

THE REBEL OF THE BENBOW!

GRIPPING YARN OF THE SCHOOL ON THE RIVER—INSIDE.

**TOM MERRY
GUILTY?**

Read this week's
Super St. Jim's
story—

**THEY CALLED
HIM A DUFFER!**

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

Week Ending February 25th, 1939.

The GEM

2^D

TOMPKINS THE DUFFER!
TOMPKINS THE FATHEAD!
TOMPKINS THE FUNK!
GO BACK TO COLNEY HATCH!
Tom Merry





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned and no replies given by post.

"Earnest Inquirer," of Alexandria, typewrites:

1. IS BAGGY TRIMBLE FATTER THAN FATTY WYNN?

2. DOES KERR DANCE THE HIGHLAND FLING?

3. WHY ARE TOM MERRY, MANNERS, AND LOWTHER CALLED THE TERRIBLE THREE?

THANKING YOU IN ANTICIPATION.

ANSWER: OILIG MY T(R)YPEWRITeR oNcE AGA?N, hERE GOeS:

1. IF BY "FATTER" YOU MEAN "FLABBIER," TRIMBLE HAS IT. ON ACTUAL CIRCUMFERENCE FATTY WYNN WINS—BY AN INCH AND A HALF.

2. KERR SAYS, YES, HE DOES, OCCASIONALLY. THE LAST OCCASION WAS WHEN HE GOT SIX OF THE BEST FROM MONTEITH FOR TAKING PART IN A HOUSE RAG.

3. YES, THAT'S JUST WHAT I'VE BEEN GOING TO ASK THEM. SEEMS THE TITLE JUST CAME ABOUT, AS ALL THREE ARE TERRIBLE FIGHTING MEN. I DON'T MEAN QUARRELSOME. GOSH, THESE ARE THREE TERRIBLE QUESTIONS TO ANSWER!

BEST WISHES. TYPEWRITe AGAIN SOM?TIME?!!!!!!@&!!



"Record Breaker," of Manchester. He's the shadow, of course, not the cat!

"Record Breaker," of Manchester, writes:

I am sending you a photo of myself. I took it myself. I am the shadow, of course, not the cat. I am going to try to beat George Eyston's record with a home-made car. Shall I try in our backyard? It is four feet long.

ANSWER: If your backyard is only four feet long, you may find yourself a little cramped for

record breaking! And the cat looks so comfortable it would be a shame to disturb it. Why not give George Eyston a break? With the smallest car and yard in the world, what do you want with any more records?

P.S.—"Detective" Kerr says, judging by your shadow, you are a long short dark fair boy with a ginger moustache and false eyebrows. Is he right?

Robert Whiter, of Wood Green, N.22, writes:

How old are you? Who is the better boxer—yourself or Tom Merry? And how much do D'Arcy's toppers cost? I enclose a photo of myself, which I hope you will print.

ANSWER: With a 'flu cold just after Christmas I felt about a hundred, but after opening a cheery letter like yours I could frisk around like a two-year-old. Fifteen is the average age in the Fourth. Modesty corner: Tom Merry is the best boxer on points in the Lower School. Talbot and myself are bracketed second. Quoting Gussy: "Bai Jove, deah boy, I do not purchase my toppahs at a fixed price, by the dozen, like oranges or melons! I am vewy particuluh about toppahs, and I often dwop into an outfittak's and twy on a numbah before selectin' one which julfils my wequirements, inwesperspective of price. Some fellows don't seem to care whethah they are seen weavin' a glossy silk toppah or a wusty old dwainpipe!"

I'm printing your picture. Your taste in literature looks good to me!

T. R. O., of Plymouth, writes:

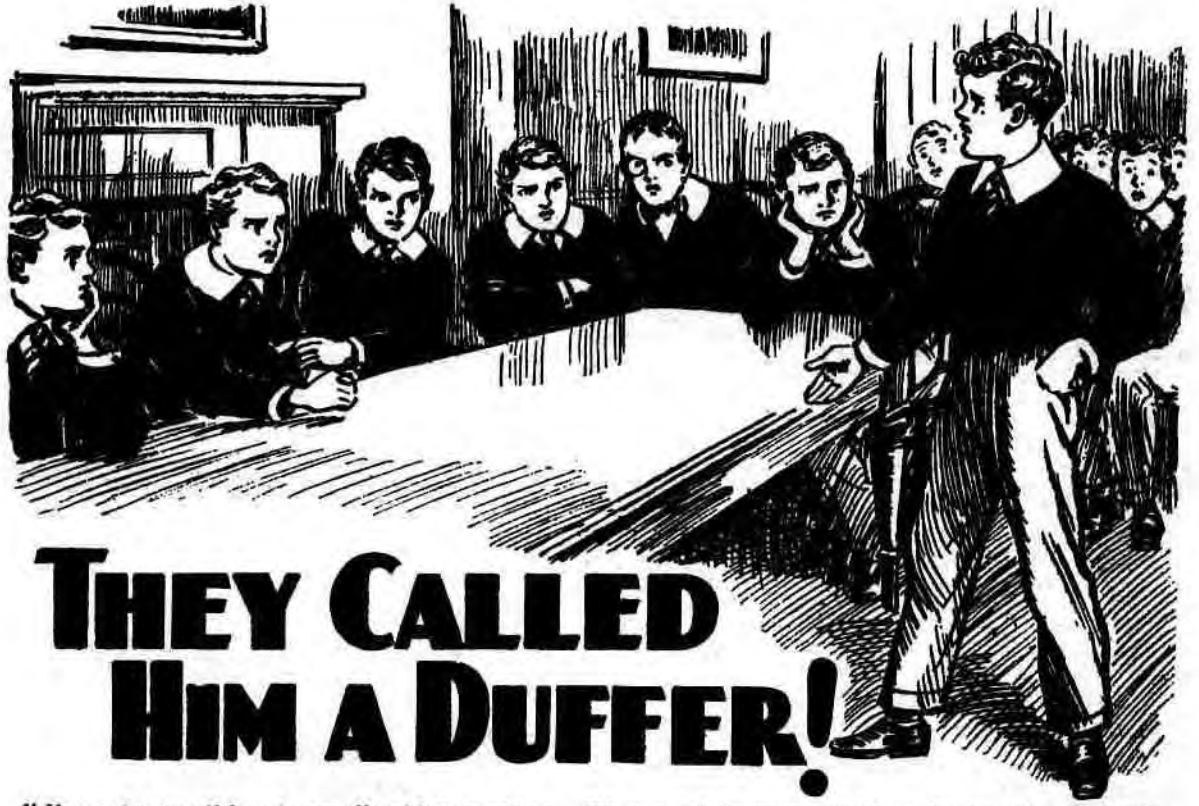
Can you beat this, Mr. Cocksure Blake? I've been in a train smash abroad, fell out of an upstairs window, was tossed by a bull, and got out of a burning building. After that I fell in the sea, but was washed ashore.

ANSWER: Not all in one afternoon, I hope? That reminds me. I was nearly run into by a bicycle myself this morning.



Robert Whiter—and his GEM.

**JUST A GENIAL ASS—A NOBODY—IS CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS UNTIL HE
MAKES ST. JIM'S SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE!**



THEY CALLED HIM A DUFFER!

"I've got something to say," said Tompkins. "I can let in some light on this matter." "You can?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Yes, I can!" said Tompkins defiantly. "Well, go ahead, then!" said the captain of the Shell.

CHAPTER 1.

Tompkins on the Warpath!

CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was wrathful. He came out of his study—Study No. 4 in the Fourth—with a red face and the gleam of battle in his eyes.

Four juniors were chatting round the doorway of Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, who shared that celebrated apartment.

They regarded Tompkins of the Fourth in surprise.

"Seen Tom Merry?"

Tompkins jerked that question at them like a bullet from a gun.

"Yaas," answered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I have seen Tom Mewwy, deah boy. But what is the mattah? You look wathah excited."

"I'm going to lick Tom Merry!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Where is he?" demanded Tompkins ferociously.

Study No. 6 stared at him blankly without answering.

Tompkins on the warpath was quite a new Tompkins.

Clarence York was nobody in particular. He was generally regarded as a duffer, rather a

fumbler at cricket, though he did his best in his way; a rather painstaking duffer in class; a fellow with no vices, but no special virtues—in fact, a nobody.

Fellows sometimes amused themselves in idle moments with pulling Tompkins' leg, and more ill-natured fellows had been known to rag his study, such an amusement being considered safe enough with "that duffer Tompkins."

Tompkins so seldom came out of his shell, so to speak, that he had caused great surprise by punching Racke's nose in the Common-room one day, taking exception to some sarcastic remark of Racke's on the subject of his illustrious front name.

He had still further surprised the Lower School by licking Aubrey Racke in the fight that followed, Racke being a much bigger and older fellow, though perhaps not much blessed with a great amount of pluck.

But, after all, anybody could lick Racke; and Tompkins, generally, was a very inoffensive fellow, who seldom made his voice heard on any subject, and took the large amount of clipping he received with good-tempered patience.

His sudden announcement that he was going to lick Tom Merry, the

Who is the St. Jim's junior that rescued a little girl in peril? That question has got everyone guessing—except Clarence York Tompkins, the chap they call a duffer!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

champion junior athlete of St. Jim's, took Study No. 6's breath away.

They could only stare at the warlike Tompkins. "Where is he?" he repeated. "If you've seen him, where is he?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Tompkins, it would be doin' you a good turn not to tell you."

"Better leave Tommy alone," grinned Blake. "My dear man, you couldn't lick one side of Tommy if he had his hands tied and his eyes shut! Better try some smaller fry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Racke of the Shell, lounging along the passage with Crooke and Scrope.

The three black sheep of the School House seemed interested.

"Pway do not butt in, Wacke——"

"I want to find Tom Merry!" shouted Tompkins.

"He's just gone down to footer with Manners and Lowther," answered Racke. "Are you looking for trouble?"

"I'm going to lick him!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Clarence York Tompkins started for the staircase with a rapid stride. The juniors stared after him.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "What evah is the mattah with Tompkins? Pewwaps we had bettah go aftah him, deah boys."

"Somebody will be wanted to pick up the pieces after he's done licking Tom Merry," remarked Digby.

"We'll carry him home, poor chap!" said Herries. "Come on!"

"By gad, I'm on this!" grinned Racke. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. were hurrying after the truculent Tompkins, and Racke and his friends followed them. Mellish and Trimble came out of their study and stopped Racke.

"Where are you off to?" asked Mellish. "I thought we were going into your study for a game?"

"Something better on than that. Tompkins is going to lick Tom Merry!" chuckled Crooke.

"Oh crumbs!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Baggy Trimble.

And they joined Racke & Co., quite keen to see the encounter between Tompkins of the Fourth and the captain of the Shell.

The news spread as the juniors hurried out of the School House after Clarence York. The news that Tompkins was on the warpath, with Tom Merry selected as the happy victim, caused excitement and merriment on all sides. Grundy, Wilkins and Gunn, Talbot and Gore, Kangaroo and Glyn, and a dozen other fellows joined the crowd that followed Tompkins down to Little Side.

There were a good many fellows on the junior footer ground. Tom Merry evidently had no suspicion that the warlike Tompkins was on his track as he chatted with Manners and Lowther.

He was made suddenly aware of it, however.

Tompkins, breathless with haste, and red with wrath, reached him and clutched him by the shoulder, swinging him round.

Tom Merry, in great surprise, found himself looking into Tompkins' red and wrathful face.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated.

"Yah!" was Tompkins' reply.

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"Wha-at?"

"Yah! Rotter!"

Tom Merry blinked at him. That roar of defiance from the usually quiet and inoffensive Tompkins took his breath away. He had no quarrel with Clarence York, so far as he was aware.

"Cad!" howled Tompkins, shaking his fist under Tom Merry's nose. "Rotter!"

"What on earth are you calling me names for?" demanded Tom Merry, too astonished to be angry. "Are you off your rocker?"

"Put up your hands!"

"What for?"

"Because I'm going to lick you."

"Lick me?" stuttered Tom.

"Yes, you rotter!"

"Mad as a hatter!" said Monty Lowther in wonder. "Does this run in the family, Tompkins, my unfortunate young friend?"

"Must be potty!" said Manners in equal wonder.

Tom Merry backed away a pace as Tompkins flourished a knuckly and somewhat grubby fist under his nose.

"Look here, you potty duffer," exclaimed Tom, "what's the matter? I don't want to slaughter you."

"Yah! Come on!"

"But what's the row? What the dickens—

Oh, my hat!" yelled Tom, as Clarence York fairly rushed at him and smote him hip and thigh.

CHAPTER 2.

Signed, Tom Merry!

"GWEAT Scott! Dwag that idiot off, deah boys!"

"My hat!"

Tom Merry backed away, defending himself. Two or three thumps had taken effect upon him in the surprise of the moment, and he was getting angry. But he only warded off Tompkins' furious drives so far. He did not want to hurt him, and Clarence York would have been very severely hurt if the athletic Shell fellow had hit out.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, always kind-hearted, rushed forward and caught Tompkins by the shoulder, and pulled him back.

"Leggo!" roared Tompkins.

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Leggo! I'm going to lick him!" shouted Tompkins, wrenching himself away from Arthur Augustus. "Come on! Yah! You think you can treat me as you like, don't you, because I'm a quiet chap? Well, I'm not afraid of you!"

"But——"

"Come on, you rotter!"

Tompkins rushed to the attack, and Tom Merry's hands went up once more.

The juniors gathered round in an amazed ring, even the players coming off the pitch to see what was on. Footer practice was not nearly so entertaining as Clarence York Tompkins on the warpath.

"Go it!" shouted Racke. "Go for him, Tompkins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The silly ass ought to be dwagged off before he gets hurt," said D'Arcy anxiously. "Don't hurt him, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry was not hurting him. He was too good a boxer for Tompkins to be able to do him any damage, and his guard was perfect. Tompkins attacked with terrific vim, but he could not

get through the defence, and Tom Merry smiled at him over the active hands that stalled him off helplessly. Once or twice he gave the Fourth Former a tap when he came too close, and that was all. Tom Merry's hands seemed like a stone wall that the enraged Fourth Former could not pass, and he raged in vain, rapidly losing his breath.

"Bai Jove! That chap will get vevy tired if he keeps up those wemarkable gymnastics much longah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clarence York Tompkins dropped his hands at last, fairly exhausted by his vain attack upon an impenetrable defence.

"Oh, you rotter!" he gasped.

"Had enough?" asked Tom, laughing.

"Yah! You rotter! Cad! Why don't you hit out?" roared Tompkins. "Are you afraid to?"

"Well, not exactly," chuckled Tom Merry. "You silly ass, don't you know that you would fold up like a pocket-knife if I hit you?"

Tompkins stood panting.

"Interval!" announced Monty Lowther, amid a general chortle. "Now, you chump, suppose you tell us what you're going for Tommy for?"

"Because he's a rotter!" gasped Tompkins.

"I really think you'd better punch him, Tommy," said Lowther. "One punch will be enough, and then somebody can carry the body in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd rather find out what bec he's got in his bonnet," said the perplexed captain of the Shell. "What have I done, Tompkins, or what do you think I have done?"

"You know I can't lick you, you rotter!" gasped Tompkins, almost weeping with rage. "If I could, you wouldn't dare to rag my study and stick up insulting messages on the walls!"

"But I haven't done anything of the sort!" gasped Tom Merry in amazement.

"Liar!"

Tom clenched his hands, and his eyes gleamed. For a moment he came very near giving Clarence York Tompkins what he had been asking for.

"We'll look into this," he said quietly. "Unless you've gone potty, somebody has been pulling your leg."

"You've signed your name to it!" howled Tompkins.

"I haven't been in your silly study at all, you howling ass!"

"You—you haven't!" muttered Tompkins, taken aback.

"No, you chump!"

"But your name's signed there——"

"I'll go and see it," said Tom. "If somebody's been using my name, there will be trouble for that somebody!"

Tompkins blinked at him in great doubt. Taking no further notice of the egregious Clarence York, Tom Merry walked away to the School House, with a crowd of curious fellows at his heels. Quite an army of the Fourth and the Shell arrived at Study No. 4 to investigate the cause of Tompkins' amazing ebullition.

Tompkins' studymate, Mulvaney minor of the Fourth, was standing in the study now with an expression of surprise and wrath in his face. He had just come in. He stared at the crowd as they arrived.

"Phwat does this mean?" he demanded.

Tom Merry stepped into the study and looked round.

It was evident that ragers had been at work. Clarence York's desk had been up-ended, and the contents were scattered on the floor. Two or three prize books were in the fender, with soot thrown upon them. On the rug was a heap of broken crockery. And there was an inscription chalked on the wall, and when the juniors saw it, the cause of Tompkins' outbreak was explained at last.

"Tompkins the Duffer! Tompkins the Fat-head! Tompkins the Funk! Go back to Colney Hatch!"

"(Signed) TOM MERRY!"

CHAPTER 3.

By Whose Hand?

TOM MERRY'S eyes glittered as he read that message on the wall, which had not unnaturally roused the inoffensive Tompkins' fighting blood.

Clarence York had followed him, but he was not warlike now. He was beginning to realize that his simple leg had been pulled once more. The inscription on the wall was scrawled in capital letters, and so gave no clue to the handwriting of the perpetrator.

"You silly chump!" said Tom Merry, in measured tones. "Didn't it occur to you that anybody could have written that rot?"

"N-no!" stammered Tompkins.

"Sure, it's your name, Tom Merry," said Mulvaney minor.

"I don't think I need tell anybody here that I didn't write up that caddish rubbish," said Tom Merry, looking round.

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

"You—you didn't?" stammered Tompkins.

"No, you idiot!"

"Then somebody did!"

"Did you work that out in your head?" asked Monty Lowther, with interest.

"Wacke, vevy likely," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "That howlin' ass licked Wacke a week or two ago, you know, and this is just one of Wacke's twicks. He wanted Tom Mewwy to thwash Tompkins."

"Was it you, Racke?" demanded Tom Merry sharply.

Aubrey Racke glanced carelessly into the study.

"Was what me?" he asked.

"Did you write that rubbish and rag Tompkins things?"

"By gad! Looks as if you did!" answered Racke coolly. "There's your name signed to it, anyhow!"

"Some lying cad used my name!" said Tom. "You're quite capable of a trick like that, Racke."

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly think any fellow would write up your name, Tom Merry," he answered. "It seems too thick for me."

"And to me," added Croke.

"I've already said that I did not write it," said Tom quietly. "If you doubt my word, Racke, say so plainly, and I'll smash you!"

"Thanks! If you say you didn't, there's no proof that you did, I suppose," yawned Racke. "But I don't see why you should connect me with the thing. I certainly know nothing whatever about it!"

And with that the cad of the Shell lounged away with his friends.

"I suppose it would hardly be playing the game to find Wacke guilty without any evidence?" remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Might have been Crooke, or Scrope, or Mellish, or Trimble!" said Manners. "Any one of them is cad enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Clarence York Tompkins' face was a study. He was not a very bright youth, but he could see now that he had been taken in.

"I—I'm sorry, Tom Merry," he stammered. "I—I thought it was you!"

"Only a silly ass like you would have thought so!" snapped Tom. "You'd better make sure next time, or you may get damaged."

And Tom Merry left the study.

Manners and Lowther lingered, giving Clarence York Tompkins expressive looks. They were more exasperated with Tompkins than Tom Merry was.

"Tompkins, my boy, you've made a bloomer," said Lowther.

"I—I know."

"If you hadn't been a howling ass, you'd have guessed that some cad stuck Tommy's name there to get you a licking."

"I—I—"

"You can't help being a howling ass," continued Lowther considerably. "But there are limits, and I think the limit ought to be impressed on your mind, Tompkins. I think a jolly good bumping is the best way. What do you think?"

"Look here—oh! Yah!"

Bump, bump!

Clarence York smote his study floor with his person, in the grasp of the two indignant Shell fellows.

Manners and Lowther left him sitting there, gasping, and walked out of the study feeling that justice had been done. Clarence York Tompkins felt that it had been rather overdone.

Mulvaney minor, grinning, helped him up.

"Why didn't you lend me a hand, you sniggering chump?" demanded Tompkins ungratefully.

"Sure, and ye asked for it, intirely," answered Mulvaney. "I wonder Tom Merry didn't mop up the ground wid ye."

"I—I thought—"

"Arrah, ye can't think!" interrupted Mulvaney. "If ye want to think, think out who mucked up our study, ye gossoon!"

"I—I suppose it was Racke—or Crooke—or Scrope—or Mellish—or Trimble—or Clampe of the New House—or Chowle—"

"Faith, ye've got a good list to choose from," said Mulvaney minor sarcastically, "and perhaps it was somebody else all the time!"

"Oh, it was one of those rotters—or all of them," said Tompkins with conviction. "Gore or Reilly or Kerruish might have ragged the place, but not to this extent—this is rotten, and they wouldn't have stuck up that lie on the wall, either. It was some cad!"

Mulvaney nodded.

"A regular spalpeen!" he agreed. "And ye ought to find him, and when ye do, I'll hold your jacket for yez!"

"How can I find him?" said Tompkins hopelessly. "I don't know who it was, only I'm sure it was one of that gang, perhaps the lot of them together. No good punching Racke's nose if it

was Clampe, or pulling Clampe's boko if it was Mellish!"

"Go for the lot of them, one aafter another," suggested Mulvaney minor. "Lick the whole gang all round!"

"I can't, you wild Irish ass!"

"Oh, ye're a gossoon!" said Mulvaney. "Sure, it's up against this study, and somebody ought to be licked for this. If you don't do it, I will. And by the same token, there's Trimble, and I'll begin on him!"

In an unlucky moment for himself the inquisitive Baggy poked his little fat nose into the study.

With his truly Hibernian scheme of thrashing the black sheep of the school all round, one after another, to make sure of getting at the guilty party, Mulvaney minor started on Trimble.

He rushed at that podgy youth with his fists up, and the light of battle in his eyes, and Trimble jumped back into the passage in alarm.

"Here, keep off!" he yelled. "Oh! Ah!"

Trimble bolted.

"Arrah!" said Mulvaney minor. "Come back, and be licked intirely!"

He rushed down the passage after Trimble. The fat junior scudded down the big staircase, and on the lower landing ran into Mr. Railton, who was coming up. The Housemaster's grasp closed on Trimble's collar.

"Trimble!"

"Yaroooh! Oh dear!"

"Mulvaney minor!" thundered Mr. Railton. "What are you chasing Trimble down the stairs for?"

"Oh, begorra—to catch him, sir!" gasped Micky Mulvaney.

"And why do you want to catch Trimble?"

"To—to—to—"

"Keep him off!" gasped Trimble. "I didn't rag his study—I never knew anything about it. Besides, it was only Tompkins' things that were ragged. 'Tain't his business at all. Oh dear!"

"Have you any reason to believe that Trimble has done any damage in your study, Mulvaney minor?"

"N-no, sir! Only—"

"Only what?"

"Somebody has, sir, and—and sure, I was going to lick all the spalpeens that might have done it, sir, to get at the right party," said Mulvaney ingenuously.

Mr. Railton frowned portentously.

"Mulvaney minor, if you carry out that ridiculous intention, you may expect to be reported to the Head for a flogging on each occasion that you disturb the peace!" he thundered.

"Oh!" gasped the Irish junior. "Oh, sir!"

"Trimble, you may go. Remember my warning, Mulvaney minor!"

"Yiss, sorr!" gasped Micky.

He returned discomfited to his study. His scheme, for what it was worth, was knocked on the head; and the insult to Study No. 4 had to remain unavenged.

Clarence York Tompkins was tidying up, with a dismayed face, and Micky lent him a hand, growling to himself. But although his drastic measures had to be nipped in the bud, Micky Mulvaney remained firmly convinced that Racke & Co. had been responsible for the outrage in Study No. 4, and he informed Clarence York Tompkins that they had to be made to sit up for it. Clarence York fully agreed; only he did not quite see how it was to be done.



"Put up your hands!" howled Clarence York Tompkins. "What for?" asked Tom Merry. "Because I'm going to llok you!" exclaimed the enraged Fourth Former. "Look here, you potty duffer!" said Tom. "What's the matter? I don't want to slaughter you!"

CHAPTER 4.

Tompkins is Mysterious!

TOM MERRY gave Clarence York Tompkins a cheery nod and a smile when he came across that egregious youth again.

The captain of the Shell had quite forgiven Tompkins; he had, indeed, forgotten his existence until he saw him again. Clarence York was not a person of consequence.

Tompkins was looking glum. He stopped Tom Merry to speak to him.

"I'm sorry I went for you yesterday, Merry," he began.

"All serene—no harm done," said Tom, with a smile. "But it's always a good idea to get hold of the right party before you begin punching noses. It saves misunderstandings!"

Tompkins laughed feebly.

"But—I don't know the right party," he said. "I'm jolly certain it was Racke and his gang, or some of them. They think I'm a silly ass they can do anything they like with, you know," went on Tompkins dismally. "But I'm not such an ass as they think. I've got brains, you know!"

"I'm sure you have," assented Tom agreeably, refraining from asking Tompkins why he didn't use them if he had them—a question Monty Lowther would certainly have asked.

"I believe the whole gang of them were in it!" went on Clarence York. "They've been grinning

and sniggering together a lot, and they keep on chipping me about it, you know. They like to hold a chap up to ridicule, and fellows always seem ready to laugh at me, for some reason!"

"It's too bad!" said Tom, listening cheerfully to poor Tompkins' grievance. There was no limit to Tom Merry's sunny good nature.

"I'm not such an ass as they think, though!" said Tompkins darkly. "I've been thinking!"

"Yes?"

"They make the fellows think I'm an ass!" said Tompkins. "But it's better to be an ass than to be a rogue, isn't it?"

"Very much better," agreed Tom. "You have the advantage of them there!"

"Oh! So you think I'm an ass, too?"

"N-no! I—I didn't mean exactly that!"

"Well, some fellows who think that a fellow is an ass are going to have their eyes opened!" said Tompkins. "I've been thinking, and when I have a good think I can tell you I have some jolly good ideas. I'm jolly well going to show Racke & Co. up to all the school!"

"Are you really?"

"The school's going to know them better," said Tompkins. He tapped his forehead. "I've got it here, you know!"

"Eh? Got what?"

"Brains!" said Tompkins impressively. "Intellect!"

"I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure," said the amazed captain of the Shell, again exercising self-restraint, and forbearing, to observe that he wouldn't have thought it.

"Yes, you can grin!"

"I wasn't grinning, old chap!"

"You can grin," repeated Tompkins, unheeding, perhaps guessing that Tom was grinning inwardly, so to speak. "But I've got the brains, and I'm going to show them up! All St. Jim's is going to see that gang in their true colours! I've thought it out. I know how to dish them. You leave it to me!"

"Certainly," said Tom. "I wish you luck, old chap! Hallo, there's Manners! Ta-ta!"

And Tom Merry went on to footer with his chums, wondering what on earth was working in the mighty brain of Clarence York Tompkins—until he forgot Tompkins' existence again, which he did in a few minutes.

Tompkins, with an expression of deep and gloomy thought on his chubby face, paced the quad under the elms, his hands driven deep into his pockets. He was so deep in thought that he did not see Mulvaney minor approaching, till the Irish junior clapped him on the back. Then Tompkins yelled.

"Ow! You fathead!"

"Well, wake up, then!" said Micky warmly. "Phwat for are yez going to sleep standing up, like a horse?"

"I was thinking, you ass!"

"Oh, don't be funny, ye gossoon! You can't think. If you could think you would niver be such a howling ass, and the fellows—"

"Bother the fellows! The fellows will see that I'm not such an ass before long," said Tompkins.

"And phwat are ye going to do to convince them at all, at all?" asked Mulvaney minor sarcastically.

"Wait and see!"

"Sure, I'll wait, but I don't think I shall see," grinned Micky. "But niver mind that. What about yere new bike?"

"Never mind that."

"Hasn't yere uncle sint the money, after all?" asked Micky sympathetically.

"I've got it in my pocket now," answered Tompkins.

"Well, thin, didn't ye ask me to come wid ye to select the new bike, intirely?"

"I've changed my mind about that. I've got other things to think of now," said Tompkins mysteriously.

Perhaps he expected his studymate to display great curiosity regarding the "other things," but Micky didn't. He only yawned. Even in his own study poor Tompkins was looked upon as an ass to be tolerated as good-humouredly as possible.

"Oh, all serene, thin! I'll get along to footer," said Mulvaney. And he got!

Clarence York Tompkins remained pacing the quadrangle for some time, and finally he headed for his study in the School House, with an expression on his face which indicated that his mind was made up.

There had apparently been some outcome to his deep thinking, though what it was remained a secret.

Half an hour later Micky Mulvaney came in to Study No. 4, and found Tompkins busy at the table. Tompkins jumped up, and thrust hastily into his pocket the paper he had been scribbling.

Probably if any other fellow had done that

Micky would have asked him what he was up to. But Tompkins' studymate was never surprised at anything Tompkins did, and did not consider any of his actions was worthy of inquiry. He only said:

"Time for tay, me bhoy!"

"I'm going out before tea," said Tompkins.

"Oh, all right!" said Mulvaney indifferently, not even asking Tompkins where he was going.

Tompkins went unquestioned, and returned unquestioned; and though he looked very mysterious when he came back, Micky Mulvaney never even noticed it. And when Tompkins dropped hints that, later on, the fellows would see what they would see, Mulvaney minor only thought that he was being "quare," as he generally was, and still exhibited a plentiful lack of interest. Poor Clarence York was so completely a nobody that he could be as darkly mysterious as he liked without anybody even observing that he was darkly mysterious.

CHAPTER 5.

The Gratitude of John Brown!

"WELL, I'm blowed!"

Tom Merry uttered that exclamation forcibly in his study, in tones of the greatest astonishment.

It was several days since the affair of Tompkins—an affair that had passed out of the recollection of nearly everybody in the Lower School.

Tom Merry had come in after boating practice, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy called out to him that there was a letter for him in the rack.

Tom Merry took the letter down carelessly enough. The address on it was typewritten, and he supposed that it was some advertisement, probably from a local firm.

But when he opened it his eyes grew round with astonishment as he read, and then he uttered that forcible exclamation.

"Anythin' w'ong, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"N-no! But this beats the band!" said Tom Merry in great wonder. "I should think it was a hoax. Anyway, it's a matter that concerns the 'Weekly,' so all the staff had better read it."

"Somebody inquiring why it's called the 'Weekly' when it generally comes out monthly?" asked Lowther.

"No, ass! It's a notice to be put in the 'Weekly.' Pass the word round for the staff to come to the study," said Tom. "All the blessed editors had better see this."

Tom Merry went up to his study with the letter in his hand. His remark had caused general surprise and interest, and it was not long before the whole staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" were gathered in Study No. 10 of the Shell.

"Tom Merry's Weekly" had a numerous staff of editors and sub-editors. The Terrible Three naturally were members of it; and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy regarded themselves as members; and Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn of the New House served in sub-editorial capacities.

With so large a staff it really was surprising that "Tom Merry's Weekly" did not appear regularly, but somehow it didn't. When a number appeared, it was generally owing to a great and combined effort on the part of the staff, after which they rested on their laurels, so to speak, for a few weeks. A number had now long been overdue, and was nearly ready for the press, and

then it would be printed as soon as somebody could be induced to bike down to Mr. Tiper's in Rylcombe with the copy.

Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. arrived in the study promptly. Communications for the "Weekly" from outside St. Jim's were naturally rare, and they were curious to know what it was about. It was tea-time, but the staff agreed that the matter was more important than tea—Fatty Wynn, perhaps, having some doubts on that point.

"Well, here we are!" said Blake.

"Sit down, gentlemen," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Pewwavs you would kindly point out what we are to sit on, Tom Mewwy."

The editor-in-chief did not heed. Only a few of the gentlemen present were able to accept his invitation to sit down—the floor not looking inviting, and the number of chairs and boxes being limited.

"Gentlemen," said the chief editor, "I have received a most remarkable communication—"

"Is this going to be a speech?" asked Kerr.

"Order!"

"New House kids shouldn't interrupt!" remarked Manners.

"Bow-wow!"

"I don't think there ought to be a speech," observed Fatty Wynn. "It's tea-time, and—"

"Silence for the chair!"

"Order!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah, deah boys!"

"A most remarkable communication," said the chief editor calmly. "I will read it out to the staff. Silence, please!"

There was silence as the chief editor read the letter out.

It undoubtedly was, as Tom Merry had stated, a most remarkable communication. It ran:

"Sir,—Will you have the kindness to insert the following notice in your paper, which I understand circulates among the junior boys of your school?

"Mr. John Brown desires to express his heartfelt gratitude to the junior schoolboy of St. Jim's who, at great risk to himself, so gallantly saved his little daughter from injury last week. Not knowing the name of the brave and generous youth, Mr. Brown takes this method of thanking him. As a slight token of his gratitude, and a souvenir of the occasion, Mr. Brown is sending a handsome new bicycle to the school, to be handed to the youth in question."

"I shall be gratefully obliged if you will insert this notice in your paper. I am sure the brave lad will be very pleased to hear that my little daughter is now quite well, and I sincerely hope that he has recovered from the injury to his hand. The bicycle will reach St. Jim's to-morrow. I suggest that the staff of your paper form a committee to award it to the gallant lad, with all honour. I should be happy to be present, but that is impossible."

"Very sincerely yours,
JOHN BROWN.

"The Elms, Sussex."

The editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" listened in silence and with the keenest interest. Certainly it was a remarkable letter, and rather an agreeable one. A St. Jim's fellow who had run serious risk to save a little girl from injury was a fellow whom Tom Merry & Co. would have delighted to honour.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Bwown appeahs to be a vevy decent old boy."

"Let's have a look at the fist," said Kerr.

"The letter's typewritten," answered Tom Merry.

"Oh, signature and all?"

"No; the name's signed."

"Let's look at that, then."

Kerr took the letter and scanned the signature with a keen eye. Kerr did not seem so much impressed by the letter as the other fellows.

"John Brown" was written in a heavy hand with a thick-nibbed pen.

"The Elms, Sussex," said Kerr thoughtfully.

"That's rather a vague address."

"What have you got in your noddle, Kerr?" demanded Figgins.

"Well, it crossed my mind that it might be a hoax," said Kerr.

"That occurred to me," said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Why should Mr. Bwown w'ite anythin' of the sort if it wasn't twue?"

"Yes, answer that, Kerr!" said Herries.

Kerr grinned.

"Fathead! If it's a hoax there's no Mr. Brown at all. I don't see why he should typewrite the letter."

"Lots of people type their letters," said Blake. "It saves time. My pater generally does."

"It's signed all right," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it's a remarkable letter," said Tom, "and it might be a hoax. Racke and his set would like to take a rise out of the 'Weekly.'"

"Yaas, that's so," admitted D'Arcy. "It might

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be a twick of Wacko to make us look a lot of asses."

The editorial staff looked thoughtful.

"It may be some practical joker who wants to make us stick a silly notice in the 'Weekly' and get us grinned at. We should look duffers if we printed that notice and then Racke or Crooke let it out that he had sent it," said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Phew! We should, and no mistake!" said Blake.

Tom Merry nodded. That thought was in his mind, too.

Practical jokes had been played on the staff of the "Weekly" before, and they did not intend to be victimised.

"Blessed if I quite know what to do, then!" said Tom, wrinkling his brows. "If it's genuine, the notice ought to go in the 'Weekly.' But——"

"Pewwaps the chap is pwsent," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? What chap?"

"The chap who wescued Mr. Bwown's little daughtah fwom injuwy."

"My hat!"

That was a new thought. Tom Merry looked round at the numerous staff inquiringly. But there was a general shaking of heads.

"Must have been a New House chap," said Figgins thoughtfully. "Was it you, Kerr? Just like you to do it and say nothing about it."

Kerr laughed.

"Not guilty!" he answered.

"Not you, Fatty?"

"No," grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Must have been Redfern," said Figgins. "Reddy's just the chap."

"Might have been lots of fellows," said Tom Merry. "Old Kildare—or Darrell——"

"Mr. Bwown says it was a juniah, deah boy."

"Yes; I forgot that. Very likely it was Talbot."

"Yaas, wathah! Just like old Talbot, and he wouldn't say anythin' about it, eithah!"

"Well, what's the verdict?" asked Tom Merry. "It would be beastly to refuse to put the notice in if it's genuine, but we don't want to risk being hoaxed. We can't apply to Mr. Brown."

"There's the bike," said Blake. "If it's delivered to-morrow, as the letter says, that will settle it, I suppose?"

"My hat! Of course!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that! Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry's face cleared at once. Blake's sage suggestion solved the knotty problem.

"Right as rain!" said Tom. "If a man sends a new bike here, to be given to the chap, that will settle it. People don't send about new bikes for nothing. If the bike doesn't arrive the notice goes into the fire. We'll wait till the bike comes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And until then not a word about the letter," said Tom. "If it's a hoax, the merry joker can be left with nothing to chortle over."

Which was assented to at once.

Naturally, the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" looked forward to the following day with keen anticipation.

They were not disappointed.

In the afternoon Taggles came up to the School House to see Tom Merry.

The bike had arrived.

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The whole staff of the "Weekly" rushed down to the lodge to inspect the handsome new bike, packed in a crate, delivered there for Master Tom Merry, with Tom's name on the label, and the addition "from J. Brown."

It was a handsome bike undoubtedly, and certainly could not have cost less than ten pounds. The juniors surveyed it with great admiration, and certainly envied a little the lucky fellow whose courage had been thus rewarded. It only remained to find the lucky fellow. And that day Mr. Brown's notice was inserted in the copy of "Tom Merry's Weekly," which was duly taken down to Rylcombe to the printer's.

CHAPTER 6.

Who's the Man?

"TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY" had never been in such great demand.

The new bike had attracted some attention. Fellows had wondered why the captain of the Shell, having received a new bike, should leave it still packed in the bike-shed.

Nothing was said by the staff, however. Mr. Brown's notice in the junior school paper was the first hint of what the bike was for.

As soon as the news got out, fellows claimed copies of the "Weekly" at once, to read the message from Mr. Brown. The whole edition was disposed of in a few minutes, and then fellows had to borrow copies, or read over one another's shoulders.

Groups of juniors could be seen in the quadrangle and the passages eagerly perusing that notice from the grateful Mr. Brown.

In both Houses of St. Jim's it was not long before every fellow knew Mr. John Brown's message almost by heart.

There was so much keen excitement on the subject that even the Sixth Form took note of it, and some of them asked to see the paper. Kildare, the captain of the school, whistled when he read the inspiring words:

"Mr. John Brown desires to express his heartfelt gratitude to the junior schoolboy of St. Jim's who, at great risk to himself, so gallantly saved his little daughter from injury last week. Not knowing the name of the brave and generous youth, Mr. Brown takes this method of thanking him. As a slight token of his gratitude and a souvenir of the occasion, Mr. Brown is sending a handsome new bicycle to the school, to be handed to the youth in question."

Kildare read that in Tom Merry's own special copy of the paper, respectfully handed to him by the skipper of the Shell. Naturally, he stared.

"Is this a little editorial joke?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Tom. "It's straight goods. We thought it might be a hoax at first, but the bike's come."

"Oh, the bike's here?"

"Yes. Like to see it?"

"I would," said the astonished Kildare.

Tom Merry led the way to the bike-shed. A crowd of juniors were already there surveying the bicycle.

Kildare had apparently had some lingering doubt, but all doubts had to vanish at the sight of the bike.

It was as handsome a machine as was to be found within the walls of the school, brand-new,

LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther



Hallo, Everybody!

Skimpole wants to know what leapfrog is. It is the pursuit of hoppiness.

Most film actors like to be alone—on the front page!

Some people, like Mr. Ratcliff, are born busybodies. They have an interferiority complex.

Then there was the vaudeville performer who gave up his snake-charming act, because even the snakes began to hiss him!

News: I hear that swing music—known as hotspielerei—is banned in Pomerania. So now we know where to spend our holidays.

As the chemistry master said after the explosion: "I think we can take it, boys, that the formula was wrong!"

and of a good make. Any fellow who received that bike would have reason to be pleased with it.

"Well, my hat!" said Kildare. "It beats me!"

"Here's Brown's letter," said Tom.

Kildare read the letter.

"He suggests that you form a committee to hand the bike to the chap entitled to it," said Kildare. "Know the chap?"

"Not yet. He'll come forward, I expect, now the notice is out," said Tom. "That's why it's put in the 'Weekly,' of course."

"Well, this Mr. Brown seems a decent sort," said Kildare. "Quite a nice, grateful way of acknowledging a service. I hope it will turn out to be a School House kid."

"Oh, sure to!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare walked away, evidently puzzled. But the juniors did not see much to be puzzled about. The matter was straightforward enough. Mr. Brown wanted to acknowledge a great service rendered, and he had taken the simplest way of doing it—not having time to attend to it personally. That was all there was about it.

The staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" willingly formed themselves into a committee to award the bike to the proper claimant. It was arranged for the ceremony to take place in the Hobby Club Room—an apartment which afforded space for a large gathering. The following day—Saturday—was fixed for the presentation, that giving the hero ample time to hear about the matter and come forward.

And Kerr sagely suggested there would

Monty Lowther writes for the GEM by kind permission of Mr. Linton, who has agreed to wait for a two-hundred-line impot while this column is finished!

Mr. Selby told the Third to write an essay of at least fifty words on pets. Wally D'Arcy, stumped for inspiration, wrote "When I can't find my dog Pongo, I go about calling Pongo, Pongo, Pongo, Pongo, Pongo, Pongo, Pongo, Pongo Pongo . . ." (up to fifty!).

Story: An Englishman, a Scotsman, and an Irishman had dinner together. The Scotsman said he'd pay the bill. Later, the police found an Irish ventriloquist had been beaten up!

A naturalist says he has found a rare bird known as the Whydah in California. Probably looking for the Whydah open spaces.

I hear a monk in Switzerland lives chiefly on fried fish. Out of the frying-pan into the friar!

The proprietor of Blankley's, in Wayland is described in the "Wayland Gazette" as a king of commerce. Monarch of all he purveys!

"I know why you've come to see me," said the critic to the famous actor: "all you want is the publicity I give you." "I don't care if you never mention my name in your putrid column," snorted the actor, "so long as you spell it right!"

That's all for this week, chaps.

probably be some work for the committee to do, for there were some fellows who might claim the bike without being entitled to it. That was not an agreeable thought, but undoubtedly it was the case. There are black sheep in every flock, and, naturally, St. Jim's was not free of them. Fellows like Trimble and Mellish and Chowle, for instance, were capable of such a false claim if they thought they could make it with security. It dawned upon the awarding committee that they might have to sift several claims to Mr. Brown's bike.

That certainly detracted from the honour and glory of the proceedings; but they were prepared to do the sifting thoroughly, and to visit drastic punishment upon any fellow who made a false claim.

After the notice in "Tom Merry's Weekly" had been read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested, there was keen curiosity to see Mr. Brown's letter itself. So many fellows asked Tom Merry for a look at the letter that at last Tom pinned it up outside his study door, for all St. Jim's to read if they liked. And it was read, and read again, by every fellow in the Lower School.

That day there was only one topic in the Lower School at St. Jim's—Mr. Brown's notice in the "Weekly"; and speculation as to the name of the fellow who was entitled to the bike was rife on all sides.

It was odd that nothing had been heard of the fellow so far, or the incident, especially as Mr. Brown mentioned in his letter that the gallant

rescuer of the little girl had hurt his hand while performing his noble action.

It was remembered that Talbot of the Shell had his "fin" hurt, and fifty fellows at least asked Talbot if he was the man.

Talbot smilingly denied the soft impeachment.

Then it was recalled that Mulvaney minor had been squeezing his hand ruefully that morning, but it was discovered that that was simply due to an application of Herr Schneider's pointer. Durrance of the Fourth had a bad finger, which he was called upon to explain—but he explained that he had only snapped a penknife on it.

Who was the lucky man?

All these false scents having been followed in vain, the juniors were left to wonder who the fellow was.

By evening it was certain that the lucky man knew all about the notice in "Tom Merry's Weekly." He couldn't fail to know all about it, unless he was both blind and deaf.

Why hadn't he come forward?

The committee were ready to receive his name; but he hadn't come up. And the suspicion gained ground that Mr. Brown must have been mistaken as to the school the gallant youth belonged to. It was possible that the brave act had been performed by an Abbotsford fellow or a Grammarian, and that Mr. Brown had mistaken him for a St. Jim's chap. Indeed, as nobody admitted that he was the noble youth, that seemed the only explanation.

It was rather an awkward thought to the committee, for the bike was on their hands to be disposed of, and if the right fellow did not turn up they had no idea what to do with it.

"It's beastly awkward!" said Kerr, when the committee discussed that theory.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "We shall have to go woun'd to the othah schools lookin' for the wight party."

"I don't mean that! I mean that if it's not a St. Jim's chap at all, that will make it safe for some rogue to come forward and pretend he's the fellow!"

"Bai Jove! I cannot believe there is such a vogue in this school, Kerr!"

"The committee will see that a spoofer doesn't get the bike," said Jack Blake emphatically.

"I refuse to believe that any St. Jim's chap would make a false claim," said Arthur Augustus equally emphatically.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Lowther.

The committee were discussing the matter in the Common-room after tea. Monty Lowther interrupted with that exclamation as Baggy Trimble of the Fourth entered the room.

Trimble had his arm in a sling.

CHAPTER 7.

Trimble Tries It On!

ALL eyes were turned upon the podgy Baggy. There was an expression of patient suffering upon his fat face as he came in, as of one who was enduring pain with heroic fortitude.

Clarence York Tompkins brushed against him, and Trimble gave a yelp.

"Mind my hand!"

"What's the matter with your paw, then?" asked Tompkins.

"It's hurt, of course!"

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"Faith, and how did ye hurt it so much intirely?" asked Mulvaney minor.

"I—I knocked it to-day, and that started it paining again!" exclaimed Trimble. "I got the injury last week!"

"Last week?" exclaimed half a dozen voices.

"I thought so!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Behold the gallant hero, you fellows!"

"Bai Jove! Twimble!"

Baggy Trimble was the cynosure of all eyes. His statement that he had hurt his hand last week was a warning of what was coming.

"How did you hurt your hand last week, Trimble, old nut?" asked Cardew of the Fourth, soft as the cooing dove.

"Well, I didn't want to tell about the matter, really," said Trimble modestly. "But as Mr. Brown has sent me a new bike, I suppose I ought to claim it—"

"You!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I don't see why you should be surprised at that, Merry. I suppose most chaps here know that I am as brave as a lion."

"Ye gods!"

"Give Trimble a hearin'," grinned Cardew. "Go it, Trimble! You rescued beauty in distress. I've been expecting you to come forward."

"So have I," said Levison, "now that it's pretty clear that it wasn't a St. Jim's chap at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, give him a chance!" said Clive. "Go it, Trimble!"

"Yaas, go it, Twimble, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with unusual cordiality.

Thus encouraged, Baggy Trimble went it.

"I hope you won't think I'm bragging," he said. "It's not my way to brag, as you all know."

"Bai Jove!"

"But as the bike's mine, I've really got no choice but to explain," said Baggy calmly. "It happened last Saturday. I was lying in the grass—"

"And you're lying now," said Lowther. "We know that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was lying in the grass," roared Trimble, "near Rylcombe Lane, thinking of—of the scenery and—of things, when the motor-car rushed by. I jumped out into the road and seized her!"

"Her? Who?"

"The motor-car?"

"Of course not, you duffer—the little girl—Brown's daughter!"

"Was she there?"

"Of course she was there, or how could I have rescued her at the risk of serious injury to myself?" demanded Trimble. "She was—was gathering buttercups, and didn't see the car!"

"Gathering buttercups in the road, and in February?" yelled Manners.

"I—I—I mean she was crossing the road to—to—I—I—I don't know why she was crossing the road, anyway—but there she was, and the car was rushing down on her. I didn't stop to think of the risk. I sprang into the road and seized her by the hair!"

"And swam ashore with her?" asked Cardew.

"Yes—I mean no!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course I didn't swim ashore, as it was on dry land," said Trimble, glaring at the humorous Cardew. "How could I? I'm telling you the facts!"

"The facts! Oh, my hat!"

"Go it, Trimble! Get on with the facts!"

"You seized the runaway car by the bridle, and forced it back on its hind legs?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No!" yelled Trimble. "I seized the little girl in my arms!"

"It was by the hair just now!"

"I mean by the hair—and dragged her into safety in the nick of time. The motor-car swept by. Mr. Brown rushed up and wrung my hand."

"I wonder he didn't wring your neck, if you seized his little girl by the hair!" remarked Cardew.

"And that's what hurt your hand?" asked Lowther.

"No! My hand was hurt in the rescue. It was dashed by a flying hoof!"

"A whatter?"

"A hoof of a motor-car?" shrieked Wilkins.

"I—I mean one of the wheels passed over it—"

"You silly chump!" roared Tom Merry. "You wouldn't have had any hand left if it had."

"Try again, Baggy!" said Levison, amid a roar of laughter.

It was evident that Baggy Trimble's claim was not being taken seriously by the School House juniors. Indeed, from his mixed assertions, it was pretty clear that he had thought first of making it a runaway horse, and decided on a motor-car on second thoughts.

"I—I mean it didn't pass over my hand," stammered Trimble.

"Not much difference!"

"It dashed against my hand, you see. It was my other hand that Mr. Brown wrung, in a—a transport of gratitude," said Trimble. "He said I should hear from him later, and he rushed away with his daughter—for a doctor, I think. I never thought much about the matter—never thought of mentioning it, in fact."

"Trimble does these heroic things every day, and forgets 'em," remarked Cardew.

"But now," said Trimble, "Mr. Brown's sent me a bike, of course—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you fellows are cackling at! You can hand that bike over to me, Tom Merry!"

"That bike isn't a prize for the biggest liar in Sussex," answered the captain of the Shell, laughing.

"Trimble would bag it if it was!" grinned Blake.

"Look here, you're not going to do me out of that bike!" howled Trimble. "If you think you're going to keep my new bike, Tom Merry—"

"Shut up, while the committee gives its decision," said Blake. "Gentlemen, it's agreed that every false claimant gets a good bumping, isn't it?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As a warning to Trimble, and to other rogues who may think of following in his footsteps, Trimble is going to be bumped!"

"Passed nem. con."



"Behold the gallant hero, you fellows!" said Monty Lowther. Baggy Trimble was the cynosure of all eyes. His statement that he had hurt his hand was a warning that he was going to claim to be the fellow who had rescued Mr. Brown's little daughter!

"Here, I say—leggo!" roared Trimble indignantly. "I say—Yaroooh!"
 "Bump, bump, bump!"
 "Yow-ow-woooooop!"
 Amid roars of laughter Baggy Trimble crawled out of the Common-room. The first claimant to Mr. Brown's bike had been disposed of.

CHAPTER 8.

Claimants Galore!

AUBREY RACKE of the Shell was looking very thoughtful as he went up to his study. He was not looking thoughtful because he had his prep to do; he was not thinking of prep. Quite other thoughts were working in the active mind of the black sheep of the School House.

Crooke and Scrope of the Shell and Mellish of the Fourth were in the study when Racke came in and closed the door after him.

"Well?" said Scrope. "What's on? You asked us to come here."

"A jolly good thing!" answered Racke, sinking his voice. "If we four stick together, it's a good thing all round."

"What's the game?" asked Mellish suspiciously.

"Brown's bike."

"Are you the giddy rescuer?" grinned Crooke.

"Yes," said Racke calmly.

"What!" It was a yell of astonishment and disbelief from his comrades. "You?"

"Exactly," said Racke.

"Don't be funny, old chap!"

"Draw it mild, you know!"

"Think again!"

Aubrey Racke shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Shut up and listen!" he said. "Of course, I don't know a dashed thing about old Brown and his daughter. But nobody else does, either. It's clear enough that the chap doesn't belong to St. Jim's at all—the man made a mistake about the school. He may have mistaken an Abbotsford cap for a St. Jim's cap, or something of the sort."

"Likely enough."

"If it was a St. Jim's chap, he'd have come forward," said Racke. "I've been waiting to see if anybody would come forward. Nobody has."

"Excepting Trimble," grinned Crooke.

"That fat fool was lying, of course. Well, as it wasn't a St. Jim's chap at all, the coast is clear," said Racke. "That bike cost ten pounds at least, and we can sell it for nearly as much. What's the good of letting it go begging?"

"What's your scheme, then?" asked Crooke.

"I rescued the little girl, and you chaps saw me do it," said Racke. "Three witnesses are good enough. Well, I keep the bike, and I stand you fellows a quid each for your evidence."

"Well, of all the cheek!" exclaimed Scrope indignantly. "You want all the butt-end of the bargain, and no mistake!"

"Well, it's my idea, isn't it?"

"Not good enough," said Crooke. "If we bag that bike, I suggest selling it and whacking it out fair."

"Two pounds ten each," said Scrope. "That's worth picking up, especially as we've had such rotten luck with the gee-gees lately."

Racke frowned.

"Look here, half at least ought to come to me,

as it's my wheeze," he said hotly. "You've only got to bear witness."

"You get all the glory for nothing, anyway," said Crooke. "It will give you a leg-up in the school, to be supposed to have acted decently for once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, suppose we say equal whacks all round," said Racke grudgingly. "It's worth picking up—especially for the kudos. May get to the Head, and lead to a public compliment on speech day, or something of the sort. Might even get a medal or something. Whacks all round, then. I can spin a good yarn, and you fellows can witness it. They can't get round that."

"They'll want to know why you never mentioned it before."

"Modesty."

"Modesty—you?"

"Oh, don't be a funny idiot! I didn't want to swank about it—that sounds all right. I'm only coming forward, finally, because of Trimble's false claim. I feel that the truth ought to be known."

"Well, that may go down," said Scrope. "Make up a good yarn that will bear wind and weather, and we'll back you up all round on fair terms."

"Right!" said Crooke.

"What about you, Mellish?" demanded Racke. The shady member of the Fourth had been listening, but he had not spoken.

Mellish shook his head.

"I'm afraid it can't be done, Racke," he replied.

"Conscientious scruples—what?" sneered Racke.

"Not exactly. Only, you see, I can't very well let you bag the bike, because—"

"Because what, confound you?"

"Because it really belongs to me," said Mellish calmly.

"You?"

"Mean to say you were the chap?" shrieked Crooke.

"That's it!"

"Well, of all the liars—"

"I'm telling the simple truth," said Mellish, unmoved. "I rescued Brown's little girl, and I don't see why I shouldn't say so to all the school."

Racke & Co. stared at Mellish as if they would bite him. The Fourth Former's claim took their breath away.

"You—you—you—" stuttered the enraged Racke.

"Remember what Trimble got!" said Crooke warningly.

"Trimble was lying," answered Mellish.

"Well, you're lying, aren't you?"

"Certainly not. I happened to rescue the little girl from serious injury at great risk to myself, and I don't see why I shouldn't claim the bike."

"You've got the nerve to keep that up to us who know you?" shouted Racke.

"It's true."

"Liar!"

"You can think as you like, of course," said Mellish, rising to his feet. "Make your rotten claim, Racke, if you choose. I shall make mine."

And Mellish left the study, slamming the door after him.

Racke & Co. looked at one another in angry exasperation.

"I—I say, he couldn't really have done it, could he?" said Scrope.

Racke gave a scornful laugh.



**Detective Kerr
Investigates**

No. 32.

**THE MYSTERY
OF
THE EXPRESS.**

THE news that a special new locomotive was to be tried out with the Brightsea Express aroused great interest at St. Jim's. The main railway line passed through Wayland Junction, and several fellows resolved to make the trip, it being a half-holiday, to photograph the new engine on its maiden run. Unfortunately, there was a mistake in the time published in the "Wayland Gazette," and the St. Jim's party, expecting the express at 3.20 p.m., learned that it had passed nearly an hour previously—at 2.30 p.m. exactly. Next day, they were surprised when Baggy Trimble offered photographs—which he said he had taken himself—of the express. Though blurred, they sold well among locomotive enthusiasts—till Manners, being suspicious, asked "Detective" Kerr to investigate.

MANNERS: I doubt whether Trimble's photographs of the Brightsea Express are genuine, Kerr.

KERR: What makes you suspicious, Manners?

MANNERS: Well, as you know, I am rather keen on photography, and I can tell you it is difficult to take a good photograph of a train moving at high speed.

KERR: Trimble's snap is rather blurred.

MANNERS: Not so blurred as it would have been if Trimble had taken it the way he claims, with an ordinary camera without a speeded shutter.

KERR: You think Trimble got hold of a negative from somewhere and is palming off snaps of another train altogether?

MANNERS: Exactly. And a lot of chaps who missed seeing the express on its trial run are buying them, too—at Trimble's price!

KERR: What time did the Brightsea Express actually pass through Wayland Junction?

MANNERS: At two-thirty-one precisely, according to the stationmaster—

KERR: I say, Reilly, I hear you were one of the photographers who missed seeing the express?

REILLY: Sure, and 'tis meself that was disappointed, entirely. After we'd made sure—Hammond and I—of getting to Wayland in plenty of time!

KERR: What time did you get to Wayland? Do you remember?

REILLY: Sure! We caught the local train from Rylcombe to Wayland. It leaves every hour. We caught the two-twenty-three.

KERR: Did it leave promptly?

REILLY: Sure! But it was a couple of minutes late at Wayland.

KERR: Hard luck, Reilly! Still, you should be able to catch it next half.

REILLY: But we wanted a photograph of the maiden trip. We'll have to buy one from Trimble—the profiteering spalpeen!

KERR: Just a tick, Trimble!

TRIMBLE: Want a copy of my snapshot of the Brightsea Express, Kerr? They're a shilling each—and well worth it!

KERR: Could I just have a look at one, Trimble?

TRIMBLE: Here you are! Mind you, Kerr, the express was travelling at over a hundred miles an hour, so it was bound to come out a bit blurred.

KERR: Quite. How did you manage to be on the scene so early? The other fellows thought the express was running at three-twenty.

TRIMBLE: Oh, I'm fly, you know! I looked it up in the "Daily Telegraph" to make sure. Then I caught the local from Rylcombe.

KERR: Wouldn't that have been too late?

TRIMBLE: It nearly was, I can tell you. The local takes seven minutes from Rylcombe to Wayland, so I only just got there in time.

KERR: And the Brightsea Express went through at two-thirty-one?

TRIMBLE: Yes, that's right. I remember looking at my watch as soon as I had taken my snap. Do you like that photo, Kerr?

KERR: I think it's a really remarkable piece of work, Trimble, in the circumstances!

(Is Trimble's snap genuine? If not, how has he given himself away? Kerr's solution will be found on page 33.)

"Of course not, ass! He's too big a funk to run risks for anybody. He'll be laughed at, like Trimble!"

"If he makes a claim, though, he may give away what we've just been arranging," said Crooke uneasily.

"That won't work. We shall simply say he's lying to back up his own false claim," said Racke coolly. "The fellows know Mellish, and they'll believe that at once!"

"Well, that's so."

"With a good yarn and two witnesses we shall bag the bike," said Racke confidently. "Easy enough for us. Let's arrange the details, and have it all pat."

And, instead of getting on with their preparation, Racke & Co. proceeded to arrange their precious scheme.

Meanwhile, Mellish looked in at Study No. 10 in the Shell, where the Terrible Three were at work.

Tom Merry pointed to the door at once.

"Busy!" he said. "Cut!"

"Just a word, please!" said Mellish. "I'm claiming Brown's bike!"

"Oh, my hat! You?"

"I expected you to be down on me," said Mellish suddenly. "I'm prepared to prove it before the fellows."

"My dear chap, I'm not down on you," said Tom Merry good-temperedly. "It's rather a surprise, that's all. I suppose you know you're not the only claimant?"

"Trumble's a sneaking liar!"

"There's others!"

"Has Racke been here already?" exclaimed Mellish.

"Racke! No! Is Racke claiming it?" ejaculated Tom in astonishment.

"I—I believe so. He's a liar!"

"Very likely. We shall see. But Chowle has been over here from the New House, and he claims it," said Tom Merry. "He says Clampe saw the thing, and is prepared to bear witness."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mellish.

More of his shady friends than he had supposed were after Mr. Brown's bike, that was evident.

"Can't attend to it now," said Tom. "Prep, you know. The committee meets in public to-morrow afternoon in the Hobby Club Room to decide the question, and award the bike. All claimants have to put in their claim by then."

"I'll be there," said Mellish.

"If you've got any proof, you'd better bring it."

"Lots! And I'll bring it!"

And Mellish left the study.

"My hat!" murmured Manners. "It can't have been Mellish. Everybody knows he's a funk, anyway!"

"Well, even a funk might buck up, seeing a little girl in danger!" remarked Tom. "He'll have to prove it, though!"

The Terrible Three went on with their prep. Ten minutes later the door opened, and Wally of the Third came in with Levison minor, marching Reuben Piggott between them.

"Here he is!" announced Wally.

"Take him away and bury him!" said Monty Lowther. "Smoky little cads are not wanted in this study."

"He's the giddy hero!" exclaimed Levison minor warmly.

"What?"

"That's it!" said D'Arcy minor. "You might have guessed it was one of the Third, though I admit that Piggott isn't the likeliest chap to do a thing like that. But he says he did."

"So you were the chap, Piggott?" asked Tom, with a very curious look at Racke's Third Form henchman.

"Why shouldn't it be me?" said Piggott doggedly.

"No reason why it shouldn't, if it was. I'll put your name down. Hobby Club Room to-morrow afternoon," said Tom.

The Third Formers departed, and the interrupted prep was resumed. It was nearly finished when Racke of the Shell looked in.

"If I'm not interrupting you fellows—" began Racke.

"You are!" answered Manners.

"Sorry! I thought I'd better mention that I'm the chap who's entitled to Mr. Brown's bike."

"Your name goes down!" said Tom Merry. "Hobby Club Room to-morrow afternoon! Good-night!"

"Oh, all right!" said Racke.

And he retired.

Tom Merry looked rather grim.

"That makes five claimants," he said. "Four spoofers, at least!"

"Five, I fancy!" said Monty Lowther.

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"They're about the unlikeliest chaps in the school to have done such a thing, anyway, and the likeliest to make false claims."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Looks to me as if it wasn't a St. Jim's chap at all," he confessed. "Still, they'll have a hearing, and the spoofers will get it in the neck! This affair doesn't seem likely to bring much credit on the Lower School in the long run. It seems to be bringing the rogues into the limelight. I wonder if there'll be any more?"

But there were no more, and the Terrible Three were suffered to finish their prep in peace.

CHAPTER 9.

The Committee Sits!

CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS was waiting for Tom Merry when the Shell came out after morning lessons the following day.

Tom Merry gave him a friendly nod.

"About that bike—" began Tompkins.

Tom stared.

"You putting in a claim, too?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Was it Tompkins who rescued beauty in distress, after all?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A number of the Shell fellows stopped, and Racke & Co. burst into a roar of laughter. Certainly Clarence York Tompkins was not very convincing as a heroic rescuer.

But Clarence York shook his head.

"I'm not the giddy hero!" he said. "I'm not laying claim to being one. I only wanted to know if the bike had been claimed."

"Oh, yes!" said Tom. "Five fellows have got their names down already. The investigation's coming off this afternoon!"

"Only five?" asked Tompkins.

"My hat! Isn't that enough?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Only one can be genuine, and four must be telling crams!"

Tompkins grinned.

"You can see the genuine one here, if you like!" said Aubrey Racke.

"You!" exclaimed Tompkins.

"Certainly!"

"Well, I thought it might be you!" said Tompkins unexpectedly. "In fact, I was sure your name would be down, Racke. I'd have betted on it!"

And with that Tompkins walked away, leaving Racke rather surprised. Racke had not expected that testimony from the Fourth Former, whom he had always treated with contumely.

"Well, that's an unsolicited testimonial, if you like!" remarked Manners. "Could it have been Racke, after all?"

"He says so," remarked Talbot mildly.

"Yes; but that's only evidence that it wasn't!"

The juniors chuckled as Racke scowled and stalked away. None of the fellows in the Shell believed that Racke had done a courageous action. They knew him too well.

The investigation of the afternoon was keenly looked forward to; and early after dinner the committee repaired to the Hobby Club Room in the School House. It was a committee of ten—the Terrible Three, Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. They were to see justice done; honour to the hero of the piece, and drastic punishments to false claimants.

A swarm of juniors came in to watch the proceedings. Both Houses were well represented,

with Third and Fourth and Shell. The committee sat at the big table, and the audience stood or sat at a respectful distance. A space was left for the claimant. Racke was the first to appear. He swaggered in with a confident manner, with encouraging looks from Crooke and Scrope.

Tom Merry stood up.

"Gentlemen, you are all aware of the circumstances in which we meet this afternoon—"

"Hear, hear!"

"A brave action has been performed, presumably by a St. Jim's fellow. A little girl was rescued from danger—"

"Bravo!"

"Her father has sent a handsome bike as a souvenir of the occasion, to be presented to the—"

"Noble youth!" said Lowther.

"To the noble youth. The chap is requested to come forward and put in his claim. False claimants will be scragged."

"Hear, hear!"

"Five names have been put down," said Tom Merry. "Of course, only one can be genuine. The five claimants will please step forward." Tom Merry read out the names. "Chowle, Mellish, Piggott, Racke, and Trimble."

The five juniors stood up to general inspection. Clarence York Tompkins indulged in a chortle.

"Silence!" rapped out Blake.

And Clarence York blushed, and was silent.

The five fellows standing before the committee scowled at one another. They were all members of the black-sheep brigade, and generally on more or less pally terms. But there was division and rancour now. They were rivals for honour and glory, and for a bike worth ten pounds, and that made all the difference. The kind of friendship that existed among Racke & Co. was not warranted to stand much strain.

It was rather a matter of surprise to some fellows that the rest of the black sheep weren't claiming the reward of merit, too. Clampe, Scrope, and Crooke were just as likely candidates as the rest. But there were reasons for that. They had their parts to play in the affair.

Tom Merry looked rather grimly at the candidates. There were plenty of fellows at St. Jim's likely enough to have acted in the way described by Mr. John Brown; but the fellows who had come forward were not at all likely. It was curious that the reward of heroism was being claimed by fellows generally regarded as funky.

"I don't think there's much need to examine Trimble," said the captain of the Shell. "Trimble's done with—"

"Look here, you know!" exclaimed Trimble warmly. "You just give me a chance! I'm the man, and I've told you so. Give a chap a chance! I want that bike—I—I—mean, I did the trick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very well! Fair play's a jewel!" said Tom. "State your claim!"

"Last Thursday," said Trimble, "I was walking by the river, when I heard a scream for help. Looking round, I saw a little girl struggling in the waves—"

"The what?"

"I mean, the river. Plunging in, I seized her and bore her to the shore, to the arms of her sorrowing father," said Trimble.

The committee gazed at Trimble as if fascinated.

The bumping the day before had apparently convinced Baggy that the motor-car story would

not hold water; and he had set his mighty brain to work to invent another yarn. It did not seem to occur to the fatuous Baggy that the second story was disproved by the first. He seemed to regard it as a great improvement, and he blinked quite confidently at the committee.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry at last.

"That chap beats the band!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in wonder.

"Look here, you know it's true—"

"You told us a motor-car story yesterday," roared Blake.

"Yes; but—but you yourselves said that wasn't true," said Trimble. "I'm letting you know the facts now, the exact facts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the whole assembly.

"We've had enough of your exact facts!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Stand aside! Put him in his place, you chaps!"

Half a dozen members of the committee jumped up and seized Trimble. The fat Fourth Former roared protests, but his roaring was not heeded. Jack Blake produced a cord, and Trimble was tied by the ankle to a leg of the long table at the lower end. Evidently this was to secure him till he could be dealt with, with the rest of the false claimants.

"Look here, you know—" howled Trimble.

"Shurrup!"

"But, I say—"

"Kick him every time he opens his mouth, somebody!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"You'll be dealt with later, Trimble. Silence, please! Piggott, come forward."

Reuben Piggott of the Third Form came forward rather uneasily. Trimble's fate did not seem to encourage him. But there was a howl of encouragement from the Third. Piggy was

(Continued on the next page.)

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not popular, but the Third loyally backed up their own representative. Blake called for silence, and there was a hush for Piggott's story of heroism.

CHAPTER 10. Rival Claims!

"**YOW-OW!** Lemme go!"
"Kick that fat idiot!"
"Yarooop!"

Baggy Trimble was silenced again.

"Go on, Piggott!" said Tom Merry, kindly enough. Tom did not like the smoky little rascal of the Third, but he was there to give fair play all round.

"Go it, Piggy!" called out Wally of the Third encouragingly.

"Tell the truth, or as near as you can get, old nut!" said Reggie Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Now, Piggott!"

Piggott licked his dry lips.

"I—I haven't much to say," he began. "It—it happened like this. You know the level crossing between here and Abbotsford. I was passing it on Wednesday, last week, and—and saw a little girl playing on the metals. The express was coming along. I—I just cut in and pulled her away in time. That's all."

"Better than Trimble's yarn," commented Mulvaney minor.

Tom Merry regarded Piggott keenly.

"What time did this happen?" he asked.

"About three. I'd gone for a stroll after dinner."

"Don't think I disbelieve you, Piggott, but we've got to inquire. Any chap know anything about the Abbotsford trains?" asked Tom, looking round. "Was there an express at that place at that time?"

There was a roar from Grundy of the Shell.

"No, there jolly well wasn't!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I went to Abbotsford on Wednesday of last week, and caught the local from Wayland at a quarter to three. It was going over the level crossing at three."

Piggott jumped.

"I—I meant to say four!" he exclaimed. "I didn't notice the time exactly, but it was nearer four than three, now I come to think of it."

Then there was a howl from Wally of the Third.

"You measly little beast, you came in before four last Wednesday! I saw you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Piggott opened his lips again, but no word came forth this time. He was hopelessly exposed, and further lying did not seem much use.

Tom Merry's brow grew stern.

"Put him with Trimble!" he said.

Piggott, with crimson face, was marched down the table and tied to the leg of that article of furniture. Trimble had a companion in misfortune now. Two claims had been disposed of.

"Next man in!" said Figgins.

"Next liar wanted!" remarked Monty Lowther. And there was a chuckle.

Chowle of the Fourth came forward, scowling at the other waiting claimants.

"Go it!" said Tom Merry laconically.

"It didn't happen anything like Piggott said," began Chowle. "It was a simple affair enough.

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The little girl had fallen into Giles' pond, and I waded in and fetched her out. I didn't run much risk. Old Brown's overdone that part of it. Still, I did the trick, such as it was."

Chowle's story made a better impression. By not laying claim to heroic distinction he certainly made it sound more plausible.

"Anybody with you at the time?" asked Kerr.

"Yes—Clampe."

"Oh!"

"Bring your witness," said Tom Merry.

Clampe of the Shell came out of the ranks of



The door opened and Wally D'Arcy and Levison minor man-
announced Wally. "Take him away and bury him!"
Levi-

the audience. There was a murmur of interest now. An eye-witness was impressive.

"You back up Chowle's story?" asked Tom.

"Certainly!" said Clampe. "I saw it done. Not that it was anything to make a fuss about. The old gentleman was excited, and he seemed very grateful to Chowle. But there was nothing in it. That pond is too shallow to be dangerous."

"Hold on!" said Kerr. "Mr. Brown said in his letter that the chap hurt his hand. How did you hurt your hand in a pond, Chowle?"

"Only scratched it on a pin the kid had in her togs," said Chowle. "I just grabbed her, you know, to pull her out, and the pin stuck in my hand."

The committee consulted in low tones. Chowle

had made an impression. Kerr turned to him again.

"Why didn't you mention the matter before this, Chowle?"

"Never cared to. It wasn't anything really. It's just old Brown's gratitude that made him think I'd done a lot," said Chowle modestly.

It was a good answer enough.

"Well," said Tom Merry at last, "we must give the others a hearing, Chowle. So stand aside for a bit, will you?"

"Certainly!" said Chowle.



pushed in with Reuben Piggott between them. "Here he is!" said Monty Lowther. "He's the giddy hero!" exclaimed the son minor.

He was not put with Trimble and Piggott. The fellows, in fact, were inclined to believe his story, especially as he had a witness. But the other candidates for distinction had to be heard. Chowle and Clampe sat down beside the table to wait for the rest to be disposed of.

"Racke!" called out Tom Merry.

Aubrey Racke lounged forward.

"Go ahead, Racke!"

"Blessed if I half care to get into a wrangle with a set of liars like these chaps!" he said sulkily. "Still, as I did the trick I don't see letting them get the credit. Chowle's yarn is a lie from beginning to end!"

"Never mind that; give us your yarn," said Blake.

"Oh, all right! Last Saturday I was out with Scrope and Crooke, when a trap passed us with a runaway horse," said Racke. "There was a little girl sitting in the trap, frightened to death almost, and I saw a man running after it. He yelled to us to stop the horse. Crooke made a grab at it, but he missed, and I managed to get hold of the reins and stop him. It gave my hand a bad twist, but I stopped the horse. Nothing specially heroic about it. I might have got a kick; but I didn't, as it happened. The man came up and overwhelmed me with thanks, and drove off in the trap. That's all."

"Scrope and Crooke were with you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Come forward, you two witnesses!"

Scrope and Crooke joined Racke before the committee. They were quite prepared to give evidence. The seriousness of the proceedings was marred by a sudden cackle from Clarence York 'Tompkins, and Mulvaney minor took Clarence York by the collar and shook him.

"Shurrup, you spalpeen!" he said. "Nothing to cackle at now, is there?"

"Silence!"

"You two fellows corroborate Racke's statement?" asked Tom Merry, eyeing the two witnesses.

"Oh, yes!" said Scrope carelessly. "It's right enough."

"Certainly!" said Crooke. "It happened just as Racke says. I jolly nearly stopped the horse, but just missed. Racke happened to do it, that's all."

"When did this happen?"

"Saturday afternoon."

"And where?"

"Rylcombe Lane, about a hundred yards from the Green Man."

"What time?"

"I remember hearing three strike a few minutes afterwards."

Tom Merry looked round.

"Anybody remember being in Rylcombe Lane about three last Saturday?" he asked.

There was no reply. Whether the incident had happened or not, it was pretty clear that Racke & Co. had been on the spot at the time mentioned and had observed that no St. Jim's fellows were near. Their story could not, at all events, be disproved.

The committee consulted again, puzzled and perplexed.

Chowle's witness had impressed them; but Racke had two witnesses. And all the witnesses were eye-witnesses! Evidently there was some hard lying going on, but on which side it was the committee could not guess.

"Two witnesses are better than one, deah boys," Arthur Augustus remarked sagely.

"Much of a muchness the lot of them!" grunted Blake.

"Somebody's lying!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, there's still another claimant to be heard," said Tom Merry at last. "Racke, stand aside a little, will you, while we hear Mellish?"

"Certainly!"

Racke & Co. sat on the table with a confident air. Whether the bike was awarded to Racke or not, they felt safe enough. Trimble and Piggott, tied to the table leg, eyed them savagely. Two of the claimants had proved false, and two were doubtful. All eyes were upon the fifth as Tom Merry called on Mellish to come forward.

CHAPTER 11.

What Clarence York Knew!

"GO it, Mellish!"

Mellish glanced disdainfully at his rivals, and they gave him wolfish looks in return. Percy Mellish seemed confident enough.

"Well, I'm the chap," he said modestly. "I may as well mention that Racke asked me to be a witness for him when he fixed it up with Crooke and Scrope to tell lies for him. I refused, naturally."

"That's a lie!" growled Racke.

"It's the truth, and you know it. In your study last evening—"

"You weren't in my study last evening!"

"Look here—"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Never mind Racke now, Mellish. Let's hear your yarn."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This is how it happened," said Mellish. "It was a runaway trap, just as Racke said; only I did it, not Racke. Mr. Brown seems to have left the trap outside an inn, with the little girl in it, and the horse was frightened by something, and bolted. I was in the field when I heard it coming by, and the man after it, yelling. I plunged through the hedge and jumped in the way, throwing up my hands to stop the horse."

"Liar!" came from Racke.

"Shut up, Racke! Go on!"

"The horse rushed right down on me," continued Mellish. "I caught at the bit, but missed, but managed to grab the shafts. I held on to it, and the horse stopped. Then Mr. Brown came up. My hand was cut on something—part of the harness, I suppose—and Mr. Brown gave me a lift into the village, to go to the doctor's."

"Oh!"

This statement made something like a sensation. If Mellish had been to the school doctor's with an injured hand on the day in question, that was pretty good proof.

"What doctor?" asked Kerr.

"Dr. Short, the school doctor, of course."

"You showed him your hand?"

"Yes, and he bandaged it for me."

"When did this happen?"

"Wednesday, last week."

"You're willing for us to telephone to Dr. Short, and hear what he says?"

"Certainly."

"Did anybody notice Mellish with a bandaged hand last Wednesday?" asked Tom Merry, glancing round at the impressed audience.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a start. "I did!"

"So did I," said Jack Blake. "I remember on Thursday morning Mr. Lathom asked him in class if he'd hurt his hand."

Several other fellows added their testimony to that. It was established that Mellish had hurt his hand the previous week, at least.

Racke's face was a study now.

"Did you tell anybody about it at the time, Mellish?"

"Yes—Racke," said Mellish coolly. "Of course, that's what put it into his head to make the claim."

"It's a lie!" yelled Racke. "He never said a word about anything. I know he hurt his hand, but it was nothing to do with stopping a runaway horse. He caught it in the gate, and he told me so at the time."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

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"Not much good piling up whoppers like that, Racke," he answered. "I told you about having stopped the trap, and you said nobody would believe I'd done a plucky thing, and that I should be set down as a liar if I told anybody else. That's why I never mentioned it."

"You—you—" spluttered Racke.

"Silence!" said Tom Merry. "Was anybody with you at the time, Mellish?"

"No; I happened to be alone. And I haven't promised to sell the bike and whack out the money among witnesses, like Racke!" said Mellish sarcastically.

"Bai Jove! Has Wacke done that?"

"Yes, he has!"

"It's a lie!" shouted Crooke.

Tom Merry scratched his curly head perplexedly. Two out of the five claimants had been disposed of easily enough, but the other three had all made out good cases. The witnesses were not of very good character, certainly; still, a witness was a witness. Mellish had no witnesses, but the fact that he certainly had injured his hand the previous week was good evidence. Possibly, of course, the fact that he had injured his hand in the gate had put into his head the idea of making the claim. Still, he had a good case.

"John Brown's set us a pretty good job," remarked Figgins, rubbing his nose. "Two of them are lying right enough. But which?"

"Echo answahs which!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Put it to the vote!" suggested Herries.

Tom Merry shook his head. It was a matter that had to be decided, and it was no use voting on it. The bike had to be awarded to the genuine claimant.

The committee consulted anxiously, but a decision was hard to reach. Percy Mellish had quite a vaunting look while he waited. He seemed to be feeling sure of success.

Racke, Crooke, Scrope, Chowle, and Clampe were scowling. As for Trimble and Piggott, they were hopeless. Their lying had been clumsier than that of the other candidates, and they were done for.

There was a buzz of voices in the crowded room. Discussion was going on among all the juniors. And all of them admitted that it was a puzzle. The bike could have been awarded to one claimant, but there were three, whose claims seemed to be as good as one another.

"Blessed if I know how it can be decided!" said Tom Merry. "If any fellow here has any suggestion to make, the committee would be glad to hear it."

"I'm your man!"

That reply came from Clarence York Tompkins. "Oh, dhry up, ye gossoon!" said Mulvaney minor.

"Keep that idiot quiet!" said somebody.

Tompkins sniffed.

"I've got something to say," he shouted, "and I'm jolly well going to say it, too!"

And Tompkins of the Fourth marched forward determinedly.

His face was red, but his manner was resolute as he came up to the table. He was regarded rather impatiently by the committee. Nobody hoped to hear a suggestion of any value from the duffer of the School House.

"Tompkins, deah boy, wun away and play," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kindly.

"I've got something to say!" answered

Tompkins. "I can let in some light on this matter!"

"You can?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes, I can!" said Tompkins defiantly.

"Well, go ahead and do it, then, old scout," said the captain of the Shell good-naturedly. "Blessed if I know what to make of it! What do you know about the matter, anyway?"

"I know this much—and can prove it—that all these rotters are lying, every one of them!" said Tompkins.

"I shouldn't be surprised. But I don't see how you can know anything about it."

"Well, I do. I know all about Brown, and about what happened, and—and everything," said Tompkins.

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, if you know everything, you may as well tell us," said Tom. "Pile in, and cut it short, kid!"

Tompkins was the centre of attraction now. He was not quite accustomed to being the centre of attraction, and the swarm of eyes turned upon him, made him red and nervous; but he was very determined.

"Don't be afraid, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Go ahead! What can you pprove?"

Tompkins raised a dramatic forefinger and pointed to Racke & Co.

"I can prove that every one of that gang is a liar and an attempted swindler!" he said. "Not one of them ever saw Mr. Brown's little girl, or saved her from injury!"

"How do you know?" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently.

"Because there isn't such a person as Mr. John Brown—"

"What?"

"And there isn't such a person as his little girl—"

"Eh?"

"And I can prove it!"

CHAPTER 12.

Tompkins' Triumph!

CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS certainly held the limelight now.

Every eye was glued upon him.

His astounding statement had taken away the breath of every fellow present, including the many claimants.

Tom Merry found his voice at last.

"Are you potty?" he demanded.

"I can prove it!" said Tompkins doggedly.

"Prove that there isn't a John Brown?" demanded Lowther.

"Yes."

"You know he sent us a letter, and a notice to be put in the 'Weekly'—"

"He didn't!"

"Then who did?" roared Blake

"I did!"

"You?"

There was a howl from the whole committee. It was echoed by the crowd of juniors, in blank amazement.

"Bai Jove! The poor chap's wandewin' in his mind!" said D'Arcy.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Blake.

"I think everybody knows what an idiot Tompkins is!" said Racke. "What are you wasting your time on him for?"

"Bedad, come away and be quiet, Tompkins, darling!" called out Mulvaney minor.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We'll go into this. You say you sent us that letter and the notice for the 'Weekly,' Tompkins?"

(Continued on the next page)

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"Yes, I did!"

"How, and why?"

Tompkins pointed to Racke & Co. again.

"Those cads ragged my study—they're always ragging and chipping me," he said. "I told you, Tom Merry, that I was going to show them up in their true colours!"

Tom started.

"My hat! I remember you talked some piffle," he said.

"I thought it out," continued Clarence York Tompkins, amid a breathless silence now. "I meant to show them up before all the fellows for the liars and cheats and swindlers they are. I knew that if there was something valuable to be had, and it seemed safe to claim it, they would be on. I worked it out. I made up Brown's letter in my study, and took it down to Rylcombe to get it typed. I couldn't risk writing the lot of it, in case my fist should come out. I practised a jolly long time writing 'John Brown' to get it unlike my fist."

"Oh, begorra!" murmured Mulvaney minor.

"When the letter was ready, I biked away to a distance to post it to you, Tom Merry," went on Tompkins. "Mulvaney knows my uncle had sent me the money for a new bike. I bought my bike, and had it sent here to you. That was the bait," explained Tompkins. "My bike had to be delivered here, anyway, and I made use of it to draw those rotters on and make them give themselves away."

The committee gazed at Tompkins in wonder.

Was this duffer of the Fourth—the butt of the School House—this deep and almost Machiavellian plotter?

The St. Jim's fellows were learning something about Clarence York Tompkins.

"I knew you'd put that notice in the 'Weekly' as soon as the bike came along, and prove that it was a genuine bisney," said Tompkins, grinning a little. "I knew that when these cads saw the notice they'd wait a bit to see if the right chap came forward, and then, if it seemed safe, they'd scheme to annex that bike. You see, I knew them!"

"Bai Jove!"

Racke & Co were looking sickly now.

Chowle made a movement towards the door, but Cardew headed him off. There was to be no escape for the claimants.

"Go on, Tompkins," said Tom Merry quietly.

"It worked out just as I expected," said Tompkins coolly. "Nobody made a claim for the bike, so it was supposed that John Brown was mistaken about the chap being a St. Jim's chap. Then all these rotters saw their chance to bag a bike worth ten pounds. I knew they would."

"My hat!"

"How they'd work it I didn't know," said Tompkins. "I rather thought Racke would get the whole gang to bear false witness for him, or something of the kind. I knew they'd be after the prize, anyway, either as rivals for it, or by arrapping to whack out the plunder. Every sneaking cad in the place was sure to show himself up in his true colours when it looked as if ten quid was to be had by telling a few lies!"

"Old Machiavelli come to life again!" said Monty Lowther in wonder. "Can this really be Tompkins? Are we dreaming?"

"Bai Jove, it weally seems like it!"

Tompkins grinned.

"If you want proof, I'll give it to you," he

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said. "I've got the bill from the man who typed the letter for me. I've got the receipt from the bicycle-shop, with the number of the bike specially put in. That bike's my new bike, and I'm not giving it to anybody. Thank you for minding it for me for a day or two, Tom Merry."

"Oh, begorra!" gasped Mulvaney minor.

Tom Merry's expression was very peculiar. He glanced at the receipts Clarence York displayed, but it was not necessary. It was clear enough to whom the handsome new bike belonged.

"Does it occur to you that you've spoofed us, as well as these cads, and got us to put a spoof notice in the 'Weekly'?" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Serve you jolly well right, too!" retorted Tompkins.

"What?"

"If you think a chap's a silly duffer, you can't be surprised if he pulls your leg and proves that he isn't," said Clarence York. "You asked for it, and you've got it, and serve you right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The committee looked at the ineffable Tompkins as if they would eat him. The whole proceedings were unutterably ridiculous, seen in the sober light of the facts. Tom Merry & Co. had been utterly spoofed, coolly used by the amazing Tompkins to pay off his old score against Racke & Co. The staff of the "Weekly" had been hopelessly hoaxed, and Racke & Co. had been shown up, in the full light of day, as the rogues and rascals they were. Truly it was a triumph for Clarence York Tompkins!

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus at last. "That cheeky young wottah ought to be wagged! He has been foolin' the whole of the Lowah School!"

"Serve 'em right!" said Tompkins independently.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, he's pulled our leg," he said. "Perhaps it does serve us right, too. Tompkins isn't quite the duffer he's been thought. He ought to be lynched, but I think we'll let him off. But as for these dingy cads—"

"I—I say, it—it was really a—a—a joke—" mumbled Mellish.

"Shut up, you worm! Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "there are five awful liars here, and three other awful liars who have borne false witness for them. I call upon all present to make them understand what we think of them!"

Tom Merry did not need to call twice.

Like a wave the indignant juniors swamped the black sheep of St. Jim's; and the ragging that followed was a record.

When Racke & Co. escaped from the Hobby Club Room at last, they were feeling that life was not worth living.

And worse, perhaps, than the ragging itself, was the utter scorn and contempt of the whole Lower School. For a long time after that crushing exposure, Racke & Co. hardly dared show their faces in public.

Clarence York Tompkins was an object of great interest to his schoolfellows for some time afterwards.

It was admitted on all hands that Clarence York was not the duffer he looked.

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The Last Day at School!

“CHEERIO, Franky!” Bob Lawless clapped Frank Richards on the shoulder as he spoke, riding close to him on the trail through the timber, and Frank nearly pitched on to his horse's mane.

The chums of Cedar Creek were on their way to school in the bright, sunny morning, and Frank Richards had sunk into a deep reverie. That hearty clap on the shoulder effectually roused him from it.

“Oh!” he ejaculated.

Bob laughed.

“Twenty-five cents for them, old chap!” he said.

“Eh—for what?”

“Your thoughts, of course. They must be worth it, to judge by the way you've been scowling for the last ten minutes.”

“Have I been scowling?” asked Frank mildly.

“Well, perhaps you'd call it a thoughtful frown,” grinned Bob. “I know you've been staring at your gee-gee's ears, with a face tied up in a knot. You don't seem to notice what a gorgeous morning it is. Can't you smell the scent from the pinewoods?”

“Ye-es. But I was thinking of old Beau,” said Frank.

Bob's cheery face became serious at once.

“Well, I've been thinking about him, too,” he said. “It's pretty rotter old Beau having to clear off, Franky! I guess I shall miss the Cherub. We began our acquaintance by punching each other's noses, but—”

“I suppose it's better for him to go, Bob,” said Frank. “His father's right, I suppose. But we shall miss him. He will miss us, too.”

“I guess so. Can't be helped,” said Bob. “There's a few days left yet.”

“Beau doesn't want to leave Cedar Creek,” said Frank, “though he's going to what would be called a much finer sort of life.”

“Fancy the Cherub being the nephew of an English earl!” said Bob. “Some fellows would

It comes hard to Vere Beauclerc to say good-bye to Cedar Creek, but it's harder still to part from his father. For Vere is haunted by a fear for his wastrel father's safety—a fear that proves well-founded.

The SHADOW of FEAR!

by Martin Clifford.

swank about that. It doesn't count for anything out here, but I suppose in the Old Country it means an awful lot. The Cherub will grow into a terrific dude, and he will wonder that he ever managed to put up with Cedar Creek and the backwoods.”

Frank Richards shook his head.

“You don't think that, Bob. Hallo! Here he is!”

Vere Beauclerc, on his handsome black horse, was waiting at the fork of the trail. He smiled faintly as the chums joined him, and they rode on together. It was evident that the coming parting did not make him happy, though he was little accustomed to betraying his feelings.

Wealth and distinction awaited him in England; but it meant a break with all he had known, and, above all, with his loyal chums, and with his father, the remittance man of Cedar Creek.

Lascelles Beauclerc, the wastrel of the family, was not wanted at home. His brother was willing to provide for Vere, but it was upon the understanding that the wastrel remained where he was. Vere felt the slight to his father, and he had passionately refused to accept his uncle's offer, but Mr. Beauclerc had accepted it for him.

The die was cast now, and in a couple of days more Vere Beauclerc was to take the post-wagon to Kamloops, the nearest railhead town, to start on his long journey.

“Looking forward to it, Cherub?” asked Bob Lawless, breaking a long and grim silence, only broken hitherto by the tattoo of hoofs on the hard trail.

Beauclerc started.

“To what? Going home, do you mean? No.”

“Not to the baronial halls?” asked Bob, with a smile.

Beauclerc smiled, too, but very faintly.

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"I'd rather stay here," he said. "I was brought up here. this is my home. And—and I don't want to leave my father I—I can't help thinking—"

He broke off.

"Your pater's all right?" asked Frank.

"Oh, yes! Better in health, I think, than he has been for a long time," said Vere. "But—but there's something I don't quite understand about him. I know it will be a blow to him when I go, but he thinks it his duty to send me. But—but he will miss me; he will be all alone at the shack, and—and—"

He broke off again, his brow clouding. His chums were silent. All three of them felt keenly the shadow of the coming change. Bob and Frank, too, could not help wondering that the remittance man, the hopeless wastrel, had found firmness enough to do his duty in that respect, for they could guess what a loss his son's departure would be to him. Vere was all he had.

Of late the waster had seemed to change his ways. He had not been seen at the camp saloons or in the poker parties at Gunten's store in Thompson. The once-familiar sight of the remittance man zigzagging home in the small hours of the morning had not been seen for some time past. It was as if the unfortunate waster wished his son to take away with him the best recollection possible of his father.

But after Vere was gone would the change last? The boy would have been glad to think so, but he was doubtful. When Lascelles Beauclerc was left quite alone, was it not only too likely that he would sink deeper than ever into the mire he had lately emerged from? That thought haunted Vere, and embittered the parting, shadowing whatever anticipations he might have had of his new life.

With a clatter of hoofs, the three chums rode up to the lumber school. They were early for lessons, and a good many of the Cedar Creek fellows gathered round them in the playground. The news about Beauclerc was known at the lumber school, and it excited a great deal of interest there.

At one time Beauclerc had not been popular in the school. The cheery, hearty young Canadians hardly understood his quiet reserve, and were inclined to attribute it to snobbishness on account of his great connections at home. They understood him better now, and Beauclerc was very well liked.

"So you're going home, Beauclerc?" said Chunky Todgers. "Gunten says you've got a place in the post-wagon for Wednesday."

Beauclerc laughed.

"Yes, Chunky."

"I say, is your uncle really a nobleman?" asked Chunky inquisitively.

"Yes."

"What's his title?" asked Eben Hacke.

"Lord St. Austell."

"My, that sounds tip-top!" said Hacke admiringly. "I suppose you're feeling simply excited at going?"

"Not at all," said Beauclerc quietly. "I'd rather stay here if I had my choice."

"Well, carry me home to die!" ejaculated Eben Hacke. "Look here, I guess I'll do a trade with you, if you like. Let me go instead of you. I dare say your uncle will be just as pleased—more, very likely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're all sorry you're going, Beauclerc!" said Tom Lawrence.

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"Me solly, too!" said little Yen Chin. "Me miss nicey old Chelub! Pool little Chinese cly!"

"We'll come and see you off in the wagon if Miss Meadows will let us off," said Dick Dawson.

"And I've got a box of maple sugar for you to take with you," said Chunky Todgers. "I don't believe you can get it in England."

"You've got it, Chunky?" asked Bob Lawless.

"Yep."

"Then I'll bet you ten to one that it doesn't last till Cherub goes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bell rang, and Cedar Creek went in to lessons.

Father and Son!

IT was Beauclerc's last day at Cedar Creek. The next day was to be spent in the final preparations for his journey.

After lessons he walked about the school grounds with his chums, taking his last look at Cedar Creek. His face was clouded. He was surprised himself to find now attached he had grown to the school in the backwoods.

When the chums left at last, Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey bade a kind farewell to Beauclerc, and gave him their good wishes.

In the setting sun the three chums rode on the homeward trail. All three were silent. At the fork of the trail they halted.

"We shall see you to-morrow, Beau," said Frank.

"For the last time," said Beauclerc.

"No fear!" said Bob. "We're going to see you off on Wednesday morning when the wagon comes. I believe some of the fellows are coming, too."

"It's jolly good of them," said Beauclerc. "I—I never thought anybody at the school would care if I went, excepting you fellows, of course."

Frank and Bob trotted onwards towards the ranch, and Beauclerc followed the branch trail towards Cedar Camp. The black horse proceeded at a walk in the gathering dusk, Vere remaining plunged in thought. He came in sight of the shack, and saw his father at work in the field close by the little home.

Lascelles Beauclerc was digging industriously, and Vere watched him curiously as he rode on. In former days he had not often seen his father work. Sometimes the remittance man had turned to in a desultory way, but always with grumbling and repining. His thoughts were always with his old life, and the pleasure of labour was unknown to him.

But now, for the first time in Vere's remembrance, a quiet contentment seemed to have come to the remittance man. The clearing round the shack was growing more trim than it had ever looked before though the boy's labour had always kept it in something like order.

Lascelles Beauclerc looked up, and stood leaning on his spade as he heard the clatter of hoofs.

Vere jumped down. His father gave him a kind word of greeting, and then, leaving the spade jammed in the earth, went into the shack. Vere put up his horse in the shed and then followed him in.

Since the decision that Vere was to go, he had received nothing but kindness from his father, and it went strangely to the boy's heart.

They sat down to the evening meal. Vere could eat little. His heart was heavy, and his attempt to keep up a cheerful appearance was not very successful. After the meal Lascelles Beauclerc

lighted his pipe. Father and son sat silent for a long time. It was Vere who broke the silence.

"Father."

"Yes, lad?"

"I—I don't want to oppose your wishes," faltered Vere. "but—but if you would let me stay—"

"That is all settled, Vere."

"I—I know; but—"

"I suppose you feel it a little, parting from what you have been accustomed to, my boy," said Mr. Beauclerc. "But you can trust your father's judgment that it is for the best."

"I do, father. But—"

"You will miss Richards and Lawless at first, but you will make other friends in England, Vere."

"I wasn't thinking of that just then. But—"

"But what?"

"You'll miss me, dad?"

"Naturally."

"But—but do you want to be left alone, father?"

A strange smile flickered over the remittance man's face for a moment. Vere hardly knew why, but it gave him a vague alarm.

Mr. Beauclerc smoked in silence for some minutes. He spoke at last.

"Now that you are going to leave me, Vere, I will speak plainly. Your uncle is quite right in thinking that you will be better away from me. What am I? A waster, a loafer, a man at whom the finger of scorn is pointed, even in this rough country."

"Father!"

"I am not of their kind," said the remittance man, shrugging his shoulders. "They are right, Vere. In their place I should feel the same contempt for a remittance man that these Canadians feel. I am no father for a lad like you, Vere. What are you going to learn from me? To live an idle life, and to live as a pensioner on the bounty of a relation. If your character had not been strong you would be ruined by such an example before your eyes. It will do you no good to remain with your father, Vere. I have thought of that very much lately."

"Father!" murmured the boy.

"You are going to a new life—a life suitable for one of your name and family," went on the remittance man. "You will feel a wrench at first, but that will pass. You will have every chance, and you will make more of your life than I could make of mine. You are differently built. I was doomed from the beginning—a bad training, early self-indulgence. So long as my father lived I was denied nothing, and I denied myself nothing, and the end of it you see."

He made a restless movement.

"I've been a waster all my life, Vere. I've fought against it sometimes—never for long, and never effectually. I have to drag it out to the end. Drink and gambling have been my bane, but I cannot give them up."

"But—"

"As I have lived I must live. I am too old to change. Vere, if you remained with me you would see me sinking lower and lower."

"Don't talk like that, father!" muttered the boy miserably.

"This is the truth, Vere. You are young now, and you do not fully understand. And you are an affectionate son, and you make allowances that others will not make. But as you grow older you will grow to despise your father."

"Never!"

"Even now, Vere, you have felt the stigma of my reputation," said the remittance man coldly. "You have never told me so, but I am well aware that even at the backwoods school you have had to listen to sneers and hints on the subject of the remittance man the loafer—"

Vere Beauclerc cringed.

"All that must end," said Mr. Beauclerc. "Now it is ending, Vere."

"But—but father, since the flood you—you have been different!" faltered Vere timidly. "Why not—"

"The leopard cannot change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin," said the remittance man moodily. "I have made an effort for your sake, Vere, but that effort will not last."

"Then—then after I'm gone—"

"There is no need to speak of that, my boy. The best thing you can do when you get to the Old Country is to forget that you ever had a father."

"You know that couldn't be, father. But—but I will not go!" exclaimed Vere. "If it is as you say, you need me, and I shall stay."

The remittance man rose to his feet.

"No more of that, Vere. You must go; that is settled and irrevocable. And I have my own plans after you are gone, and your presence here would seriously interfere with them."

Vere compressed his lips, bitterly wounded.

"Then you do not want me, father?"

"No," said the remittance man steadily. "My plans could not be carried out if you remained, and therefore you must go."

"I shall not speak of it again, father," said the boy bitterly.

He went to his room with a bitter heart. His father did not want him; that was the beginning and the end of it. What plans were they which could not be carried out in his presence at the shack? Well he knew that once his father's shady associates had nearly succeeded in drawing him into crime. Was it that when his son was gone Lascelles Beauclerc would throw aside the last restraint that had hitherto held him in check?

Vere Beauclerc slept little that night.

The Parting!

"HALLO, Cherub!"

There was a clatter of hoofs outside the shack in the sunny morning, and Bob Lawless shouted cheerily as he rode up.

Beauclerc came out to meet his chums. The remittance man was not to be seen.

"We've come to help you, Beau," said Frank Richards.

"My packing's done," said Beauclerc. "There wasn't much of it—only a bag." He smiled faintly. "If you fellows like, I'd rather have a ride round to-day—a last look round the valley."

"Jolly good idea!" said Bob Lawless. "We'll make a day of it, and have a ripping ride for the last time."

Beauclerc brought out his horse, and the three schoolboys rode away together. Frank and Bob had leave from school that day.

"My father's gone out," Vere explained, perhaps feeling that some explanation was required why his father did not want him at home on his last day in the section. "He will be out all day on business."

"Business" with the remittance man generally meant poker or euchre at the Red Dog or Gunten's store, but the chums learned later in the day that

this time Mr Beauclerc's business was of a different sort

The chums enjoyed their last ride in the valley, though their hearts were not light. The sun was sinking when they turned their horses homeward at last

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless left Beauclerc at the shack, promising to be there again in time to meet the post-wagon in the morning, and rode away to the ranch

On the dusky trail they fell in with Billy Cook, the foreman, jogging homeward from Cedar Camp, with purchases slung on both sides of his horse. The ranchman glanced round at the school-boys trotted up and joined him on the trail

"Any news from the camp, Billy?" Bob Lawless inquired

Billy Cook grinned.

"Yep! Old Man Beauclerc has been opening their eyes."

"Not painting the town red again, surely?" exclaimed Bob.

"Nix! He's been paying his debts."

"Oh!"

"The boys are all talking about it," said the ranchman—"you bet your sweet life! Old Man Beauclerc has been round the town paying his bills! Must have used up his last remittance to the last Continental red cent, if you ask me. Not only in Cedar Camp; over in Thompson, too!" The ranchman chuckled. "I calculate he must have taken a hull gripsack full of receipts home with him to the shack!"

"Oh!" said Frank Richards, quite taken aback by that odd information.

"The boys say Old Man Beauclerc is a reformed character," grinned Billy Cook. "He declined to take a hand in a game at the Red Dog. He stood out when it was drinks all round at the Continental. I guess it's time the skies were falling after that!"

"That's all good news," said Bob

"Too good," said the ranchman sagely. "I've seed these hyer reforms before; they break out worse after. Slow and sure is the thing, my sonnies. You don't go the whole hog at one jump. Next week I reckon Old Man Beauclerc will be keeping it up with the boys from Oshkosh—I reckon!"

Frank Richards could not help feeling that the ranchman was probably right, though he hoped for the best

The next morning the chums mounted their ponies early to ride to the shack. The post-wagon from Thompson passed on the trail at an early hour, and Vere Beauclerc was to board it near his home. The post trail ran a quarter of a mile from the shack, and at the nearest point Vere Beauclerc was waiting with his father when the chums rode up

Mr Beauclerc looked unusually trim and well dressed. Vere was pale and quiet. His bag lay at his feet in the grass.

Bob and Frank dismounted and hitched their horses to a tree. Mr. Beauclerc was going with his son on the post-wagon to Kamloops, but here the boy was to say farewell to his friends.

The remittance man nodded civilly to the boys. Beauclerc smiled at them a little tremulously.

"You're early," he said.

"The early bird catches the worm," said Bob. "I don't feel very spry this morning, though, somehow"

"You'll write when you get home, Beau?" said Frank.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,619.

"I'll drop you a line from Quebec," said Beauclerc. "I'm staying one day there, it seems. And—and I'll write as soon as I land in England. I—I wish you fellows were coming with me!"

"Don't I, just!" said Frank.

"P'r'aps we'll run over and see you in the summer holidays, Cherub," said Bob. "I guess I'll try to work it with the popper."

Beauclerc's face brightened

"You might," he said.

"I guess it won't feel the same place without you, Cherub," said Bob. "Just to think that we'll never meet you again at the fork of the trail going to school—"

Bob's hearty voice broke off abruptly.

"I was thinking of that," said Beauclerc in a low voice.

"The post-wagon is coming," said Mr. Beauclerc.

There was a clatter of hoofs and a rumble of wheels on the rough trail. The post-wagon from Thompson, drawn by three horses, clattered up, and stopped as the driver spotted the passengers standing beside the trail.

But behind the wagon there was a loud clatter of more hoofs, and a bunch of boyish riders came in sight. Chunky Todgers, Eben Hacke, Tom Lawrence, Dick Dawson, and Harold Hopkins, and two or three more Cedar Creek fellows rode up and jumped from their horses.

"I guess we were bound to see you off, Cherub," grinned Hacke.

"Thank you—thank you, all!" said Beauclerc in a deeply moved voice. He was strangely touched by that last act of attention from his school-fellows

"Sorry you're goin', and I 'ope you'll 'ave a good time!" said Hopkins. "And I tell you what, Cherub—if you ever find yourself down Old Kent Road way, you give my uncle a look in. He keeps a fried-fish shop—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Eben Hacke.

"Look 'ere, 'Acke—" began the Cockney schoolboy warmly.

"I'll remember, Hopkins," said Beauclerc, with a smile. "Hallo, Chunky!"

Chunky Todgers was nudging his arm. Chunky's fat face wore a woebegone expression.

"I—I say, Beauclerc—" he murmured.

"Yes, kid?"

"You remember I—I was bringing you a bag of maple sugar to take home?"

Beauclerc had, as a matter of fact, forgotten that important circumstance, but he nodded, with a smile

"It was awfully kind of you, Chunky!"

"I—I put it on my hoss when I started this morning—"

"Yes."

"I—I tasted it as I came along," said Chunky. "The—the air's so fresh in the morning it makes you awfully hungry. It was jolly good, and—and—"

Beauclerc laughed; he could guess what was coming

"And—and somehow it all went!" said Chunky dolorously. "There—there isn't any left!"

"Never mind, old chap. I'll take the will for the deed," said Beauclerc.

"But—but I say, you know, I'm going to send you some by post!" said Chunky.

"I guess you'd better get some other galoot to take it to the post office, then!" said Bob Lawless.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All aboard, gents!" sang out the driver, cracking his whip.



"Good-bye, Beau, old chap! Good-bye, Cherub!" As the wagon rumbled down the trail the Cedar Creek fellows waved their hats after it. Beauclerc, sitting in the wagon, waved back, and looked for the last time on the scene he was leaving for ever.

Mr. Beauclerc and the bag were already in the wagon. Vere stepped in, and there was a last handshaking all round. Frank Richards and Bob Lawless gripped their chum's hand in turn at last, and the wagon started.

"Good-bye, Beau, old chap!"

"Good-bye, Cherub!"

The wagon rumbled down the trail. The Cedar Creek fellows waved their hats after it, and Beauclerc waved back till it was out of sight in a dip of the prairie.

The waving group disappeared from the sight of the boy in the wagon. He sat with a pale and clouded face. His father did not speak.

The horses clattered on, to the accompaniment of a cracking whip. Vere Beauclerc sat in silence, looking back from the rolling wagon, back at the scene he was leaving for ever.

What was his father's intention after he was gone? What were the "plans" he had spoken of?

In the new life of sobriety and self-restraint during the past few weeks Lascelles Beauclerc was undoubtedly looking upon things in a different light. A change had taken place in him which Vere could not understand. He had shown that he felt the shame of his degradation, yet in the same breath he had said that he could not mend his ways—that the effort was beyond him. Was he content to sink back into what he had been—and worse? The boy could not think so. And yet what else did his father's words mean? What was the hidden thought at the back of the remittance man's mind?

Vere had spoken several times of meeting again—perhaps in England, perhaps in Canada. His father had always brushed the thought aside. It was clear—bitterly clear to the boy—that his father did not expect to see him again in this life. But why?

Once or twice Vere had caught an unguarded expression on Mr. Beauclerc's face, a look of deep sadness that wrung his very heart. In spite of what the man had said, the parting with his son was bitter to him. Vere was assured of it. His son was all he had, and he was losing him. But, then, why did he not let the boy stay when he was willing, eager to stay? Vere was hopelessly perplexed.

The train came at last. Mr. Beauclerc saw his son into the train.

"Good-bye, my boy!" he said in a faltering voice. "Think as kindly of your father as you can in the years to come! I have not been a good

The Shadow of Fear!

"KAMLOOPS!"

Little had been said during the long drive. The post-wagon drove at last into the railway town, and Mr. Beauclerc and his son descended.

There were two hours to wait at the station, and a meal was taken, and then father and son waited for the train. They paced the platform for some time in silence.

Vere glanced occasionally at his father's grave face. There was a deep unrest in his heart. He could not understand his father now. For days past there had been something in the remittance man's manner that perplexed and alarmed him.

father to you, but I've always cared for you, my boy! Good-bye—good-bye!"

"Oh, father," said Vere, his voice choking, "even now it's not too late! Let me come home with you in the wagon!"

Mr. Beauclerc smiled.

"Good-bye, Vere!"

He stepped from the train. His tall figure stood motionless, watching, as the great train moved out, and Vere waved his hand and his father waved back. Then he vanished in the dark.

Beauclerc sank back in his seat. The train thundered on. Vere's mind was full of troubled thoughts. When would he see his father again? What did his strange looks and words mean? Was it possible—his very heart seemed to chill at the thought—that death might prevent a meeting?

His father was not old, but his life had told upon him. Late hours and drink and unhealthy excitement would undermine the strongest constitution in the long run, and his father had never been strong. Was it possible that Lascelles Beauclerc had felt a forewarning of such an end, and so had sent his son away to a new home and a new protector?

Vere started up in his seat, hardly able to repress a cry of fear and misery, as that black thought came to him. Was it possible? Was he leaving his father not only to solitude, but to die in solitude? In his excited, feverish state of mind the terrible thought grew upon him, till it seemed to the boy that it was a marvel he had not guessed it before. That and that alone could account for all his father had said, and for what Vere had read in the face that had so puzzled him.

The train was roaring down an incline, with a squeaking of brakes. There was a buzz of talk in the boy's ears, but he hardly realised that he was not alone. The train was speeding on. Before long it would be climbing the slopes of the Rocky Mountains. That giant barrier would rise between him and his father—his father, whom he would never see again with his living eyes.

It was too much. Beauclerc started to his feet. The conductor was passing along the aisle, and Beauclerc caught him by the arm.

"When's the next stop?"

"Ten minutes, sonny," said the big Canadian, glancing curiously at the boy's white face. "No time to get down, though—only a stop for water."

"Thank you!"

Beauclerc gathered up his bag mechanically. His mind was made up. He had not thought it out. His mind at that moment was incapable of consecutive thought. He was acting upon instinct—an instinct there was no denying. His father might be angry at his return; he would be angry. But he was going back—he must go back.

The great train came to a stop. Without giving himself time for hesitation, Vere Beauclerc jumped out. Lights twinkled in the darkness about him. He stumbled on.

"All aboard!" he heard a call in the distance, then the snorting of the moving engine.

He stood with beating heart, and watched the lights disappear along the line. The train was gone! It was too late for repentance now, if he had repented. But there was no change in his thoughts. His only thought was to get to his father. He stumbled along in the dimness.

"Hallo! Lost yourself, sonny?"

A big man in a stetson hat, with an oil-can in his hand, looked down on him. Vere stopped.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,619.

"Can I get a horse here?" he asked.

"I guess you can, if you've got the durocks," said the big man, staring at him. "Lost your train?"

"I left the train. I've got to get back home!" stammered Beauclerc.

"And where may your home happen to be, sonny?"

"Up the Thompson River."

"I guess you can't get there to-night, then. Perhaps I could manage a snake-down for you in the station-house."

"I must get home. If you will let me leave my bag here till I can send for it, and tell me where I can get a horse—"

"I guess—"

"I'm afraid my father's ill—very ill," muttered Beauclerc. "I've got to go."

"Oh, that alters the case!" said the station-master kindly. "You come along with me and I'll see you through."

No time was lost. Mr. Beauclerc had given his son ample money for the journey, and there was no difficulty in hiring a horse in the straggling village round the railway sheds. In a matter of an hour, Vere Beauclerc was in the saddle, riding away into the darkness, and the lights of the railway vanished behind him.

Saved From Himself!

CLATTER, clatter!

Incessantly the hoofs beat in the silence of the night. The moon came up over the Rockies at last, and found Vere Beauclerc still riding tirelessly. Through the long, dark night he rode, unconscious of fatigue. He did not know how many miles he had covered.

But the horse showed fatigue at last, and his pace slackened.

Where was his father now? The post-wagon home from Kamloops would be all night on the trail, jogging along with its sleepy driver. It would be long past midnight when it drove into Thompson—perhaps near to dawn. Mr. Beauclerc would be dropped at the shack—perhaps at three in the morning. It was barely three now. He could tell that by the stars. He would reach home perhaps an hour later than his father—not more than that. What would the remittance man say when he knocked at the cabin in the dead of night? He would be angry. What did it matter?

A terrible fear was growing in the boy's heart—a fear that he dared not put into words. The fearful suspicion that had forced itself into his mind was too black and bitter to think upon clearly. But he longed to be at the cabin, to see his father was safe—safe!

Over the pine forests sailed the full round moon. He rode on and on, as fast as the slackening horse could stride. Would he never reach the shack? He was in familiar surroundings at last. He caught a glimpse in the far distance of the Lawless Ranch, where his chums were sleeping peacefully, all unconscious of his wild night ride. He glanced at it for a moment, as the thought of Frank and Bob crossed his mind, and rode on.

His horse was showing signs of distress now, though the boy himself felt no fatigue. Long, long hours had passed since he had ridden from the railroad. Even at that feverish moment it went to his heart to over-drive the animal he rode, but he could not spare it.

His father. He could only think of his father and the terrible dread in his heart.

His steed stumbled at last and whinnied piteously. Beauclerc slid from the saddle. He patted the horse's neck gently kindly, and threw the rein over a low branch.

On foot he ran on along the creek till the trail left it, and then on to the shack. In the glimmering moonlight his old home came into sight—the backwoods home he had thought never to see again. No light was burning.

Breathlessly, beginning to feel at last the weariness of his long effort, the boy ran up to the shack. It was dark within, but the door opened to his touch. Parting, he stepped into the shack. "Father!" he called softly.

There was no reply. He threw open the door wide, and the moonlight streamed in. The bunk in the corner was empty; the door of the inner room was open, and that room was empty also. Where was his father?

In Cedar Camp, perhaps, at the Red Dog, or playing poker with the sports at Thompson. The hour was too late even for that.

"Father!" There was a note of terror in the boy's voice when he called again. It was no longer a fear that oppressed him; it was a terrible certainty.

He ran blindly from the shack and looked towards the creek. Silver in the moonlight, black under the trees, the creek ran, murmuring through the night. The bark canoe was gone from its place. His father had taken the canoe—at that hour! Why?

"Father! Father!"

The words were strangled in his throat. He stood panting on the bank, searching the creek with his eyes. A shadow moved under the overhanging trees.

Splash!

It came faintly to his ears across the water. From the shadows a canoe floated into sight—empty!

"Father!" shrieked Beauclerc.

He plunged madly into the water. His face was like marble, his eyes wild; but he swam with strong strokes towards the circling bubbles in the shadows.

His groping hand caught at something that floated. With feverish, almost mad energy, he dragged his burden shoreward, and Lascelles Beauclerc, white and almost unconscious, was laid in the long grass, the moon glimmering on his face, his son kneeling by his side.

"Father! Father!"

The remittance man's eyes opened, fixing strangely upon his son. It was his son's hand that had dragged him back from the valley of the shadow of death—from the last crime of a mispent life.

"Vere!" The man's voice was hoarse and broken. "I am dreaming! Have I gone mad? My son!"

"Father!"

The remittance man dragged himself to a sitting posture, leaning weakly against a gnarled trunk. Understanding came to the man at last.

"Vere, what are you doing here?" he muttered huskily.

"I—I came back!"

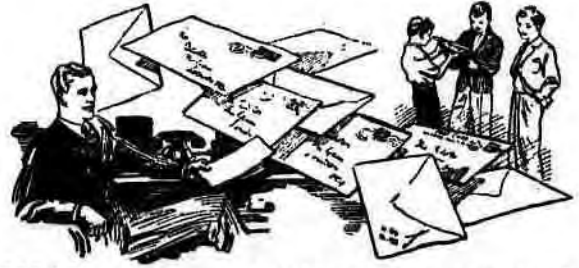
"How did you know?"

Vere groaned

"I did not know, unless it was Providence that warned me. I only feared—" His voice broke. "Oh, father, how could you do it?"

A spasm crossed the wretched man's face. The

(Continued on page 36.)



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

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

HALLO, CHUMS!—In a few weeks' time now the GEM will reach its thirty-second birthday, which, readers will admit, says more than words could do for its unfailing popularity and the high standard its stories have maintained over so many years. It has stood the test of time.

In view of our approaching birthday I have arranged for some great yarns during March to honour the occasion. In next week's number, for a start, there is a super programme awaiting you. Firstly we have

"GARDEW GUTS LOOSE!"

Many readers will be pleased by that title, for it tells that the popular Ralph Reckness is once again in the limelight. The St. Jim's juniors never quite know how to take the cynical, defiant dandy of the Fourth. He behaves just as the mood suits him—and in next week's yarn it suits him to kick over the traces. He has become bored with being a model youth, and with Racke & Co. he starts frequenting a gambling den in Rylcombe. That's asking for the sack short and sharp, should the Head get to hear of it. But Cardew revels in daring and risky enterprises. His chums, Levison and Clive, however, have his welfare more at heart, and though they cannot prevent Cardew from cutting loose they think of another method of saving him from his folly. What it is you will learn in this powerful story.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW MASTER!"

This yarn of the chums of Cedar Creek is the first of a gripping series. A new master is due at the backwoods school, and by chance Vere Beauclerc, who is away from school for a day, meets him in dramatic circumstances before he arrives. He comes upon the new master—Mr. Trevelyan—being attacked in the timber by Frisco Jo and two other rustlers. Vere, unable to do anything against armed ruffians, dashes away for help. But when he returns Mr. Trevelyan has vanished with his captors. Yet, to Beauclerc's amazement, he discovers later that the new master has turned up at Cedar Creek, and that he is not the same man who was attacked in the timber! It is a strange mystery, and it will grip and hold your keenest interest. Don't miss it!

"TUCKEY'S WONDERFUL WHEEZE!"

In the next sparkling story of the chums of the Benbow, Jack Drake is still under the persecution of the prefect Ransome. So Tuckey Toodles, sympathising with him, brings his mighty brain to bear on a scheme of revenge. He thinks of a good wheeze, and, with Drake and Rodney's help, it is put into action. The details of the wheeze are carefully made, and Tuckey is all set to provide the finishing touch—to the discomfiture and confusion of Ransome. But—the best-laid schemes of mice and men—and Tuckey Toodles—gang aft agley!

To wind up this great programme, Jack Blake is his usual blunt self in dealing with readers' letters. Monty Lowther invites you to laugh off some more jokes with him, and Kerr is on the track of another mystery. Don't forget to place your order early, chums.

Chin-chin!

THE EDITOR.
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,619.



Drake thrust the bat recklessly through the opening, and it caught Hubert Ransome on the waistcoat. "Yoooooogh!" gasped the bully of the Sixth.

Trouble to Come!

"DRAKE'S late!" Daubeny of the Shell made that remark, with a smile, to his chums Egan and Torrence.

The St. Winifred's fellows were gathering for evening call-over on the deck of the Benbow.

Latecomers had come scrambling over the gangway from the shore, and joined their respective Forms, and Mr. Packe, the master of the Fourth, was beginning to call the roll.

There was one fellow absent from the Fourth. It was Jack Drake, who had gone on "boat fagging" with Ransome of the Sixth that afternoon. Ransome was absent, too, but prefects of the Sixth were privileged beings. It was quite otherwise with juniors of the Fourth.

"He can't still be faggin' for Ransome," murmured Egan, in answer to Vernon Daubeny's remark.

Daubeny shook his head.

"More likely they've had a row," he said. "I noticed that Drake was lookin' very ratty when they started. Packe will rag him for missin' call-over, anyhow."

"Rodney's lookin' anxious," grinned Egan.

"Silence!" called out Lovelace, the captain of St. Winifred's; and the bucks of the Shell ceased to whisper.

Daubeny grinned as he looked across at Dick Rodney, in the Fourth. Rodney looked anxious. He had been feeling uneasy about his chum that afternoon, and Drake's non-appearance at roll-call worried him.

Mr. Packe had not yet noticed the junior's absence. He was calling the roll in a droning voice, and was not yet at the "D's."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,619.

The REBEL of the BENBOW!

By Owen Conquest.

But Jack Drake's name came at last.

"Drake."

Daubeny & Co. grinned at one another. Dick Rodney cast a glance round anxiously.

There was a patter on the deck as a lithe figure ran from the gangway, and Drake, a little breathless, wedged into the Fourth.

"Adsum!"

The answer came just in time. Mr. Packe gave the junior a rather severe glance, but he made no comment, going on with the roll-call.

Drake was breathing hard as he stood among the Fourth Formers. He had been running to get back to the Benbow in time.

The roll-call was finished at last, and the school dispersed. Jack Drake and Rodney walked away together, and Daubeny, who was very curious to know what had happened that afternoon, followed them across the deck.

"You just did it, Drake," he said.

Drake gave him a grim look.

"Where have you left Ransome?" went on

Jack Drake is by no means half-hearted when he hits back at a bullying prefect. But it has painful results for Jack, as well as for his enemy!

Daubeny. "I understood that you were fagging for him this afternoon."

"You knew I was," answered Drake curtly. "You fixed it up with Ransome to fag me, to keep me away from the cricket."

"My dear man, you must think I have a lot of influence with Sixth Form prefects!" said Daubeny.

"You have, with Ransome's kind," said Drake. "How much did you lend him for his services, Daub?"

"You'd better not let anyone hear you makin' insinuations of that kind against a prefect," remarked Daubeny. "I fancy you'd be called up before the Head. But where did you leave Ransome?"

"Three miles down the Chadway," answered Drake. "I chucked away the oars, and the boat was stranded—and I left Ransome with it and walked home. Now you know."

"My hat!" ejaculated Daubeny.

Drake turned his back on the knut of the Shell, and walked away.

"Come down to the study, Rodney," he said. "I'm famished!"

Rodney's face was very serious as he followed

Drake down to Study No. 8 in the Fourth. He was dismayed by the news he had just heard.

In Study No. 8 he handed out a meal for Jack Drake, who ate with a good appetite. He had missed his tea and he was hungry. Tuckey Toodles came into the study, and joined Drake at the table. Tuckey hadn't missed his tea, but he was quite ready for another.

"I say, old chap, you're booked for an awful row!" Tuckey remarked, with his mouth full.

Grunt from Drake.

"I heard Daub saying——"

"Bother Daub!"

"Oh, yes, but I heard him saying you'd stranded Ransome down the river, and Egan and Torrence were chortling over it no end. Egan says you'll get a prefects' licking."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"It's rather serious, though, Drake," Rodney remarked.

"I suppose it is."

"You stranded Ransome three miles away?"

"Yes."

"Then he's got to walk home and leave the boat?"

"Same as I did."

"But it's his boat, and—and if you chucked away the oars, I suppose they're lost for good?"

"They're probably out at sea by this time!" answered Drake coolly.

"Oars cost money," remarked Tuckey Toodles sententiously. "Ransome's mean. He will want you to pay for them!"

"But—but——" said Rodney.

Drake gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"I meant to make Ransome fed-up with fagging me at boats," he said. "I've done it. He will think twice before he takes me again."

"Yes, but——"

"You know as well as I do it was a trick!" said Drake savagely. "Daubeny put him up to it—lent him money, too, most likely!"

"I believe so," said Rodney quietly. "But we can't prove it, Drake, and an accusation like that would get you into trouble with the Head, without any proof to offer. The Head wouldn't dream of taking any notice of it."

"I know that. I'm not thinking of accusing Ransome. I know there's going to be a row when he gets back, and I suppose I can stand the racket."

"It will be a prefects' licking, at least."

Drake's eyes gleamed.

"We shall see," he answered.

Sawyer major of the Fourth put his head in at the doorway.

"I say, Drake, Ransome has just come on board. He's looking very ferocious!"

"He would!" assented Drake.

"He's coming here, I think," said Sawyer.

"Let him!"

There was a heavy tramp of feet in the passage outside. Sawyer major dodged away, and Ransome of the Sixth appeared in the doorway, with an ashplant in his hand.

At Close Quarters I

JACK DRAKE rose quickly to his feet. He had expected trouble to follow his escapade on the river that afternoon, and now the trouble had come. But it did not find Drake in a submissive mood. The sense of injustice was strong upon him, and, prefect as Ransome was, the junior was not in the least inclined to submit.

Ransome's face was dark with anger as he strode into the study. He was gripping the ashplant till his knuckles showed white.

"So you're here!" he said in a gasping voice. "You cheeky little cub! I've had a three-mile tramp home!"

"Rather a twister for you after so many smokes!" remarked Drake.

"I suppose you know what to expect now, Drake?" said the Sixth Former between his teeth.

"Yes, I've an idea," assented Drake.

"I'm going to thrash you till you can't howl!" gasped Ransome.

Drake made no reply to that. But as the infuriated senior advanced upon him he backed round the study table. His eyes were gleaming.

"Come here!" said Ransome savagely. "Hold out your hand!"

Drake put his hands behind him.

Rodney looked on, not knowing what to do. The prefect had the right to use the ashplant, and defiance of authority was a serious matter. Dick Rodney's sympathy, of course, was with his chum, but he was dismayed.

Ransome strode round the table with a furious face. All through that weary tramp back to the school on the river he had comforted himself with a mental picture of the thrashing he was going to administer to his rebellious fag.

Drake did not retreat farther. He caught up a cricket bat from the corner and stood on the defensive.

"Hands off!" he said quietly.

"Put that bat down!" roared Ransome.

He halted, his eyes fixed on the junior furiously; but Drake did not put down the bat, and his look showed plainly enough that he was ready to use it.

"Do you hear me, Drake?" panted the prefect at last.

"I'm not deaf!"

"Put that bat down!"

"Rats!"

Ransome made a spring towards the junior, his ashplant swinging in the air.

Crash!

The bat met the ashplant, and it was knocked whirling from the senior's hand. The next moment the business end of the bat clumped on Ransome's chest, and he went staggering back.

"Oh! Ah! Ow!"

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Tuckey Toodles.

"Get out of my study, Ransome!" said Drake quietly. "Get out! Do you hear? You'll get hurt if you don't!"

"You—you——"

Clump, clump, clump!

The cricket bat smote Ransome again forcibly. The prefect made a clutch at it, but he did not catch it—only with his wrist, and he gave a howl of anguish.

"Get out!"

Ransome backed away to the door, the junior following him up with the lunging bat.

"I—I—I'll make you pay for this!" stuttered the prefect, as he was driven out of the study under a shower of lunges.

"Get out!"

Ransome backed out, and, almost white with rage, hurried away. A number of the Fourth had gathered in the passage, and they were looking on at the extraordinary scene with staring eyes.

Drake slammed the door of Study No. 8. He

pitched the bat in the corner again, with a grim brow

"I—I say, you've done it now!" gasped Toodles.

"He'll come back with the other prefects!" said Toodles. "I say, there'll be an awful row! Fancy battling a prefect! You'd better hook it before they come, Drake! You can hide in the hold—"

"Cheese it, you fat duffer! You two had better clear off!" said Drake. "I'm going to lock the study."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Toodles.

"I'm not going to clear off," said Dick Rodney quietly. "If you're going to hold out, Drake, I'll hold out with you!"

"No need for you to get into a row, too. Better hook it."

"I'm staying."

Drake stepped to the door.

"Cut, Toodles!" he said.

Tuckey Toodles rose to his feet. He hesitated.

Tuckey was certainly not of the stuff of which heroes are made, but he was in a state of great excitement now, and the danger was not close at hand—yet. So long as the danger was not too near, Rupert de Vere Toodles was capable of heroism.

"I'm not going!" he said.

"Aas! Clear off while you're safe!"

"No fear! I'm standing by you, old top! We'll bar up the study and keep 'em out!" said Toodles. "I'm with you, old chap! Lock the door!"

Drake turned the key in the lock. There was no more time to waste, for heavy footsteps already sounded along the passage. The enemy was evidently returning with reinforcements. Sawyer major's voice squeaked through the keyhole:

"They're coming! Look out!"

And Sawyer's footsteps pattered away in a great hurry.

A few moments later the door-handle was turned, and then rattled savagely.

"Locked!" said the voice of Armitage of the Sixth.

Thump, thump!

"Open this door!" hissed Ransome.

The juniors in the study did not speak. They were committed to hostilities now, and they realised that the matter was serious. Tuckey Toodles cast a longing glance at the window. His heroism had oozed away already. But outside the window flowed the waters of the Chadway. There was no retreat for the unheroic Tuckey.

"Will you open this door?" roared Ransome.

"No!" said Drake.

"Leave it to me, Ransome!" It was the voice of Oliphant, another prefect. "Drake!"

"Well?"

"Let us in at once!"

"I'll open the door if Ransome makes it pax," answered Drake.

"Why, you—you cheeky little idiot—"

"Pax!" repeated Armitage. "Do you think we're Fourth Form fags, you cheeky little imp?"

Thump, thump!

"Open the door!" shouted Ransome.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Obstinate little beast!" said Oliphant. "Leave him alone; he will have to come out at bed-time."

"If he doesn't open the door I'll smash it in!" said Ransome, choking with rage.

"It isn't much of a lock. A chisel would do it," said Armitage. "Cut off and get a chisel or something, and we'll wait here."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—NO. 1,619.

Ransome's footsteps were heard hurrying away. Drake and Rodney looked at one another, and Tuckey Toodles gave a gasp.

"Oh dear! Had-had-hadn't you better open the door, Drake, old chap?"

"Shut up!"

"I—I say—"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

And Tuckey Toodles shut up, but with very deep misgivings.

Holding the Fort!

"LEND me a hand with the table, Rodney!"

"Right!"

The study table was swung to the door and jammed there. Against the table the arm-chair was planted, and then the other articles of furniture. The noise was heard outside the study, and Armitage and Oliphant were heard chuckling. Apparently, they did not take the matter so seriously as the enraged Ransome. But though they chuckled, they were, none the less, determined. Neither of them liked Ransome very much, but they were quite in agreement with him in putting down rebellion against the authority of the high-and-mighty Sixth.

Ransome came hurrying back with a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other. He was savagely determined to get at the rebel of the Fourth without delay.

"Go it!" grinned Oliphant.

Knock, knock, knock!

Ransome drove the chisel between the door and the jamb just over the lock, and hammered it in.

The study doors on the Benbow were not of the same solid construction as the old warship itself. The Benbow's old oaken planks had braved the sea for a hundred years, and were as stout as ever, but the study bulkheads were of a much more modern make. A few minutes Ransome's chisel was driven well home, and the door was creaking ominously and the lock groaning. There was a loud crack as it gave.

"Done it!" said Armitage.

Ransome pushed the door hard. But the barricade within kept it closed. It came open an inch or two, and stuck again.

"My hat! They've got it barricaded!" said Oliphant. "Jevver hear of such cheek? Take that stuff away at once, Drake!"

No answer.

"All right," said Oliphant. "Put your shoulders to it, you fellows. Now, then, all together!"

Under the gaze of a crowd of juniors farther along the passage, the three big Sixth Formers put their shoulders to the door and shoved. The door opened another couple of inches.

It could not open farther, for Drake and Rodney were bracing themselves against the barricade within, shoving with all their strength to keep it in place.

"All together!" murmured Oliphant. "Go it!"

The door creaked and groaned, and the barricade trembled. Another inch was gained. There was a terrified squeak from Tuckey Toodles. Never had a hero so thoroughly repented of his heroism as the unfortunate Toodles did at that moment.

"I say, old tops, let them in!" he gasped. "I—I haven't got anything to do with this, Oliphant. I haven't really, you know!"

"Pull that stuff away, then!" growled Ransome.

"I—I say, Drake, do you mind—" mumbled Toodles.

"Keep away, you fat idiot!"

"Oh dear!"

"I'll lick you if you don't help, Toodles!" shouted Ransome, through the narrow opening.

"No, you won't," said Oliphant. "Let the kid alone. We can manage without help from a fag."

Ransome gritted his teeth, but he made no reply to his fellow-prefect. He exerted his strength on the door, and the barricade gave again.

Drake breathed hard.

The juniors had the advantage of position, but the strength of three powerful seniors was too much for their resistance. It was evident that the door was yielding. But Drake was not disposed to yield. His blood was up now, and he was utterly reckless of consequences.

"Stick to it, Rodney!" he whispered.

He made a bound across the study for his bat.

The barricade yielded more as his support was withdrawn, and in another minute the door would have swung open. But that minute was more than enough.

Drake rushed back to the door, bat in hand, and thrust it recklessly through the opening. It caught Hubert Ransome on the waistcoat, and there was a gasping yell from the bully of the Sixth.

"Yoooooogh!"

Ransome staggered away from the door, and sat down in the passage.

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Oliphant. "Here, look out! Oh—ah—yaroo!"

A lunge of the bat through the opening caught Oliphant on the ear. He backed away from the door, roaring. Armitage jumped back, just in time to escape another lunge.

The door slammed again.

Drake and Rodney jammed the furniture into place once more, panting. The attack had been stopped.

Outside, the voices of the prefects could be heard, in tones of fury, and some chuckling from the distance. Fourth and Third and Shell were crowded down the passage now, looking on, and they seemed to be enjoying the scene. But the prefects were not enjoying it. Oliphant and Armitage were almost as furious as Ransome by this time.

"Smash the door in!" shouted Armitage. "By gad, I'll make an example of the cheeky little cads!"

"Hold on!" murmured Drake.

The two juniors braced themselves against the barricade again. There came a furious pressure from without, and the door yielded a few inches. Drake thrust out the bat, but the enemy were on their guard this time, and it was clutched and jerked away from his hand.

"Now, then!" panted Ransome. "Shove!"

"It—it's going!" gasped Rodney.

Drake caught up the inkpot from the shelf. With a swing of his hand, he sent the ink swishing through the opening, and it splashed over three red and furious faces.

There was a chorus of howls, and the pressure on the door ceased. Once more it was slammed shut.

The attack was not resumed this time. Three lofty prefects of the Sixth Form were splashed with ink, and they had had enough for the present. Their footsteps were heard retreating.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Rodney. "How is this going to end, I wonder?"

"They'll bring Lovelace!" exclaimed Tuckey Toodles. "Oh dear! Lovelace will think I'm mixed up in it, you know. It's awfully inconsiderate of you, Drake, I must say that!"

"Dry up, you fat chump!"

The juniors waited. The enemy had been driven off successfully, but it was only too certain that the matter would not end there. They waited anxiously to learn the next move on the part of the prefects.

It was not long in coming. A steady footstep came along to the door, and there was a sharp tap.

"Drake!"

It was the voice of Lovelace, the captain of St. Winifred's.

"Hallo!" said Drake.

"Open the door at once!"

"Can't be done!"

"I order you, Drake, as captain of the school," said Lovelace, very quietly.

"I'm not going to be licked by Ransome!"

"I shall see into that matter. Now, you've played the goat quite enough in this study. If the door isn't opened at once, I shall ask Dr. Goring to step here. You know what that means."

There was a silence, and the juniors looked at one another. In his most reckless mood Drake would not have thought of defying the authority of the Head, and he knew that Lovelace was in earnest.

"Well?" snapped the captain of St. Winifred's.

"I'll give in to you, Lovelace," said Drake at last. "Wait a minute, old top!"

"I'm waiting!"

The furniture was dragged away and the door opened. Lovelace of the Sixth stepped into the room, with a grim brow.

"A precious young ass you've made of yourself!" he snapped.

"I'm not going to be bullied by Ransome! I've given in to you, not to him!" answered Drake coolly. "If Ransome's going to lick me, I'm going to put up a fight!"

"You're not dealing with Ransome now, but with me. You'll be taken before the prefects. Come along!"

Drake followed the captain of St. Winifred's from the study. Dick Rodney followed.

"You're not wanted, Rodney," said Lovelace shortly.

DETECTIVE KERR INVESTIGATES.

Solution:

KERR: Trimble could have caught either the 1.23 or the 2.23 after morning classes, but according to his own statement he arrived only just in time to see the Brightsea Express, which passed at 2.31. So he must have caught the 2.23, which was scheduled to arrive at Wayland at 2.30. But Reilly and Hammond were on that train, and Reilly said it was two minutes late—arriving therefore at 2.32, one minute after the Brightsea Express had gone. If Trimble was on the 2.23 from Rylcombe, he could not have snapped the express any more than Reilly could. Evidently Trimble was not on the 2.23 at all—though, looking up the time-table, he had seen that it was due at Wayland at 2.30. Trimble's attempt to cash in on an old negative thus met with a "smash"—and when his customers found him out Trimble was "smashed," too.

"I helped Drake——"

"Dry up, you young ass, and stay where you are!"

And Lovelace led Jack Drake away, a good deal like a lamb to the slaughter.

A Prefects' Licking!

LOVELACE'S study, in the Sixth Form quarters, was rather crowded. It was a meeting of the prefects. The whole august body had gathered to deal with the case of the rebellious Fourth Former—a matter which they regarded with due seriousness.

The prefects sat or lounged round the study, and Jack Drake stood in the middle of the room, quite erect and self-possessed, and perhaps a little defiant. Arthur Lovelace, as head prefect and captain of the school, took the lead in the proceedings.

Ransome's narrow eyes glittered at the self-possessed junior. He was not wholly pleased by the turn affairs had taken. The matter was out of his hands now, and though a prefects' licking could be made severe enough, it was not nearly so severe, in any case, as the thrashing that Ransome was yearning to administer. But as he had failed to deal with the recalcitrant junior on his own, the prefects' meeting had to deal with him, and Ransome was only called on to state his case.

He stated it, however, to a sympathetic audience. Of the secret scheme between him and Daubeny of the Shell the other prefects naturally suspected nothing. And Drake only suspected it. Without a vestige of proof he could not make an accusation. No one present would have believed a word of it. It would have been looked on as a

reckless slander. And Drake, though his suspicions were strong, was not certain. He knew that Ransome disliked him on his own account, and how much Vernon Daubeny had had to do with the matter he could not tell.

To the other prefects it seemed simply a case of a rebellious fag, and such a case they were prepared to deal with drastically.

Lovelace turned to Jack Drake when Ransome had finished.

"Anything to say?" he asked laconically.

"Oh, yes!"

"Go ahead, then, and cut it short."

"Ransome's a rotten bully——"

"What?"

"And a sneaking cad——"

"Eh?"

"Am I to stand here and listen to that, Lovelace?" roared Ransome furiously.

Some of the prefects were grinning involuntarily.

"Shut up, Drake!" said Lovelace sharply. "I asked you if you had anything to say in your defence."

"Lots! I won't fag for Ransome, and I believe he's only fagging me to keep me away from cricket."

"That's utter rot! You'll fag for Ransome when you're told," said Lovelace. "You'll be refusing to fag for me next."

"So I would if you were a cad like Ransome!"

Lovelace coughed.

"That's enough. You're sentenced to a prefects' beating, Drake, and I hope it will be a lesson to you."

The august meeting rose. Lovelace selected a cane, and Oliphant pushed out a chair into the middle of the room.

"That's for you, Drake," he said.

Drake did not move.

"Bend down," said Lovelace, frowning. "I'm ready, Drake."

"I won't!"

Lovelace knitted his brows. He was a good-hearted fellow, and he meant to be just, according to his own ideas, but he was growing very angry now.

"Put him down!" he said.

Armitage and Royce took hold of the junior's shoulders and swung him towards the chair. Drake clenched his hands hard for a moment. But resistance was too hopeless. He had no chance in the grasp of big Sixth Formers, and there were half a dozen in the study.

He was swung to the chair, and forced upon his knees, and made to lean over the chair seat. A strong hand on the back of his head kept him in position.

Then Lovelace began with the cane.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The lashes fell steadily, and Jack Drake had to grit his teeth hard to keep back a cry of pain. But he made no sound.

His face paled a little, but his teeth remained shut, and no cry escaped him, much to Ransome's disappointment.

Twenty times the cane rose and fell, though the last strokes were light.

"He hasn't had enough!" growled Ransome angrily.

"That's for me to decide," answered Lovelace curtly. "Drake, you can get out!"

Drake rose to his feet. His face was white, and he was feeling the pain of the infliction acutely.

(Continued on page 36.)



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THE REBEL OF THE BENBOW!

(Continued from page 34.)

He staggered a little as he turned towards the door.

"It's your own fault, you know," said Lovelace, not unkindly.

Drake made no answer.

Dick Rodney was waiting in the passage outside, with an anxious brow. He took hold of his chum's arm.

"Come on!" he said softly.

Without a word Drake accompanied him to Study No. 8. That celebrated apartment was in a state of considerable disorder now. Rodney looked at his chum's strained face anxiously.

"I—I suppose you've had it bad?" he said hesitatingly.

Drake nodded.

"I—I didn't hear anything outside."

"I wouldn't let Ransome hear me howl," muttered Drake. "But—but it hurt, all the same."

He moved restlessly to the window, and stood staring out on the dark waters of the Chadway.

When he turned from the window at last his face was still a little pale, and his eyes were gleaming.

"I've had a prefects' licking because I won't fag for Ransome," he said, in a low voice. "But it won't make any difference. I won't fag for him!"

"I'll back you up, old chap," said Rodney quietly.

There was trouble ahead for Study No. 8 on the Benbow!

Next Week: "TUCKEY'S WONDERFUL WHEEZE!"

THE SHADOW OF FEAR!

(Continued from page 29.)

grief and misery of his son sent a pang to his heart.

"It was the only way," he muttered—"the only way! It was the first decent thing it ever came into my mind to do. Better make an end of it, once and for all, than live to be a burden and disgrace till you hate me."

"Never that. Only—only promise me that you will never think of that again." He made a shuddering gesture towards the creek. "I can bear anything else—anything but that!"

"And you came back!" said the remittance man in a tone of wonder. "A few minutes more and— You must have ridden all night."

"I shall never leave you again, father, even if you command me. But you must promise me what I have asked."

The remittance man made a weary gesture.

"Well, it shall be as you like, I promise. Do you know you are throwing your life away. Vere, for a man who is not worth a single thought?"

"You have promised," said Beauclere, unheeding. "I know you will keep your promise. Thank Heaven I came in time!"

When the dawn came, it found Vere Beauclere sleepless and worn; but it found him calm, almost happy. His father was saved to him, and whatever wild ways Lascelles Beauclere's feet might tread in future days, his promise was sacred, and the most dreaded blow of all would never fall upon the remittance man's son.

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