

"THE NIGHT RAIDERS!" Grand New Yarn of Fun
and Rivalry at St. Jim's.

The **GEM** **2^D**

ALL ONE
PRICE
3/9!





Blake Answers Back!

James Green, of Cambourne, Redruth, Cornwall, writes:

1. When was St. Jim's supposed to be built? 2. What is the idea of sleeping in dormitories? 3. Are St. Jim's chaps allowed to go to the pictures? 4. How far is St. Jim's from the nearest big town? 5. How much pocket money do you get per week? 6. Who is the ugliest fellow at St. Jim's—you, I suppose? Thanks very much.

ANSWER: 1. 1500 odd. 2. Because there aren't enough grand suites to go round. 3. On half-holidays, yes. 4. Wayland is about three miles distant by road. 5. That's telling. 6. Your supposer needs oiling. I nominate Grundy. Thank YOU. Come again. And send a snap. Unless you're too odd-looking!

"Fat Boy," of Huntingdonshire, writes:

Why do you consider all fat boys enormous scoffers? I myself tip the scales at 19 stone, but I am NOT an extraordinary eater. I have not yet heard of a fat boy who can eat as much tuck as Trimble of St. Jim's or Bunter of Greyfriars!

ANSWER: I've never heard of anybody who could eat as much as Trimble or Bunter, either—and I've certainly never heard of a boy weighing 19 stone before! One thing, you can be sure of taking a "big" part in whatever is going on.

"Just Another Cad," of South London, writes:

In a recent answer you said smoking and gadding under sixteen is caddish. About nine per cent of your readers are of the working class, and we have not done work till late at night—after seven o'clock. We have no time for your so-called healthy sport, and our only enjoyment is sitting at home having a quiet smoke, and perhaps a tanner on our favourite greyhound on Saturday, just for the fun of it. Win or lose, it doesn't deprive me of my pocket money, and I guarantee to be as healthy and strong as any of your crowd.

P.S. Just another unprinted letter.

ANSWER: Some fellows have a tough time, I admit. But if you imagine that the GEM readers who go to work stay indoors smoking every evening, and gamble away hard-earned pocket money on Saturdays, you're making a big mistake. I'm sure they lead a more useful and healthy existence in their leisure time. You may be as healthy and strong as any of "our crowd," but believe me, you're not going the right way to

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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.

retain your health and strength. Unprinted letter, did you say?

B. U. P. D., of Bishop's Stortford College, Herts., writes:

I should like to know the names of the colleges at Oxford University.

ANSWER: Some of the principal colleges are: Magdalen, New, Queen's, University College, Merton, Hertford, All Souls, Oriel, Brasenose, Lincoln, Exeter, Wadham, Trinity, Balliol, and St. Johns.

Beryl Jones, of Coseley, Staffs, writes:

How old are most of the Fourth?

I see in the photograph of you you seem to be copying something out of a book, and there are lots of papers in a wastepaper-basket. Trying to improve your handwriting?

I enclose a photograph of myself, as you seem to think everybody's nervous of sending one.

ANSWER: We're mostly about fifteen. The picture of me is merely an artist's impression of yours truly in the very act of answering back. Sorry my back is towards you. I always try to "face" every query, and make this "feature" frank and free. I sometimes use a typewriter, but you can't see it in the drawing. Herries' bulldog, Towser, had been chewing the ribbon again. Send a snap—not a drawing—and I'll gladly print it.

BRIEF REPLIES.

"Regular Reader," Birmingham.—Yes, Cardew's a good chap—at times. Some distance between St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood. Towser says Woof! ("Thanks!") T. H., of Eltham.—Shell are between fifteen and sixteen years. Reilly for stamps. You'd be in the Second at eleven. R. F. D., of St. John's, Newfoundland.—Tom Merry is junior boxing champion. Racke is fifteen years—nine stone. Tom Merry is usually good for thirty-five runs (average), with a century now and then! "Grammarians," of Liverpool 23.—No, 'fraid I don't know all the Rylcombe Grammar School Fourth by name. D. Jackson, of Southport.—Ask the Ed for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Most of us are Scouts at St. Jim's. It doesn't do any harm to "Be prepared," does it?

THERE'S NOT A DULL MOMENT IN THIS LIVELY NEW LONG YARN OF FUN AND RAGGING AT ST. JIM'S—INTRODUCING ALL YOUR FAVOURITES.

The NIGHT RAIDERS!



The door of Study No. 6 being ajar, Figgins & Co. could see what was happening in the room, and it made them stare. Rake and Crooke were playing havoc with the contents of the study. This was not a "rag." The cads of the Shell were wrecking Study No. 6 like a couple of hooligans!

CHAPTER 1.

In Haste!

"OH!" roared Jack Blake.

"Come on, Blake!"

"Oh crikey!"

"We shall be late, deah boy!"

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

It was quite a startling surprise for Blake of the Fourth. It was so very unexpected.

The bell was ringing for school in the sunny June morning. St. Jim's fellows were on their way to the Form-rooms. Books required for first school were in the study, and Blake & Co. had left it a little late. They cut up to Study No. 6 when the bell rang. Blake cut ahead of his comrades, did the Fourth Form passage at about 50 m.p.h., and arrived at the study door.

That door was shut—which was to be expected.

Also, it was locked—which was quite unexpected.

Fourth Form fellows did not lock their study doors. If by chance a Fourth Former did lock his study door the key ought to have been on the outside, and no key was visible. Jack Blake, naturally, never supposed for a moment that that study door was locked. Why should he?

It was unfortunate, all the same.

Reaching the door of Study No. 6, Blake turned the handle, pushed, and ran on to enter with the opening door all in one movement, as was natural for a fellow in a hurry.

As the door did not, as expected, open, Blake ran into the door. His nose tapped on hard old

Who are the mystery raggers of St. Jim's? They get their School House victims guessing with their daring rags—and foil two night raiders seeking a treacherous revenge on Tom Merry & Co.

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

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oak. It tapped hard. Blake's roar woke most of the echoes of the School House.

Letting go the door-handle, Jack Blake staggered back in the passage, with both hands clasped to his nose. His remarks, like those of Truthful James in the poem, were "frequent and painful and free."

"Oh! Ow! Yow! Wow! My boko! Wow! What idiot—ow!—locked that—wow—door? Ow! Yow-ow! Wooh!"

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, following him up the passage from the study landing, stared.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He turned his eyeglass on Blake in great surprise.

"Wow!" roared Blake. "Ow!"

"I say, why don't you get those books?" asked Herries. "Lathom will be waiting!"

"Ow! Oh! Ow!"

"Hurt your nose?" asked Dig.

"Oh, no! I'm doing this for fun!" yelled Blake, in exasperated sarcasm. "I'm just doing a song and dance to amuse you while we're late for class! Ow!"

"Well, we'd better get the books," said Herries; and he turned the door-handle. "I say, what's the matter with this door? It won't open!"

"Ow!"

"Have you locked it, Blake?"

"Oh, yes!" howled Blake. "I locked it just to bang my nose on it! Idiot!"

"Well, somebody must have locked it, as it won't open," said Herries. "The key's not in it! Who's got the key?"

"What howling idiot has locked that door and taken away the key?" howled Blake. "You, Gussy, you ass?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Have you got that key?" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! I wish you would not wear at a fellow like that, Blake! I am sowwy you banged your nose; but, weally——"

"Have you got the key?" shrieked Blake.

"Oh, no! But pway don't get so feashfully excited and wear at a fellow——"

"Ass! Have you got the key, Dig?"

"No! Some ass has been larking, I suppose," said Dig. "Look here, we've got to have our books. We can't go into Form without books."

"Look round for the key," said Herries.

Three fellows looked round for the key while Blake rubbed his suffering nose. But no key was to be seen. Whoever had locked the door of Study No. 6 had apparently taken the key away with him—which was fearfully exasperating to fellows who wanted their books for school.

There was a patter of feet, and a junior came cutting round the corner from the Shell passage. It was Tom Merry, and he was laden with a pile of school books that reached almost to his chin.

Blake & Co. stared at him.

Then they glared at him.

"Looking for your books, you fellows?" called out Tom, as he came.

"Those our books?" roared Blake.

"Yes. Here they are."

"You howling ass!" bawled Blake. "Call this a joke—snaffling fellows' books and locking the study door? I've banged my nose! Now I'll jolly well bang yours!"

"I say—Yaroooh!" roared Tom Merry, as Blake rushed.

The pile of books toppled and crashed. Tom Merry had no time to bother about books. He

had to defend himself from a fierce onslaught. Blake had a pain in his nose, and another in his temper. He was going to make it quite clear to the captain of the Shell what he thought of this sort of a joke.

"Look here——" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! I say—Keep off, you mad ass—Oh crikey!"

"Collar him!" shouted Herries.

"Bump him!" howled Dig.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I tell you——" howled Tom Merry.

But he had no time to tell the exasperated Fourth Formers anything. They collared him on all sides and swept him off his feet.

Bump!

"Ow!" roared Tom, as he sat in the passage.

"You mad chumps—Ow! I tell you—Wow!"

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"And one more for luck!"

Bump!

"Oh! Ow! Ooogh!" gasped Tom Merry, as the four left him sitting and spluttering, and gathered up scattered books. "Oh crumbs! You potty fags—Ow! Ow!"

"Take that as a tip not to lark in a fellow's study!" hooted Blake, as he stacked books under his arm.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a sillay, waggin' ass, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"You blithering owls!" roared Tom Merry, staggering to his feet. "Who's been larking in your study? You thumping chumps, I found that stack of books in my study when I went for my own—ow!—and, as your names were in them, I knew they were yours—wow!—so I cut along with them! Oooh!"

"Oh! Bai Jove!"

"You found them in your study?" gasped Blake.

"Ow! Yes, you fathead! Wish I'd left them there now! Ow!"

"Who put them there, then?" hooted Herries.

"How should I know, ass? I found them in a stack on the table, fathead! I'll leave them there another time, idiot! Ow!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Go and eat coke, you Fourth Form fatheads!" And Tom breathlessly cut back the way he had come. He had no more than time to get his own books and cut down to the Shell Form Room.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "It was wathah wuff on Tom Mewwy to bump him for bwingin' us our books——"

"Come on!"

"Yaas; but——"

"Do you want to be late, fathead?"

"Not at all, deah boy! But pewwaps we ought to go aftah Tom Mewwy and expwess our wegwets for that wathah unfortunate ewwah——"

"Fathead!"

Blake grabbed Arthur Augustus by the arm and ran him down the passage to the stairs. The bell had ceased to ring, and there really was no time for Arthur Augustus' Chesterfieldian manners to be given a run.

"Weally, Blake——" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Come on, ass!"

"But, weally——"

"Boot him on the trousers, Herries!"

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be booted on the twousahs, Blake! Let go my arm! Dig, let go my othah arm! I insiat——"

Still insisting, Arthur Augustus was rushed

away, and Study No. 6 arrived at the door of the Fourth Form Room as Mr. Lathom opened it for his Form. Just in time, they went in with the Fourth.

CHAPTER 2.

A Surprising Discovery!

GEORGE FIGGINS of the Fourth Form winked at Kerr and Wynn of that Form. Kerr and Wynn grinned.

Figgins & Co. of the New House seemed in very cheery spirits that sunny morning.

Blake and his friends, breathless and flustered, seemed to interest them as the juniors took their places in Mr. Lathom's Form-room.

"Anything up, Blake, old bean?" whispered Figgins, as Jack Blake, red and breathless, went to his place.

"Only some silly ass larking in the House," grunted Blake. "We jolly nearly had to come in without our books. Some thumping chump shifted them into a Shell study! I'd jolly well like to know who it was!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "The uthah ass has taken away the key of our stoday door, you know."

"Who was it?" asked Figgins.

"Haven't the foggiest," grunted Blake. "I'll jolly well find out, though, and punch his nose after class."

"New House man?" asked Figgins.

"How could it have been a New House man, ass? It must have been done overnight."

George Figgins chuckled.

"There is some howlin' ass playin' twicks in the School House!" said Arthur Augustus. "Nobody knows who it is. One night Knox of the Sixth was wagged aftah lights out, and anotheah night all the clobber in the Shell dormitoway was enaffled and hung ovah the banistahs. Now our stoday has been wagged. I weally considah—"

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Lathom. "Take your places!"

Blake & Co. in first lesson did not give their whole attention to Mr. Lathom.

They were thinking, with considerable exasperation, of that happening in Study No. 6.

Some mysterious ragger seemed to be at work in the School House of St. Jim's.

Often and often did New House men rag School House men who, often and often, returned the compliment. But this time it did not seem to be a matter of House ragging. For these recent surprising happenings, all within the past week or so, seemed to have happened after the Houses were locked up for the night, after which, of course, House rags were impossible.

Blake & Co. had grinned over the ragging of Knox of the Sixth, who was unpopular in the House. But it had puzzled them. They had chortled over the ragging in the Shell dormitory; still it puzzled them. Now Study No. 6 had been the victim, and they neither grinned nor chortled, and were more puzzled than ever.

Had it been possible for Figgins & Co. to get into the House after lights out, they would have known what to think. As it was, they did not think of Figgins & Co. in connection with these mysterious rags.

It was, in fact, a mystery—and now that Study No. 6 had had the benefit of it, it was a most exasperating mystery.

Somebody had the key of Study No. 6. It

was quite likely that something had happened in that study, not yet discovered, as the door was locked. Who had that key?

It must be a School House junior. That seemed certain enough. Blake wondered whether it was some School House man in the Fourth, and he looked over the Form instead of concentrating his attention on the words of wisdom falling from the lips of his Form-master.

Baggy Trimble grinned at him.

"I say, Blake, where did you dig up that nose?" whispered Baggy.

Blake rubbed his nose. It was rather red from its collision with the door of the study.

"Been in the wars?" asked Levison.

"Banged it on a door!" grunted Blake.

"Oh gad! What did you do that for?" asked Cardew.

"Fathead!"

"Silence in the class, please!" said Mr. Lathom. "You will go on, Blake."

Which was rather awkward for Blake, as he had been giving all his thoughts to the mysterious ragger, and none to Mr. Lathom, and did not know where he was to go on from.

"Aeolus haec contra—" whispered Kerr.

And Blake went on to construe, dismissing more important matters from his mind for the moment.

He stumbled through "Tuus O regina, quid optes," etc., and then the infliction passed on to another victim, and Blake was able to resume his cogitations on those more important matters. Some fellow in the School House had the key of Study No. 6. Who?

Blake had not solved that problem when the Fourth were dismissed for morning break. But he had to have that key. He wanted to get into his study, and ascertain whether anything had happened there, in addition to the shifting of the books. It was very probable that something had.

"Bettah ask Tom Mewwy," suggested Arthur Augustus, when the Fourth came out. "The waggin' wottah put our books in his stoday, and pownaps the key was there, too."

The Shell were out, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were found in the quad. They smiled as Blake & Co. came up—perhaps entertained by the aspect of Blake's crimson nose. Monty Lowther put his hand before his eyes, as if dazzled. Blake gave him a glare.

"Look here—" he hooted.

"Wait a minute till I get my smoked glasses," said Monty, affecting to fumble in his pockets for the same. Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"I'll give you one to match if you're going to be a funny ass, Lowther," snorted Blake.

"No need of matches, so long as you carry about that nose," answered Monty Lowther affably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dry up, ass!" Blake did not seem in a mood for Monty's little jests. "Have you fellows seen anything of a key?"

"I have," answered Monty. "I saw a chap standing on one."

"Standing on it?" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! You—you mean that he was standin' on it to hide it, Lowthah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Well, I saw it all right, but he certainly was standing on it," answered Monty Lowther.

"Who was it?" asked Herries.

"Blake."

"Me!" roared Blake.

"Yes, you!"

Blake's chums stared at him.

"Have you got it, after all, Blake?" demanded Herries.

"No, ass! No, fathead! I haven't seen it to-day, and I certainly wasn't standing on it! What do you mean, Lowther, you ass? Where did you see me standing on a key?" howled Blake.

"At Venice."

"What?"

"In the hols," explained Lowther. "Don't you remember standing on the quay, when we were going out in a gondola?"

"On the quay!" stuttered Blake. "You—you—funny idiot! I'm asking you about the key of my study. You churring chump, if you talk any more rot, I'll mop up the quad with you! Was the key of my study along with those books, Tom Merry?"

"No," said Tom, laughing.

"Somebody's got it," said Blake. "We've got to get into our study. I want to know who's got that key? As soon as I find the howling ass who's got that key I'm going to smash his features so that his nearest relation won't know him! It was his fault I banged my nose on the study door."

Blake took out his handkerchief to rub his nose, which still had rather a pain in it.

Clang!

There was a general jump as a key clanged on the ground. It had dropped from Blake's handkerchief as he drew it from his pocket.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"There's the study key!" howled Dig.

"Blake had it all the time!" gasped Herries.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "You must be an ass, Blake, to put your study key in your pocket, and forget all about it."

Blake stood gazing at the key at his feet. Herries picked it up, and Blake still gazed at it. He seemed dumbfounded.

"You've found that howling ass you mentioned," grinned Monty Lowther. "Are you going to smash his features?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That—that—that's the key!" stuttered Blake. "It was in my pip-pip-pocket, wrapped up in my hanky. Who put it there?"

"Didn't you?" asked Herries.

"Idiot!"

"Well, if you didn't, who did?"

"Chump!"

"The jolly old ragger, I suppose!" said Manners. "He must have shoved it into your pocket in the dorm after locking your study last night!"

"Oh!" gasped Blake. "That's it! But who—"

"Who the thump—" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's some blithering ass going about the House playing these potty tricks! Who—"

"Well, there's the key!" said Blake. "I'm going to see whether anything's happened in our study!"

And Blake & Co. started for the House; Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther following on, quite curious to see what might have happened in Study No. 6.

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CHAPTER 3.

All One Price!

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door of study No. 6 in the School House was open at last. Blake & Co. stared in. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther stared in. And a dozen other fellows, who had come along to see what might be seen, stared in also.

There was a yell of laughter in the Fourth Form passage.

It was quite a surprising sight in Study No. 6. It seemed to strike most of the beholders as funny.

On the study table was a pile of hats. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, had an extensive wardrobe, and a liberal supply of handsome hats! The unknown night visitor to the study had evidently rooted about for Gussy's hats, and rooted out the lot!

Four silk hats were jammed one on top of another. Two straw hats were packed above. On the summit of the pile was another topper.

Attached to the stack was a ticket, in capital letters:

ALL ONE PRICE!

3s. 9d.

"Bai Jove! My hats!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in horror and dismay. "What awful wottah has been waggin' my hats?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared. Blake and Herries and Digby grinned. They had not known what to expect when the study was unlocked; anything really might have happened there, and it was rather a relief to find that nothing had happened—except to Gussy's hats. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not amused. He gazed at the pile of hats in great dismay.

"What feahful wascal—" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at in waggin' a fellow's hats!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Isn't there?" giggled Trimble. "He, he!"

"All one price, three and nine!" chortled Levison of the Fourth. "Selling the lot, Gussy?"

"I am not sellin' my hats, Levison, you ass! It is some wascally wottah who has done this—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sale now on, you men!" called out Monty Lowther. "Anybody looking for a bargain in hats?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"All one price—"

"Three and nine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, crimson with wrath, strode in to No. 6. Hats could not be jammed together like that in a stack without damage. Damage to Gussy's elegant headgear was no laughing matter—though the crowd of fellows in the passage seemed to think that it was.

"Bai Jove! They are all wuffed!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Fancy any fellow bein' wuffian enough to handle silk hats like that. An absolutely barbwous bwute! Where's my hat-bwush!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cacklin', you duffahs!" roared Arthur Augustus. "There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at in this! Bai Jove! The bwute has made my best hat look like a busby! Where's that beastly bwush? Oh cwikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy began brushing hats. They needed it!

"But who the dickens," exclaimed Tom Merry, "did this?"

"Echo answers, who!" said Manners.

"Some ass seems to have set up to rag the House!" said Monty Lowther. "Blessed if I can guess who it is."

"You ought to be able to guess, if anybody can," remarked Aubrey Rake of the Shell. Rake and Crooke had come along to join the crowd outside Study No. 6.

Lowther looked round at Rake.

"What do you mean, Rake?" he demanded.

Aubrey shrugged his shoulders.

"I know who parked cigarettes in my Sunday topper!" he answered. "You owned up to that."

"Bai Jove! Was it you, Lowthah?" came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice from the study. "You uttah ass—"

"May as well own up, Lowther!" said Rake.

"Lowther knows nothing about it, you cheeky ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Parking your putrid smokes in your topper was quite a different matter."

"Was it?" sneered Rake. "I don't see it, if it was! A silly ass who would lark with one fellow's topper would lark with another fellow's."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Crooke.

Blake & Co. looked at Monty Lowther rather suspiciously. Monty had a reputation as a funny man, and he never found it easy to resist a jest.

"Look here, was it you, you fathead?" growled Blake. "Looks to me like a New House jape—only I don't see how the ticks could have got in and done it."

"They couldn't, and you know it!" said Rake coolly. "It was a School House man. Three School House men ragged Knox of the Sixth—and some of us can guess who they were. Somebody in the Shell ragged our clobber the other night—and I fancy I know what his name was! And how—"

"I've said that I had nothing to do with it, Rake!" said Monty Lowther, his eyes gleaming at the cad of the Shell.

"You can say so until you're black in the face, and I shan't believe you," retorted Rake coolly. "I know that you did it, just as if I'd seen you sneak down from the dorm and do it."

Monty Lowther glared at him. He was a funny man, it was true, and he lived and moved and had his being in japing and jesting. But his word was as good as gold. Aubrey Rake's was not; which was perhaps the reason why he placed so little faith in the words of the others.

"He, he!" chuckled Baggy Trimble. "Everybody says that ragger is a mystery—but I fancy we could spot him, if we put our heads together."

"I fancy so!" said Rake.

"Oh!" Monty Lowther eyed them. "You fancy you could spot the ragger if you put your heads together, you two?"

"Yes, rather!" giggled Baggy.

"No doubt about it," said Rake.



Making a sudden stride, Lowther grabbed Baggy Trimble's collar with his left hand and Aubrey Rake's with his right. Two heads were suddenly brought into collision. Crack! "Yaroooh!" roared Trimble. "Oh! Ow, wow!" yelled Rake.

"Then I'll give you a chance!" said Lowther, and, making a sudden stride, he grabbed Baggy Trimble's collar with his left hand and Aubrey Racke's with his right.

Two heads were suddenly brought into collision. Crack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Trimble.

"Oh! Ow! Oh! Wow!" yelled Racke. "You silly fathead, what do you fancy you're doing?"

"Helping you to put your heads together!" answered Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh!" roared Baggy, rubbing his fat head. "Wow!"

"You cheeky rotter!" yelled Racke, wrenching his collar away and rubbing his head. "Keep your paws to yourself, you ruffian!"

Aubrey Racke clenched his fists, and made a step towards Lowther. Then he unclenched them, and made another step—backward! He stamped away down the passage, scowling.

"Hallo, there's the bell!" exclaimed Tom Merry. Break was over, and there was a general rush.

"Come on, Gussy!" shouted Blake.

"I have not finished bwushin' my hats, Blake. I cannot possibly leave them in this howwid condish. They are all wuffed."

"You'll get lines if you're late."

"I shall have to wisk it! I weally must bwush these hats!"

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus was left brushing hats, as the rest of the crowd scampered away. Third school was third school; but toppers were toppers; and third school had to wait!

That, to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, seemed inevitable. It did not, however, seem to strike Mr. Lathom in that light.

When the swell of St. Jim's came in, a quarter of an hour late, the master of the Fourth fixed a grim eye on him.

"D'Arcy! You are fifteen minutes late! You will remain in the Form-room fifteen minutes after class!" he rapped. "You will occupy the time by writing out a Latin conjugation."

"Oh cwumbs!"

And when the Fourth Form were dismissed Arthur Augustus remained in solitary state in the Form-room, scribbling Latin moods and tenses. Which was extremely unpleasant, and made Arthur Augustus simply yearn to discover who had ragged his hats!

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus on the Warpath!

"**W**AIT here!" murmured Aubrey Racke.

"But what's the game?" asked Croke, puzzled.

All the juniors were out of the House, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, kept in the Fourth Form Room writing out a Latin conjugation. Arthur Augustus had five minutes more to go when Racke and Croke came into the Form-room passage and stopped at a window that looked out on the quad.

"That ass D'Arcy's kept in!" said Racke in a low voice. "I heard his pals speaking about it—"

"Nothing to do with us," said Croke, with a stare.

"He will pass us when he comes out!" went on

Racke, unheeding. "Don't look round—keep looking out of the window."

"What on earth—" said Croke.

"I want him to hear what we're saying as he passes," said Racke, with a sour grin. "If he knows we mean him to hear, it will be N.G. If he hears it by accident, all right!"

"Oh! But what—"

Aubrey rubbed his head.

"That cad Lowther banged my head on Trimble's in break," he said. "I've got an ache in it now."

Croke grinned.

"Well, you asked for it!" he said. "I'd have punched his face for it."

"You wouldn't!" sneered Racke. "You'd no more have punched his face than I did, Croke! Don't gas! But somebody else is going to punch his face, I fancy."

"Blessed if I see—"

"Quiet! Here he comes!"

A footstep was heard from the direction of the Fourth Form Room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his fifteen minutes up, was dismissed at last.

Racke and Croke, looking out of the window, had their backs to him as he came down the passage. As they had, of course, no eyes in the backs of their heads, it appeared that they did not observe him coming. Arthur Augustus would have passed them, unheeding, but Racke's voice reached his ears as he came.

"It was Lowther, of course! I knew that at once, as I woke up last night and saw that his bed was empty in the dorm."

"Did you?" gasped Croke.

This was the first he had heard of it.

"Yes; as soon as I knew there had been a rag I knew at once what Lowther went down from the dorm for."

Arthur Augustus came to a sudden halt. He fixed his eyes—and his eyeglass—on the backs of the two Shell fellows standing at the window in the passage.

Not for a moment did it occur to Arthur Augustus' unsuspicious mind that they were waiting for him to pass, and that Racke's remark was timed to reach his ears as he came within hearing. They did not know that he was there at all—so far as Gussy could see.

"Can't tell D'Arcy that," said Croke, playing up to Racke's little game. "You don't want to start a row."

"Oh, no, I'm not going to mention it to D'Arcy! No bisney of mine to give Lowther away if he chooses to jape those Fourth Form asses! I wondered what he was writing that ticket for when I looked into his study after prep last night. Of course, I knew when I saw it sticking on D'Arcy's hats in his study."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Wacke!" he exclaimed.

Aubrey Racke spun round, with quite a dramatic look of surprise.

"Oh! Is that you, D'Arcy?" he exclaimed.

"What are you doing here? I thought the Fourth were out long ago."

"I was kept in, Wacke. But nevah mind that. I heard what you were sayin' to Cwooke," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "So you saw Lowthah goin' down fwom the Shell dorm last night, Wacke?"

"I'd rather not say," answered Racke, shaking his head. "You've no right to listen to a private conversation, D'Arcy, and then ask fellows questions."

"Hardly!" said Crooke. "I'm surprised at you, D'Arcy."

"You cheeky wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I could not help hearin' what you said, as you were speakin' as I came along! Do you think I would listen to fellows like a tick like Twimble?"

"Well, I'm not going to tell you anything!" declared Racke. "I can't help what you may have heard me say to Crooke, but I'm not telling you anything."

"You saw Lowthah w'itin' that sillay ticket in his studay, aftah pwep?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Find out!" retorted Racke.

"I heard you say so to Cwooke!"

"I can't help what you heard. You shouldn't come along quietly and hear what fellows are saying, with their backs turned."

"You uttah wottah, I did nothin' of the kind! How could I help hearin' what you said to Cwooke?" shrieked Arthur Augustus, crimson with indignation. "If you wepeat your words, Wacke, I will knock them back down your cheeky neck."

Aubrey Racke did not repeat his words. He shrugged his shoulders and walked away with Crooke. Arthur Augustus was left breathing wrath.

He knew now. Racke refused to tell him anything, but really, it was not necessary, after what he had heard. Angry as he was, Arthur Augustus was glad that he had chanced to catch those words. He knew now who had ragged his hats—at least, he had no doubt that he did!

He hurried out into the quad, his noble eye gleaming behind his eyeglass. Blake and Herries and Digby were waiting in the quad for him to come out, and they gazed in surprise at his wrathful countenance.

"What's up?" asked the three together.

"Where's that wottah, Lowthah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to thwash him!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"It was that uttah wottah that wagged my hats! I am goin' to give him a feaful thwashin'!"

"But—" exclaimed Blake.

"Pway don't waste time talkin', Blake! I have found out that it was Lowthah, and I am goin' to thwash him!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "I will teach him to wag my hats, bai Jove!"

"But—" gasped Herries.

"Where is the wottah? Levison, do you know where Lowthah is?" called out Arthur Augustus.

"I think he's gone up to the studies," answered Levison. "What—"

Arthur Augustus cut off into the House again, leaving Ernest Levison staring. Blake, Herries, and Dig rushed after him. If the japer in Study No. 6 really was the funny man of the Shell, they were ready to call on Monty Lowther and smite him hip and thigh. But they did not quite see how Arthur Augustus had discovered the culprit all of a sudden.

"Hold on, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake.

Arthur Augustus did not hold on. He shot on! Blake & Co. pursued him up the staircase. Blake grabbed at the tail of his jacket.

"Look here, hold on!" he hooted. "How do you know—"

"Welease me, you ass!"

"But how—" hooted Dig.

Arthur Augustus was far too excited and wrathful to waste time in words. He jerked his jacket away and raced on.

"Collar the silly ass!" exclaimed Herries.

"Stop him!" gasped Dig.

Clutching hands were close behind Arthur Augustus. He put on speed. It was rather unfortunate that Cutts of the Fifth was coming down, round the curve of the staircase, as Arthur Augustus, coming up, rounded that curve at top speed. He did not see Cutts till he crashed.

It was a terrific crash! Arthur Augustus' head caught Gerald Cutts on his waistcoat. Cutts of the Fifth went over backwards and landed on the stairs with a crash and a roar.

"Ooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He reeled back from the shock. It was fortunate that his friends were just behind him, or Gussy might have done the lower stairs in one!

As it was, he staggered back into Blake & Co., knocking them right and left. Four members of the Fourth Form were distributed over the staircase. They sprawled and roared.

Cutts of the Fifth sat up, gasping. He pressed both his hands to his waistcoat and spluttered. He fixed a deadly eye on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Cutts was not a good-tempered fellow. But even a good-tempered fellow might have been annoyed by that collision on the staircase. Cutts of the Fifth had more bumps and aches and pains than he could have counted, without going into high figures.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Cutts.

He scrambled up and fairly hurled himself on the swell of St. Jim's.

"You young idiot!" he gurgled. "Take that! You dangerous young lunatic! Take that—and that—and that—and that—"

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

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Arthur Augustus took them. He had no choice about that. He roared as he took them.

"Yawwoh! Welease me, you wuffian! Oh cwikey! Wescue, deah boys!"

Blake, Herries, and Dig scrambled up and jumped to the rescue. Arthur Augustus needed rescuing—Cutts of the Fifth seemed to fancy that he was beating carpet! They grasped Cutts and dragged him off, and as the enraged Fifth Form man began distributing his thumps impartially among the whole party, they rolled him over on the stairs and rolled him down.

Leaving them thus busily engaged, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shot on, across the study landing, and headed for Study No. 10 in the Shell.

CHAPTER 5.

Something Like a Shindy!

TOM MERRY ran his fingers through his curly hair in perplexity.

"It beats me!" he said.

"And me!" agreed Manners.

"Can't be the New House ticks," said Monty Lowther.

"How could it?"

Monty shook his head. He did not see how it could.

"Must be some man in this House," said Tom. "But who—and why? Why should a School House man rag his own House? First there was Knox of the Sixth—then us in the Shell—and now those Fourth Form kids! Some funny ass is going about making himself a regular nuisance! But who?"

It really was a problem.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were discussing it in their study after third school. They wanted to elucidate the mystery if they could. But the mystery seemed beyond them.

Some person or persons unknown had started ragging in the House. There seemed to be absolutely no clue to the offender, or offenders. But that mysterious ragger had to be spotted and stopped.

Daylight raids, of course, would have been put down to Figgins & Co. of the New House. But nocturnal raids could—so far as Tom Merry & Co. could see—only be perpetrated by some member of the House. And that member of the House seemed to be quite undiscoverable.

"We've got to spot him," said Tom. "We can't let the cheeky ass carry on. But how—"

A rapid patter of footsteps in the passage interrupted the captain of the Shell. A breathless figure arrived in the doorway of Study No. 10.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth stared in. He did not speak. He rushed at Monty Lowther.

"What—" spluttered Lowther, as an arm was thrown round his neck, hooking him off the table, where he was seated.

Thump, thump!

Arthur Augustus started work at once. Having got his man, he lost no time. Monty Lowther roared frantically as his head went into chancery and Arthur Augustus thumped his features. He struggled wildly.

"Gussy—" gasped Tom Merry.

"D'Arcy, you potty ass—" gasped Manners.

"Ow! Wow!" Lowther struggled and roared. "Dragimoff! What the thump— Oh, my hat! Yarooop!"

"You wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus.

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"Waggin' a man's hats! I'll give you waggin' my hats! Bai Jove! I'll—"

Tom Merry and Manners, recovering from their astonishment, hurled themselves at the swell of St. Jim's. They grasped him together, dragged him off Monty Lowther, and spun him across the study.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he spun.

He collided with the wall and sat down at the foot of it. Monty Lowther, gurgling, glared at him.

"You mad ass!" he bellowed. "Have you gone off your rocker? What's the matter with you, you potty piffler?"

"You wagged my hats, you wottah!" Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. "I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'! I wefuse to have my hats wagged! I am goin' to give you a lesson about waggin' a man's hats, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rushed to the attack again. Monty Lowther jumped to meet him half-way. But Tom Merry pushed between.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Stop it, D'Arcy! Stop it, Lowther! Oh, my hat! Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry roared as he received a punch from D'Arcy intended for Lowther, and another from Lowther intended for Arthur Augustus. The peacemakers are said to be blessed, but Tom Merry did not feel like it at the moment.

"Gewwout of the way, you ass!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to thwash that wottah Lowthah—"

"Get out of the way!" roared Lowther. "I'm going to make mincemeat of that tailor's dummy!"

"You uttah wottah—"

"You blithering cuckoo—"

"Stop it!" roared Tom. He shoved Arthur Augustus back. "Collar that other idiot, Manners!"

"I wepeat that I am goin' to thwash Lowthah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"I'm going to smash that dangerous maniac!" yelled Monty Lowther.

But the mutual thrashing and smashing was delayed. Tom Merry jammed Arthur Augustus against the wall and pinned him there; Manners collared Monty Lowther and dragged him backwards.

"Now tell us what you've gone potty for, D'Arcy, you mad ass!" hooted Tom.

"I have not gone pottay, you fathead! I have found out that it was Lowthah who wagged my hats, and I am goin' to give him some more! I have not finished thwashin' him yet, by any means! Gewwout of the way, Tom Mewwy, or I shall thwash you first, and Lowthah aftahwards!"

Arthur Augustus made a rush, shoving the captain of the Shell back. Tom Merry put out a foot, and Arthur Augustus stumbled over it and sat down. The next moment Tom flattened him out and sat on his chest.

Under his weight Arthur Augustus wriggled wildly.

"Gewwoff!" he shrieked. "You are wumplin' my waistcoat! You are dwivin' all the bweath out of me! Gewwoff!"

"Are you still going to thrash Lowther?" inquired Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'll stay where I am!" said Tom, settling himself more comfortably on the sprawling swell of St. Jim's. "Now, what's put it into your silly head that Monty ragged your silly hats?"

"I found him out."

"You didn't—you found me in!" said Monty Lowther. "I jolly well wish you had found me out, you dangerous lunatic!" Monty had had several hefty thumps, but they did not seem to have diminished his jesting propensities.

"You sillay ass, I have not come heah to listen to your wotten punnin'! I have come heah to thwash you for waggin' my hats! Will you gewwoff, Tom Mewwy?"

"Sit on him," said Manners. "Gussy, you born idiot, Monty never ragged your hats. He's said so."

"Wubbish! What did he go down ffrom the dorm last night for, then?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What did he w'ite that sillay ticket for?"

"I never did, you ass!" howled Lowther. "I was fast asleep all night, and I never saw that ticket till I saw it on your silly hats."

"Wats! You were seen, you wottah, and you cannot pull my leg! A chap in the Shell saw you, and I heard him say so!"

Three breathless Fourth Formers arrived at the door of Study No. 10. Blake & Co. had left Cutts of the Fifth for dead, as it were, and followed on. Arthur Augustus gave them a howl as they appeared.

"Wescue, deah boys! Dwag that ass Tom Mewwy off me so that I can get at that wottah Lowthah and thwash him."

"You're safer where you are, old tulip!" said Blake. "Who's been pulling your leg, you fathead?"

"Somebody has," said Tom. "Lowther never went down in the night, and he never knew anything about that silly ticket till he saw it! Who's been spinning you that yarn, Gussy?"

"I heard it by accident," howled Arthur Augustus. "If Wacke had told me so I should not have believed him, knowin' him to be a fibbin' wottah, but I heard him speakin' to Cwooke about it, entiahly by accident—"

"Racke!" yelled Lowther.

"Yaas, Wacke! He saw you; he wufused to tell me when I asked him, but I heard him tellin' Cwooke about it, entiahly by accident—"

"Some accident!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That worm Racke has been pulling your leg and setting you to scrap with Monty."

"He was not pullin' my leg, Tom Mewwy. He nevah knew I was anywhah neah him when he was speakin' to Cwooke—"

"You frumptions chump!" howled Monty Lowther. "Can't you see that Racke meant you to hear and that he was leading you by your silly nose?"

"Plain enough!" said Tom Merry.

"Gussy's the sort of ass to have his leg pulled like that," sighed Blake. "What I can't make out is, why they sent him to St. Jim's if there was a home for idiots available!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Got it into your silly head now, Gussy?" demanded Manners.

"You burbling cuckoo!" said Monty Lowther. "Racke never saw anything of the kind! He was spinning that yarn for you to hear! Got it now?"

"He was pulling your leg, fathead!" hooted Tom Merry.

"Gussy's born to have his leg pulled," said Blake. "That's his special mission in life. Roll him out, and we'll take him home, and, I say,

what will you fellows put up if we have a whip-round to buy a strait-jacket for him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three rolled Arthur Augustus out of the study. It could not be ascertained whether it had dawned on Gussy's noble mind that Aubrey had been pulling his leg; Arthur Augustus had no leisure, or breath, to state his views on the subject. The Shell fellows having rolled him out, Blake & Co. rolled him along the passage, and rolled him into Study No. 6.

There they left him to sort himself out!

CHAPTER 6.

One Good Turn Deserves Another!

"POOR old Aubrey!" said Monty Lowther commiseratingly.

Tom Merry and Manners looked at him.

After class that day, the Terrible Three of the Shell were on the study landing, leaning in a row on the banisters—and waiting. Why they were waiting, Tom Merry and Manners did not know.

Lowther, it seemed, did! Monty Lowther had told them that Racke and Crooke would be coming up to their study soon, and that he wanted them to wait till Racke and Crooke came. That was all they knew.

After the trick Aubrey had played that morning, pulling the noble leg of Arthur Augustus, and starting him on the warpath, Lowther's chums would not have been surprised had Monty invited Aubrey into the gym to put the gloves on; or behind the gym with the gloves off! But the study landing was hardly the place for a scrap, so it appeared that that was not what Monty was thinking of. Tom Merry and Manners waited—not very patiently, perhaps. Tom would have been glad to go down to the nets, and Manners to take his camera for a walk. However, they waited; and at last the footsteps of the two black sheep of the Shell were heard on the stairs.

Monty Lowther did not look round. He did not need to look round. He had a small pocket mirror in the palm of his hand, which gave him a reflection of the stairs below. So he knew when Racke and Crooke appeared. And as they came within earshot, he made the commiserating remark that surprised his chums. Naturally, it reached the ears of Aubrey Racke also, on the staircase below, and caused him to glance up at the backs of the three Shell fellows leaning on the landing banisters.

"What—" began Tom Merry.

"The sack at last, I'm afraid!" said Lowther. "Aubrey's going to get it right in the neck if he's copped! And he will be. Crooke, too—he will have to stand for it as well as Racke."

"But what's up?" asked Manners. "Has Railton spotted them breaking out at night, or what?"

"Well, you know the sort they are!" said Lowther. "They smoke in their study after class—they back gee-gees with a frowsy lout at the Green Man—they keep sporting papers and things in their study! We know all about them in the Shell—"

"Railton doesn't know what we know in the Shell," said Tom.

The footsteps were no longer heard on the staircase. Racke and Crooke had come to a halt with startled faces, and were listening eagerly.

If trouble was coming for the two bad hats of

the School House, they were very glad to get a tip in advance. They were very keen indeed to overhear this.

Tom Merry and Manners suppressed a chuckle. As Lowther had started on the subject as soon as the two black sheep came up, they could guess that he wanted them to hear. He was, in fact, playing over again the game that Racke had played with Arthur Augustus that morning. But that suspicion did not occur to Aubrey Racke or his comrade. They were alarmed, and eager to hear more of this impending trouble.

"Railton will know as much as any fellow can tell him when he looks through their study," said Monty Lowther. "I fancy there's enough in that study to make him send them up to the Head!"

"Not much doubt about that," agreed Tom Merry. "But is Railton going to search their study?"

Racke and Crooke exchanged a sickly glance on the stairs.

If the Housemaster of the School House became suspicious and searched their study, he was likely to find at least enough to send them to the Head for a flogging. Smokes and cards and racing papers and betting lists were not supposed to exist in studies at St. Jim's; and though Aubrey carefully kept such things out of sight, a search was certain to reveal them, if the Housemaster's suspicions were awakened.

"More power to his elbow if he bowls them out," said Manners. "It's time those two dingy rotters were sacked!"

"I was wondering whether I ought to tell Racke what I know," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "I mean, there's still time for him to get rid of the things before Railton comes up. At least, I think so. What's the time now, Tom?"

"Quarter past five."

"Well, Railton won't be up here till half-past. Think I ought to look for Racke and tip him? He's a dingy waster and a worm and a rank outsider, but do we want him sacked?"

"I don't see that you need butt in!" said Manners. "If Racke asks for it, why shouldn't he get it?"

"Well, yes; but if a fellow knows that a beak is on the prowl, it would be only good-natured to put a man wise."

"That's so," said Tom Merry. "But I wouldn't barge in. I don't see why Racke shouldn't take his chance if he chooses to be a rorty sportsman."

There was a sudden patter of feet on the stairs. Racke and Crooke had heard enough—quite enough! They ran up the remainder of the stairs, and cut across the landing.

"Hallo, there's Racke!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, as two running figures disappeared up the Shell passage. "Wasn't one of those chaps Racke?"

"I fancy so!" grinned Tom Merry.

Racke and Crooke fairly scudded up the passage to Study No. 7, which was their study. They rushed into that study, hurling the door open.

Monty Lowther winked at his friends.

"Think they heard what I was saying to you fellows?" he asked.

"Sort of!" chuckled Tom.

"Think they got the idea that our giddy Housemaster was coming up on the prowl at half-past five?"

"I don't see what other idea they could have got."

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"But I never said so," argued Monty. "I'm a bit more particular about my facts than dear old Aubrey is. I said that Railton would know as much as any fellow could tell him if he looked through their study. So he would. I said he wouldn't be up here till half-past five—and he won't. So far as I know, he's not coming up here at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The guilty flee when no man pursueth, what?" grinned Lowther. "Racke seems to have got quite a wrong impression from my remarks—same as Gussy did from his this morning. History repeats itself, my beloved 'earers'!"

His chums chortled.

"What did they scud off to their study for like that?" went on Lowther. "What do you think they're doing?"

"Getting rid of the evidence as fast as they can, I fancy!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Just so! Let's go and see them at it."

Three grinning juniors walked up the passage to Study No. 7 in the Shell.

The door of that study was shut. But sounds of hasty movements could be heard within, and gasping voices.

"For goodness' sake hurry up, Crooke! Where did you put the 'Racing Tipster'?"

"Under the cushion on the armchair, I—I think."

"Get it, quick—while I get rid of these smokes! Buck up, for goodness' sake—"

"What about the cards?"

"Shove them on the fire, you fool! If Railton found cards here, think he'd suppose we'd been playing rummy? Stick them in the grate!"

"I say, I gave half-a-crown for that pack—"

"You thundering fool, are you going to be sacked to save half-a-crown?" hissed Racke. "Stick them in the grate—I'll light this paper under them—now the smokes!"

"I say, can't we hide the cigarettes somewhere? That's a seven-and-six box—"

"Think Railton wouldn't root it out if we hid it, you dummy? Hope to goodness they'll burn before he comes up! Quick!"

"What rotten luck!"

"Don't jaw—quick! Thank goodness we got the tip in time that he was coming—that cad Lowther would never have told us! Quick—quick!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther grinned at one another blissfully in the passage. Racke and Crooke, in the study, were working with desperate haste to get rid of the incriminating evidence before the arrival of their Housemaster—who was not coming.

Talbot of the Shell came out of Study No. 9. He stopped and looked at three grinning faces.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

"Two of 'em," answered Monty Lowther—"Racke and Crooke! They're expecting Railton, and making a few preparations for him."

Lowther stepped to the study door and tapped on it, a sharp tap such as Mr. Railton might have delivered had he come to that study.

Two startled gasps were heard within.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh crikey!"

Evidently Racke and Crooke had the impression that the Housemaster had arrived!

Lowther pushed open the door. A fire was burning in the study grate—a copy of the "Racing Tipster" flared, and a "Racing Guide" smouldered—and a heap of playing-cards were burning. Crooke, with another racing paper in

his hand, and Racke, with both hands full of cigarettes, spun round in sheer terror towards the door as it opened.

They gasped with mingled relief and rage at the sight of the Shell fellows instead of the Housemaster they dreaded.

"You fool!" panted Racke. "What do you want?"

"Any charge for seeing the show?" inquired Lowther.

"What are you fellows up to?" inquired Manners. "What the thump do you want a fire for in June?"

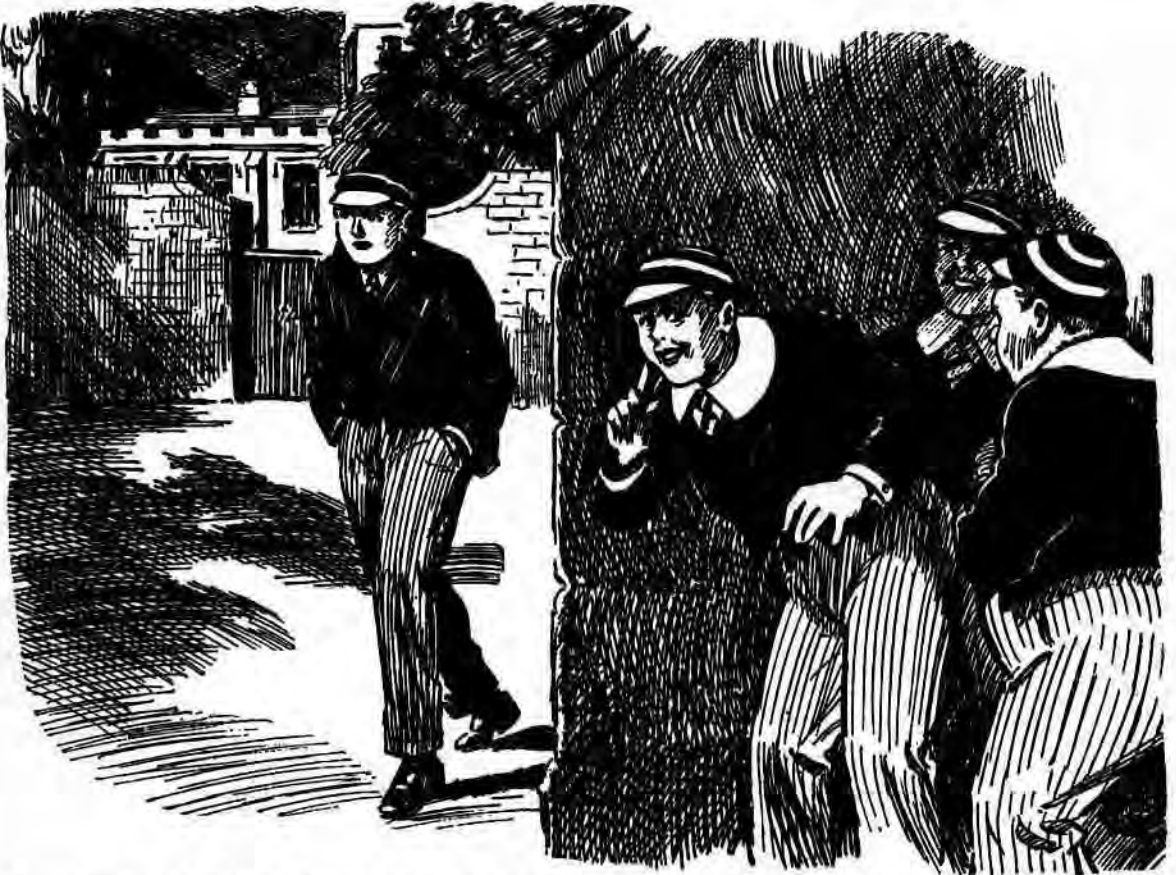
"Mind your own business!" snarled Racke.

"Racke's got cold feet!" explained Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

More and more cigarettes were crammed into the flames, and stirred with the poker. Racing literature of various kinds was added. It was quite a bonfire in the grate in Study No. 7, and as it was a warm June afternoon, that study simply reeked with heat. Racke threw the window wide open, and waved an atlas about to clear the air.

"I say, Railton will notice all that ash in the grate!" gasped Crooke. "He's sure to notice it."



It was ten to one that Outts, coming along by the old stone wall, would spot Figgins & Co. crouching in the shadow of the buttress. Figgins made a sign to his comrades, and Kerr and Wynn, understanding, grinned, and stood ready for the Fifth Former.

He crammed the handfuls of cigarettes into the fire, and stirred with the poker.

"Is Railton coming, Talbot?" panted Crooke. "Can you see him in the passage?"

"Railton!" exclaimed Talbot. He glanced down the passage to the landing. "No, nobody's coming—only Kangaroo."

"Buck up, Crooke, you fool!" exclaimed Racke, in a shrill voice of terror. "Are you going to stand there jawing when Railton may be up here any minute? Get the other box of smokes—it's in the tomato tin."

"What's this game?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell, staring into the study. "My hat! What a bonfire! What the thump do you want a fire for, Crooke?"

"We can tell him we've been burning a lot of old exercises, you fool. Better burn one, for him to see!"

Aubrey hastily sorted out a Latin exercise, burned the edge of it at the fire, and dropped it into the fender. Really, that was a masterly touch—a half-burnt exercise lying in the fender to show that nothing but old exercises had been burned in the grate.

"I say, I can still see some cigarettes!" muttered Crooke, peering anxiously at the smoky, ash mass in the fireplace.

"Sti. them up, you fool!"

Five fellows watched from the passage with great interest. Gore and Skimpole, Bernard

Glyn and Clifton Dane, came along to join the audience. Racke cared nothing for the gathering crowd of Shell fellows—it was the Housemaster he dreaded; and it was very near half-past five now.

"Is Railton coming, you men out there?" called out Crooke.

"No!"

"Oh, good!"

"We're through!" gasped Aubrey Racke, mopping his perspiring face. "Mind you remember it was old exercises we were burning, if Railton asks. I don't care what he suspects—he can't prove anything now. We're all right!"

"All your smokes gone, Racke?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes, you rotter!" snarled Aubrey. "Nothing in the study now that Railton mightn't see—we're all right, no thanks to you! I jolly well know that you weren't going to give me the tip that Railton was coming."

"Is he coming?" asked Lowther.

"You rotter, you know he is—I heard you saying so to your pals as we came upstairs!" sneered Racke. "You never meant to give me the tip—but I got it all the same."

Monty Lowther glanced at his grinning chums.

"I fancy Racke must have misunderstood me," he remarked. "You can see that he supposed from what I said that Railton was coming up. Funny, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And they've burned all their smokes, and their cards, and their racing papers for nothing, so far as I can see!" continued Lowther. "What a life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Shell fellows in the passage.

"Have you been pulling Racke's leg, Lowther?" asked Talbot, laughing.

"No, he pulled it himself. It's one of those remarkable coincidences you hear about sometimes!" explained Lowther. "This morning Gussy happened to hear Racke and Crooke talking, and never guessed that they meant him to, and went off at the deep end. This afternoon Racke and Crooke happened to hear me talking, and never guessed that I meant them to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry and Manners.

"What?" howled Racke.

"So they seem to have got a scare," went on Lowther, "and they've destroyed all the jolly old evidence, in a blue funk because they thought that our dear and respected Housemaster was coming up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This study will be quite wholesome till they get a fresh supply," remarked Monty Lowther. "Quite a pleasant surprise for Railton, if he should happen to come up—though I don't suppose he will! Well, you men, now the show's over, what about a spot of cricket?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows moved off, howling with laughter. Racke and Crooke looked at one another. Monty Lowther gave them a cheery grin before he went.

"One good turn deserves another, what?" he remarked. "Gratters on the unusually decent state of your study."

And Monty Lowther, smiling, walked away after his friends.

Racke and Crooke were left staring at one another—and at the heap of hot ashes in the

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grate—all that remained of racing papers, sporting works, and innumerable expensive cigarettes!

They did not speak. They could not. Their feelings were too deep for words. No words in any known language could have done justice to the feelings of the two black sheep of the Shell just then.

CHAPTER 7.

Quite a Surprise for Cutts!

"QUIET!" breathed Kerr.

"What—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Quiet!"

"But what—" whispered Figgins.

"Will you be quiet?" breathed Kerr.

A silver crescent of moon hung like a sickle over St. Jim's. It glimmered on the old quad, the school buildings, the ancient, ruined tower, and the old, flagged courtyard that surrounded it—and glimmered also on the New House juniors who were far from dormitory and bed.

Figgins & Co., at that late hour, were out of their House—a circumstance that would have evoked the direst wrath of Mr. Ratcliff, their Housemaster, had he been aware of the same. But Figgins & Co. were very wary, and their House slept peacefully, none within aware of their absence.

They had dropped over the little gate that gave access to the old yard by the tower. From the crypt under the tower, the secret passage—known only to Figgins & Co.—led to the School House.

Fatty Wynn had discovered that secret passage quite by accident. Figgins & Co. had used it several times since. They were keeping it very dark—and so long as it remained a secret, the mysterious ragers in the School House were likely to remain mysterious!

All was silent and still in the vicinity of the old tower, which was at a distance from the school buildings. But it seemed that Kerr's keen ear had caught a sound, for he whispered to his friends to keep quiet, and dragged them into the deep shadow of an ancient buttress.

They kept very quiet. It was only for a lark that Figgins & Co. were out of their House after lights out, but the penalties for such an escapade were severe, in the event of discovery.

A faint sound came to the ears of all three. It came from the direction of the gate they had climbed over a few minutes ago.

"Oh gum!" breathed Figgins.

Kerr pressed his arm as a signal for silence.

Somebody was at that gate. Nobody had any business there at that hour, unless it was some master or prefect who knew that fellows were out of House bounds, and was looking for them. Which was a dismaying thought to the three. The prospect of being marched back to their House and facing Mr. Ratcliff was really horrifying.

Peering round the buttress, they picked out a shadowy figure at the gate, dim in the dusky moonlight. They saw it swing over from the quad and drop lightly.

It was not a master. It was some senior—whether a Sixth Form prefect or not, they could not distinguish.

The dim figure stood at the gate for a few moments, looking back over it, and apparently watching and listening.

Then it dawned on the New House trio. Whoever the fellow was, he was not a prefect in quest of juniors out of their House. He was some fellow breaking bounds at that late hour.

By cutting across that old courtyard, a fellow could reach an outside wall which gave on Rylcombe Lane. It was a safe way out and in for a breaker of bounds.

"Some goat going out on the tiles!" whispered Figgins. "Don't let him see us, though!"

"Quiet!" whispered Kerr.

The fellow at the gate turned. Faint as Figgy's whisper had been, he seemed to have caught some sound.

He stood staring round the old courtyard, and as the moonlight glimmered on his face, Figgins & Co. recognised him—he was Cutts of the Fifth, a School House man.

Cutts, the sportsman of the Fifth, was evidently on his way out—no doubt to keep some appointment with a sporting friend.

Figgins & Co. backed close to the wall of the tower, in the shadow of the bulging buttress. They had nothing to fear from Cutts—he had more to fear than the juniors if he was discovered out of his House. But they did not want to be seen. Fellows who were out of House bounds at eleven o'clock could not be too careful!

They heard footsteps at last on the old cracked flags of the ancient yard.

Cutts had left the gate and was coming past the old tower, keeping close to the old, dismantled wall to keep in shadow.

Figgins suppressed a gasp.

Coming along the old stone wall Cutts could see nothing of them yet, but when he passed the buttress it was ten to one that, watchful as he was, he would spot the three figures crouching back in the shadow. And he would be passing that buttress in less than a minute.

Figgins made a sign to his comrades. The faintest whisper would have reached Cutts' ears. He did not speak, but the Co. understood his sign, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn nodded and grinned.

They stood ready. Cutts came quietly along the wall, hugging shadow. But they could hear him, cautious as his footfalls were.

He came past the buttress. For a second he stood clear to their eyes in the moonlight. And in that second Figgins & Co. jumped together.

There was a startled gasp from Cutts of the Fifth.

Never was a fellow so surprised.

He hardly knew what was happening. He went over, suddenly upended by hands that grasped him from the shadows and came down with a bump on the old flags. He flattened out, with his features grinding on the old stones of the yard and a knee planted in the small of his back.

Cutts gurgled wildly

Who had jumped on him and collared him so suddenly he had not the faintest idea. His brain was in a whirl.

He was released as suddenly as he had been grasped.

Leaving the Fifth Former with his startled and amazed face on the old stones, Figgins & Co. cut away and dodged into the doorway of the old tower.

Within, in tense darkness, they stopped and listened.

It was some moments before the astounded Fifth Former sat up, gasping and spluttering for breath. His gasps and splutters floated to their ears. They heard him drag himself to his feet.

Peering out from the darkness of the interior of the old tower, they saw Cutts tottering back to the gate in the glimmer of the moon.

He was staring round him with startled, amazed, apprehensive eyes.

His sudden assailants had vanished like spectres, while his face was flattened on the flags. Cutts had not had even a glimpse of them. Who they were, and what they were doing, he had not the remotest idea. But it was evident that he was startled and scared, and that he had had enough of the old tower by moonlight!

Watching all round him, as he went, like a startled rabbit, Cutts of the Fifth tottered back to the gate, and hurriedly clambered over it into the quad.

Evidently he had given up the idea of breaking bounds that night. His sporting friend was booked for a long wait if he waited for Cutts! The Fifth Form sportsman was only anxious to get safe back to the House.

Figgins & Co. grinned as he disappeared over the gate. They heard a faint sound of running feet that died into silence.

Cutts of the Fifth was gone

"O.K.!" chuckled Figgins. "Cutts won't be seeing his bookie to-night. We've done him a good turn, really. Jevver see a fellow so scared?"

The Co. chuckled.

"Come on!" said Kerr. "All clear now!"

And he turned on a pocket-torch, and the New House trio descended into the crypt to follow the underground passage that led to the School House, to its outlet by the oak panel in the Fourth Form passage in that House.

Cutts was probably back in bed in the Fifth Form dormitory before they reached their destination; but the New House raiders were very cautious when they stepped through the secret door into the Fourth Form study passage.

At that hour of the night when all St. Jim's slept—or should have been sleeping—they had counted on finding the coast clear. But they realised now that it might not be quite so clear as they had supposed—it was quite possible that Cutts of the Fifth was not the only giddy goat in the School House who might be up and about, instead of fast asleep in his dormitory as he should have been.

The mystery of the unknown ragers would not have remained a mystery much longer had some School House man spotted Figgins & Co. in the School House after lock-up and lights out. It was a peril they had not thought of—but they thought of it now. Cutts of the Fifth had unconsciously put them on their guard.

The Fourth Form passage in the School House was dark and silent when the three stepped quietly into it. But they stood listening, their ears strained to catch the slightest sound. And there was a sudden low whisper from Kerr:

"Quiet, for the love of Mike! There's a light—"

"A light!" breathed Figgins.

"Yes—look!"

"Where?" whispered Fatty Wynn. "I can't see it. Where—"

"In Blake's study!"

"Oh!"

Faintly, a mere glimmer in the darkness, it gleamed from the doorway of Study No. 6.

That door was ajar—a few inches open. It

was not the study light that shone—it seemed like the light of a small torch. But it had caught the Scottish junior's keen eye.

Somebody was up—and that somebody was in Study No. 6—the very study to which the New House raiders had intended to pay a visit!

CHAPTER 8.

Aubrey's Deep Scheme!

"RACKE, old man—"

"Oh, don't jaw!"

"You're overdoing it, you ass!"

"All the better! Lowther will get the benefit—and his pals!"

"But—"

"It's safe as houses, you fool! Think anybody knows we've come down from the dorm?" Aubrey Racke of the Shell gave a low chuckle—audible to three pairs of ears in the Fourth Form passage. "No. They'll know Study No. 10 did it when they see the evidence in the morning. I've got it all cut and dried."

"But—"

"Oh, don't jaw! See if you can find any more ink."

"You've not used all that red ink yet."

"I want the rest of that. That's going to be the evidence."

Three New House juniors, silent as spectres, exchanged glances outside the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

The whispering voices within came clearly to the ears of Figgins & Co.

Who could be up after eleven o'clock at night in Blake's study was quite a puzzling mystery to the New House trio—till they heard the whispering voices of Aubrey Racke and his pal.

Then they realised how the matter stood.

Figgins & Co. had planned a rag in that study—quite a harmless sort of rag. Raiding the rival House was all in the game; but the raiders never did any real damage; only a general lark to make the enemy sit up and take notice!

But the rag that was going on in Study No. 6 was not a harmless lark. Racke of the Shell was on the trail of vengeance!

The door being ajar, the New House Co. could see part of the study within, and what they saw made them stare.

A pocket-torch had been set up on the mantelpiece to show light. It did not give much, but it gave enough for Racke and Crooke to carry on their nefarious work. Books and papers lay all over the floor, smothered with ink, red and black. A silk hat, no doubt the property of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, lay in sight, looking more like a concertina than a hat—having been stamped on. From what they could see, Figgins & Co. could guess what they could not see. This was not what they would have called a rag. Racke and Crooke were wrecking Study No. 6 like a couple of hooligans.

Figg's eyes glinted.

He did not want this kind of thing put down to the mystery ragers. But it was done, and Racke was evidently going further, and there was no stopping him without giving away their secret.

Figgins & Co. would have been glad to rush into the study and knock the two young rascals right and left. But that was not practical politics. Their presence in the House had to be

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kept a secret. Aubrey and his pal had to be allowed to carry on at their own sweet will.

"For goodness' sake, leave the clock alone!" came Crooke's startled whisper. "That clock's worth something!"

"All the more reason for smashing it! They can make Study No. 10 pay for it if they like!"

"Don't make a row!"

"Nobody to hear if I did. But I'm not a fool, and don't you be a shivering funk!"

There was a grinding sound in the study. It sounded as if the study clock was being ground under foot.

"There'll be a fearful row about this!" muttered Crooke uneasily.

"That's what I want!"

"If the beaks get on to it—"

"I don't care if they do! In fact, I'd like Railton to take it up. It would mean a flogging for the fellow who did it!"

"Well, that's jolly thick, Racke!"

"Is it?" sneered Racke. "Thicker than the trick Lowther played on us to-day? We got rid of over five shillings' worth of cigarettes when he pulled my leg and made me believe that Railton was coming up to search my study!"

"If you're sure you can fix it on that gang—"

"I've got that all cut and dried. Think I'd be doing this if there was the smallest spot of a chance of getting it landed on me?"

"Let that die alone!"

"Rot!"

There was a sound of tearing pages.

Figgins & Co., in the passage, exchanged expressive looks.

Their feelings were deep. This rag, it seemed, was to be put down to Tom Merry & Co. somehow!

How Racke proposed to carry out that scheme was a mystery to Figgins & Co. He was malicious enough, and unscrupulous enough, but they could not see how he was going to do it.

Kerr quietly set open the door of Study No. 5, ready for dodging when the ragers came out of Study No. 6. But Racke and Crooke were not coming out yet. The genial Aubrey's work was far from done.

"What are you going to do with D'Arcy's writing-case?" came Crooke's uneasy whisper.

"Pour this bottle of gum into it."

"Oh crikey!"

"That atlas may as well go!" There was a tearing, rending sound again. "They can use it for a jig-saw puzzle now if they like!"

There was a faint chuckle from Crooke. He lacked the hardihood of his associate and he was uneasy; but, otherwise, he was enjoying this.

"Here's another atlas!" Tearing and rending again. "I'll mix up the bits—it will amuse them to sort them out perhaps!"

"If they think Lowther did this, they'll scrag him!"

"They're going to think so. Plenty of fellows jolly well know that the mystery rager is Lowther! Who else could it be? Some man is ragging the House—it's Lowther or nobody!"

Figgins, outside, winked at the Co.

"Now they'll think he's gone a bit farther than usual, that's all," went on Racke. "That fool D'Arcy punched his face to-day in Tom Merry's study—there's a motive, if they want to look for one!"

"Yes, they'll think of that," agreed Crooke. "But that isn't enough—you'll have to make it clearer than that!"

"I've told you I've got all that cut and dried."

"What are you spilling that red ink for? You said you wanted it."

"That's what I wanted it for, ass!"

"Are you mad, Racke?" came Crooke's startled whisper. "You're treading in that red ink—you'll carry it all over the shop!"

"I shall carry it as far as Study No. 10 in the Shell, at any rate," answered Racke coolly. "That's the big idea!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"See now?" asked Aubrey, with a low chuckle. "Ink spilt all over the study! What's more likely than that a ragger might tread in it without noticing it? He walks off, never noticing that he's treading ink all along the passage, of course. They'll notice it fast enough in the daylight, and follow it up—and it will lead them to Study No. 10 in the Shell!"

"Oh scissors!" gasped Crooke.

"Get it now?" chuckled Racke.

"But—" stuttered Crooke.

"Safe as houses!" said Racke coolly. "I jolly well believe myself that Lowther is the mystery ragger. Who else could it be? I believe his pals were with him when Knox of the Sixth was ragged. There were three in that, at any rate!"

Three New House juniors in the passage grinned.

"Well, when they see this, they can choose between Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—or the lot of them!" went on Racke. "It's going to be fixed on Study No. 10, anyhow. They may be sorry to-morrow that they scared us into getting rid of the smokes in our study. Tit for tat! One good turn deserves another, as Lowther said to me. This is my good turn!"

And Aubrey chuckled.

"But look here, you ass!" breathed Crooke. "You've made your slippers all inky—they're drenched with red ink! Suppose some fellow noticed that your slippers are red-inky?"

"Think I'm going back in the dorm in them, fathead? I shall shove them up the chimney in my study when I've done with them. I can light a fire to-morrow, and burn them—like we did the smokes. Think anybody will be looking up our study chimney?"

"Oh, no! But—" gasped Crooke. "Look here, there's one thing you haven't thought of!"

"I fancy not! What is it?"

"Suppose Lowther, or Lowther and his pals, ragged this study, why should they go along to their own afterwards? They'd go back to the dorm!"

"I've thought of that, you goat!" answered Racke contemptuously. "There's got to be a reason for that, of course. Last time this study was ragged a lot of books were carted off to Tom Merry's study. I've no doubt it was Lowther. Anyhow, that's what happened, as you know!"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, that gave me the idea. Something else is going to be carted off—not books this time, of course. Something a fellow might like to cart off—such as a cake—"

"Oh!"

"Look in the study cupboard. I've smashed the eggs, and upset the jam. But there's a big plum cake there—and a pineapple—and a box of biscuits—and that fancy box of chocolates that D'Arcy got to-day—well, the lot of them are going to be found in Study No. 10 in the Shell when Blake and his pals follow the trail there!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Just the stuff they would cart off after ragging the study. And the trail is going to lead right up to the cupboard in Study No. 10. And what are fellows going to think when they follow it to the end and find the tuck from this study parked there?"

"By gum! You think of everything, old chap!" said Crooke admiringly. "My hat! There'll be some scrapping to-morrow—and they'll never know they're getting it for pulling our legs this afternoon!"

"I'd like them to—but it wouldn't do!" grinned Racke. "Now then, get hold of that torch—and I'll collect the plunder from the cupboard! We're through here!"

In the passage, Figgins & Co. faded like spectres into Study No. 5, and shut the door without a sound.

A minute or two later, cautious footsteps were heard as Racke and Crooke came out of Study No. 6.

Kerr, keeping the door half an inch ajar, peered out.

Racke, with a pile of comestibles—a big cake, a pineapple, a box of biscuits, and a box of chocolates—passed, leaving a track of red ink on the passage floor as he went. Crooke, holding the torch, went with him, carefully avoiding treading on the inky trail. The glimmer of the light and the stealthy footfalls died away in the passage.

CHAPTER 9.

Guardian Angels!

GEORGE FIGGINS breathed hard and deep. "Oh gum!" he murmured.

"The awful rotters!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

Kerr stood silent. He was thinking hard as the minutes passed, after the footfalls had died away.

"This tears it!" muttered Figgins. "We can't keep this dark. We were going to keep it a dead secret about knowing a way into the School House—but we can't let this go on."

"No fear!" agreed Fatty Wynn.

"We can't let that cad get by with a putrid scheme like that!" muttered Figgins. "Why, it would be fixed on Lowther and his pals, as safe as houses! What the dickens could they say—with that trail leading into their study, and the cake and things parked in their study cupboard?"

"We've got to chip in," said Fatty. "But it means that we've got to give away that we were here, and that's letting the cat out of the bag—"

"And that means an end of larking with the School House and making them sit up!" sighed Figgins. "Can't be helped. We're not letting that worm Racke get by with a dirty game like this!"

"What about it, Kerr?" asked Fatty, as the Scottish junior did not speak. "You don't think we can let a rotten game like this go on, do you?"

"Hardly," answered Kerr.

"Well, we can't dish those cads without letting out that we were on the spot," said Figgins.

"I think we can," said Kerr quietly. "That's what I've been thinking out, and I fancy we can work it all right. No hurry. We must give that precious pair time to get back to their dorm before we make a move. We can't do anything till they're safe off the scene."

"And what can we do then?" asked Figgins.

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"Mind, we're not risking letting them fix this on Study No. 10. I don't want to give our secret away, but we've got to put paid to Racke."

"We'll put paid to him all right," said Kerr—"at least, we'll see that he puts paid to himself." The Scottish junior chuckled softly. "Racke's laying his jolly old trail up the Shell passage as far as Study No. 10. Suppose—after he's gone back to bed—another fellow followed on and wiped out the trail past Study No. 7—his study—leaving it to stop there?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Then, when the merry hunters picked up the trail in the morning, it would lead them to Racke's study instead of Tom Merry's."

"Oh gum!" said Figgins.

"No reason why it shouldn't, as Racke's the man who did the trick," said Kerr.

"No reason why it shouldn't; lots of reasons why it should!" chuckled Figgins. "I see! He's laying that trail past his own study as far as Study No. 10, and we—"

"We get some wet dusters and wash out the last bit," said Kerr. "That leaves it on Racke."

Fatty Wynn chortled.

"Good egg!" he said.

"A dab or two inside Racke's study will complete the picture," went on Kerr. "He's going to leave red-inky footsteps in Study No. 10, leading to the study cupboard. Well, we wash them out, and leave a few in Study No. 7 leading to Racke's own study cupboard."

"And the loot—"

"He's parking it in Tom Merry's study. Easy enough to shift it to his own. That's where he ought to park it, as he's pinched it. If he doesn't do as he ought we can help."

Figgins gurgled explosively.

"But—but, I say—" There was an anxious note in Fatty Wynn's voice. "I—I say, Kerr, old man, not the cake! I think we might have the cake—"

"You fat grampus!"

"Well, I don't see wasting the cake!" urged Fatty. "Look here, we shall have to cut out our jape; and we don't want to have to come here for nothing. Let's have the cake."

Kerr chuckled.

"Well, the cake disappears," he said. "That's all right. Plenty of other things. If you touch the pineapple or the biscuits or the chocs, we'll slaughter you, Fatty!"

"Well, perhaps just a few of the chocs—"

"Kill him!" said Kerr.

"I—I—I mean, just the cake; so long as we have the cake—"

"Kerr, old man, you're a giddy genius!" said Figgins. "I say, that will put paid to Racke, and without giving it away that we were here. We stop that rotter's game, and keep our secret all the time."

"That's the idea!" assented Kerr.

"Then there won't be a thing to connect Tom Merry's study with what's happened."

"Not a thing."

"Fancy Racke's face in the morning—when they find the jolly old trail leading to his study!" grinned Figgins. "He will think some giddy ghost must have done it. What on earth will he think, Kerr?"

"Blessed if I know! But I know what everybody else will think—exactly what has happened!" said Kerr. "Racke ragged Study No. 6 and walked off with the tuck, and it will come out that he did!"

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The juniors came to a stop outside Study No. 7 in the Shell. Up to that study the trail led unmistakably. Just outside the door was a smear of red ink. Blake's lip set. "We've followed it home, I think," he said.

"What larks!" murmured Figgins.

Three fellows grinned joyously in the dark. Kerr's keen Scottish brain had solved the problem of putting paid to Aubrey without giving away the secret that Figgins & Co. were anxious to keep.

In the morning, when Study No. 6 got on the trail, there would be no doubt about who had ragged that study. Racke's own masterly scheme would lead to Racke's own detection.

It could hardly fail. The Terrible Three would never even know what a narrow escape they had had. No one would think of them in connection with the affair at all. Racke had done it, and Racke would be found out—which was exactly as it should be. Figgins & Co. had penetrated into the School House to rag; instead of which they were going to play the part of guardian angels!

Kerr opened the door of Study No. 5 at last and peered into the passage. All was dark and silent.

But the New House trio waited a little longer, to give the precious pair plenty of time to get through and get back to their dormitory.

They emerged at last, and Kerr turned on his pocket torch. He shone the light on the old floor of dark oak.

"Look!" he whispered.

The inky trail was easily picked up. Racke had had plenty of ink on his slippers. It was certain that it would be easily discovered in the daylight. Footprint after footprint glimmered from the old oak.

"Come on!" said Kerr. "Mind you don't tread in it!"

Carefully avoiding that series of inky footprints, the three stole silently on and turned the corner into the Shell passage. There the trail ran on to the door of Tom Merry's study.

Racke and Crooke were back in bed, probably asleep by that time. If they were dreaming they certainly did not dream that three guardian angels from the rival House were carefully undoing their nefarious work.

Figgins & Co. followed the inky trail into Study No. 10. It led them across to the study cupboard. The trail was fainter there, the ink on the soles of the slippers having mostly trodden off. But it was still quite easily perceptible.

Fatty Wynn opened the cupboard door.

Within lay a large plum cake, a pineapple, a box of biscuits, and a box of chocolates—the loot from Study No. 6 which was to fix the guilt of that raid on the Terrible Three. In one second Fatty had grabbed the cake. Figgins and Kerr collected the other articles.

Figgins & Co. were giving up their intended jape that night, having the more important business on hand of putting paid to Aubrey Racke. But Fatty saw no reason for giving up the cake also. It was a large cake—a scrumptious cake. It was a reward for having turned out of bed in the middle of the night. Fatty had not been fearfully keen on turning out, but he was glad now that he had done so. That cake was worth it. Fatty's eyes danced over the cake.

Munch, crunch—munch, crunch! Fatty Wynn got busy on the spot.

"Have some, you chaps!" whispered Fatty, with his mouth full. "I say, it's scrumptious! Have some!"

"Never mind the cake now, fathead!" said Kerr. "We've lots to do!"

"Well, I'll take a snack while you fellows get on."

"Br-r-r-r!"

Figgins and Kerr lost no time, neither did Fatty Wynn. He took a succession of snacks while his comrades got on with the good work.

Dusters were sorted out. There was water in the kettle in the fender. A wet duster wiped up the stains in Study No. 10, and back along the passage as far as No. 7. A dry duster followed on, rubbing the floor dry and clean where the stains had been.

Figgins and Kerr worked rapidly, to the accompaniment of a sound of munching and crunching from Study No. 10. Fatty was working as rapidly as his comrades, though in a different way.

The inky trail now stopped at Racke's study door. Kerr sorted out a bottle of red ink from Tom Merry's desk and stepped into Racke's study. A few smears of red ink soon led across that study to the cupboard, inside which the grinning Figgins parked the pineapple, the box of biscuits, and the box of chocolates.

Kerr groped in the chimney and drew down a pair of inky slippers that had been hidden there. They were dropped into the bottom of the cupboard.

A plump face peered out of Study No. 10.

"I say, won't you have some of this cake?" whispered Fatty Wynn. "I can jolly well tell you it's scrumptious!"

"Quiet, fathead!"

"Well, if you won't—"

"Shut up!" hissed Figgins.

Fatty Wynn shut up. Munching and crunching followed. Figgins and Kerr came out of Study No. 7 and shut the door.

"O.K., Fatty!" whispered Figgins. "Come on!"

"I'm ready, Figgy!" The last morsel of cake disappeared, and Fatty Wynn breathed hard after his exertions.

"Bring the cake if you want it," whispered Kerr.

"Eh!"

"Bring that cake, fathead!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes! All right!" gasped Fatty.

"I—I—I'm bringing it, Kerr!"

"Don't leave crumbs all over the shop, either. We don't want to leave any clues about—except Racke's clues to Racke."

"I haven't left a crumb—"

"Well, come on!"

Fatty Wynn came on, and the New House trio trod softly away.

Fatty rolled rather slowly after his comrades. He had not, as he had said, left a crumb in Study No. 10. Fatty had finished that cake to the last crumb and the last plum! He had fully intended to reserve a whack for his comrades, but the cake had been so scrumptious that Fatty had rather overlooked those intentions till it was too late! Fatty had done well with that cake, and as he rolled after his friends he had rather a feeling that perhaps he had done a little too well! He breathed rather laboriously.

In a few minutes Figgins & Co. clambered, one

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after another, through the secret door in the wall of the Fourth Form passage. Fatty Wynn grunted as he clambered through. He grunted and grunted.

Kerr clicked the panel shut.

He flashed the light on the spiral stair in the thickness of the ancient wall that led down to the underground tunnel.

"Come on!" he said.

"J-j-just a mim-mim-minute while I get my bub-bub-breath!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Blow your breath! Come on, fathead!"

Kerr descended the narrow stair, followed by Figgins, Fatty Wynn grunting in the rear.

At the foot of the stair Kerr turned the light on the fat Fourth Former.

"Weren't you going to bring that cake?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, yes!" gasped Fatty.

"You fat chump, if you've left it in Tom Merry's study," exclaimed Kerr, in alarm—"if you've left any of it there—"

"I—I—I haven't! I—I've brought the cake!" gasped Fatty.

"Where is it, then?" asked Kerr. "I can't see it. Where's that cake, if you've got it?"

Figgins gurgled. He guessed where the cake was!

"You won't see it by that torch, Kerr, old man!" he said. "You'll want an X-ray outfit to spot that cake!"

"You—you—you see, I—I finished it!" gasped Fatty. "I—I was going to keep half for you fellows, but—but it went; I—I hardly know how it all went, but—but it did—"

"Oh, my hat! If you burst in this tunnel I jolly well shan't stop to collect the remains!" said Kerr.

Fortunately, Fatty Wynn did not burst in the tunnel! A quarter of an hour later Figgins & Co. were climbing quietly in at a back window of the New House and tiptoeing to their dormitory. Two minutes after that Fatty Wynn was fast asleep in bed, and he smiled in his sleep.

He was dreaming of the cake!

CHAPTER 10.

On the Trail!

JACK BLAKE stood dumbfounded.

He did not speak! He could not!

He stood in the doorway of Study No. 6 after breakfast in the morning, gazing into that study, bereft of the power of speech.

He gazed and gazed, hardly able to believe his eyes.

Rags had happened in the School House many a time and oft. Study rags and dormitory rags were far from uncommon. And since the mystery ragers had been at work they had been rather more frequent. But this was the limit!

This was unheard-of—unthinkable—hardly to be believed by a fellow who beheld it.

"Oh!" gasped Blake, finding his voice at last.

"Anythin' up, deah boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus D'Aroy from the passage. He turned his eyeglass on Blake in surprise.

Herries and Digby came along quickly. They could see from Blake's looks that something was up—very much up!

"Oh!" they gasped together, as they looked into Study No. 6.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. He followed Herries and Digby.

and looked in. Then he jumped almost clear of the floor.

His eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord. Without its aid Arthur Augustus gazed into the dismantled study.

"Oh cwikey!" he said quite faintly.

Blake stepped into the study, with a grim face. This was not a rag—a playful jape like stacking and ticketing Gussy's hats. This was an outrage! Studies had been shipped before, but no study at St. Jim's had ever been shipped like this! Some utterly unscrupulous hand had done terrific damage.

Books and papers, torn and inky, lay all over the floor. The clock lay in pieces in the fender. A writing-case streamed with gum.

Dictionaries, grammars, "Holiday Annuals," atlases, all sorts of books had been rent and torn. A silk hat had been reduced to the shape of a concertina. A straw hat was daubed with red ink.

The study cupboard was wide open. Within, eggs had been smashed and jam smeared. Some of the contents were missing. All that was not missing had been wrecked.

"Who—who—who did this?" breathed Blake.

"What rotter—" muttered Herries.

"What hooligan—" gasped Dig.

"Bai Jove! Look at my hat! My toppah has been twodden on! Look at my stwaw! All inkay—wed-inkay!"

"Our books!" panted Blake. "We shall want some of them in Form this morning—look at them!"

The chums of Study No. 6 looked round them, amazed, enraged. Wanton destruction had been perpetrated on all sides.

"The mystery ragger again, I suppose!" muttered Blake. "This is a bit thicker than usual, though. By gum, I've a jolly good mind to call Railton here! We're not standing this!"

"No feah!"

"This isn't a rag," said Dig. "This is just hooliganism! We've got to find out the skunk who did this and make him pay for the damage!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake stepped to the study cupboard.

"Some of the things are gone," he said. "They've bagged the cake Gussy had from home yesterday."

"And the box of chocs, too," said Arthur Augustus. "You wemembah there was a box of chocs came with the cake."

"My pineapple's gone," said Herries.

"And the biscuit-box," said Dig.

"That looks like Trimble," said Blake slowly. "Trimble would bag the tuck first thing. But Trimble never did this—he hasn't the nerve even if he wanted to—as well as being too jolly lazy to turn out of bed at night. The grub's gone, but it wasn't Baggy."

"Imposs!" said Arthur Augustus.

"By gum, though, if we find out who's got the stuff we shall jolly well know who did this!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's been a thumping lot of ink spilt about," said Blake. "All the ink in the study—and I fancy they brought some more with them too! Look here, you can see where they trod in it—one of them, at any rate."

Blake's eyes glinted.

Who had committed that outrageous rag in Study No. 6 was, so far, a mystery. But it seemed to Jack Blake that he could pick up a clue to that mystery. It was plain that the spilt ink had been trodden in, and there had been so much of it

that a great deal must have stuck to the shoes or slippers worn by the ragger. Blake scanned the study floor.

"By gum!" he breathed. "We can follow this up."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "Look, there's a wed-inkey footpint wight in the doorway!"

"That's a clue!" said Blake, his eyes gleaming. He bent over the inky footprint. The ink had dried on the floor, and it was plainly discernible where an inky foot had trodden.

Outside the study was another similar footprint. Blake picked up another, and another.

Five or six Fourth Form fellows gathered round. There were startled exclamations as they looked into the study.

"Who's done this?" exclaimed Levison.

"The jolly old mystery ragger again," said Cardew. "By Jove, he's done a good job of work this time!"

"Stand back, you fellows!" said Blake. "We're going to find out who did it. One of them trod in the ink and walked off with ink on his feet. His shoes must have been fairly drenched with it. I suppose he never noticed it in the dark. But look!"

A dozen fellows stared at the inky traces on the old oak.

"If you can follow that up, you can find out which dormitory he came from, at any rate," said Sidney Clive.

"Looks as if you'll get him!" said Lumley-Lumley.

Blake scanned the floor. Nobody had noticed that inky trail—till it was looked for. But now that it was looked for, it was spotted easily enough. The ink-marks had dried on the oak, and they almost leaped to Blake's eyes as he scanned the floor for them.

"This way," said Blake. "He went up the passage—"

"That's rather queer!" said Levison. "If he was going back to his dorm, he would go down the passage to the landing."

"Looks as if he went to a study first," said Cardew. "But why?"

"Oh, I know why, all right!" said Blake savagely. "He's carted off a lot of stuff from our study—a stack of tuck! He had to park it somewhere before he went back to the dorm."

"Yaas, wathah! And if this twail leads us where he went, we shall find it, and bag the wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Blake, with gleaming eyes, followed the inky trail up the passage. Behind him came an excited crowd of Fourth Form fellows. There was a general exclamation as Blake turned the corner into the Shell passage.

"Not a Fourth Form man," said Herries.

"Looks like a Shell man," said Levison. "It's plain enough that he went to a Shell study."

"Bai Jove! If it was that ass Lowthah—"

"Don't be a goat!" said Blake. "Lowther wouldn't play rotten tricks like that. It's some rotten hooligan—"

"Lowthah is a fwightful ass, Blake! I am not at all suah that it was not Lowthah who wagged my hats—"

"Bother your silly hats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Blake pushed on, followed by the crowd of Fourth Formers. Two Shell fellows had joined the crowd, and were following on—Racke and Crooke. They, at least, were not surprised to see the inky trail lead into the quarters of the Shell!

Aubrey winked at Crooke as he heard Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remarks, and Crooke grinned. Suspicion was already taking the right direction.

"Here's another footprint," said Blake, "and here's another! He went up this passage—that's a cert! By gum, the rotter never knew that he was leaving a trail like this—couldn't have noticed it in the dark! This is luck, and no mistake!"

And Aubrey bestowed another wink on his pal, as Blake & Co. followed on the trail.

CHAPTER 11. Journey's End!

TOM MERRY stared.

"What the thump—" he ejaculated.

Manners and Lowther stared also. They came out of Study No. 10 with books under their arms, when a strange and unexpected sight dawned on them.

Why Jack Blake of the Fourth was coming up the Shell passage, bent double, with his eyes fixed on the floor, with a buzzing crowd of the Fourth behind him, was rather a mystery.

"What on earth's up, Blake?" called out Manners.

"What's the name of that game, old bean?" inquired Monty Lowther.

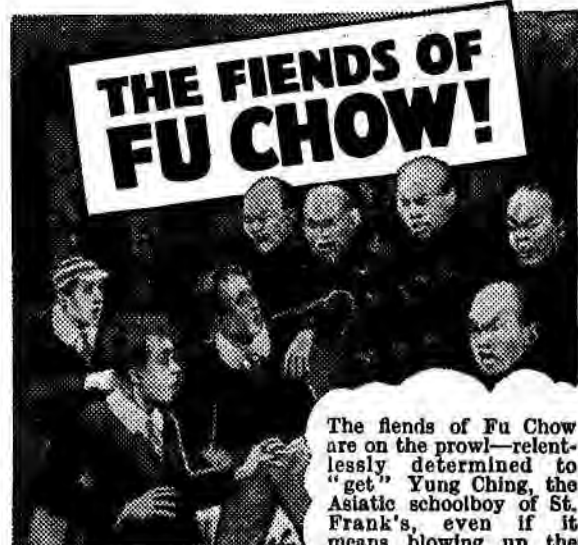
The Terrible Three hurried down the passage. Blake looked up from the trail with a grim face.

"We're after some Shell blighter!" he snapped.

"Our study was ragged last night—smashed up right and left, and ink splashed all over it—and the blighter trod in the ink—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We've followed it as far as this!" said Blake,



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breathing hard. "He seems to have had his shoes fairly drenched with ink, and he's left plenty of sign. We'll get him all right!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Think he came to a Shell study?" asked Manners.

"I know he did, from this trail! When we find the study he went into, I expect we shall find the tuck he carted off from Study No. 6—he must have parked it in his study. Gussy's cake and chocs, and Herries' pineapple, and the study biscuit-box—the blighter pinched them after smashing everything else."

Tom Merry stooped and scanned the floor. Now that he looked for sign, it was easy to read.

"Somebody came this way with ink on his shoes, that's a cert!" he said. "Red ink—"

"And there's red ink all over the floor in Study No. 6!" said Blake. "It's sheer luck that the brute trod in it. I suppose he could hardly help it, with so much about. Anyhow, he did it—and he's left a trail that a blind man could follow. Get out of the way!"

"We'll help," said Tom, "and we'll jolly well lend a hand scragging him if you spot him!"

"He will be scragged all right!" said Blake. "But that's not the lot—he's going to pay for the damage in our study when we get him, and it will run him into a few pounds. And if he doesn't pay up, we'll walk him off to the Housemaster, and Railton will make him. He's going to pay every penny of the damage he's done—new sets of school books all round, and a new study clock, and a new topper for Gussy—and a lot more things. I fancy he will be sorry for himself when he's through."

"Some bill!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"We'll make him square all right—but we've got to get him first!" said Blake. "Here's another mark—and here's another! See any more, you men?"

Jack Blake came to a stop outside Study No. 7 in the Shell.

Up to that study door the trail led unmistakably. Just outside the door was a very perceptible smear of red ink.

But beyond that point nothing was to be seen in the way of a trail.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther scanned the floor—Blake & Co. scanned it—five or six other fellows scanned it. But there was not the faintest indication of an inky mark to be picked up.

Blake's lips set.

"We've followed it home, I think!" he said.

"Looks like it!" agreed Tom.

"Racke's study!" murmured Manners. "Was it that cad—"

"Bai Jove! If it was Wacke—"

Down the passage, from the rear, Racke and Crooke were staring.

They had watched the trailing of the inky footprints with quiet satisfaction, nothing doubting that the trail would lead right on to Study No. 10. So far, neither of the young rascals had the remotest idea that guardian angels had been about the previous night; not for a moment had it occurred to them that any part of their rascally work had been undone. They were surprised and mystified when the trailers halted and gathered in a crowd outside Study No. 7 in the Shell. Why they had stopped short of Study No. 10 was a mystery to them.

Tom Merry glanced down the passage at the two.

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"Come here, Racke, will you?" he called out. "You, too, Crooke!"

"What are you stopping there for, Blake?" called back Racke.

"End of the trail!" answered Blake.

"Journey's end!" said Monty Lowther. "Come on, Racke—you're wanted here, my dear Aubrey."

Aubrey Racke stared with a very unpleasant palpitation at his heart. Crooke's face became a sickly hue.

Nothing could have gone wrong with that cunning scheme—how could it? Nobody else had been up in the night—so far as they knew, at all events. The inky trail had led the pursuit in the right direction, as it had been intended to do. Why did it not lead on to Study No. 10?

Racke breathed hard.

"That's rot!" he stammered. "Are you making out that you've been led to my study, and—"

"Exactly that!" said Blake.

"Look here, go farther on!" exclaimed Crooke. "Look farther on—"

"We've looked farther on," said Blake. "There's nothing farther on! We're going to look in your study now, you beauties; and you're going to be present when we do. This way!"

Crooke gasped for breath. Aubrey Racke, amazed and bewildered, had nerve enough to stand his ground. Crooke backed away along the passage. He had much less nerve than his associate, and he was anxious to get off the scene.

But he was not allowed to get off the scene. As he started to back away, five or six fellows cut down the passage, and surrounded him.

"Get on!" said Herries grimly.

"I—I—I'm going down!" stammered Crooke. "I—I've got to see Linton before class—"

"Linton can wait!" said Dig. "Come on, you skunk!"

"Look here—"

"Barge him!" growled Herries.

And Crooke was unceremoniously barged up the passage. Two or three other fellows gathered round Racke, and he had to follow.

Both the young rascals were in a state of bewilderment and apprehension.

Racke tried to think it out. Unless he had made some extraordinary mistake, which seemed impossible, he had carried that inky trail on to Study No. 10. Was it possible—barely possible—that he had stopped short, mistaking his own study for Tom Merry's? It was impossible—he had had the torch—he could not have made such a mistake. Yet the trail stopped at his own study!

"It's all rot!" he muttered thickly. "If you look farther—"

"We've looked," said Tom Merry. "You can look if you like. Give them a chance. If they can pick up any sign past this study, let them."

"I am sure of it!" snarled Racke.

"Go it, then!"

Racke stooped, and scanned the floor with desperate eyes. Crooke, with a sickly face, followed his example. To both of them it seemed certain—absolutely certain—that further sign would be picked up—that it must be picked up.

But there was no sign. The most desperate scanning could not pick up sign that was not there. The inky trail was plainly marked—and the end was at Racke's door!

"Well?" said Blake grimly.

"Well, you wottahs?" said Arthur Augustus.

Racke stood gritting his teeth. It was beyond his comprehension, unless he had made some awful mistake in the night. But there it was. Crooke felt his knees knocking together. Aubrey had the hardihood to face it out, but the look on Crooke's scared face hardly left a doubt on the subject. He made an effort to wriggle away through the crowd, and was promptly shoved back.

Tom Merry threw open the door of Study No. 7. "Oh, my hat! Look!" yelled Lowther.

Every eye looked. Racke stared almost wildly. An inky stain did not show up on the dark oak—it would not have caught a casual eye. But it only had to be looked for; and every eye was keen now. Within the study a smear of ink was perceptible to searching eyes.

Tom stepped in. Blake followed him. Racke and Crooke, surrounded at the doorway by a crowd behind them, watched with haggard eyes.

"Look here—" said Tom.
"And here!" said Blake.
He threw open the door of the study cupboard. "Look!" he roared.

Racke's eyes almost started from his head. Crooke staggered against the doorpost. Within the study cupboard, in full view, were a pineapple, a box of chocolates, and a biscuit box—which Racke, with his own hands, had carried off from Study No. 6 in the night and planted, as he believed, in Tom Merry's study. Had he made some amazing mistake in the night? It looked as if he had. There they were!

"And look here!" exclaimed Blake.
From the lower part of the cupboard he drew a pair of slippers. He held them up to the light from the window. Every eye could see the stains of red ink thick on the soles.

Racke gave a gasp. Unless he had been dreaming, he had hidden those inky slippers up the study chimney. Yet there they were! Aubrey stood transfixed. There was a gasping howl from Crooke.

"You fool! Oh, you fool! You've done it now! Look here, you fellows, I—I never had a hand in it; I—I only came down with Racke and—"

"Bai Jove! We've got the wottahs all wight! Collah them!"

What followed was frightfully unpleasant for Racke and Crooke. How it had happened Aubrey did not know—and never knew! But Aubrey's own trail had led to Aubrey—there was no mistake about that. And Aubrey had to suffer for his sins. And he suffered severely!

CHAPTER 12.

News for Figgins & Co.!

FIGGINS & Co. smiled.
The New House Co. seemed in very cheery spirits in break that morning.

Perhaps they were entertained by the sight of Aubrey Racke cutting round the old elms, with Blake and Herries of the Fourth after him, dribbling him like a football. No doubt they were amused to behold Crooke, in the grasp of Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, bumping on the quad with a loud bump and a louder yell. Racke and Crooke had had a rather hectic time that morning already; but Study No. 6 seemed to think that they could do with a little more in break!

"Anything on in your House, Tom Merry?" asked Figgins affably.

And Kerr and Fatty Wynn smiled.

"Yes, rather!" answered Tom. "There was a rag in Blake's study—"

"That mystery ragger we've heard about?" asked Figgins blandly.

"No; Racke and Crooke this time. They went down from the dorm last night and ragged Blake's study right and left. They're sorry for it by this time, I fancy!" said Tom Merry.

"How did you spot them?" asked Kerr.

"Easy enough, as it turned out. Racke trod in the ink he had splashed about and left a trail to his own study," answered Tom unsuspiciously. "They bagged a lot of stuff from Blake's study and it was found—except a cake—"

"A cake?" repeated Fatty Wynn.

"What became of the cake?" asked Figgins.

"Must have been scoffed, I suppose," said Tom. "The other things were there, all right—not the cake. I don't suppose they'll ever find the cake."

"No," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully, "I don't suppose they'd find that cake!"

"Much damage done in the study?" asked Figgins.

"No end!" answered Tom. "But that's all right. Blake's making out a bill for them to pay; and they seem to prefer to pay up rather than go up to the Housemaster. I fancy they'll be fed-up with shipping studies at night by the time they're through. But fancy that ass Racke treading in the ink and walking off leaving a trail to his own study—"

"Fancy!" said Figgins.

"Only fancy!" murmured Kerr.

"Just fancy!" gurgled Fatty Wynn.

Figgins & Co. sauntered on—smiling! Figgins gave his chums a cheery wink.

"Jolly lucky we were in the School House last night—what?" he remarked.

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn dreamily. "Real luck! It was a topping cake!"

THE END.

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An Unwelcome Guest!

"WAAAL, I swow!"

Frank Richards threw aside his blanket and sat up in the grass as that exclamation fell upon his ears; Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc looked up from their blankets.

Only Chunky Todgers continued to sleep. That podgy youth was a good sleeper, and probably the war-whoop of a Red Indian would not have awakened him.

The chums of Cedar Creek had camped for the night on the open prairie. They had been several days on the North-West trail now, and in this region settlements were few and far between.

The morning sun was glimmering over the prairie, and the gophers were blinking out of their holes under the thick grass, when Frank Richards & Co. were awakened by the bull-voice of the stranger.

Frank blinked at him, rubbing his eyes. He saw a huge, bearded, muscular man in leather breeches, red shirt, and a tattered stetson hat, with a black pipe in the corner of his mouth. A revolver and a hunting-knife were stuck in the stranger's belt, and his big, hairy hand rested on the butt of the revolver as he stood and stared at the schoolboys.

He was rather an ugly looking customer, and Frank's second glance was turned towards the horses and pack-mule, staked out in the grass close by.

"Jerusalem!" went on the big stranger, evidently surprised by the schoolboy camp which he had come upon suddenly. "What do you call this hyer outfit? Search me!"

The chums of Cedar Creek jumped up.

"Hallo!" said Bob Lawless.

"I guess this puts it over me!" said the stranger, staring at him. "What aire you younkens doin' on the prairie without your mammies!"

"Travelling," answered Bob Lawless. "We're on holiday. Where did you spring from?"

"I guess I'm hoofin' it to Last Chance," answered the stranger. He glanced at the horses, and added emphatically: "But I guess I ain't hoofin' it any farther than this hyer spot! No, siree!"

Bob Lawless understood that remark, and his jaw set squarely. The schoolboy camp was a good thirty miles from the nearest settlement, and the big stranger evidently fancied that the horses were at his disposal for the trouble of taking them.

His eyes were wandering greedily about the camp.

"I guess I've struck ile!" he went on. "This hyer is luck, and no mistake! I reckon this is a cinch!"

"I don't see where that comes in," said Bob Lawless quietly. "You're welcome to a breakfast here, if you like."

"I guess this will pan out a bit better than that!" grinned the bearded man. "I reckon

you'd better think twice before you jaw at Oregon Bill, sonny! Keep away from that shooter!" he rapped out suddenly, as he detected Bob moving quietly towards his rifle.

The six-shooter came out of his belt like a flash. Bob paused.

"I guess," said Oregon Bill, with a grin, "that you younkens would ha' done wiser to stay at school!"

Chunky Todgers awoke and sat up, and he blinked in great dismay at the big ruffian.

Frank Richards & Co. looked rather undecided. The revolver in the ruffian's hand looked rather dangerous, and he looked brutal enough to use it if need arose. They could see that he was a hobo—one of the Western tramps who are the pest of the outlying districts, and whose activities range from begging, chicken-thieving, and horse-stealing to robbery with violence, according to circumstances.

Certainly he looked a very ugly customer for the schoolboys to tackle, though they would not have hesitated had their rifles been in their hands. But the rifles and the shotgun were leaning against the pile of saddles, and their hands were empty.

Oregon Bill stepped between them and the rifles.

"Hands off the shooters!" he grinned. "I guess I can do all the shootin' that's wanted hyer—eh?"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Chunky Todgers.

"This hyer is luck—real luck!" went on the ruffian. "I guess you'll hop it pretty spry and get me something to eat! I'm staying to breakfast, gents!"

"You're not wanted here!" said Vere Beauclerc.

"What's that?"

"You'd better go on your way," said Frank Richards quietly.

Oregon Bill lifted his revolver.

Crack!

Frank Richards gave a jump as a bullet sang by within two inches of his head.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the hobo. "I guess that's a warning! Do you want the next one through your cabeza?"

Frank Richards clenched his hands hard. He was not frightened by any means, as the ruffian supposed, but he realised that he was helpless. It was not likely that Oregon Bill would risk his neck by sending a bullet through a schoolboy's head, but it was very probable that he would wing him if he showed fight. Frank had no desire to be laid in the grass with a bullet through his leg. It was evidently a time to temporise and act with caution.

As a matter of fact, the schoolboy adventurers had been lacking in caution. Now that they were approaching the wilds of the North-West, it would have been judicious to keep watch and ward in their camp. It was rather too late to think of that now, however.

The grinning hobo was master of the situation. Even without the deadly weapon the huge ruffian would have been a very tough proposition for the schoolboys to tackle. A levelled rifle would probably have brought him to his senses fast enough, but the rifles were out of reach.

"Now, I guess you're going to be spry!" said Oregon Bill. "You hop it lively and get me some breakfast! Sharp's the word!"

The chums of Cedar Creek exchanged glances. But there was no help for it. Oregon Bill held the whip-hand for the present.

He sat on the saddles in the grass and rested the revolver on his knee, while the schoolboys set about preparing breakfast.

With feelings too deep for words, Frank Richards & Co. started work under the eyes of the grinning but watchful hobo.

Desperate Measures!

OREGON BILL sat at his ease, with great satisfaction depicted on his rough, bearded face, while breakfast was preparing. The hobo plainly regarded himself as being in great luck—as having "struck oil" with a vengeance.

The schoolboys did not need telling that when he had satisfied his hunger, the prairie tramp intended to make off with their horses and packs and all their other belongings that were of any value. They would be left stranded on foot on the wide prairie, to make their way to some settlement as best they could. That was not at all the outcome which the Cedar Creek fellows had planned for their North-Western trip.

As they worked under the ruffian's eyes their thoughts were busy.

Brushwood had been brought along from the last timber for the camp-fire, and Bob Lawless soon had the fire going. Antelope steaks were soon frying, and the fragrant scent of coffee made Oregon Bill sniff with satisfaction. It was a breakfast such as the tramp probably had not tasted for a very long time.

"I guess this is some cinch," he remarked. "I ain't struck luck like this hyer since I lit out of Oregon over the line. I calculate I was wise to try Canada this summer. Haw, haw, haw!"

Quietly, but with deep feelings within, the schoolboys served the hobo with an ample breakfast. Steaks and corn cake vanished at a great rate down Oregon Bill's capacious throat, washed down by copious draughts of coffee. The hobo was evidently enjoying himself.

Frank Richards & Co. would not have grudged a hearty breakfast even to so disreputable a character as a prairie tramp had he asked for it civilly. But serving him under duress was quite another matter.

Having supplied the hobo's wants, the schoolboys retired to the camp-fire to cook their own breakfast. They were thinking, however, a great deal more about getting the upper hand of their unwelcome guest than of breakfast.

"He's busy for a bit," murmured Bob Lawless, with the corner of his eye on the gorging hobo. "He's laid down his shooter, too. He kinder thinks we're taking this lying down."

Frank Richards' eyes gleamed.



"I guess I'm teaching you to be spry," grinned the hobo. "I reckon—Ah! Oh! Yah!" Swish! With a sudden jerk of his arm, Bob Lawless hurled the almost boiling contents of the pitcher into the bearded face of the ruffian, and Oregon Bill started back with a yell of agony.

"We're not," he said.

"I guess not. He means to run off with our horses and truck and leave us stranded. I guess that's not in the bill," said Bob.

"We've got to handle him," said Beauclerc quietly. "The only question is, how? If you could get hold of a trail-rope, Bob, and rope him—"

"He would spot it at once if I tried."

"What's the game, then?" asked Frank. "The beast will be running off with our horses as soon as he's done feeding."

"You fellows are game, of course?" said Bob.

"He will shoot, there's no doubt about that, if he gets a chance. And he'll shoot to kill, rather than go under, if he can."

"We're game, fathead! Have you any idea?"

"Yes. I'm taking him some more coffee in a minute," said Bob. "I've got it in this tin jug. Well"—he sank his voice to a faint whisper—"when I'm handing him the coffee I'll pitch it suddenly into his face."

"Oh!"

"That will blind him for a minute. I'll make a jump for the revolver the next second, and perhaps I shall be able to get it away. You two fellows stop here, and the instant I chuck the coffee you can pick up brands from the fire and run at him. Get two big brands burning ready."

"Good man!" said Frank, with a deep breath.

"Hyer, walk up!" bawled Oregon Bill. "Can't you see my coffee's finished? Do you want me to wake you up with a bullet, hey?"

He picked up the revolver he had laid on his knee.

"Coming!" called back Bob Lawless meekly.

"Git a hustle on, then!"

Bob took up the tin pitcher of coffee and carried it towards the hobo, where he was seated on the saddles and other truck in the grass. Bob's heart was beating hard, but his face was quite calm.

Frank and Beauclerc, affecting to be tending the fire, selected two thick, short boughs that were sticking among the embers, burning at the ends. They were the only weapons to hand, but they were likely to be formidable at close quarters. The question was whether the hobo could be dealt with at close quarters before he could bring his six-shooter into play. That was the risk the Cedar Creek fellows had to run.

Frank and Beauclerc had one eye on Bob, their hearts throbbing, as he came up to the hobo with the pitcher in his hand, steaming. Oregon Bill grinned, and laid his revolver on his knee again, ready to his hand, as he held out his tin cup to be filled.

"Here you are!" said Bob.

"I guess I'm teaching you to be spry," grinned the hobo, as Bob filled the cup with steaming coffee. "I reckon— Ah! Oh! Yah!"

Swish!

With a sudden jerk of his arm Bob Lawless hurled the almost boiling contents of the pitcher full into the bearded face of the ruffian. Oregon Bill started back with a yell of agony. He reared up, clutching at his face, blinded, for the moment, by the steaming flood.

His revolver slid and dropped into the grass. Bob Lawless made a spring at it. But Oregon Bill was too quick. He flung himself forward, half-blinded, to grab at the revolver, and his left hand, striking out wildly, caught Bob on the

chest and hurled him into the grass. A few seconds more and the groping hand of the ruffian would have grasped the six-shooter.

But even as he groped, still howling with pain, Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc were rushing on him, the burning brands in their grasp, and the flaming, smoking weapons were dashed together into the face of the hobo.

Oregon Bill gave a yell of anguish and rolled back blindly, and as he rolled over in the grass the schoolboys struck again and again.

The Upper Hand!

BOB LAWLESS was on the revolver now, and he sprang up with the weapon in his hand. In a moment it was directed towards the shrieking, struggling hobo.

"Let up!" he rapped out. "I've got him covered. If he raises a finger now I'll drill him!"

The brands had been extinguished by the violent contact with the unfortunate hobo's face. They were still smoking and dropping sparks as Frank and Beauclerc ceased to lash at the howling ruffian.

Oregon Bill sat up blindly in the grass. His face was blackened, his eyebrows burnt almost entirely away, and his hair and beard badly singed. His furious howls showed that he was suffering great pain.

Half-blinded by the smoke in his face, he grabbed desperately at the knife in his belt, and strove to scramble up. There was murder in the ruffian's furious face now.

Bob Lawless' voice rang out sharp and threatening.

"Drop that knife!"

Oregon Bill did not heed. Howling with rage, he dragged the hunting-knife from his belt, and the cold steel gleamed in the sunlight.

Crack!

Bob Lawless fired without an instant's hesitation. Hesitation at that moment meant death. Oregon Bill's right arm dropped helplessly to his side as the bullet smashed through his elbow. The knife dropped harmlessly into the grass. The ruffian uttered a roar like a wounded buffalo.

"Well hit!" gasped Frank Richards.

Chunky Todgers, rather late in the day, came rushing up with a billet of wood in his hand. But Chunky's aid was not wanted. Oregon Bill collapsed in the grass, clasping his wounded arm with his left hand, and groaning with pain.

"Let up!" he murmured hoarsely. "Let up, gents! I guess I pass hyer."

"Our win!" said Frank Richards breathlessly.

The hobo was no longer dangerous. His wound was bleeding profusely, and his hard, tanned face was growing white.

"I guess you'd have done wiser to stay at home in Oregon!" grinned Chunky Todgers. "Canada doesn't want your sort, my pippin!"

"Ow!" groaned the hobo.

Bob Lawless and Beauclerc took up their rifles and the knife, and Bob snapped the blade of the latter off short. He did not care to take possession of the ruffian's property, but it was certainly wiser to leave Oregon Bill unarmed.

"You can hand me the shooter," said Chunky Todgers. "I guess it will come in useful if we meet any more hoboos, Bob."

Bob Lawless chuckled.

"More dangerous to us than to the hoboos if you have it, Chunky," he answered. "Besides, it belongs to this unwashed coyote."

"You're not going to leave him his shooter?" yelled Chunky. "Do you want him to pot us in the back as soon as we start?"

"I guess he won't pot anyone with this shooter again."

Bob Lawless discharged the remaining cartridges in the revolver into the air, and then set the weapon on the ground and clumped the butt of his rifle upon it. There was a crash, and after that the six-shooter was not likely to be of service to Oregon Bill or anyone else.

"You can travel now, my pippin," said Bob, stirring the groaning ruffian with his boot. "You're through here."

And Bob went back to the camp-fire to finish his breakfast, keeping his rifle under his arm.

Oregon Bill sat up, groaning dismally.

Frank Richards was about to follow Bob, but he paused, looking with something like compassion at the wounded scoundrel. He glanced at Beauclerc, who smiled and nodded, and without words the two schoolboys proceeded to bind up the hobo's injured arm. Oregon Bill, too surprised for speech at receiving that attention, blinked at them in savage silence while they tended him.

"Don't you chaps want your breakfast?" called out Bob Lawless.

"Wait a minute, Bob!"

"Oh, look after the rotter, if you like!" said Bob. "It wouldn't be any loss if he petered out on the prairie, I reckon."

"There you are!" said Frank Richards. "We've done the best we can for you, Oregon Bill. The best thing you can do is to take the southern trail and turn your back on Canada. Your sort don't prosper in this country."

"I guess I wish I'd stayed in Oregon," groaned the hobo. "I calculate this was a bad break. Oh, Jerusalem crickets!"

He tramped away dismally from the camp. The big ruffian disappeared in the waving grass of the prairie, and Frank Richards & Co. finished their breakfast in cheerful spirits.

Their success in dealing with the hobo elated them, and was a good augury for the future, for it was very probable that further dangers awaited them in the wilds of the North-West.

Breakfast over, the adventurers broke camp. The mule was packed and the horses saddled, and they mounted and rode out on the plain.

Bob Lawless' keen glance swept the prairie as they started. Oregon Bill had vanished from sight long since. But on the grassy plain, far in the distance, the figure of a rider appeared, faint to view.

Bob put up the field-glasses and scanned it.

"Jerusalem!" he ejaculated. "It's the Chinese! Yen Chin has followed us, after all, you fellows!"

"The cheeky heathen!" growled Chunky Todgers. "Let him come near enough for me to give him a taste of the trail-rope, that's all!"

The glasses passed from hand to hand, and Frank Richards & Co. scanned the distant figure in turn. It was undoubtedly Yen Chin, the "Chow" of Cedar Creek School. The chums had seen nothing of him for several days, and they had supposed that the Chinese had given up the idea of joining the party for the North-West, and had returned to his home at Thompson. But evidently that was not the case, after all.

Yen Chin was determined not to be left behind.

Frank Richards laughed as he lowered the glasses. The pertinacity of the little Chinese worried him a little, but it amused him, too.

"The young ass!" said Beauclerc, wrinkling his brows a little. "He will be out of place in the wilds. He's not the sort of chap for a journey of this kind. But as he's come so far—"

"He'll trot home again when he loses our trail," said Bob.

"It's a good long way."

"The pesky heathen!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "He's looking for a chance of playing tricks on us again. I'll trail-rope him if he comes near enough. I know that!"

The schoolboy party rode on, and Frank Richards glanced back several times. Once or twice he caught sight of a diminutive figure in the distance, but later in the morning it vanished, and when the party halted at noon the horizon was clear, and nothing was to be seen of the Chinese of Cedar Creek School.

Roped In!

FRANK RICHARDS looked round quickly.

It was a couple of days later, and the Cedar Creek schoolboys were camped in a clump of timber in the lower foothills of the Cascade Mountains.

Frank Richards, with the shotgun under his arm, had wandered away through the wood to look for game. He was at some distance from the camp, threading his way through the trees, when he heard a rustle close at hand. He scanned the thickets and creepers round him keenly, and as he did so something dropped from a branch above upon his shoulders, and he went with a crash into the herbage.

A startled cry left his lips. For a moment he thought that it was a lynx that had sprung upon him from above, and he expected, with a shudder of horror, to feel the fierce jaws in his flesh.

But instead of that a human knee was planted in the small of his back, pinning him face downwards in the grass. Above him sounded a soft chuckle that he knew well.

"Yen Chin!" he gasped.

"He, he, he!" came from the unseen Chinese kneeling on his back. "Flanky caught—oh, yes! Me bully boy—oh, yes! He, he!"

"You young bouncer!" exclaimed Frank, struggling to rise. "Let me up!"

"No lettee up."

"I'll rope you, you young villain!"

"No lopee Yen Chin, me tinkee!" chuckled the Chinese. "No can."

Frank Richards struggled vigorously. Had he not been taken by surprise he would have handled the little Chinese easily enough, but he was at too great a disadvantage now. The knee in his back pinned him down and held him firmly.

Frank's struggles only had the effect of grinding his nose in the rough soil, and he very soon gave them up. He lay gasping, with a face crimson with anger and exertion, as the little Chinese chuckled again.

"No gettee up," grinned Yen Chin. "Me gottee Flanky, velly bad boy. Me, Yen Chin, good boy."

"You young ass!" exclaimed Frank. "What are you playing this trick for?"

"Me wantee comee with Flanky!"

"Well, you won't, you rascally heathen!"

"Then Flanky comee with me."

"Wha-a-at!"

Frank began to struggle again as he felt the Chinese fastening a rope about his wrists behind his back. But he struggled in vain, and in a few minutes his hands were secured.

Then Yen Chin jumped up, keeping hold of the end of the rope, and allowed the English schoolboy to scramble to his feet.

"You plisoner," said the Chinese cheerfully.

Frank Richards panted. He was greatly inclined to use his boots upon the pertinacious Celestial, but he refrained.

As a matter of fact, Yen Chin was expecting that movement, and he was ready to jerk him over with the rope if he began to kick.

"Have you come here to ask for a roping?" exclaimed Frank angrily. "Let me go at once, or I'll call out to Bob!"

"Bob no hear if callee," said Yen Chin. "Too far away."

"Let me loose."

"Flanky wantee Yen Chin comee on journee?"

"No!" roared Frank.

"Then no lettee loosee. Me takee Flanky away," said Yen Chin. "Flanky ugly old lascal."

Frank Richards grinned in spite of himself. Yen Chin was evidently determined to be one of the party for the North-West, and he was not to be argued with.

"How did you get here, you little heathen?" asked Frank.

"Me follow tlaill. Follow allee way. Easy 'nuff," said the Chinese. "Me lookee, watchee, you bet. Catchee Flanky."

"What are you going to do, you young ass?"

"Takee Flanky 'way. You comee," said Yen Chin, pulling on the rope.

Frank Richards had no choice about following Yen Chin. He was too far away from his chums for a call to reach their ears, and there was no help for him.

Yen Chin picked up the shotgun and led the schoolboy away into the timber, grinning cheerfully. It was not the first trick he had played on the party that declined his estimable company on their North-Western excursion, but it seemed likely to be more successful than the last.

Leaving the camp farther and farther behind at every step, Frank Richards unwillingly followed his conductor through the timber.

Yen Chin halted at last in a deep ravine, where a little stream flowed under the heavy bushes. In that hidden spot his pony was staked out.

"You sittee down," he said.

"Look here— Oh!"

Yen Chin jerked the rope, and Frank sat down rather suddenly at the foot of a sapling. The loose end of the rope was run round the trunk and knotted, and Frank was a helpless prisoner. He glared at the grinning Chinese in great wrath.

"Oh, my hat! I'll rope you for this, you yellow rascal!" he exclaimed.

"First catchee Chinese!" grinned Yen Chin. "Flanky caught."

"You're not going to leave me here?" exclaimed Frank, as the Chinese turned away.

Yen Chin turned back with a chuckle.

"Allee light. Soon have companee," he said.

"Eh? What company?"

"Bob, p'l'aps, and Chunkee—silly, fat Chunkee—and Chelub."

With that the Chinese disappeared into the timber, and Frank, in utter amazement, was left

alone in the ravine with the staked pony. He understood the extraordinary scheme of the cunning little Chinese now.

Yen Chin intended—if he could—to bag the whole party one after another, evidently to make terms with them when they were helpless in his hands. It was Yen Chin's way of getting himself included as a member of the holiday party where his room was preferred to his company.

"My only hat!" murmured Frank.

He wriggled uncomfortably in his bonds, striving to get his hands free. But the attempt was unavailing. Yen Chin had done his work too thoroughly for that. Frank Richards was a prisoner until it suited the heathen to return and set him free.

Overhead, the noonday sun was blazing down, but the thick trees in the ravine fortunately shaded Frank from its rays. It was very warm, however, and he was soon tired and thirsty, and his feelings towards Yen Chin were far from friendly.

It was an hour later that footsteps were audible in the ravine, and Frank looked round eagerly, hoping that his chums had found him. He was sure that they would search for him when he failed to return to the camp.

His face fell as he saw the newcomers. Chunky Todgers, with a face crimson with fury, and his hands tied behind his back, was led into the ravine by the grinning Celestial. Evidently the fat youth had fallen into the heathen's hands just as Frank Richards had done.

Chunky blinked at Frank as he halted.

"You here?" he exclaimed.

"Looks like it!" grunted Frank. "And you—"

"I went out to look for you, as you didn't come back," said Chunky dolefully. "This heathen beast suddenly roped me in! I'll scalp him as soon as I get loose! I'll choke him with his own pigtail! I'll—I'll—"

"Chunkee silly fat jay!" remarked Yen Chin. "Sittee down!"

"I won't, you heathen! I— Yaroooh!"

Chunky Todgers sat down with a bump. Yen Chin coolly tied him to the tree beside Frank Richards.

The Celestial grinned at the unhappy pair with great satisfaction. Two of the party of four were in his hands.

"Give me something to drink, you heathen!" growled Frank Richards.

"Allee light!"

Yen Chin brought a tin pannikin of water from the spring, and Frank drank it eagerly.

"You dlinkee, Chunkee!"

"Yes, you heathen!"

"Allee lightee now!"

"Let me loose, or I'll scalp you!"

"No scalpee. No can."

Yen Chin vanished into the timber again.

Frank Richards and Chunky Todgers looked at one another helplessly.

"What's the mad little idiot's game?" exclaimed Chunky.

"He wants to join the party," said Frank, laughing in spite of his wrath and discomfort. "This seems to be his way of doing it."

"I'll—I'll—I'll—"

Words failed Chunky Todgers. The English language would not have expressed his feelings just then.

Two more weary hours passed by. Then footsteps were heard again.

"Beau!" exclaimed Frank.

It was Vere Beauclerc, and he did not come alone. His hands were tied, and Yen Chin was leading him, wriggling with merriment. Beauclerc was looking as much amused as exasperated. The Chinese's extraordinary proceedings appealed to his sense of humour to some extent.

"So you're in it, too, Cherub?" grunted Chunky Todgers.

"You stay hells with Chunky and Flanky!" grinned Yen Chin, fastening the rope to the sapling. "Me goos catches Bob. Then all prisoner—oh, yes! Then you all askee me velly nicey to come with you, and me sayee yes. Me good boy. Velly fond of silly old Flanky."

Yen Chin departed again.

"My hat, this is a go!" said Beauclerc. "The little beast dropped on me out of a tree like a dashed lynx! He's going to look for Bob now, I suppose."

"He won't catch Bob so easily," said Frank.

"I hope not. It looks as if we're booked to have Yen Chin with us if he does."

"We won't!" roared Chunky Todgers. "He's too full of imp's tricks for me! I'm going to lambaste him as soon as I get loose!"

"When will that be?" asked Frank.

"Br-r-r!" grunted Chunky.

It was a question to which Chunky Todgers could not find an answer. For the present, at least, all the trumps were in the hands of the "Chow" of Cedar Creek. All depended upon whether Bob Lawless was caught napping as his chums had been.

And the three prisoners waited, more than half-expecting to see Bob Lawless led into the ravine, a prisoner, by the grinning Yen Chin.

Licked at Last!

"BOB!"

A long, dismal hour had passed for the prisoners in the ravine. The sun was sloping down in the west, beyond the mountains towards the far Pacific. Shadows were lengthening in the wooded ravine.

Frank Richards and his companions had been testing their bonds again, but they could not get their hands free. Tired and angry, they had given up the attempt, and settled down to wait with what patience they could muster until Yen Chin returned, meanwhile promising the Chinese all sorts of dire punishments as soon as the opportunity came.

A footstep in the thickets caused them to look round, and they saw the sunburnt face of Bob Lawless looking out of the foliage. For the moment they fully expected to see Yen Chin with him, leading him, bound, to the place of captivity.

But Bob Lawless was alone. He was scanning the ravine from the thicket, for a moment not seeing the three prisoners seated at the foot of the sapling. He started as the three called out his name together:

"Bob!"

"This way, Bob!"

"Hurry up!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!" ejaculated Bob, as his astonished glance turned upon the three prisoners. He came quickly out of the thicket. "What the thunder—"

"Look out for Yen Chin!" said Frank hastily.

"The heathen! Is he here?"

"He's in the wood somewhere, looking for you," said Beauclerc. "You don't mean to say that Yen Chin fixed you up like this?" shouted Bob.

"Ahem—yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't grin about it! Let us loose!" exclaimed Chunky Todgers. "That heathen may come back any minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"Look here, you ass—"

"I guess I'll have you loose in a jiffy!" chuckled Bob. "Oh, this beats the whole deck, and no mistake!"

He drew out his hunting-knife and severed the ropes with a few cuts. Glad enough were the prisoners to rise and stretch their limbs.

Bob Lawless was still chuckling explosively. He seemed to see the humorous side of the matter more clearly than the other fellows did.

"How did the Chow work the riddle?" he inquired.

Frank Richards explained. Bob greeted the explanation with many chuckles.

"Well, you are a crowd of jays!" he said.

"And you mean to say that the cheeky Chow is looking for me to serve me the same?"

"Yes, rather! I wonder you haven't fallen in with him. How did you find us here?" asked Frank.

"I've been hunting for you, of course, as you didn't come back," answered Bob. "I guess I was thinking that Oregon Bill might have turned up again. I couldn't imagine what had become of you. I never guessed— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, ass! I expect that Yen Chin would have bagged you, too, if he had dropped on you."

"Not in a month of Sundays!" grinned Bob. "I keep my peepers peeled when I'm wandering. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, let's get back to the camp," groaned Chunky Todgers. "I'm awfully hungry!"

"I've got some grub in my haversack," answered Bob. "I reckoned I should find you hungry, if I found you at all."

"Hand it over!" said Chunky at once.

The three schoolboys were glad to receive the provisions from their thoughtful chum's haversack. They began munching immediately.

"I guess we'll look for Yen Chin in turn," remarked Bob Lawless. "We'll give the heathen a lesson about playing these tricks. If I hadn't been able to pick up your trail in the timber you might have stayed here all night. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll scalp him!" said Chunky Todgers vengefully.

Bob Lawless suddenly cocked his head on one side, listening intently.

"Somebody's coming!" he said.

"I can't hear—" began Frank.

"Your ears weren't trained on the prairie, old scout. I reckon it's the Chinese coming home—without me!" grinned Bob. "Let him come! Sit down as you were, and let him think you're as he left you. I'll take cover."

"Ha, ha!"

The three schoolboys plumped down in the grass at once at the foot of the sapling, with their hands behind them towards the tree. Bob Lawless jumped behind a big tree a few yards away.

A minute later there was a rustling in the underwoods, and Yen Chin came down the

(Continued on page 36.)

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ANOTHER SPARKLING FARN OF SPORT, FUN AND ADVENTURE IN THE WEST INDIES,
STARRING THE BOYS OF THE SCHOOL SHIP BENBOW.



Jack Drake, in the long field, was watching the ball like a hawk as it whizzed towards him. He backed, his eyes upward, his arm outstretched. Upon the catch depended the result of the match!

Shore Leave!

"DRAKE!"

"Hallo, Poynings!"

"Yor'd better not come with the cricketers."

Jack Drake gave Poynings of the Fifth an expressive glance.

The tropical morning had dawned upon the hills and valleys of Trinidad; on the white walls of Port of Spain, with their masses of green foliage; on the shining gulf stretching away westward to the mainland of South America.

On the Benbow all was activity—that is, so far as the schoolboys of the school ship were concerned. While the Benbow lay at anchor in Trinidad harbour the crew had an easy time. On this special morning the schoolboys had an easy time, too, for it was a whole holiday for them, on the occasion of the cricket match with the West Indian eleven.

Most of the juniors who were not playing cricket were going with the team as spectators. Tuckey Toodles, after vainly offering his services as a champion batsman and a demon bowler, was going, all the same, for the refreshments. Lunch and tea were to be stood by the West Indians, and Tuckey knew that both would be ample and good. And, since his own valuable services as a cricketer had been declined, Tuckey Toodles did not worry about the match having been taken out of the hands of the juniors.

All the other fellows in the Fourth resented the fact that Poynings of the Fifth and his friends had practically bagged the match from them. But Rupert de Vere Toodles did not

FOOLING THE FIFTH!

By Owen Conquest.

worry. So long as the "grub" was good, and there was plenty of it, Tuckey could bear any troubles with fortitude—especially other fellows' troubles.

Jack Drake, junior captain of St. Winifred's afloat, had had to hand over the leadership to Cecil Poynings. Such was the command of the senior master on board the Benbow. Poynings, as Fifth Former, was going to look after the juniors, and keep them out of mischief while they were ashore for the day—assisted by other members of the Fifth.

At least, they thought that they were going to look after the juniors. In point of fact, the juniors intended to look after the Fifth—but that was as yet a dead secret.

Two shore boats had been engaged to carry the Benbow crowd ashore, and they lay alongside the

The junior cricketers of the Benbow prove one too many for the Fifth Formers who have butted into their cricket match with a Trinidad eleven!

ship, the black rowers grinning up at the juniors looking over the side.

The cricketers had their bags ready, and Drake—dropped out of the eleven by the lofty Poynings—was with the rest. And it was then that Poynings of the Fifth made his remark. Having coolly bagged Drake's place as cricket captain, by means of practically hoodwinking the senior master, Poynings felt, perhaps, a little uneasy at Drake being on the scene at all that day. Hence his lofty command.

"Much better not come," chimed in Poole of the Fifth. "You won't be wanted on the cricket ground at all, Drake."

"Nothing for you to do there, kid, you know," grinned Tomlinson of the Fifth.

Jack Drake breathed hard.

"Won't you even let me score—in my own match?" he asked with deep sarcasm.

Poynings shook his head.

"I tell you you're not wanted," he answered. "I'd rather you kept clear of the place altogether."

"Of all the thumping cheek——" murmured Rodney.

"Now then, into the boats, you fellows who are going," called out Cecil Poynings. "Keep back, Drake. You fellows all here—Poole, Tomlinson, Hamersley—where's Hamersley?"

Hamersley of the Fifth was lounging on the other side of the deck, chatting with Tin Tacks, the black carpenter.

Hamersley looked round lazily. Of the four Fifth Formers on board the school ship, he was the only good cricketer, and the juniors would not perhaps have objected to giving him a place in their team. But it was not their team now—it was Poynings!

"Why the thump aren't you ready, Hammy?" called out Poynings warmly.

"I'm not coming."

"What?"

"You've bagged a match belonging to the fags," drawled Hamersley. "I don't call it cricket. Count me out."

Poynings frowned wrathfully.

"You silly ass, I'll count you out fast enough!" he exclaimed. "I'll play a Shell kid instead. You can take his place, Egan."

"Right-ho!" said Egan of the Shell eagerly.

He gave Jack Drake a triumphant grin as he spoke. He was in the cricket team now—and his old enemy was out! Daubeny of the Shell called to him, but Egan did not heed.

"Now then, tumble in!" growled Poynings. "I've told you to keep out, Drake. Do you hear?"

"Rats!" retorted Drake.

"What!" roared Poynings.

"Bow-wow!"

"Why, you cheeky young sweep——"

Jack Drake dropped cheerily into the boat. The juniors followed him fast, some with cricket bags, some without. Poynings stared down at the captain of the Fourth, frowning. Apparently he had expected the junior to obey his lofty order unquestioningly. Poynings was a rather superb youth, and, as a matter of fact, he often expected things that did not happen.

"I—I suppose you'll have to let him go," murmured Poole dubiously. "After all, he won't do any harm. We'll kick him off the ground if he gives any trouble."

"I've a good mind to speak to Mr. Vavasour, and have him detained on board," growled Poynings.

"His Form-master would speak up for him," remarked Tomlinson. "I don't think that would work, Poy, old top."

Poynings grunted; he felt the truth of that observation. Certainly he had not been treated with the respect due to so superb a youth, but he did not see how it was to be helped. So he gave in and made no further remark to Jack Drake.

The three Fifth Formers dropped into their boat, and Tin Tacks followed them in. Poynings stared at the Barbadian coloured gentleman.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Me go 'shore, sar," answered Tin Tacks, showing all his brilliant teeth in an expansive grin.

"Who the thump told you you could go ashore in this boat?"

"Mass' Jack."

"Do you mean Drake?" snorted Poynings.

"Yes, sar."

"You cheeky lump of ebony, what Drake says doesn't matter! You clear out of this boat!" snapped Poynings, whose temper seemed to be considerably ruffled since his passage of arms with Jack Drake.

"No like ole Tin Tacks in boat?" asked the Barbadian black.

"No, bothe: you!"

"Come into this boat, Tin Tacks!" called out Drake.

"Yes, Mass' Jack."

"Captain Topcastle has given Tin Tacks shore leave for to-day, you see," Drake explained to the irritated Fifth Former. "We're taking him along with us. If you don't like it you can lump it. Got that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tin Tacks grinned and jumped into the other boat. The black rowers gave way, and the two boats drew out from the ship. The few fellows left on board waved their hands, and the cricketing party waved back, and the boats pulled for the quay, where Arthur Cazalet was waiting for Jack Drake & Co.

Looking After Poynings!

ARTHUR CAZALET greeted the chums of the Benbow warmly. It had not taken

Drake and Rodney long to become friendly with the good-natured West Indian, and they felt by this time as if they had known him for years. He had already paid two or three visits to the Benbow, and most of the juniors knew him, though he was not yet acquainted with the Fifth Formers, excepting by sight. He was perhaps a little surprised to see Poynings, Poole, and Tomlinson among the cricketers. He did not know yet what had happened the previous day on board the school ship.

"Plenty of us, you see!" Drake remarked, with a smile. "The chaps who aren't going to play are going to spectate. There are also some chaps who think they are in the team, and are making a little mistake on that point."

Arthur opened his eyes.

"I don't quite——" he began.

Drake glanced round. It was necessary to make some explanation to the Trinidad youth, of course, for Drake had no intention whatever of allowing Poynings to have his own way in the cricket match. That matter had been definitely settled in consultation in Cabin No. 8 on the Benbow.

"This is how it is," said Drake, in a low voice. "Those three long-legged bounders getting out of the boat—you see them?"

"Yes."

"They're the Fifth. The chap with the Roman nose is Poynings. Poynings has been pulling the leg of our senior master, and has got Mr. Vavasour to put him in command for the day, making out that we juniors might get into mischief ashore——"

"Us, you know!" grinned Rodney.

Arthur laughed.

"Not likely at all, of course," he remarked.

"Well, anyhow, we're not taking any cheek from the Fifth," said Drake. "Mr. Vavasour doesn't know anything about cricket, and doesn't care much. He thinks it quite all right to make Poynings captain, and take the match out of the juniors' hands. We can't argue with him."

"I suppose not."

"So Poynings is running the show—so far. He's done me the honour to drop me out of the team—my own team!"

"What a nerve! But——"

"So we've come ashore with him like pet lambs, and we're going to keep on the pet lamb

stunt so long as we're in sight of the Benbow. But Poynings isn't going to play cricket, as he thinks. We're going to drop him somewhere, and he can spend the rest of the day finding his way to the Savannah cricket ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll play up, of course?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Arthur, "Anything to help."

"We've brought Tin Tacks ashore with us. The idea is this." Drake lowered his voice. "To get the three of them into some car by themselves, with Tin Tacks driving. Instead of driving them to the Savannah outside the town, where the cricket ground is, he is going to head for the Grand Savannah—a mistake, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That will take them out of the way more miles than they can count. And it will keep them clear of us for the day."

Arthur Cazalet chuckled.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I'll arrange the cars. I'll see that your man Tin Tacks has his chance."

"Good man!" said Drake. "I knew I could rely on you."

"Yes, rather!"

"Here comes Poynings!" murmured Rodney.

Poynings of the Fifth came up to the group on the quay, to be introduced to the West Indian cricket captain. His manner was very gracious and lofty to Arthur Cazalet.

"I dare say this kid—er—Drake—has told you how matters stand!" he remarked, after a few minutes' chat.

"Yes," smiled Arthur.

"We're going to give you a good match," continued Poynings. "I'm sorry to have as many as eight fags in my team, but that can't be helped. You see, the number of the Fifth on board the Benbow is limited."

"I see."

"But we'll give you a good game. There'll be three first-class players on our side."

"That's good."

"The ground is a good distance from here, I understand?"

"Yes; in the Savannah Park, outside the town," answered Arthur.

"I don't know the way, of course, but you—"

"Come with me," said Cazalet. "I'll make the arrangements for transit."

"Right you are!"

Poynings & Co. walked away with the young West Indian, and Jack Drake followed with the crowd of juniors. Daubeny of the Shell joined Drake, with a rather anxious look.

"Is it all right?" he whispered.

"Right as rain!"

"And Poynings—"

"Cazalet will see to him."

"Good!"

Arthur Cazalet led the way into the town. A motor-coach was waiting for the Benbow crowd, but though it was roomy, it was likely to be rather crammed. Poynings & Co. seemed a little dismayed. They did not want to crowd into the coach with a mob of juniors; that was not consistent with their lofty dignity. But they were soon relieved on that point.

"Room for you three fellows in this car," Arthur remarked casually. "You'd rather drive in the car?"

"What-ho!" said Poynings.

Arthur had driven down to town in his father's

car, an open tourer. He had intended to take his friends in the car, while the crowd went in the motor-coach. What Drake had told him had made a slight change in his plans.

Poynings, Poole, and Tomlinson got into the car. Arthur spoke in a low tone to Tin Tacks, and the coloured gentleman entered the driver's seat and took the wheel.

"Can that nigger drive?" asked Poole.

"Me drive fust-class, sar," said Tin Tacks.

"Well, mind you do," said Poynings. "Off you go, then!"

Tin Tacks operated the self-starter, the engine purred, and the car drove off. Then Jack Drake & Co., chuckling, piled into the coach with Arthur Cazalet, and started. They headed for the cricket ground, while the Fifth Formers were heading in quite a different direction, though they were not yet aware of that important fact.

Nice for the Fifth!

"THIS is rather comfy," remarked Poynings.

"Tip top!" said Poole heartily.

"The nigger can drive!" Tomlinson remarked.

The three Fifth Formers sat quite at their ease. The car ran at an easy pace through the streets of Port of Spain, past the great stores of the fine, broad streets, and over the tram lines.

Before long the town was left behind, and the Fifth Formers were bowling along a pleasant country road, with giant cabbage palms nodding against the blue sky.

Poynings & Co. had been ashore several times already, but they had not yet explored outside the capital, excepting for a drive to San Joseph. They had spent most of their shore leave sunning themselves in Frederick Street, or visiting the cinemas. They knew that the Savannah was outside the town, and that was about all they knew of it. Not for a moment, as yet, did a suspicion cross their minds that they were not heading for the cricket ground.

They were enjoying the rapid drive, and the fact that the motor-coach was out of sight did not worry them; they were glad of it. Poynings had to have the fags in his eleven, but he was not proud of being seen with what he described as a mob of kids. He was quite pleased not to see the junior members of his eleven again till they met on the cricket field.

But as the miles raced under the whirling wheels of the car Cecil Poynings began to wonder why the destination was not in sight. He tapped Tin Tacks on the shoulder.

"Aren't we jolly nearly there?" he inquired.

"Not yet, sar."

"We've come a good many miles."

"Yes, sar."

"Well, how far is it from here?"

"You'll see soon, sar."

"I suppose you know the way, after all?" said Tomlinson, with a touch of suspicion.

"Me know him, sar," said Tin Tacks cheerfully.

Poynings & Co. had to be satisfied with that, but they were beginning to feel a little uneasy.

They looked round them as the car hummed on, but there was no sign of a cricket ground or any other sports ground, and they had heard that tennis and golf were played in the Savannah. They grew more and more suspicious and doubtful as the long white road lengthened before them.

"Look here, this can't be right!" said Poole at last. "I'm sure it wasn't so far as this. The nigger's taken the wrong road."

"Blessed if I don't think so!" said Poynings. "Look here, you black beauty, I don't believe you're heading in the right direction at all!"

"All right, sar!"

"But it isn't all right!" exclaimed Poynings angrily. "Slow down, and we'll ask somebody."

"Me ask policeman, sar!" said Tin Tacks affably.

"Good! Do!"

A black policeman had appeared in sight on the road, sauntering along in a leisurely way. Tin Tacks slowed down, and called to him:

"Dis right for de Savannah, boss?"

The policeman nodded.

"Right on!" he answered.

"Thank you, sar!"

Tin Tacks drove on.

Poynings & Co. had to be satisfied, and for some time they made no further remark. They were not aware that the policeman naturally supposed, from the direction they were taking and their distance from the town, that they were heading for the Great Savannah—quite a different place from the Savannah Park close by Port of Spain. Tin Tacks had that bit of knowledge to himself.

The coloured gentleman drove on merrily, and mile after mile whisked by under the wheels.

They had crossed the Caroni River by the bridge; it flowed far behind them now. Far ahead of them loomed the Montserrat Mountains against the deep blue of the sky. It was really a most enjoyable ride, if the Fifth Formers had been out only for a drive. But they were out for a cricket match, and they were getting worried.

The black policeman's reply had silenced them for a time, but as the distant mountains loomed nearer they realised that they could not possibly be going in the right direction—for them. Moreover, Tin Tacks had left the high road now.

"Look here, that thundering nigger is taking us goodness knows where!" said Poole. "I know this isn't right. We've come a good ten miles, I know."

"Eleven o'clock!" said Tomlinson, with a start, looking at his watch. "Stumps were to be pitched at ten-thirty!"

"Stop, you confounded chunk of grate-polish!" exclaimed Poynings angrily. "Blessed if I don't believe you've been put up to this by those fags!"

Tin Tacks grinned, and drove on.

"Stop, I tell you!" roared Poynings.

"No stop yet, sar!"

"I order you, you black fool!"

"No take orders from you, sar!"

"What!" yelled Poynings.

"Stop!" shouted Poole.

"Me no stop!" answered Tin Tacks.

And the car ran on.

"It's a jape!" groaned Poynings, the truth dawning upon him at last. "Drake's put the nigger up to playing this trick! I'll spifficate that cheeky fag when I see him again! But that dashed nigger's going to stop!"

"Let's bash him with our bats if he won't stop," suggested Poole.

"Good!"

"Here, you stop dat!" exclaimed Tin Tacks, in alarm. Hard as his woolly head was, he did not want to have its hardness tested with a cricket bat. "No hit poor old Tin Tacks!"

"Stop, then, you black rotter!" snapped Poynings, grasping his bat. "I'll brain you if you don't stop!"

Tin Tacks braked, and the car slowed down. The buildings of a tobacco plantation were visible a short distance off the road, and Poynings determined to make inquiry there as to exactly where they were. As the car came to a halt he jumped down, and Poole followed him.

"You stay in the car, Tommy, and see that the nigger doesn't clear," said Poynings.

"Right-ho!" said Tomlinson.

Poynings and Poole followed the path from the road, Tomlinson sitting in the car and looking after them. He gave a jump as a powerful black hand gripped the back of his collar suddenly, and he was lifted bodily out of the seat and dropped on his feet in the road. He spun round in angry amazement. The car was in motion.

"Stop!" howled Tomlinson.

"No stop, sar!" answered Tin Tacks cheerily over his shoulder.

"You black villain! Here, Poynings—Poole!" yelled the Fifth Former.

Poynings and Poole were already running back to the road.

"Stop!" shrieked Poynings.

The three Fifth Formers rushed after the car, the perspiration streaming down their faces.

Tin Tacks drove in a leisurely way now, only taking care to keep well ahead of his pursuers. He looked back over his shoulder, with an expansive grin.

"No stop!" he answered.

"Are you going to leave us here, you black scoundrel?" roared Poynings.

"Come back in two-three hours!" said Tin Tacks.

"Oh, you rascal!"

It was too hot for much running in the tropical sunshine that streamed down on the road. Poynings & Co. halted. Tin Tacks waved his hand in parting salute and disappeared.

The Fifth Formers gazed after him, with feelings too deep for words. It was only too clear that they would play no cricket that day.

The West Indian Match!

"WE bat," remarked Jack Drake.

A cheery crowd was gathered on the cricket ground under the awnings of the pavilion.

While the hapless Fifth Formers were speeding away towards Montserrat, the Benbow juniors had arrived at their destination.

All the fellows knew by this time the trick that had been played on the obtrusive seniors, and long and loud was the chuckling over it. Only one fellow was annoyed, and that was Egan of the Shell. It was he who had suggested to Poynings the trick by which the match had been bagged, and he had been rewarded by a place in the eleven. That place, it was soon clear, he was not going to keep.

"Am I playing, Drake?" he asked sourly.

Jack Drake stared at him.

"You?" he ejaculated.

"Poynings told me—"

"Poynings must have been talking out of his hat!" smiled Drake. "My dear chap, this is a cricket match, not marbles! When we play a Trinidad team at marbles I'll play you with pleasure!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Egan scowled fiercely.

"There'll be a row about this," he said. "Mr. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,636.

Vavasour placed Poynings in charge, and you've got rid of him—"

"And now we're getting rid of you!" interrupted Drake, with a laugh. "Never mind the row, if there is a row. I dare say we shall survive it. You can go and eat coke!"

And Egan lounged sullenly away. He was the only dissatisfied junior present. All the others were rejoicing in their triumph over the Fifth. The original team, as selected by Jack Drake, was to play, and certainly there was no room for Egan. Drake had won the toss, and he went in to bat with Daubeny of the Shell, the latter eyed very morosely by his chum Egan, not so chummy with Daub now as of old.

Cazalet led his team on to the field.

The Trinidad team was a very mixed one. Half a dozen of the members were West Indians, like Cazalet; two of them were Spanish, two were French, and one was an East Indian—a dark-skinned youth of Bengalese descent. The eleven was very representative of the various races joined in Trinidad under the British flag. In that paradise of the Western seas the great English game is played by all.

Mixed as the team was, it was soon seen to be in great form, and as their average age was rather older than that of the Benbow crowd, Drake & Co. had all their work cut out. The first innings was a rapid one, the Benbow batsmen being dismissed for a total of 30 runs, and the next innings was played before lunch.

It was hot on the cricket field. But the Benbow bowling was good, and when the last Trinidad wicket fell, Arthur Cazalet and his men had only scored forty runs.

Then there was a long interval for rest and refreshment.

Tuckey Toodles had not played, but he had a mightier appetite than any of the cricketers, and a few tropical fruits hadn't made much difference to it. Tuckey fairly spread himself at tiffin, and after that he rolled into a shady corner to sleep. And until the heat had passed the cricketers rested. It was not till the blaze was over that the second innings began.

The schoolboys did better in their second innings, and there were loud cheers from the schoolboy crowd at each good hit.

Besides the Benbow fellows there were a good many other spectators; the game was worth watching. Mr. Cazalet came along in the afternoon to see the finish.

Jack Drake was at his best. He was first in the second innings, and not out when it ended, and, in spite of the good bowling, his own score was 30. The total for the innings was 70, a result that made the Benbow crowd cheer lustily.

"A 100 for two innings," Dick Rodney remarked, as he sucked an orange. "I don't think they'll beat that."

The sun was sinking towards the distant South-American sierras in a blaze of purple and gold, when the last innings began. A cool breeze came from the sea, very welcome to the cricketers. Dick Rodney had the major part of the bowling, sharing it chiefly with Drake, Daubeny, and Sawyer major. But the Trinidad score rose steadily.

"Fifty for six wickets," murmured Egan, looking on. "They'll beat Drake's crowd, and I'm glad of it!"

But two wickets fell quickly to Vernon Daubeny's bowling, with the score unaltered.

Then the batsmen made the running again. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,636.

Tuckey Toodles woke up and came to look at the score.

"Fifty-eight for eight wickets," said Tuckey, with a serious shake of the head. "They want me in the team, Mr. Cazalet. I told Drake he was running too much risk, leaving me out. Hallo! There goes another wicket! Fancy that chap Rodney getting a wicket!"

"Last man in!"

Daubeny of the Shell was bowling now to the last batsman in. Daub was doing his best, and his best was very good. The fieldsmen were all on the alert, watching for a chance. The match was touch-and-go now, with another wicket to fall, and only three runs wanted to win. Two balls were bowled, and then the batsmen stole a single, bringing Arthur Cazalet to the batting end.

The Benbow fieldsmen looked rather grim. A breathless crowd looked on as Daubeny of the Shell sent down the ball. The sweeping willow met the leather, and the ball sped on its journey—and the batsmen were running.

"Drake! Drake!" roared the Benbow crowd.

Drake, in the long field, watched the ball like a hawk as it whizzed towards him. He backed, his eyes upwards, his arm outstretched, heedless of the shout from the crowd. The batsmen were crossing the pitch as the ball fairly floated down into the ready palm.

"Caught!"

"Oh, well caught!"

"Bravo, Drake!"

There was a swarm of fellows on the ground, shouting and cheering. Arthur Cazalet came off the pitch, a rueful smile on his handsome face.

"A close thing, Drake," he said cheerily. "But a miss is as good as a mile. That was a jolly good catch!"

The Benbow had won—by a single run—and for some minutes the Benbow crowd let themselves go, and their cheers rang far over the sunny Savannah.

The stars were coming out, points of fire in a sky of dark velvet, when the Benbow crowd trod once more the deck of the old ship. Tin Tacks came up with a grin as Jack Drake stepped aboard, and clapped him on the shoulder. He suddenly remembered Poynings & Co.

"Where are they, Tin Tacks?" he asked, with a smile.

"Come aboard, Mass' Jack!" grinned the coloured gentleman. "No get back to Port of Spain till seven o'clock—too late to go play cricket. What you tink? Ole Tin Tacks debblish sharp feller. Mass' Poynings berry much bad temper. Call poor ole Tin Tacks names."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Poynings of the Fifth loomed up in the shadows, and he watched the juniors come aboard with a morose eye. Drake & Co. wondered whether he would lay his grievances before Mr. Vavasour, which might have led to painful consequences for the junior cricketers. But Poynings, with all his peculiar little ways, was a sportsman, and he held his tongue with regard to the day's happenings.

In the junior quarters that evening there was a great celebration, and Jack Drake was the hero of the hour—not only for having fooled the Fifth, but for having won the game with the West Indians by making the winning catch.

Next Wednesday: "TUCKEY'S BLACK DAY!"



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YELLOW CUNNING!

(Continued from page 29.)

ravine. He grinned as he looked at the trio, not suspecting that their hands were free as his own.

"Hallo, haven't you caught Bob yet?" asked Frank Richards, peering through the thickening dusk.

Yen Chin shook his head.

"No catchee yet. Catchee in morning," he said. "Bob goce 'way without you, me tinker. No catchee in darkee. Plenty time."

"You think you'll be able to catch Bob, do you?" asked Frank.

"Me tinker—oh, yes!" said Yen Chin confidently. "Bob silly old lascal—catchee like gophee asleep! Oh, yes! Ah-h-h-h!"

Yen Chin broke off with that startled yell as a grip of iron fastened on the back of his neck. Bob Lawless had stepped quietly from cover.

The Chinese spun round, and his almond eyes grew almost as round as saucers as he stared at Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards & Co. jumped to their feet, and the Chinese jumped, too, as he saw that they were free.

"Caught!" said Bob Lawless cheerfully.

"Ow! Lettee goce neckee?"

"So I'm a silly old rascal, am I?" demanded Bob. "You'll catch me like a gopher asleep, will you?"

Yen Chin wriggled in the Canadian's muscular grip.

"No tinker Bob silly old lascal!" he gasped. "Bob velly handsome felle—velly nice clevee old chap. Oh, yes! Lettee goce neckee. Me, Yen Chin, good boy!"

Bob Lawless shook him forcibly.

"Hold him while I get a rope!" yelled Chunky Todgers, greatly delighted at the turn of events.

Yen Chin yelled.

"No lopce pool li! Chinese! Yen Chin bully

boy. Oh, yes! Likee muchee handsome Chunkee!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Yen Chin's compliments did not appease Chunky Todgers in the least. Perhaps he knew how much they were worth. He grabbed up one of the cut ropes, folded it, and commenced operations on the Chinese.

Lash, lash, lash!

Yen Chin hopped as Chunky landed out with the rope and yelled till the timber rang again.

Bob Lawless released him, laughing, and the Chinese made a rush to escape. But Chunky Todgers did not mean to let him escape unpunished. As the Chinese rushed away, Chunky dashed in pursuit, still lashing out with the rope.

"Lettee up!" shrieked Yen Chin. "Only joke! Me likee nicee old Chunkee! Handsome Chunkee! Nicee old Chunky! Yaloooh!"

The Chinese made a desperate rush for his pony with Chunky close behind, still laying on with the rope. He had to bend down to pull up the stake peg and release the pony, and as he did so Chunky plied the rope with tremendous effect. Yelling wildly, Yen Chin dashed at the pony and scrambled on his back. Another lash caught him as he did so, and the next caught the pony, and the animal sprang away.

With Yen Chin clinging to his back like a cat, the pony dashed into the wood and vanished in the darkness.

Chunky Todgers stood panting.

"I guess that's a lesson for the heathen!" he exclaimed. "I guess that's a warning to him, some! Phew! I'm tired!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chunky Todgers had quite tired himself out, but probably Yen Chin was more tired of it than Chunky was.

The chums of Cedar Creek did not see the Chinese again as they threaded their way through the timber back to the camp. Neither was he seen when they pulled up stakes in the morning and started on the trail into the foothills.

But when, from the summit of a ridge, they looked back at the timber they had left far behind, they spotted a diminutive rider emerging from the dusk of the trees. It was the Chow of Cedar Creek—still on the track!

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