, uncle, there is—or, rather, was—something wrong about Sir Robert Digby's son," he said slowly.

"But—but I don't know if I ought to tell you."

"You'd better," said the major. "I want to see him as well as you while I'm here; and if there's anything wrong, his father's got to know."

Cutts assumed an expression of alarm. "Not his father, uncle! His father must not know!"

The major looked very startled.

"What do you mean, boy? What is the matter with young Digby? I insist

upon knowing at once! Has he been getting into trouble?"

"Don't be angry with me, uncle. But if I tell you, it will have to be in confidence, and on condition that Sir Robert Digby isn't told a word about it, and that you don't say a word to Dig about it, either. I promised him to keep it a secret. And you wouldn't ask me to break my word?"

"Certainly not. But—"

"I'm going to tell you—in fact, I must tell you, for I want you to help me in the matter, but not a word further. I may tell you, anyway, that Digby got himself into frightful trouble, and I found it out and saved him from taking an awful step. If I never have anything else to be thankful for, I shall always be thankful for that," said Cutts.

"You saved him?"

"Yes, uncle."

"I'm glad of that, Gerry," said the major, his voice a little husky. "I'm glad my nephew was here to help old Bob's son in the time of need. But you must tell me all—all! Do you understand?"

"Not unless you promise not to breathe a word to Sir Robert, sir," said Cutts firmly. "It would be a fearful blow to him, and I promised Digby that his father should never know."

"Well, I promise that."

"Nor speak about it to Digby himself, either, sir. He would not dare to face you. In fact, only to-day, as soon as he heard that you were coming, he ran out and mounted his bicycle, and has ridden off—goodness knows where."

"Do you mean to say that the boy dare not meet his father's old friend?" asked the major grimly.

Cutts nodded.

"You don't know what he's been through, sir. Besides, it's all over now, so far as Digby is concerned. I've promised him that his father shall not know, and that if I tell you you will promise not to mention the matter to him."

"You must tell me, Gerry."

"Give me your word, uncle, not to mention it to the poor kid. I assure you that he is out of his trouble now, and has promised to keep straight, and has kept his word. I keep him very closely under my eye now, I promise you. He has had his lesson, and it has done him good. But if the matter were revived, I could not answer for what might happen. When I explain everything, you will see for yourself; and I gave Digby my word of honour, uncle," said Cutts.

"You should not have done so, Gerald; but, having done so, you cannot break it, certainly. Well, I promise what you tell me shall not pass my lips to Digby or his father. Now, tell me what it is? You have alarmed me."

"I'd better show you the letter, sir."

"What letter?"

"The letter the boy had written in despair when I talked him out of his folly and helped him," said Cutts. "You know Digby's hand?"



The study door was suddenly flung wide open and Terry shouted, "You liar, Cutts!" he shouted. "You've been telling me—"

"Yes. I had a letter from him yesterday."

"Then you will recognise this."

Cutts opened his pocket-book, and took out the folded letter. He opened it, and laid it on the table before the major. Major Cutts read it, and stared, and gnawed at his grey moustache, and set his teeth hard.

For this was the letter:

"Dear Dad,—I'm afraid you will be shocked at this. I'm awfully sorry. I've got into frightful trouble. I'm so upset that I hardly know what I'm writing. Dear old dad, don't be too upset when you hear what's happened. I've been betting on horses, and I've lost a lot of money. They've been worrying me for weeks and weeks, and I've been going to write you, but didn't dare to ask you for seventy-five pounds. I've been so miserable, I wish I was dead. I can't stand it any longer, and I'm going to drop over the bridge on the Rhyl to-night, and they won't be able to threaten me any longer."

"Good-bye—and forgive me."

"Your miserable son,

"ROBERT."

CHAPTER 10.

The Cheque!

THERE was a long silence in the study. The major gazed blankly at the letter he had read in Digby's handwriting. He knew the hand. He had Digby's letter in his pocket at that moment, and this was the same sprawling, schoolboy hand. The half-incoherent wording of the letter seemed to show the dreadful stress of mind under which it was written. There was a cloud on the



burst into the room, his face angry with indignation. "Digby!" Cutts started back, a look of alarm on

major's face when he looked up at last. Cutts was watching his face with keen eyes.

"Good heavens!" said the major.

Cutts gave a sigh.

"You understand now, sir, why Sir Robert must know nothing of it. I think it would have broken his heart if he had received that letter."

"Poor old Bob!" said the major. "I think it would. And you say that the foolish boy was actually going to send this letter to his father?"

"I found him with it on the table before him, sir. He was half-beside himself, crying as if his heart would break," said Cutts, with an artistic shake in his voice. "I had noticed that there was something wrong with him for some time past, and I had asked him questions; but he always evaded answering. But several times he asked me to lend him money, so I guessed that money troubles were at the bottom of it."

"The night he wrote this letter I had been struck by his looks, and I was very uneasy. I was, in fact, thinking about him, and I had gone out into the quad to take a turn before going to bed, and was wondering whether I ought to write to his father, or speak to the Head; but you understand that it would have been a delicate matter to risk getting the kid into trouble with his people."

The major nodded without speaking.

"I was in a most unpleasant frame of mind, as you can imagine," said Cutts. "Then I saw that there was a light in the window of Digby's study. It was an hour after the bed-time of the Fourth Form, and the study should have been dark, of course; and it struck me at once that Digby had come down for something, and I hurried to the study

at once. He was sitting there, with this letter on the table before him. He had just written it, and I read it over his shoulder. In the circumstances, I felt that I was justified in doing so, uncle."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Then I knew what he meant to do. He was going to get out of the school, and drop into the river. His troubles had unnerved him to that extent, and he was not at all himself," said Cutts. "He was worried to the pitch of suicide. I was so horror-stricken that I cried out something, and then he found I was in the study."

"He jumped up and ran for the door, and I had to struggle with him to stop him. But I got him back, and locked the door, and talked to him. I needn't tell you what I said. I was rather upset myself; but I got the whole miserable story out of him."

"He had been led into gambling—putting money on horses—and had borrowed money, too, the rascals knowing that his father was a baronet, and knowing that Sir Robert would pay to avoid a scandal. Of course, they couldn't have understood the pitch of desperation they were driving the boy to."

"Digby dared not write to his father to say he owed seventy-five pounds."

He knew Sir Robert would never have paid such a sum. He was terrified at the thought of the exposure and scandal—and, of course, he would have been expelled from the school when the truth came out—and so he had made up his mind to do the mad thing."

"The young fool!" said the major.

"I talked him out of it. I made him promise to go back to bed," said Cutts. "But there was only one way I could influence him. I promised to pay the money for him, and set him free of his creditors. On his side, he promised never to mix with such rascals again; and he has kept his word, uncle. A straighter, better kid than Digby couldn't be found in the school to-day. I give you my word about that, uncle."

"I am glad to hear it, Gerald. I certainly think that such a lesson ought to have been enough for him."

"It was enough, uncle."

"But you say you promised to pay the money, Gerald," said the major, puzzled. "Have you told anyone else about this?"

"No one, uncle."

"Not your father?"

"Not a word, uncle. My father would think me a fool. Business men take different views of matters," said Cutts apologetically. "I hope you don't think it wrong of me to confide in you instead of my father? I felt that you would understand the case better, somehow; and you have been, in a way, responsible, as it was by your request that I took Digby under my wing, so to speak."

"That is right, Gerald. But if you have not asked your father for the money, how could you have obtained such a sum as seventy-five pounds?"

Cutts hesitated.

"I am afraid you will blame me, uncle," he said; "but there was only one way to get the money. I could not ask my father for such a sum, and you were still in Africa then—or, rather, on the steamer home. I raised seventy-five pounds from a moneylender."

"Gerald?"

"I was afraid you would condemn me, sir," said Cutts submissively. "But I could not think of anything else to do. The man—a man named Hooke—is fair in his way. I have paid the interest out of my allowance. It has kept me pretty short, I admit, but—but I don't complain of that. Uncle, I'll admit that I hoped that when you came home, you would help me."

The major was silent. His eyes were again on the letter on the table, and he did not see the almost haggard anxiety with which Cutts was watching his face.

"Did Digby know how you raised the money, Gerald?"

Cutts shook his head.

"I did not tell him, uncle. The poor fellow had enough to bear—it was useless telling him that, too. He could not help it. I did it on my own responsibility, after trying to find some other way. I told Digby that if he would promise to go straight, and keep his promise, he would never hear a word of the matter again—from me, from you, from anyone. He has kept his word. Uncle, I know what a serious thing it is for a fellow of my age to have dealings with a moneylender. My only excuse is that it was not for myself, but to save the son of your old friend—the boy you had asked me to look after."

"You did right, Gerald. There was no other way, I suppose," said the major. "But it is surprising that a moneylender should make you such a loan. He must know that he could not recover it at law, as you are a minor."

"They know their business, uncle. The man would only have to send his claim to the Head of St. Jim's, and I should be expelled from the school for having had dealings with him. He considered that my relations would find the money rather than that; he knows my people are rich."

"You risked all that, Gerald, to save my friend's son—because I had asked you to take care of him?" said the major.

"I did, uncle, though I may say I like the lad very much myself. He is a fine fellow, and, as I said, as straight as a die now he's out of his trouble."

"You owe this man—this Hooke—seventy-five pounds?" said the major, after a pause.

"Yes, uncle."

"What interest have you been paying him?"

"Five shillings a week."

"The rascal! Why, that would be more than fifteen per cent!" the major exclaimed.

"I had no choice in the matter, uncle."

"The rascal shall be paid," said the major. "I will draw a cheque for the amount. His claim shall be met in full, and I should like to have the pleasure of kicking him downstairs, bogad, as well! The name is—what—Hooke?"

"Better make the cheque out to Hooke & Griggs—that is the name of the firm, uncle," said Cutts, his hands trembling a little.

"Give me a pen!"

Major Cutts extracted a leather pen from his pocket.

wallet from an inside pocket, and opened it, and produced his cheque-book. Cutts, in spite of his nerve, felt a little giddy. He had played out his cunning game with unscrupulous determination, but he knew how much he was risking. Even now that he had gained his point, and swindled his uncle out of the seventy-five pounds he owed to Hooke and Griggs, he did not feel safe. But his hand was firm as he passed the pen to the major.

Major Cutts wrote out the cheque, and Cutts could scarcely trust his eyes as he read:

"Pay Messrs. Hooke & Griggs the sum of seventy-five pounds—£75."

The major detached the cheque from the book, and blotted it, and handed it to Cutts.

"Send that to the man, and have done with him," he said.

"Uncle, I shall never be able to thank you enough!"

Major Cutts made a gesture. "I feel that I caused this, in a way, Gerald, by asking you to take care of Digby," he said. "But, mark me, if anything of the kind should recur, you are to communicate with me at once—let me know—and I will deal with the matter!"

"I shall obey you, uncle. But I am sure nothing of the kind can occur—I have kept a sharp eye on Digby, and I am quite satisfied."

"I am glad to hear that, at all events."

"I am sorry you won't see him, uncle," said Cutts regretfully. "I think you mentioned in your letter you had to take the six o'clock train back. I am afraid Digby will stay out until you are gone."

The major shook his head. "I shall see him," he said quietly.

"But your train, uncle?"

"I can catch a later one."

"But—but you will say nothing to Digby. You remember—"

"I shall not forget my promise, Gerald," said the major, with dignity. "But I must see Bob's son before I go—I am decided about that."

Cutts was again conscious of an uneasy feeling. He had played out his dangerous game with success so far, but he knew he was walking on thin ice. Yet even then his nerve was of iron; his look did not change.

"I am glad you can stay, uncle," he said. "I suppose I had better send this cheque at once?"

"Certainly. I will walk down to the post office with you, and you can register it," said the major.

"That will be ripping, sir!"

Uncle and nephew left the study together.

CHAPTER 11.

Up to Gussy!

TOM MERRY glanced over the foaming top of his glass of ginger-beer, and remarked:

"That's Cutts' remark!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded. Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus were "out" in the House match, and Tom had crossed over to the tuckshop for a "ginger-pop."

Tom had to keep his eye on the field, but Arthur Augustus, as a common or garden member of the team, was taking things easy now, gently and delicately sipping iced lemonade through a straw.

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D'Arcy let go the straw and adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and took a careful survey of the soldierly looking man who was leaving the School House in company with Cutts of the Fifth.

"Looks a vewy decent sort," he said.

"A little bit like Cutts in feature," said Tom Merry; "but a better specimen, I fancy. I've heard of him from my uncle—he's a major, and a good soldier."

"Too good for that wascal Cutts," said D'Arcy. "See how Cutts is makin' up to him. I heard him wifer disrespectsfully to his uncle in speakin' to a Fifth Form chap, and look at him now."

"Rotten humbug!" said Tom Merry, finishing his ginger-beer. "I'm off!"

Tom Merry walked back to the cricket. Jack Blake took his empty seat at the little table under the elms outside the school shop. Blake had gone down under Fatty Wynn's deadly bowling for 19.

"Warm, isn't it?" Blake remarked.



"I say, mister, will you do that again? My small brother never saw it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Smell, 48, Melstock Avenue, Upminster, Essex.

"Did you say ginger, Gussy? Certainly! As many as you like—and ask them to ice it!"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He was gazing towards the major and his nephew. Major Cutts was approaching. He had evidently caught a glimpse of the cricket field, and wished to see the fellows playing. Besides the junior House match there was a Form match between Fifth and Sixth, and all the mighty men of the two top Forms were engaged in strife with the nimble willow and the elusive leather.

Kildare was hitting out to the bowling of Lefevre of the Fifth, and the hitting of the captain of St. Jim's was worth watching.

Major Cutts was an old cricketer—he had played at Lord's for Harrow in his time, and he was naturally keen on the great summer game.

Blake followed Arthur Augustus' glance curiously, and spotted Cutts and his uncle.

"Oh," said Blake, "old Cutts and young Cutts—eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Looks a tough old sport. Ginger-beer, please, Mrs. Taggles! I'll come and fetch it."

And Blake went in for the ginger-beer.

When he came out again, D'Arcy's eyeglass was still fastened upon the bronzed major. The swell of St. Jim's was deep in thought.

"Upon the whole," he murmured, as if speaking to himself, "I think it is up to me to explain."

"What bee have you got in your bonnet now?" asked Blake.

"I have not got a bee in my bonnet at all," said D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' about Dig bein' away, aftah havin' witten to Majah Cutts that he was pleased to be goin' to see him to-day. The majah will think it wude, Dig not bein' here, and I wegard it as bein' up to us to explain."

"Cutts will tell him," yawned Blake.

"But Cutts sent Dig out," said D'Arcy. "He might not like to mention that he is the cause of Digby's absence. I weally considah I ought to mention to Majah Cutts that Dig is sowwy he is out."

"But Dig will be back before the major goes, won't he?"

"Looks to me as if he's goin' now; they're goin' down to the gates, and takin' in the cwicket gwound as they go."

"Well, pile in!" said Blake, with a grin.

Arthur Augustus rose from his seat, and strolled across to get into the major's path as he came down to the cricket ground. D'Arcy raised his straw hat in the most elegant manner as the major came up.

Cutts of the Fifth gave him a stony look. He didn't want the major to get talking with any of Digby's chums, if he could help it. A chance word might spoil everything for him.

But Major Cutts, naturally, paused at the elegant and handsome junior stood in his path, with a lifted straw hat.

"Pway excuse me, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I pwesume, sir, that you are Majah Cutts?"

"Quite right!" said Cutts' uncle.

"I am D'Arcy, of the Fourth, sir. Pway excuse the liberty I take in addressin' you, but I am Digby's best chum."

"Indeed?" said the major.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I feel bound to expwess Dig's wegwet that he is not here to greet you, sir. We know all about your bein' his patah's old fwiend, and Dig would have been vewy glad to meet you here; but he has had to go out."

"Is that so?" said the major, a little surprised. "Did Digby say that he wanted to see me, D'Arcy?"

"Well, I do not wemembah his words, sir," said D'Arcy, "but certainly he did wish to. As you appeah to be goin' early, I thought I might mention that he will be vewy sowwy to miss you. He weally had to go out this aftahnoon to oblige Cutts—"

"What?"

"Nonsense!" said Cutts, a dull flush rising in his cheeks.

For a moment his heart had stood still at the horrible risk of his uncle discovering that he had purposely sent Digby away from the school that afternoon. His eyes gleamed with suppressed rage as he looked at the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy looked surprised.

"I do not like to heah my wemarks chawactewised as nonsense, Cutts," he said stiffly. "I certainly think you should have explained to Majah Cutts why Dig is not here as you know vewy well why he is not here. It would be wotten to allow the majah to think that

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal!
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, Chums! Take a look at the photo below. Aren't they a happy group of schoolboys? They're just a few of the members of the GEM Club at the Modern School, Surbiton, and a more loyal band of GEM supporters it would be hard to find. They're all keen readers, and each member buys his own copy every week. The club has also many members of the fair sex, and they enjoy the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. just as much as the boys. I have a photo before me of a group of the girl members of this club, and I will publish it on this page next week.

WANTS ST. FRANK'S STORIES!

In my mail this morning was a letter from Jack Taylor, of Manchester. He writes: "I used to be a regular reader of the 'Nelson Lee Library,' and when it became incorporated with the GEM, I immediately became a reader of that excellent paper. Now I wouldn't miss a story of the chums of St. Jim's for anything. But, at the same time, I should like to renew acquaintance with old Nipper & Co. of St. Frank's. Is there any likelihood of their adventures appearing again? I'm sure there are many old 'Nelson Lee' readers who would welcome more stories from Mr. Brooks."

Thanks for your letter, Jack. As a matter of fact, I've had many letters from time to time asking me to revive the St. Frank's stories, and I have been giving the matter some serious thought. I cannot promise anything definite at the moment, but there is a possibility that St. Frank's yarns will be appearing again soon—though perhaps not in the GEM. I will have more news later, so I advise all my readers who want

these stories to keep their eye on this page.

"THE COMING OF THE TOFF!"

This is the title of the super yarn which Martin Clifford has provided for your entertainment next Wednesday. The story deals with the thrilling and unusual circumstances in which a new boy comes to St. Jim's, and tells how, in the space of a couple of days, he becomes the most popular fellow in the school! Talbot certainly has a winning way with him, and the Shell welcome him with open arms. But there is one junior at St. Jim's who regards the advent of the new boy with suspicion, and watches his growing popularity with a heavy heart. That is Joe Frayne, the little waif of the Third, whom Tom Merry befriended and brought to St. Jim's. Joe has a special reason for his suspicions, as you will learn.

Here is a powerful and dramatic story which brings out all the best qualities of Martin Clifford's writing, and readers will enjoy every word of it.

"WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?"

Those readers who have followed the early adventures of the Greyfriars chums from the beginning must have noticed the gradual change in the character of Harry Wharton. More and more he is learning to keep his hasty temper, which has led him into so much trouble, in control. Once the most unpopular boy in the Remove, he has been slowly but surely winning the esteem of his Form-fellows, until now he is one of the leaders of the Remove. So it is that, in next week's grand yarn, we find Harry Wharton among

the candidates who put up for the captaincy of the Remove cricket team. His rivals are Bob Cherry, and Bulstrode, the Form bully. Who will win the honour of leading the Remove? I'll leave Frank Richards to tell you all about it next week.

"THE SIGNOR'S SECRET!"

By the way, mention of Frank Richards reminds me that there is another grand new cover-to-cover story by him appearing this week in the "Magnet." Many GEM readers, I know, take our companion paper, but to those who don't, I will say this: Give this week's number a trial, and I am certain you will become regular readers. The story deals with circus life, featuring Billy Bunter in the leading role. It is full of fun, thrills, and schoolboy adventure, and readers will evince the greatest enjoyment in following the experiences of the Greyfriars chums.

QUICKEST K.O.!

"What is the shortest prizefight on record?" asked J. B., of Bermondsey. Believe it or not, the shortest professional fight ever staged lasted exactly eleven and a half seconds! Al Foreman, the British boxer, landed this lightning k.o. in his match against Ruby Levine, a Russian boxer, in Montreal, in 1928. For a second and a half Levine faced Foreman, then—thud!—one punch, and it was all over.

MODEL PLANE CHAMPION!

Albert Judge, of Clapham, is very proud of one of the model aeroplanes he has made, and for a very good reason. The machine won him the Wakefield Trophy for Model Aeroplanes at Detroit, U.S.A. He has always taken a keen interest in model plane building, and the one which he entered for the trophy cost him five shillings to make. He took it across to the States, and, competing against the entrants of five other nations, his model plane made a flight of over four minutes' duration. As a matter of fact, model plane builders of this country proved their superiority over other nations by winning the first, third, and fifth prizes in the competition!

TRY THIS!

How many farthings in £9 13s. 7½d.? Can you work it out in your head in less than thirty seconds? If so you will beat the time set up by a seven-year-old boy in Cyprus. I tried it on our office-boy. He took five minutes, and then gave me the wrong answer!

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A cheery group of readers of the Modern School GEM Club, Surbiton, display their favourite paper.

Dig had been wude and neglectful to his paternal oldest friend."

Major Cutts gave his nephew a curious look.

"I shall see Digby," he said. "I had intended to leave early, but I am staying later, as it happens, D'Arcy. When Digby comes in, will you tell him that I want to see him?"

"With pleasuah, sir!"

And D'Arcy raised his straw hat again and stepped aside. Major Cutts and his nephew walked on to the cricket ground.

"I am afraid Digby has misled the juniors about his going out," Cutts remarked casually. "He could not very well tell them, I suppose, that he was going out specially because he was afraid to meet you, uncle."

"I suppose not," assented the major. "The young rascal seems to have used your name—eh?"

"It appears so. He fags for me sometimes," explained Cutts. "I suppose he told the kids he was fagging for me this afternoon or something of the kind, if they asked him where he was going."

The major's brows contracted. "I don't like that," he said. "It looks as if his reform is not so complete as you thought, Gerald, if he has been resorting to lies."

Cutts considered. "As a matter of fact, sir, I gave him a message to take for me, and he may have gone out with it," he said, as if he had just remembered it. "He need not have gone to-day, as it was not important. But he may have made it the pretext for going out, and so kept within the truth in what he told the juniors."

"Still, I don't like it!" Cutts considered it better to let the matter drop there. He realised that he would have to see Digby and speak with him before the latter saw the major. If Major Cutts had kept to his original intentions of leaving by an early train, all would have been well.

But the major was grimly determined to see Digby. Cutts was walking in very slippery places, and he realised it very clearly.

He was thinking it over as he stood watching the cricket by the old soldier's side. Major Cutts was watching Fatty Wynn bowling against Kangaroo with keen interest. Cutts hardly saw the cricket at all.

"Well hit!" shouted the major as the Cornstalk junior sent the ball away to the boundary. "That's a coming man, Gerry. Who is he?"

"Eh? Who?" said Cutts vaguely. The major turned to stare at him.

"Didn't you see that hit?" he asked in astonishment.

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"Who's the kid?"

"Noble of the Shell," said Cutts. "He's an Australian. Shall we be getting down to the post office, uncle?"

"I should like this letter to catch the collection, so that they'll get it to-night."

"Oh, certainly, my boy!"

The major turned somewhat reluctantly away from the cricket, and uncle and nephew walked down to the post office in Ryloombe, where the cheque was duly sealed up in a registered envelope and dispatched.

Cutts drew a deep breath of relief when it was gone, and he had the receipt for it in his pocket. Whatever happened now, he was safe from Griggs and Jonas Hooke. Even if anything came out, his uncle would not be likely to stop the cheque. All he had to do now was to get rid of his uncle before

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the truth came out, and that was his one anxiety. Any kind of concern for the junior whose name he had blackened did not enter Cutts' mind. He had no time to think of Digby—he was too busy thinking about himself.

CHAPTER 12.

Digby and the Major!

DIGBY came in after the House match was finished. His chums met him as he was wheeling in his bicycle. Digby was a little tired with his long ride, but his first thought was for the match.

"How did it go?" he asked, as he met Tom Merry in the quad.

Tom smiled.

"A draw," he said. "We tied with the New House for exactly a hundred. Figgins came near scoring some more, but Lowther caught him out just in time."

"Glad the House was not licked," said Digby.

"Delivered your precious message?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Major Cutts is here," said D'Arcy. "He asked me to tell you that he wanted to see you, Dig. I'm pretty certain that Cutts had not mentioned that he sent you out this afternoon, for some reason. I felt that I was bound to point out to the majah that you did not intend to be disrespectful in going out. You had better explain to Majah Cutts that you had to go."

"Well, I didn't have to go," said Digby. "I went out to oblige Cutts. Cutts will have told the major that, I suppose, if he asked after me."

"I'm quite sure he hasn't."

"Oh, rot!" said Digby. And he wheeled away his bicycle. He was putting the machine up in the bike-shed when Cutts came in. The Fifth Former had been keeping an eye open for Digby, and he spotted the junior immediately he came inside the gates.

"Given Hallam my message?" he asked.

"Yes," said Digby. "Here's the answer."

Cutts took the note and put it in his pocket without opening it.

"By the way, my uncle wants to see you. It seems that your father specially asked him to see you and tell your father how you are getting on."

"Right-ho!" said Digby.

"The major is a bit rusty at your being out," said Cutts.

"Didn't you tell him—"

"I was just telling him, but he was so annoyed that I didn't dare to go on," said Cutts. "I have to keep him in a good temper, you know. It may mean a fiver to me, and a quid to you, Digby, if he keeps his blessed temper while he's here. Be a bit tactful with him, won't you?"

Digby grinned.

"I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle," he said.

"Don't mention that I sent you over to Abbotsford. It will get his rag out at once. He supposes now that it was a message I happened to give you, that would have done at any time. Let him go on thinking so."

"All right."

"He would be ratty if he knew I sent you out this afternoon. You'll be careful not to let him know it!"

"Rely on me," said Digby cheerfully.

"I won't make any trouble between you and your uncle, Cutts; you may be sure of that."

For a moment Cutts' heart smote him. The generous confidence of the boy touched some chord within him.

Little did Digby dream of the use the black sheep of the Fifth had made of his name, without leaving him a chance of clearing it, because he would never even know that it had been blackened.

"Thank you, Dig!" said Cutts.

"You're a good kid!"

Digby put his bicycle in the stand, and came out of the shed with Cutts.

"My uncle is in the study now," said the Fifth Former. "Will you come there and see him?"

"Yes, when I've got some of the dust off," said Digby.

"We're going to have tea," said Cutts.

"It will be a decent spread, and the feed will help you to stand my uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come as soon as you're cleaned down."

"Right-ho!"

Digby went up to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House for a wash and brush-up, and Cutts returned to his study. He had left his uncle there, talking to Knox. Knox of the Sixth was entertaining the soldier with stories of Cutts' prowess in games, and the old major was listening with pleasure. He was very proud of his nephew, and he liked to hear about his great deeds on the playing-fields. And Knox, who intended to have a "whack" in Cutts' tip, if it was a good one, piled it on for the major's benefit.

Curly Gibson, who fagged for Cutts, was preparing the tea. Cutts had guessed that his uncle would be pleased to be asked to a "study brew," and he intended that study brew to be a great success. The major, who had a keen appetite, looked on at the preparations with great satisfaction as he sat by the window, chatting with Knox.

Knox took his leave when the Fifth Former came back.

"Tea ready?" asked Cutts genially.

"Just on," said Curly Gibson.

"Good! When it's quite ready go and tell Digby."

The Third Former sniffed.

"Blow Digby!" he murmured.

"Eh? What's that?"

"I'm not fagging after Fourth Form kids!" muttered Curly.

Cutts laughed.

"Shut up!" he said. "You can take half a dozen tarts when you've finished, kid."

Curly Gibson's face brightened up at once. Six jam tarts would make a pleasant little feed for himself.

"So Digby's come back, Gerald?" the major asked.

"Yes, uncle. I've just seen him, and told him to come here to tea."

"Good!"

Curly Gibson departed, with the message for Digby, and the jam tarts for himself. In a few minutes Digby appeared in the study doorway, with a freshly washed and glowing face, and a spotless collar. He was a little shy with the grim-looking major, but the sight of the feed on the table made his face light up.

The major fixed his keen eyes on the junior.

Digby's honest, simple face was hardly what Major Cutts expected to see after his nephew's description of what he had saved Digby from. Certainly, judging by appearances, no one would ever have suspected Digby of the Fourth of having been mixed up in gambling transactions with book-makers.

"Come here, my lad!" said the major, not unkindly. "You are Bob Digby's son—hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Digby.

The major shook hands with him,

"I've promised your father to see you, and tell him how you look."

Digby smiled.

"You can tell him I'm in top form, sir," he said. "You can mention that I want a new footer, if you think of it, sir. We're starting footer here soon, you know."

Major Cutts laughed.

"Did you know I was coming here to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir! Cutts told me."

"And did you think it was quite respectful to your father's old friend to go out the afternoon I was coming?" the major demanded.

Digby gave Cutts a look of dismay.

"I—I—," he stammered. "I knew I should see you before you went, sir, or I shouldn't have gone out. Cutts told me—"

Digby was about to state that Cutts had mentioned to him that the major would be staying later, but a look from Cutts stopped him in time. He broke off in confusion.

"Oh, you didn't know I was going by an early train?" said the major, mollified.

"No, sir."

"You didn't tell Digby I was leaving early, Gerald?"

"I—I'm afraid I forgot to mention it to him, sir," muttered Cutts.

Digby stared blankly at Cutts. Cutts had deliberately told him that the major would be catching a late train, and that Digby would have ample time to see him after coming back from Abbotsford. It was quite clear now, even to Digby's simple and unsuspecting mind, that Cutts had known the major was going early, and had deliberately misled him. Why, the junior could not imagine. But the fact was clear enough.

Digby felt his face growing red. Cutts had lied to him, and had evidently also lied to his uncle. Digby did not know why, but he was troubled and worried by it. The warning of his chums came back in his mind. Why had Cutts lied? Did Cutts want to prevent him from meeting the major? Was there—as Tom Merry & Co. persisted in thinking—something hidden behind all this? Was some deep game being played under Cutts' curious and unlooked-for kindness and friendship? Digby was not suspicious, but the doubt could not be driven from his mind. He was feeling very uncomfortable, and even the sight of the excellent feed Cutts had provided did not wholly console him.

"Then you intended to see me, Digby?" the major pursued.

"Why, yes, sir!"

"You expected to be back at the school before I left?"

"Certainly!"

The major scanned his face. Digby was a little red; but he was looking surprised, too, at this close questioning, and his honest face was a sufficient guarantee that he was not speaking untruths.

Cutts was in torture. He had been unable to prevent this meeting between his uncle and Digby. The major would not break his promise about the secret, but he was naturally determined to question Digby as much as he could without breaking that promise. And the junior's simple and honest replies could not fail to impress the major. Already Major Cutts could see that his nephew had at least been mistaken in assuming that Digby had gone out that afternoon purposely to avoid meeting him.

"Well, I am glad of that," said the

major, after a pause. "I told your father I would see you, and send him news of you, and so I have stayed for a later train."

"It was very kind of you, sir," said Digby.

"Tea's ready," said Cutts uneasily.

They sat down to tea, and Digby recovered his spirits. The ride had made him hungry, and the feed was first-class. Digby began to enjoy himself; but Gerald Cutts was very far from enjoyment. For the major, anxious about Digby after what Cutts had told him of the junior's late escapades and difficulties, talked to the Fourth Former incessantly, making him talk, and drawing him out.

And Digby ran on cheerfully. He

The major and Digby were chatting over the tea-table. Digby was giving the major a description of the great Wallaby match which the juniors had watched on that famous occasion, and Major Cutts was listening with keen interest.

His interest was not only in the historic match, but in Digby himself. He was scanning and judging the boy's animated face as he talked.

Cutts had gone to the door to call his fag. He was on tenterhooks. His own part in the great Wallaby match the major did not know, and some inadvertent word from Digby might give him away and lead to fresh surmises. To his over-wrought mind it seemed that his uncle already distrusted him.



"What have you to say, Gerald?" said Major Cutts in a steely voice. The wretched black sheep of St. Jim's bowed his head in shame. What could he say? "What you have told me about Digby is false?" asked the major. "Yes," murmured Cutts.

had no objection to talking about himself and his Form, and his work and his play, and he was quite willing to give the major all the particulars he wanted to know.

And the major listened to the cheerful and innocent talk, and the wonder grew and grew in his perplexed mind. How could this cheerful, thoughtless, happy junior ever have been in such a desperate frame of mind as to have written that fateful letter? And in the major's face Gerald Cutts read the perplexity passing in his mind, and the black sheep's own anxiety grew more intense.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry Takes a Hand!

"FAG!"

Cutts called from his study doorway, and Curly Gibson came trotting along the passage,

"Gibson, take this note to Knox," said Cutts in a low voice, scribbling on a sheet of paper and handing it to the fag.

"Yes, Cutts."

The fag took the note; but Cutts took it back a second later, fetched an envelope from the study, and sealed the note in it.

Curly Gibson looked at him indignantly.

"Do you think I'd read your blessed note, Cutts?" he demanded.

"Cut along with it," said the Fifth Former.

And the Third Former sulkily departed. He did not like the distrust of himself implied by the careful sticking up of the note in the envelope.

However, he hurried off in search of Knox of the Sixth. Knox was not in his study, and the fag looked round the House for him. He inquired of Tom

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Merry as he met him in the lower passage.

"Seen Knox?"

"He was in the quad a few minutes ago," said Tom Merry.

And Curly hurried off to look in the quadrangle.

He found Knox at last, chatting to Seton of the New House. Curly dashed up to him breathlessly.

"Note for you, Knox, from Cutts."

And Curly vanished.

Knox opened the note and gave a whistle as he read it, for it ran as follows:

"Will you get D out of my study somehow?"

"C."

"My hat!" said Knox. "I wonder—Excuse me, Sefty; I'm wanted." And, with a nod to the New House senior, he walked away to the School House, looking very thoughtful.

Meanwhile, Digby was enjoying himself in Cutts' study, and Cutts was in a state of mental torture.

The major seemed to be deeply interested in everything that concerned Digby, and the junior was naturally flattered.

He was not at all averse to giving the old soldier the fullest particulars of everything.

"My nephew played in the Wallaby match, I understand," the major remarked presently.

Digby coloured for a moment; he remembered the unpleasant rumours in the Lower School about Cutts on that occasion. But it was not his business to give Cutts away to his uncle.

"Yes, sir, Cutts was in the team," said Digby. "It was a ripping match, sir, and we beat them at the finish—beat the Wallabies, sir! There was a junior in our eleven—Fatty Wynn of my form. You should see his bowling!"

The major smiled.

There was a tap at the door, and D'Arcy minor of the Third looked in.

"Is Digby here?"

"What-ho!" said Digby.

"Knox has sent me to say he wants you."

"Can't come!" said Digby. "Explain to Knox that I'm having tea with Major Cutts, and ask him to excuse me, Wally."

"Right-ho!" said Wally.

He ran off; but he was back again in a couple of minutes.

"Knox says you're to go to his study at once."

"What for?"

"He wants you."

"I don't fag for Knox," said Digby independently.

"You had better go," said Cutts quietly. "I dare say he only wants to speak to you, Dig, and he'll let you come back."

"Yes; cut off!" said the major.

Digby rose reluctantly.

"I'll be back shortly, anyway," he said, and he left the study.

When he was gone the major turned to his nephew with a very perplexed expression. Cutts drew a deep breath.

It was coming now, he felt. The major's expression was only perplexed, but to Cutts' eye there was suspicion there. But he must allay it, disarm it. He felt that he could rely upon Knox to keep Digby out of the study. Knox did not know of his plot, but he was keenly interested in helping Cutts "tap" the major for a good-sized tip.

"It's very odd!" Cutts' uncle said at last.

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"What is, uncle?" asked the Fifth Former.

"About Digby."

"I don't quite understand, sir."

"I have talked to him, questioned him, drawn him out in every way," said the major. "My idea was to see whether his character had been irreparably stained by his rascally experiences—whether he had really reformed. Gerald, he shows no sign whatever of having been through such experiences. If it were possible I should suppose that you had made some egregious mistake—that Digby had never done a rascally action in his life. How he can be so free and talkative and merry with such a thing on his mind is more than I can imagine."

"I have taken it off his mind, uncle, by helping him out," said Cutts, with a smile—a twisted and frozen smile.

"But he must remember it if he has any conscience; it must torment him a little," the major said. "I—I suppose there is no mistake. You have not taken too serious a view of the position he was in—"

Cutts felt a chill inwardly. He knew that the major was struggling against a doubt that was rising in his breast.

"You can judge of the position by Digby's letter, uncle," he said.

"True," said Major Cutts. "Give me that letter again, Gerald."

Cutts handed it over.

Major Cutts read it through slowly, conning it over carefully word by word. Cutts knew that he was making an examination of the handwriting, to make sure that it was actually in Digby's hand. The major did not distrust his nephew—he would not have admitted that thought to himself for a second. But there was something in the matter he did not understand, and it puzzled him and worried him.

Cutts' story did not agree with the junior's frankness and easiness. If the major had not seen Digby he would not have entertained a doubt. But now he was so perplexed that he could not make it out. He did not distrust Cutts, but he was unconsciously following a line of reasoning which led inevitably to distrust of Cutts.

"It is extraordinary," the major said, laying the letter on his knee at last. "But for this letter in Digby's handwriting, Gerald, I should think that you had dreamed it all."

Cutts forced a laugh.

"I could not very well dream the letter," he said.

"No," said his uncle. "The letter clinches it. But that lad—so frank and open and free, yet with such a burden of guilt upon his mind—Gerald, it is almost impossible that any boy should be such a monument of lying and deceit and hypocrisy as Digby has proved himself to be, according to this letter and to what you have told me."

"But, sir—"

Cutts did not finish.

The half-open door of the study was flung open and Tom Merry burst in, his face flushed and crimson with indignation, and his eyes blazing wrathfully.

"You liar, Cutts!" he shouted.

Cutts started to his feet, a look of alarm on his face.

"Get out of my study, Merry!" he hissed, springing towards the junior. "How dare you listen at my door, you spying young hound!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists and faced the Fifth Former with fearless scorn.

"You cad! You liar! So that is the meaning of it all—we knew you were playing some caddish game—you have

been slandering Digby behind his back while you pretended to be friendly with him. You villain!"

"Stop!" shouted the major in a voice of thunder as Cutts was about to hurl himself at the junior. "Gerald, stand back!"

"Uncle! I—"

"Stand back!"

The major was on his feet now; he pushed his nephew back, and then frowned sternly upon Tom Merry.

"Now kindly explain who you are, and why you have dared to come here and call my nephew a slanderer and a liar in my presence," he said.

"I'll do that fast enough. I'm Tom Merry of the Shell, and I came here for Digby. Knox is keeping him to do lines, and Digby asked me to come here and explain to you that he couldn't come back," said Tom Merry. "I had just got to the door while you were speaking. I hadn't the slightest idea of listening, but your voice is loud, and I couldn't help hearing what you said. Cutts is telling lies, as usual, when he says I was spying. I didn't know he was slandering Digby till you said so, and when I heard that—"

"Is Digby your friend?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "We've been chummy ever since I came to St. Jim's. I know Digby enough to know that he's square all the time. If Cutts says he isn't, Cutts is lying—as he always is! All St. Jim's knows Cutts, and there isn't a fellow in the school who would take his word without proof!"

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Do you understand that it is my nephew you are speaking of?"

"I understand that it is my friend whose character he has been taking away!" said Tom Merry fearlessly.

"You are Digby's pater's friend, and he has slandered Digby to you. He has given you lying yarns to take to Digby's father, perhaps. Send for Digby, and tell him what your nephew has said! I don't know what it is. But you spoke of lying and deceit and hypocrisy—and everybody in the School House will tell you that Digby couldn't be a liar or a hypocrite any more than he could fly!"

Tom Merry almost panted out the words in a blaze of indignation.

The major's stern look softened. Whether he believed Tom Merry's view or not, he could not be angry with a lad who stood up so promptly and fearlessly for his friend.

He looked at his nephew and started. Gerald Cutts' face was livid. The black sheep knew that all was up now, and if ever guilt was written in any face, it was written in Gerald Cutts' that moment.

The major looked at him long and hard.

"We shall go into this!" he said quietly.

CHAPTER 14.

The Way of the Transgressor I

CUTTS wetted his dry lips with his tongue. His brain was reeling now, his coolness and self-possession seemed to be deserting him at last. But he made a tremendous effort to pull himself together. "Go and fetch Digby," said Major Cutts. "Tell Knox I want him for a most important matter, and he must come, otherwise I shall appeal to the Head."

"Very well, sir!"

Tom Merry hurried away. He ran

to Knox's study, where Digby was sitting at the table dolefully writing lines. Knox was there keeping an eye on him, and doing his best for Cutts. Tom Merry came into the study without any ceremony.

"Knox! Major Cutts wants Digby at once—it's very important!"

"He can't go!" said Knox angrily.

"If you don't let him go, the major is going to ask the Head. Dig, you're to come at once. Cutts has been slandering you to his uncle, and I caught him at it. You've got to defend yourself."

"Oh, my hat!" said Digby.

And, leaving Knox standing puzzled and undecided, Digby followed Tom Merry from the study. As they went along the passage Tom Merry explained what he had heard, and by the time they reached Cutts' study Digby was in a state of anger and indignation.

Meanwhile, the major had been speaking to his nephew—in very different tones from those Cutts had heard from him before. His uncle's voice was dry and hard.

"This must be thrashed out now, Gerald. You made me promise not to say a word to Digby. I presume that now, for the sake of clearing up the matter, you are willing that I should do so?"

"No, uncle," said Cutts.

"If you refuse to have the matter cleared up, Gerald, I shall have to believe that you have slandered Digby to me, as Merry declares."

"You have his letter in your hand," said Cutts.

"Will you let me show it to Digby?"

"You can please yourself, of course, if you distrust me."

"I cannot please myself," said the old soldier sternly. "You have my word. Unless you allow me to show this letter to Digby, I must believe, sir, that it is a concoction of your own."

"Uncle!"

"I don't want to believe bad of you, Gerald. For your own sake, let me clear up this matter in the only possible way."

"Do as you like," said Cutts.

"You release me from my promise?"

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Yes."

"It is the only way you can be cleared of horrible suspicion, Gerald," said the major more gently. "I sincerely hope that you may come out of this without a stain of your honour."

He did not speak again till Tom Merry came in with Digby.

Digby bestowed a furious glare upon Cutts as he came in.

"Tom Merry's told me!" he exclaimed. "What have you been telling your uncle about me? Let me hear it, and I'll prove it all lies!"

The major held out the letter.

"Read that, boy!" he said harshly.

Digby read the letter; he held it so that Tom Merry could read it, too. Tom Merry stared at it blankly, quite taken aback; but Digby only looked surprised. He did not see why a scene from Cutts' play should be introduced into the discussion.

"Did you write that letter?" demanded the major.

"Yes."

"You wrote it, Dig?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Of course I did!" said Digby.

"Can't you see it's in my hand?"

"But—but—"

"Then my nephew's case is proved!" said the major, with a deep breath of relief. "Gerald, I must ask your pardon."

"What's all this about?" asked the



amazed Digby. "I suppose it's nothing against me having written this foolery, is it?"

"What!" thundered the major. "You admit having been in debt owing to gambling; you admit having contemplated suicide; you admit—"

Digby stared at the major blankly for a moment, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter, boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Digby.

"Excuse me, sir; I can't help it. You don't mean to say you thought this was a real letter—a letter to my pater? Oh crumbs!"

"What—what is it, then?"

"Cutts knows what it is!" said Digby. "Has he been palming this off on you for a real letter? Oh, my hat! He was pulling your leg, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose I can tell your uncle about the play, Cutts?" said Digby, looking at the Fifth Former. "I say, Cutts, you're looking pretty white about the gills. Was it all lies about the play—a trick to get me to write this letter, so that you could palm it off on your uncle? What turn has it served you to do that?"

"Explain yourself, boy!" exclaimed the major. "Do you mean to say that that letter was not written to be sent to your father?"

"My hat! Dad would have had a fit if he got that letter!" grinned Digby. "It's not a letter at all—it's a scene in a play!"

"A—a—a play?"

"Yes; Cutts said he was writing a play, and, as he had hurt his wrist, he asked me to take it down from dictation. There was a lot more of it; this is only from one scene," said Digby.

"What have you got to say to that, Gerald?" said the major.

What had Cutts to say? Digby's statement was evidently true, and further and closer investigation could only prove it beyond doubt. Further investigation was of no use to Gerald Cutts.

The wretched black sheep of St. Jim's bowed his head in misery.

There was a long silence.

"You must speak, Gerald, and before

Digby," said the major, in an altered voice. "Is his statement true?"

Cutts groaned.

"Yes."

"What you have told me about him is false?"

"Yes."

"Please go, my boys," said the major. "Digby, you can be satisfied with that. My nephew retracts all he has said against you."

Tom Merry and Digby left the study in silence.

Major Cutts fixed his eyes upon his nephew. Cutts of the Fifth stood with bowed head, white as chalk, despair in his face. The game was up now, with a vengeance.

"Why did you do this, Gerald?" said the major at last. "Why did you deceive me? Was it for the money?"

"Yes," muttered Cutts. "I—I—oh, what's the use of talking? You'll throw me over now. But you'd have thrown me over, anyway, if you'd known the facts; and you'd have known them in a day or two if I hadn't paid Hooke and Griggs."

"It was you, and not Digby, who had been gambling, who had lost so large a sum of money?"

"Yes."

"And this man Hooke—he was not a moneylender, but—"

"A bookmaker," said Cutts.

"And you lied and slandered my old friend's son to obtain the money to pay him!" said the major bitterly.

"It was the only way. Would you have given me the money if I'd asked for it? Or would my father? I had to save myself. It's all up now—I know I'm done for!"

Cutts threw himself in a chair, and let his face sink into his hands.

The major looked at him long and doubtfully.

"You have acted like a scoundrel, Gerald," he said at last, in measured tones. "I cannot acknowledge a scoundrel as my nephew! I am, as you say, done with you! I shall not stop the cheque. You may take that as a final gift from me. You will never have anything else to expect. You understand? Good-bye!"

Major Cutts quitted the study. His heavy footsteps died away down the passage. Gerald Cutts was left alone.

There was great indignation in Study No. 6 when Tom Merry and Digby told their tale there. The Terrible Three and the chums of the Fourth resolved to make Gerald Cutts "sit up" for what he had done, and teach him a lesson. But when they saw Cutts of the Fifth again their desire for vengeance melted away.

Cutts was looking white and worn, as if old age had fallen upon him suddenly, and the juniors realised that he had been punished enough.

It was some time before Cutts of the Fifth recovered his old coolness and composure, and looked his old self again. Needless to say, his callous and unscrupulous behaviour, in which Digby had so nearly been his dupe, was a lesson that was not lost upon the juniors. No member of the "Co." was likely again to have anything to do with the black sheep.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "THE COMING OF THE TOFF!"—a powerful long yarn telling of the thrilling circumstances which brought Talbot, a new boy, to St. Jim's, and of his adventures there. You simply mustn't miss this story—order your GEM early.)

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MORE FUN AND THRILLS FOR THE FAMOUS FOUR AT GREYFRIARS.

THE FAMOUS FOUR!

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Harry Wharton, coming to his study for his cap before going out with his chums, discovers Hazeldene, the cad of the Greyfriars Remove, at his desk. Hazeldene makes the excuse that he wanted to see the diamond which was a gift to Wharton from Hurree Singh. But Harry, though allowing Hazeldene to go free, knows that his timely arrival prevented a theft.

Wharton puts the diamond in his pocket for safety, and then departs with his chums for the village. Before they leave they are warned by Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, that Melchior and Barengro, two gipsies whom the chums of the Remove were responsible for bringing to justice for kidnapping, have escaped from gaol.

On the way to the village the Famous Four have their fortunes told by Nadesha, an old gipsy woman, and she warns Wharton that danger from a Romany threatens him.

Later, after a feed at the tuckshop, Wharton has a row with Bob Cherry, and, losing his temper, goes off on his own. He makes for the ruined chapel in Friar's Wood to carry out the original intention of the juniors of exploring the secret passage which connects with Greyfriars. But at the ruins he falls into the hands of Melchior and Barengro, who have taken refuge there. The gipsies search him, and find the diamond. While they are gloating over it the junior breaks away and escapes. He meets his chums in the woods, and, forgetting their recent quarrel, tells them what has happened. They race to the ruins, and Wharton and Bob Cherry collar Melchior, while Nugent and Hurree Singh give chase to Barengro, who, however, gets away.

Wharton recovers his diamond from Melchior, but then, just as Nugent and Hurree Singh are returning from their fruitless chase, the gipsy wrenches himself free and flees into the woods.

(Now read on.)

Loyal to the Gipsies!

HARRY WHARTON staggered rather dizzily to his feet. He passed his hand over his eyes in a dazed way. Bob Cherry jumped up, with a yell.

"After him!"

He was dashing away in pursuit of Melchior, when Harry Wharton caught his arm and pulled him back.

"No good!" he exclaimed. "He's gone!"

Bob Cherry rather reluctantly halted. But a moment's reflection was sufficient to show him that Harry was right, and that it would be useless to pursue the gipsy through the tangled woods.

"You've got the diamond?" asked Nugent.

"Yes," replied Harry; "that's safe enough. After all, that was the chief thing."

"Yes; but it would be a jolly good thing to get those two rotters under lock and key; and safer for us, too," said Nugent. "We'd better call in at the police station to tell them about it and let them know all we can. It will help them to catch the scoundrels."

"Good! We'll do that—Hullo!"

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

Harry Wharton broke off. "Look there!"

There was a glimmer of red among the green bushes, and the gipsy woman who had told the juniors' fortunes came in sight. She started at the sight of the boys, and advanced quickly towards them.

"So she belongs to those rotters!" muttered Nugent. "Yet she had rather a good face, I thought. But she's one of them."

"Yes, I heard them mention her name. She seems to be a sort of scout for them, and I expect supplies them with food. Of course, they can't venture to go into the villages themselves."

"She would get into trouble if the policeful sahibs knew that," Hurree Singh remarked. "It is what your lawyers call compounding a felonious intent."

"Ha, ha, ha! I never heard of that

Revenge on Harry Wharton and greed for the diamond the junior possessed brought Melchior to Greyfriars in the dead of night. But not for the first time, the gipsy finds the Famous Four in fighting form!

crime before!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "But I say, the old lady is going to speak to us. Hallo, ma'am! Your friends have hooked it."

Nadesha looked at them anxiously. "Have you seen Melchior?" she asked.

"Yes," said Harry. "He stole a diamond from me, and we've got it back."

"He is gone?"

"Yes."

"Which way did he go?"

Harry pointed to the wood. Then he stepped a little nearer to the gipsy.

"Nadesha, you are old enough to be my mother, but I can give you a word of advice," he said quietly. "Those two men are utter scoundrels. Let them alone. You look honest and kind; I believe you are. Have nothing more to do with them."

The old gipsy looked at him with a curious expression.

"A true Romany doesn't desert one of her blood in the hour of distress," she said proudly.

"I have heard that they are outcasts from their tribe," said Harry. "The true Romany doesn't steal, I have heard, and those scoundrels are thieves and worse."

Nadesha nodded.

"It may be so. But my faith belongs to them while they are in danger, at least. But you don't understand—and I've no time to lose."

And without another word the old gipsy hurried away into the woods, and the red shawl disappeared from view.

A Fourth Form Invitation!

"WHARTON!"

"Hallo, Temple!"

The chums of the Remove were coming in at the gates of Greyfriars. They had called in at the police station after coming back from the ruined chapel, and they had found Inspector Snoop very glad of the information they gave him.

The inspector promised that Melchior and Barengro would be under lock and key before dark; whereat Bob Cherry coughed, and Nugent winked at Hurree Singh. Wharton replied solemnly that he was sure of it, and they left the station and strolled back to the school. As they went in Wharton was hailed by Temple of the Fourth.

The Fourth Form at Greyfriars was a high and mighty Form. The Remove, or Lower Fourth, was considered "not in it" with the Upper Fourth. Temple was head of the Fourth, and he was a very great man; at least, in his own opinion and that of his immediate friends.

Temple was rather an elegant individual, given to dressy tastes. He adopted a patronising air towards the Remove—an air which the Removeites were always swift to resent. They found it hard to bow down even to the mighty seniors of the Fifth and Sixth, and they were certainly not going to kowtow, as Bob Cherry expressed it, to any Fourth Formers.

The air of a good-natured patron was very noticeable about Temple as he hailed Harry Wharton at the gate.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton."

Harry glanced at his chums.

"Do you mind me speaking to this chap?" he asked.

Bob Cherry, entering at once into the joke, assumed an expression of profound thought.

"Well, you see, Wharton, there's the dignity of the Remove to consider," he remarked.

"Yes, that's what I was thinking of," said Harry.

"Cut it short, anyway," said Nugent.

"In the circumstantiality of the case the shortfulness should be great," said Hurree Singh.

Temple looked annoyed.

"Oh, don't be so funny!" he exclaimed. "When a chap is going to do you a favour, you might be a little more polite about it."

"Ladle out the favours," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "What's in the wind, anyway?"

"You know we chaps in the Upper Fourth have a debating society, meeting in the evenings in the class-room?"

"Yes, we've heard of it."

"Well, it has been proposed to admit the Lower Fourth to the meetings," said Temple beamingly.

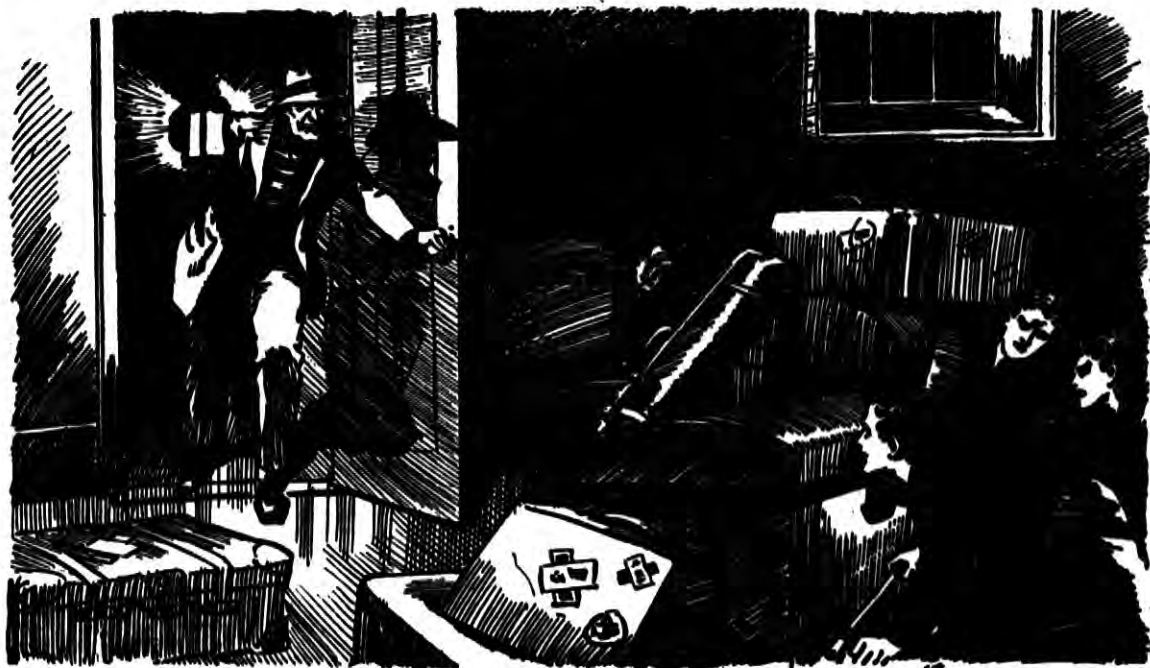
"To admit the what?"

"The Lower Fourth—Remove, your Form."

"Call it the Remove, old son. There's nothing low about us, and, as a matter of fact, we really take the top place at Greyfriars."

"Well, of all the cheek!"

TELLING HOW HARRY WHARTON & CO. GOT THE BETTER OF TWO LIVELY ARGUMENTS!



The juniors crouched, silent and watchful, in their cover as the door to the secret passage swung open. Melchior stood in the doorway, lantern in hand, looking cautiously about him to make sure all was safe before he entered.

"The topfulness of the Remove is extreme."

"Oh, ring off!" said Temple. "We're doing this thing as a favour to you kids. We thought that, as your elders and superiors, we ought to improve your minds. You can't deny that they want a lot of improving."

"Well, I take that as really kind of you," said Harry Wharton gravely. "But what's the wheeze? Do we take part in the debates?"

"Certainly not!" said Temple promptly. "You sit down quietly and listen. The subject this evening is, whether the present system of the government of public schools is satisfactory. We're going to have a ripping debate on the subject."

"Yes, it sounds promising."

"I'm up to speak, and Dabney, and Bates. It will be worth listening to, I can tell you, if you want to improve your minds."

"Well, of course, we want to do that."

"Good! Then come!"

"But we mustn't join in the debate?" asked Nugent, taking the cue from Harry, who had given him a sign that he had something "on."

"Certainly not! It would be an infraction of the dignity of the Fourth Form to allow Remove kids to join in the debates," said Temple. "But you can ask questions, of course."

"Oh, I see, we come out strong at question-time!"

"Yes, you can ask one question each, if you like, and the speakers will reply to you, to clear up any doubts in your minds. I know that you'll find it improving."

"That's really kind of you, Temple."

"You'll come, then?"

Harry looked at his companions and winked.

"Rather!" he said.

"Good! The Fourth Form Room at seven sharp, then."

"Right-ho!"

And Temple strolled away. Dabney, his chum in the Fourth Form, joined him as he left the group of Removites.

"Are they coming?" asked Dabney. "Yes, they were glad to come. Of course, they're pleased at our taking any notice of them, Dab."

"They ought to be," said Dabney rather doubtfully. "Have you explained that they won't be allowed to bother us with any talking?"

"Yes, they agreed to that, except at question-time."

"Good! Only those four coming?"

"Well, yes, I thought it would be better to try it with those four first, before letting in the bulk of the Remove."

"Good idea!"

"Yes, I think it's a good idea all round," Temple confessed. "You see, the Remove are always getting their backs up at us, pretending they're as good as the Fourth Form, and all that, and we've had lots of rows. Now, this is a way of putting them in their place, and making them follow our lead quietly and submissively as they ought to do, without any bother."

"You're right there."

All the same, Dabney looked rather dubiously across at the Removites. Had they been grinning he would have suspected something. But the faces of the Famous Four were quite grave and thoughtful as they strolled across the Close to the School House. It was evident that the condescension of the Fourth Form leader had greatly impressed the usually unruly juniors of the Remove.

The four chums retained the same gravity of demeanour as they entered the House and went upstairs. Not till they were in Study No. 1, where Billy Bunter was getting tea, did they break out into any expression of the merriment that was consuming them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"How kind of them," said Harry.

"We're going into the Fourth Form Room like a set of good little boys, to have our minds improved."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not to take part in the debate," grinned Nugent.

"Except at question-time," chuckled Bob Cherry. "At question-time we can come out strong, and have any little doubts in our minds removed by intelligent explanation from Fourth Form piffers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The questionfulness will be terrific," said Hurree Singh. "That's where we come out in a strongful manner. We must be early at the meeting, my worthy chums. As your English proverb states, 'procrastination is the receiver and as bad as the thief.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aren't you ready for tea?" demanded Billy Bunter. "I've got it ready."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry, looking at the well-spread tea-table. "Blessed if I knew we were so well supplied, Bunter."

"You weren't. I ordered these things at the tuckshop."

"My hat! Cheer, boys, cheer! It's Bunter's treat!"

"Not at all," said Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "I'm going to stand a treat when my postal order comes. I'm really expecting it by every post, but it's delayed."

"Who bought this grub, then?"

"It's not paid for yet."

"Oh!"

"It comes to ten shillings the lot," said the Owl. "You see, I thought you'd be hungry after your run in the woods, so I had a ripping feed ready. There's half-a-crown chalked up against each of you at the tuckshop. See!"

"Why, you cheeky young porpoise, I'll—"

"I don't think that a grateful way of speaking, Cherry, after all the trouble
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I've taken," said Billy Bunter, in a tone of remonstrance. "I think it was very thoughtful of me to get your tea."

"I suppose it was—and you'd have cleared the board, I expect, if we hadn't come in," said Bob Cherry. "Never mind; I'm jolly hungry, and as for the bill, that can wait, or we'll sell Bunter's watch and pay for it."

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Dish up the eggs, Bunter, and don't talk. We're hungry, and we've to attend an important debate to-night."

And the chums of the Remove were soon heartily discussing the tea so thoughtfully provided for them by Billy Bunter at their own expense!

A Warning for Wharton!

"IS Wharton here?"

A Third Form fag put his head in at the door just as the chums of the Remove were rising from the tea-table to prepare for their visit to the meeting of the Fourth Form Debating Society. Harry glanced at him.

"Yes, I'm here, kid. What's wanted?"

"Note for you from your sweetheart," said the cheeky fag, tossing a crumpled envelope on the table. "Ripping girl, too!"

Harry coloured, and his chums grinned.

"What do you mean, Perkins, you cheeky young rascal?" asked Harry.

"She spotted me inside the gate through the bars," said the fag, grinning. "She asked me if I knew Master Wharton, and I said I had heard of a bouncer of that name who was not kicked out of the Remove yet."

"Go on, Perkins. Who was it?" said Bob Cherry.

"A gipsy lady," said the fag, "old enough to be my grandmother. But there's no accounting for tastes."

"Get out!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"That's a nice way to talk to a chap who has brought you a billet-doux!" exclaimed Perkins. "Isn't that letter worth a jam tart?"

"Give him some tarts, Bunter, and kick him out!"

Bunter accordingly bestowed a couple of tarts and a hearty kick upon the fag, who, however, dodged the latter and cut off with the former. The Owl lost his balance and sat down, and Bob Cherry slammed the door.

"Now read the letter, Harry. We're all curious."

Harry opened the envelope and read aloud the single sentence that was contained inside.

"I want to speak to you.—NADIESHA."

It was from the old gipsy. The chums looked at one another.

"What can she want to speak to me about?" said Harry.

"Better go and see her," said Nugent.

"Yes. I suppose this means that she's still at the gates, and I'm to go down there and see her?" said Harry thoughtfully.

"No doubt."

"Well, I'll buzz off. As she says me, you fellows had better not come. I'll tell you about it afterwards."

"There goes a quarter to seven," said Bob Cherry as the school clock chimed out. "You haven't any time to lose."

"If I'm not back in time, you chaps go to the Fourth Form Room, and I'll follow when I get in," said Harry Wharton, taking up his cap.

"Right you are!"

Harry left the study in a somewhat

puzzled mood. What the old gipsy could have to say to him was a mystery. But he had already a liking for Nadesha in his heart. He had read in her face that she was good and kind, and he wondered at her connection with the two brutal ruffians whom she was aiding to escape from the meshes of the law. But doubtless the strong Romany feeling as to the claims of kindred accounted for that.

The Close was dark now; it was past locking-up time. Harry hurried down to the great stone gateway, and there, in the dark shadow of the arch, he caught sight of a dusky face on the other side of the iron bars of the gate. It was Nadesha.

The gipsy uttered an eager exclamation as the boy came quickly towards the gate and stopped.

"Ah, it is you!"

"It is I," said Harry. "I thought the note must be from you, Nadesha. I'm glad to see you. But what brings you here?"

"I must warn you. You are in danger. Listen! Melchior took a large diamond from you to-day in the woods."

"Yes; but we got it back."

"Melchior is furious at the way you used him."

"He deserved worse."

"That may be," said Nadesha. "But he is furious, and he is determined to revenge himself on you, and to obtain possession of the diamond, which he imagines is of great value."

"It is of great value—a hundred pounds, at least."

Nadesha looked at the junior sharply.

"How came you to possess such a stone, then?"

"It was given to me by my friend Hurrey Singh, whom you saw with me to-day. He is a prince of India."

"Then Melchior is right and his project is not so mad as I thought. The police have been hunting for him very closely, and he must leave this part of the country. But he needs money—or something that he can turn into money—and he is determined not to go till he has obtained possession of the diamond and revenged himself on you."

"Thank you, Nadesha. I shall be on my guard."

The gipsy drew a hurried breath.

"You don't understand. It's not an ambush in the woods that you have to fear. He's coming here!"

"Here?" said Harry, startled.

"Yes."

"But—but I don't understand," said the junior. "How is he coming here?"

"I believe he's coming to-night."

"Oh, I see! You mean burglary?"

"Yes."

Harry understood now, and the thought of what might have happened but for this warning made his heart beat faster.

"So Melchior is going to enter the school to-night," said Harry quietly. "Right! But you, Nadesha—how comes it that you give me this warning?"

"To save you from injury."

"Thank you, Nadesha! But now I know I must tell Dr. Locke. Melchior will be watched for and arrested."

"I knew it."

"Then you have made up your mind to let him be taken?"

"What choice had I when it was a question of that or of this crime?" said the old gipsy bitterly. "I pleaded with him, but he was adamant, and then he struck me."

"Struck you!" exclaimed Harry, with a start.

The gipsy drew her red shawl aside

and showed a dark bruise on the temple.

"He left me dazed in the wood," she said in a low voice.

"The cowardly brute!" The words broke hotly from Harry Wharton.

Nadesha smiled. She drew the shawl about her head again.

"That blow was the end. I've done with him. But even then I should not have betrayed him but for you. I would not leave you to this danger. But now you know."

She made a movement to depart.

"Stop!" exclaimed Harry hurriedly. "You have not told me enough, Nadesha. When is Melchior coming?"

"Some hour in the night. I can tell you no more than that."

"He's sure to come to-night?"

"Yes, I think so. Now that the police are so close on his track, every hour he spends in the neighbourhood is full of terror for him."

"Yes, I suppose so. But how does he propose to enter? It's not easy to get into a building like Greyfriars."

"I don't know. But he knows a way. I think, for he spoke with complete confidence of being able to enter the school with ease."

"I shall have to warn the Head, Nadesha."

"I know. Let matters take their course now. Barengro refuses to join in the enterprise," said the gipsy. "Melchior will come alone. Barengro has already fled. As for the other, let him take what's coming to him."

The gipsy drew her shawl closer about her, and she made a movement to go. But Harry Wharton spoke again eagerly:

"Wait a little, Nadesha. Where are you going?"

She did not reply.

"Your people—what will they say of this if they come to know it—and Barengro will guess and may tell?"

"I shall not go back to my people."

"You must not go like this. Besides, the Head may think I'm romancing. You must come to him, to tell him what you've told me."

Nadesha hesitated.

"Promise me, Nadesha, that you will remain while I go to speak to the Head," said Harry Wharton persuasively. "I cannot open the gate, but I will not be long."

She nodded.

"I will remain."

And Harry Wharton cut off swiftly across the gloomy Close towards the Head's house. Seven chimed out from the tower, but Wharton had forgotten the meeting of the Fourth Form Debating Society by this time. There were more important matters to think of. Harry mounted the steps of Dr. Locke's house and rang the bell.

A Shock for the Head!

DR. LOCKE was seated in the drawing-room when he received an announcement that a junior named Wharton wished to speak to him very urgently. The Head smiled and glanced apologetically at Mrs. Locke. The Head's wife, a kindly lady with a grave, gentle face, smiled, too. She had noticed Wharton more than once.

"Let him come in by all means," she said.

"Very well," said the Head. "You may admit him, Mary."

So Harry Wharton was shown in by the maid. The junior's face was very earnest and excited. Mrs. Locke glanced at him curiously.

Harry stood cap in hand, the colour coming a little into his cheeks.

"Well, Wharton," said Dr. Locke, "I hear that you desire to see me on very particular business."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, please explain yourself, Wharton. It is close on dinner," said the Head, looking at his watch. "I can give you a few minutes."

"If you please, sir, there's to be a burglary at Greyfriars to-night, and I thought I ought to tell you about it."

A bombshell exploding in the room could hardly have startled the listeners more. Dr. Locke gave quite a jump, and his wife uttered an exclamation.

"Are you serious, Wharton?"

"Quite serious, sir."

"Do you mean that you have learned that a robbery is intended?"

"That's the case, sir."

"Then you did quite right to come to me," said the Head. "Pray go on and tell me all about it, Wharton."

"Certainly, sir."

And Harry Wharton, in a few concise sentences, explained about the adventure at the ruins in the afternoon, and the visit of Nadesha to the school.

Dr. Locke listened in amazement.

"You should have reported this to me before, about this afternoon's happenings," said the Head. "But never mind. Where is this diamond you speak of?"

"I have it here, sir," said Harry, taking the case from his pocket. "I didn't wish Hurree Singh to give me so valuable a thing, but I felt that I could not refuse a parting gift."

He handed the case to the Head.

Dr. Locke uttered an exclamation as he opened it, and the nabob's diamond sparkled into view.

"What a splendid stone!" said Mrs. Locke.

"It is not possible for such a stone to remain in the care of a junior, Wharton," said Dr. Locke. "With your permission I will lock it up in safety until the end of the term."

"I should be glad if you will do so, sir."

"Very good! Now, about this gipsy. You say she is waiting at the gate," said the Head thoughtfully, as he slipped the little case into his pocket.

"Yes, sir, I asked her to wait, as I thought you might like her to corroborate what I've just told you and—"

"That was quite right, Wharton."

"I am curious to see her," said Mrs. Locke. "What were you about to say, Wharton? There is something else in your mind, I can see."

Harry gave her a grateful look.

"Yes, ma'am. I was thinking that—that—"

"You may speak freely, Wharton," said the Head, kindly enough.

"Well, sir, I was thinking whether something could be done for old Nadesha, sir," said the junior, colouring. "You see, she has broken with her tribe by giving us this warning, for they are sure to know about it—and—"

"And she is destitute?" said Mrs. Locke softly.

"Yes, ma'am, that's it. It seems a shame that she should go like this—alone—penniless—without friends, because she has served others—"

"You are right, Wharton. It is very thoughtful of you, and shows a kind heart," said Mrs. Locke. "Something must be done for this person, if the facts are as they seem to be." And she glanced at the Head.

Dr. Locke nodded.

"Decidedly! Take this key, Wharton, and admit this Nadesha by the wicket, and bring her here as soon as possible."



Nadesha uttered an eager exclamation as Harry Wharton came towards the gate. "Ah, it is you!" "Yes," said Harry. "What brings you here?" "Listen!" said the old gipsy. "You are in danger from Melchior!"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, delighted.

And he hurried away. The Head's face was very grave.

"This is a serious matter," he observed. "Serious injury might have been done but for this warning."

"Yes, and something must be done for this gipsy woman," Mrs. Locke remarked, a shade of thought on her brow. "Could she, if a suitable person, remain with us?"

"I leave that entirely in your hands."

In a few minutes there was a tap at the door, and Harry Wharton re-entered with his companion. Nadesha paused in the doorway, the colour deepening in her dusky face.

Mrs. Locke stepped towards her kindly. The good lady noticed at once the fatigue of the gipsy, the worn look on her face, and the bruise on her temple. She made Nadesha sit down, and then gave her a glass of wine.

From the clock tower came the echo of a quarter chiming out, and Harry Wharton remembered the debate in the Fourth Form Room, and gave a slight start.

The Head glanced at him.

"You needn't wait, Wharton," he said. "Of course, you have your preparation to do. You may rest assured that all proper measures will be taken to secure your safety to-night, and to deal with the burglar. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

And Wharton, saying good-night to Mrs. Locke, left the room. He hurried away from the Head's house, satisfied that he had done all that was required of him. He was free now to join his chums in the Fourth Form Room.

He looked in at Study No. 1 on his way, and found only Billy Bunter there. Bunter was carefully finishing up the remnants of the feed. There was no

limit to the Owl's stowing capacities; at least, it seemed so to his chums. Whatever was on the table, Bunter could always manage to clear it if required.

"Have they gone to the meeting?" asked Harry.

"Yes, long ago," said Bunter, without looking up from the remains of a steak pie.

Harry smiled and left the study. It did not take him long to reach the Fourth Form Room. Light was streaming out from under the door, and there was the sound of a voice, which he recognised as Temple's.

He could not distinguish the words, but the head of the Fourth Form was evidently on his legs and making a speech.

Harry opened the door and entered the sacred precincts of the Fourth Form Room, and looked about him with a good deal of curiosity.

Fun at the Meeting!

THE scene in the Form-room was an interesting one. The members of the Fourth Form Debating Society were there in force, some fifteen or sixteen youths of various ages from fourteen to sixteen being seated there with grave and attentive faces. The audience was not always so grave, but the presence of a group of Removites made the Fourth Formers particularly careful to keep serious appearances on this occasion.

The chums of the Remove were seated in a row on a form, listening to the speech with owl-like gravity.

Harry Wharton stepped quietly to the form and sat down beside Hurree Singh. Temple glanced at him, but did not cease his speech. He was near the end, and a few minutes later he sat down.

Dabney, the chairman of the debating society, then glanced at a paper, and called upon Bates to expound his views. Bates, a rather stout youth with a red face, got up, and it was evident at a glance that he had forgotten a carefully prepared speech.

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen—" "Hear, hear!" said the debating society with one voice.

"The question before us to-night—" "Cut that—you're not chairman!" said Dabney.

"I suppose I can say what I like, whether I'm chairman or not," said Bates.

"Oh, go on!" "The question is whether the present system of government in Public schools is a satisfactory one," said Bates. "Our friend Temple has replied to that question in the affirmative—" "Hear, hear!"

"I beg to differ. The system is unsatisfactory. My reasons for this statement are— Has anybody seen a little bit of paper lying about?" asked Bates, looking round him.

"No!" "I had some notes written on it."

"Speak without 'em, then!" "But I've forgotten my reasons."

"Never mind the reasons," said Dabney. "Get on with the speech. We can't stay here all night, you know."

"How can I get on with the speech when I've forgotten what I was going to say?" demanded Bates rather excitedly.

"Then let Dabney have his go first, while you look for your rotten paper, you ass!" said Temple, frowning a little as he glanced at the Removites. He was rather sensitive about what the Lower Fourth Formers thought of the proceedings of the debating society.

The solemnity of the four faces was the same, but Temple had a suspicion that the Removites were putting that on, with the idea of secretly "rotting" the meeting.

"Is it in order for a speaker to be called an ass?" asked Bates, looking at Dabney in an inquiring sort of way.

Dabney shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said. "The fact that he may deserve it does not excuse the use of the expression. You must withdraw the word, Temple."

"Oh, very well!" said Temple. "I withdraw it, but I shall punch Bates' head in the dormitory to-night. Get on with the washing, Dab."

"Right-ho! Gentlemen, I rise to—" "Are you sure you haven't seen a little paper lying about anywhere, you fellows?"

"Shut up, Bates!" "But—" "Order! Silence!"

"Oh, very well! But if you don't find my notes I shan't be able to make a speech, that's all," said Bates.

"Jolly good thing, too!" said Penny.

"Look here, Penny—" "Oh, shut up!"

"Order! Order!" "I rise to take the opposite side from that espoused by our friend Temple," said Dabney, when order was restored.

He paused a moment and glanced at the Removites. All four of them, as if moved by the same spring, were taking notes. Dabney felt slightly uncomfortable.

"Go on, Dab!" said Temple.

"Hear, hear!" said the meeting.

"I regard the present system as unsatisfactory," said Dabney, referring to a paper in his hand. "In the first place, the Fourth Form is not allowed to take a sufficiently prominent place in the school."

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"Good!"

"Then, the lower Forms—such as the Remove and the Third—are considered to be something of an equality with a Form like ours."

"Shame!"

The Removites were seen to be taking notes again.

"Then the Fifth and Sixth often think they have a right to bully us and even cuff us sometimes," said Dabney, warming to his subject.

"Shame!"

"The prefects are chosen from the Sixth Form solely. The captain of the school is always elected from the Sixth Form. Where is the Fourth Form in all this? I repeat, gentlemen of the debating society and fellow-Formers—I mean, Form-fellows—that is to say, Former-fellows—" "Leave it at that! Get on with the washing!"

"I repeat, where does the Fourth Form come in?"

"At the door!" suggested a would-be joker, who was instantly squashed by a dozen or more freezing glares bestowed upon him by the debating society.

"My view, therefore, is," resumed Dabney, "that the present Public school system is a mockery, a delusion, and a snare! Unless an equal number of prefects is, are, and shall be chosen from the Fourth Form, what becomes of the freedom for which our ancestors fought at Waterloo?"

"Bravo!"

"What becomes of the boasted British constitution, when the system of fagging the Fourth Form flourishes in these enlightened days of the twentieth century?"

"Hear, hear!"

"I move, therefore, that the Public school system will never be satisfactory till fagging is confined to the Remove and the Third Form, and prefects are chosen from the Fourth as well as the Sixth."

"Hear, hear!"

And Dabney sat down. He sat down as a speaker, and stood up again as a chairman, to put the amendment to the meeting.

It was carried by a majority, even Temple voting for it against his own resolution, so convinced was he by his chum's arguments.

The resolution was accordingly negatived, the amendment being adopted that the state of things was not satisfactory in the Public schools of the twentieth century, for the reason set forth by Mr. Dabney in his telling speech.

"And further," said Dabney, "I propose that this meeting, representing all that is best in the Fourth Form at

THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

All of you must have noticed the posters displayed in the windows of the best firework retailers, inviting you to join the Brock's Firework Club. For the benefit of those who have not yet taken advantage of this scheme, I am going to tell you what it is all about.

You simply go into a shop displaying the Firework Club Notice and ask for a membership card. Then, if you are not under thirteen years of age, a card will be issued to you on payment of your first subscription, which may be 1d. or 1d. or whatever sum you care to put down for a start. You then continue to pay in your subscriptions (any sum) as often as you like until early October, each sum being entered on your card, and on or before November 4th you choose goods to the value of your subscriptions. Perfectly simple, isn't it? Think what a splendid heap of fireworks you will have—especially if father helps you.

My tip to you boys is to keep watch for announcements about the Club, and when you see the Card in a shop window go right in and get enrolled. Most of your pals will be in the scheme, you'll find.

Greyfriars, passes the resolution that we don't care a rap for the Sixth, and that all the prefects can go to the dickens—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And that if any prefect interferes with us we shall tell him to go and eat coke!"

"Time that light was out!" said Carberry of the Sixth, looking into the room. "Another five minutes, youngsters. If the light isn't out then, you'll hear from me!"

"Yes, Carberry," said Dabney meekly.

And the prefect went out and slammed the door.

The debaters looked at one another rather uncomfortably. After Dabney's resolution, his reply to Carberry seemed rather inadequate. Temple broke the painful pause by looking across at the Removites and addressing them:

"Have you got any questions to ask, kids?"

Even the obnoxious word "kids" failed to break down the grave politeness of the Removites.

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"Certainly!" he said. "We—" "I've found my paper!" interjected Bates, drawing a crumpled fragment of soiled exercise-paper from his waistcoat pocket. "It got in here somehow."

Gentlemen—" "Order!"

"I'm going to make my speech—" "Too late! It's out of order!"

"You've been jawing all the time!" "You heard what Carberry said?"

"That's all very well, but—" "Order! Shut up, Bates! Go on, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton gravely referred to his notes.

"We are allowed one question each?" he asked.

"Yes. And the chairman will do his best to reply."

"Very well. I should like to be enlightened on the following point. Mr. Dabney says he takes the opposite side from that espoused by his friend Temple. Espoused means married.

Does the honourable chairman mean to imply that his friend Temple is a married man, and has left his wife in order to come to Greyfriars and join the Fourth Form Debating Society?"

Temple turned red and some of the debaters giggled. Dabney looked savagely at the Removites, but they were absolutely solemn. If anything, their gravity had grown more serious, and they seemed to hang upon the chairman's reply as upon words expected from an oracle of wisdom.

Dabney could not quite make it out.

"No," he replied shortly. "I didn't mean to imply anything of the sort. If you fellows are rotting—" "

Harry Wharton sat down, and Nugent rose to ask his question.

"The chairman stated that the Remove is supposed to be on an equality with the Upper Fourth. Does he mean to insinuate thereby that the Upper Fourth is on an equality with the Remove? If so, I hurl back the insinuation in his teeth!"

"Look here, you rotters—" "Order! Next question!"

Bob Cherry stood up.

"The honourable chairman made an allusion to our ancestors fighting at Waterloo. I should be glad to be informed how our ancestors got so far afield as Waterloo, as there were no tourists' excursions in those days?"

Dabney turned red.

"That was a figure of speech," he explained.

"Oh! I suppose—" "

"You have no right to suppose!" interrupted the chairman. "Next question!"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh stood up, an expression of almost wistful earnestness on his dusky face, but a glimmer in his eyes.

"I have listened to the debatefulness of the society with much instruction and general improvefulness to the brain," said the nabob. "The speeches of the ludicrous members—"

"Order!"

"Have greatly enlightened me as to the state of their brains, and I now know exactly how much intelligence there is in the Fourth Form of this honourable school."

The members of the debating society looked at one another rather dubiously, not knowing exactly how to take this remark.

"Well, go on!" said Dabney.

"After expressing the pleasurefulness with which I have listened to the debateful talkfulness of the present esteemed members, I should like to be questionable on the following point."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go on, Inky!"

"The esteemed rotten chairman says that this meeting represents all that is bestful in the honourable Form you belong to."

"Certainly!" said the chairman.

"Hear, hear!"

Hurree Singh looked puzzled.

"I have no doubtfulness of the statement made by the esteemed chairman," he said; "but if this meeting represents what is most bestful and intelligent in the Fourth Form, what is the degree of intelligence in the worstful members of that esteemed and ludicrous Form?"

The debaters looked at one another.

"The condition of the brainfulness of this honoured meeting has made itself apparent, but what is the brainfulness of the more stupid members of the Fourth Form like?" asked Hurree Singh. "Is it expressible, and can the force of Nature no farther go, as a poet so well puts it?"

"Look here, you confounded nigger!" exclaimed Dabney, starting up. The irrepressible grins of the Removites made it clear enough at last that the debating society was being rotted by the hitherto grave and reverent chums. "If you're looking for a thick ear—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Bob Cherry. "Answer the question. If this meeting represents the most intelligent portion of the Fourth Form what degree of idiocy has been reached by the rest?"

"I am awaiting the replyful rejoinder of the honourable, rotten chairman!"

"You cheeky kids—"

"Turn 'em out!"

"Kick 'em out!"

The debating society made a rush. The Removites had already risen from the form, and they backed to the door. The Fourth Formers charged at them, and at the same moment the door opened, and Carberry looked in.

"Now, then, put that light out at once!"

The juniors stopped the rush. Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh walked calmly out of the room, and Carberry glared in while the Fourth Formers prepared to go.

From behind the cover of the prefect the Removites placed their fingers to their noses in extended order, as a parting salute to the debating society. Temple, Dabney, and their fellow members gasped with rage.

Then the chums of the Remove walked away, and roared with merriment in the upper passage.

"It was funniful," said Hurree Singh, amid yell of laughter. "But I have a

feeling that the esteemed Fourth Formers will not ask us to any more of their debateful meetings."

And Hurree Singh was right. Temple and Dabney, after that experience, quite gave up the project of improving the minds of the Remove.

In the Night!

AND now, what about Nadesha? said Bob Cherry, as the chums of the Remove went into Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter had completely finished the feed, and the room was empty. Harry Wharton at once became grave, and he closed the door before he spoke. His chums looked at him curiously. They could see by his expression that there was something unusual on the tapis.

"It's a serious matter," said Wharton. "I'll give you the story in a few words."

And he explained what had happened during his absence from his chums. Bob Cherry gave an expressive whistle.

"Good old Nadesha!" said Nugent. "It was awfully decent of her. I suppose the Head will send for the police?"

"I suppose so," said Harry; "and some of the masters will stay up, I expect, with a policeman or two, to watch for the scoundrel."

"We ought to be on in the scene," said Nugent.

"That's what I was thinking."

"Our noble presence would probably lead to the capturefulness of the giddy burglar," the nabob remarked. "But the instructor salibs will not allow it."

"Not if they know," said Wharton. "Look here, you chaps, turn this over

in your minds and tell me what you think. Nadesha says that Melchior spoke confidently about being able to break into Greyfriars. Now, I don't suppose a wandering ruffian like that has much idea of the skilful part of burglary; and where is he to get burglar's tools from, only just out of prison as he is?"

"That's true enough, but—" "Yet he seemed certain of getting in. My idea is that he doesn't mean to come by door or window in the usual way."

Nugent stared, and Bob Cherry grinned.

"You don't think he means to come down the chimney, surely!" said the latter.

Harry did not smile.

"I think he has another way of getting in," he said quietly.

"Blessed if I can guess what it is," said Nugent.

"You remember that he was hiding with Barenegro in the ruined chapel in the Friar's Wood, Nugent?"

Nugent gave a start. "My hat! Do you mean that he may have discovered the secret passage leading from the ruined chapel to Greyfriars?" he asked excitedly.

"Why not?"

"It is extremely likely," said Hurree Singh. "While I was hiding that time in this esteemed school I followed the passage to the old chapel to get some fresh airfulness. There is nothing secret about it if you pull away the ivy which grows very thickfully over the opening at the other end."

"It's more likely than not that Melchior found it, looking among the ruins for a safe hiding-place," said

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Harry Wharton. "If he discovered it, and found that it led to the school, all would be easy."

"My hat! And but for old Nadesha's warning—"

"The ruffian might have got his revenge on us. But now—"

"Now we shall have the golden opportunity of improving the shining hour," said Hurree Singh. "After the school is sleeping the sleep of the just we shall proceed creepfully from the dormitory—"

"And get into the box-room, where the passage leads," said Harry quietly. "If the gipsy comes through the passage he can only get out into the school by way of the box-room."

"Good! And we shall be there."

"With a cricket stump each—"

"And a rope and a flashlamp."

"You're all game?" asked Harry.

"Rather!"

"Then it's settled. And, mind, mum's the word."

"The mumfulness is important," said Hurree Singh. "I shall be as dumb as the esteemed oyster."

And the chums of the Remove were extremely careful to keep their secret. Nothing unusual disturbed the routine of Greyfriars up to the bed-time of the Remove, when that Form went up to the dormitory.

What measures were being taken by the Head Harry Wharton did not know, but he guessed that the police had been sent for; though they would not come till after the boys' bed-time to avoid comment.

The Famous Four did not go to sleep with the rest of the Remove. They were too excited, and their hearts beat faster when they thought of the coming vigil in the box-room, and the possible—or, rather, almost certain—encounter with a desperate and probably armed ruffian.

They heard the clock strike ten and then eleven. The House was very still. As the last stroke of eleven died away Harry Wharton rose quietly from his bed. The other three followed his example without being called.

The chums dressed themselves rapidly, and then took out the cricket stumps which they had hidden under their blankets.

"Come on!" whispered Harry Wharton.

The Remove chums stole out of the dormitory, closing the door silently after them. The passage was pitchy dark, but they knew the way well. They trod lightly on the stair up to the box-room, remembering that it was given to creaking.

The darkness was intense. Harry Wharton felt for the handle of the door and opened it. He paused to listen before he entered. There was no sound in the silence of the night. A glimmer of stars fell through the window on the boxes and lumber in the room.

Harry closed the door behind his chums, and then led the way through the lumber towards the little door which gave on the secret passage.

During the past week a new look had been fitted to the door. It was intended to keep the boys of Greyfriars from exploring the dangerous recesses, but it was not likely to baffle Melchior long if he came that way.

"Cover!" whispered Harry. "I don't suppose he'll come along much before midnight; but he might, and it's best to be in time."

The chums of the Remove took cover among the lumber, close to the little door, and grasped their weapons and waited.

It was an anxious and weary vigil. They heard the quarter chime out, then the half-hour, and then the three-quarters; and finally midnight tolled forth on the silent night.

Still no sound had broken the quiet. But a few minutes later came a slight sound, which started the Removees into new watchfulness, and sent the blood tingling through their veins.

It was a sound from the other side of the little door—the sound of a hand groping over the door, and the chums breathed hard.

It was a matter of minutes now!

There was a creak—a grinding sound.

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The door was being forced by some tool inserted between the lock and the door frame. A sharp snap—the lock had parted. A glimmer of light came through and the door swung open.

The juniors crouched, silent and watchful, in their cover. They heard a movement; a man was standing in the opening, lantern in hand, looking cautiously into the box-room, to ascertain that all was safe before he entered.

Not a sound or movement. Satisfied, Melchior, the gipsy, stepped into the room, his black eyes glinting. He stepped away from the door, and passed the big box which concealed Harry and Bob. He flashed the light from right to left, and gave a convulsive start as he caught sight of the ambushed juniors.

He was not given time to think or act. Harry and Bob sprang at him fiercely, slashing with the stumps. The lantern crashed to the floor and the gipsy followed it, half-stunned by the blows he had received.

"The light—quick!" shouted Harry Wharton.

Hurree Singh drew a flashlamp from his pocket and switched it on. Harry, Bob, and Nugent piled on the dazed gipsy.

Melchior struggled madly, but the juniors had him pinned to the floor.

"The rope!" panted Harry.

"Here it is, my worthy chum!" exclaimed the nabob. "I will execute the tiefulness of the esteemed rotter's hands!"

And while the chums held the gipsy fast, Hurree Singh bound his wrists tightly together, and then did the same with his ankles. Melchior was a helpless prisoner. He lay glowering at the Removees. There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs and the door of the box-room was thrown open.

The noise of the struggle had echoed far through the silent house. Dr. Locke, Wingate, Mr. Quelch, and a policeman dashed into the room.

"Why, what—what—" gasped the Head.

"We've got him, sir!"

"We thought he might come in this way, sir," explained Harry Wharton. "We were right, and we've got him. We hope you will excuse us for leaving the dormitory without permission."

The Head smiled slightly.

"I see you have got him, Wharton. You should not have run this risk; but, fortunately, no harm is done, and I excuse you. Go back to bed."

"Thank you, sir."

The chums of the Remove went back to the dormitory feeling extremely well pleased with themselves. The whole Remove was awake now, demanding information as to the row, and the part the four had taken in it.

"Oh, don't bother!" said Bob Cherry. "We've been capturing burglars while you've been snoring, that's all! Lucky you had us chaps to look after you!"

The next morning they were the heroes of the school. Melchior, the gipsy, had been taken to the station, and was in safe hands, and not likely to escape again. Nadesha met Harry Wharton in the morning, and the junior learned, gladly enough, that the gipsy was to remain at Greyfriars in Mrs. Locke's service.

The Famous Four were lions in the Remove that day, and fellows in higher Forms regarded them with envious eyes. They had distinguished themselves and brought glory to their Form, and the Remove was in a position to crow over the Fourth—and crow it did, to its heart's content!

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