

"THE PLOT AGAINST TOM MERRY!"

Great St. Jim's
Yarn — Inside.

THE
GEM
2^D





Blake Answers Back!

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

"Foxy," of Berea, Johannesburg, South Africa, writes:

I've been a reader for a year and a half. Where is your home? Could you publish a list of the Fourth? What make of bicycle do you ride? When was the GEM first published. Last question: What House are the following in: Racke, Clampe, Scroope, Levison major and minor?

ANSWER: *Hope you'll be a reader for a decade and a half, at least! My home is in Yorkshire. I did publish a list of the Fourth. You must have missed it. Not allowed to advertise special makes of bikes, though mine's often advertised in the pages of the GEM. GEM first appeared in March, 1907. Racke is in the School House, and so are all the others except Clampe. Scroope spells his name Serope.*

John Docherty, of Glasgow, writes:

Who is the biggest chump at St. Jim's? What weight is William George Bunter? Could Ernest Levison fight the Bounder of Greyfriars? Why is the Shell called the Shell? Hope I didn't waste a penny on a stamp. I was born in Aberdeen!

ANSWER: *Thanks for your postcard. Biggest chump title rests between Grundy and Trimble, I think. Bunter weighs 14 st. 12 lbs. Guess Levison would put up a good fight against anybody, but the Bounder is tough. Plenty! The Shell is the name for an intermediate Form at certain schools. 'Nuff space for a penny? Let me know if you're not satisfied.*

Arie Jaruslawsky, of Tel-Aviv, Palestine, writes:

Sometimes I ask myself various things, and I wish to ask you about them. 1. Why do you describe all fat boys as gluttons? 2. I myself, thank goodness, am not fat, but I think it isn't right to give them such a bad character.

ANSWER: *Fatty Wynn is one of the best; have you missed reading about him? Glad to hear from you; write some more. Baggy Trimble is a glutton, of course. He even admits it.*

"Talbot," of Herne Hill, writes:

What about a new school paper like the "Magnet" and GEM?

ANSWER: *Well, that's a good idea! Who says?*

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Nola Stewart, of Bulawayo, S. Rhodesia, writes:

Tell Tom Merry I suffer from sleepless nights because of him!

ANSWER: *Oh, my hat! Try counting the "black sheep" at St. Jim's. Or imagine Trimble drowning. That'll soon put you to sleep—perhaps!*

Christopher Dawson, of Southbourne, Bournemouth, writes:

I very much want to see this published as I've just taken up reading the GEM regularly. Do you think Lowther's stuff is rubbish? (I don't!) Why not include Greyfriars yarns? Who's most popular out of Merry, Lowther, Manners, and D'Arcy?

ANSWER: *Popularity is a bubble, at best—but all four you mention are rattling good fellows. I like Lowther as a jester and laugh at his jokes with the rest. Greyfriars yarns commence in this issue.*

"Two Dinkum Aussies," from Sunny Queensland, write:

Explain the Einstein Theory in full. Where does Harry Noble come from? Is it Melbourne, Victoria, or Melbourne, Queensland? Make up your mind!

ANSWER: *In full? Stop the presses. There'll be no story this week. No, on second thoughts, I'll explain the Einstein Theory of the Fourth Dimension in the Fourth Dimension—where it won't take up any space! Kangaroo hails from Melbourne, Victoria. Everything "dinkum"! Hope that's the word!*

"Kenrock of Binsham," Gateshead-on-Tyne, writes:

You must be getting on for 200. You're my favourite (don't blush). I'd like a good playful fight between your study and Tom Merry's. Oblige me? P.S.—What painful questions you sometimes get!

ANSWER: *You get me wrong, pal. I'm actually 201. We aren't fighting Tom Merry & Co. this season; too much common sense. P.S.—"Painful"? That's hardly the word, sometimes!*

ONCE AGAIN THE NEW MASTER OF THE FOURTH ATTEMPTS TO BLACKEN TOM MERRY'S NAME!

The Plot Against TOM MERRY!



"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther as the disreputable figure met Mr. Silverson. "What a specimen for a St. Jim's master to be meeting!"

GUSSY HITTING BACK!

"THE wat!"
"Eh?"
"The wottah!"
"Who?"
"The weptile!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's seemed to be in a state of indignation.

He came into Study No. 5 in the School House breathing wrath. There was a flush in his cheeks, and his noble eye gleamed behind his eyeglass.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at him inquiringly.

Only ten minutes ago Arthur Augustus had left that study to walk over to Wayland to see his tailor. His return was unexpected—especially in such a state of wrath and excitement.

"The outsidah!" went on Arthur Augustus.
"The uttah wascal!"

Somebody, it was clear, had roused Gussy's deep ire.

"What on earth's the row?" asked Jack Blake.
"Knox of the Sixth——"

"Bothah Knox of the Sixth!"
"Had a row with the New House men?" asked Herries.

"Rubbish!"
"Well, what's up?" demanded Digby.
"That wat! That wottah! That wascal! That weptile!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Silverson?" asked Blake.
He had guessed it. It was the new master of the Fourth Form to whom Arthur Augustus alluded. There was absolutely no other person at St. Jim's to whom that string of compliments could possibly be applied.

"Yaas!" said Arthur Augustus. "Silvahson—that wottah—that wat—that uttah bwute! He has gated me! I explained to him that I was goin' to see my tailah. He had the impudence to express doubt of my statement! It would be vewy bad form to hit a beak in the eye——"

"Eh?"
"But I was vewy stwongly tempted to punch the bwute!" said Arthur Augustus. "If he stays much longah at St. Jim's, I feel sure that I shall end by littin' him! The wat!"

"Well," said Jack Blake. "We all know

**Powerful New Yarn of
the Cheery Chums of
St. Jim's, by**

MARTIN CLIFFORD

that the new beak is a blighter and a bargee! But this is the limit! Standing between a fellow and his new trousers—"

Herries and Digby chuckled.

Arthur Augustus did not. He saw nothing at which to chuckle. New trousers were a serious matter to the swell of St. Jim's.

"That is not the worst, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I am vewy anxious to see about my new twousahs. But the wottah pwetended to doubt my word! He pwetended to fancy that I was goin' out of bounds. He said that he was not satisfied with me, owin' to my association with a boy in another Form whom he did not trust!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Blake, Herries, and Digby together.

"He means Tom Mewwy, of course!" said Arthur Augustus. "The wottah is down on Tom Mewwy—goodness knows why. The more he wants to make us dwop Tom Mewwy, the more I am goin' to stick to him."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"I was just goin' out at the gate when he was goin' out, too—and he called to me!" said Arthur Augustus. "He ordahed me to wemain within gates! And Mr. Wiggs has my new twousahs all weady for me! I shall not be able to see my new twousahs to-day."

"Awful!" said Blake sympathetically.

"Well, it is not exactly awful, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "But it is vewy annoyin'. But if that wat, that wottah, that weptile, thinks a fellow is goin' to stand it, I can jollay well tell him that he had anothon guess comin'. When he comes in, I fancy he will be sowwy that he did not let me go out. Where's that bottle of gum?"

"Gum?" repeated Blake.

"I am goin' to pouah that bottle of gum into the armchair in his studay," explained Arthur Augustus. "When he sits in it, pewwaps he will be sowwy that he did not let me go and see my tailah."

"I say, Silverson's rather a dangerous man to jape," said Digby doubtfully. "He whops jolly hard—much harder than old Lathom used to."

"I am not goin' to leave my card!" said Arthur Augustus sarcastically. "I should like the wat to know who did it—but it would not be judicious! I am goin' to leave him in the dark about that."

"But—" said Herries.

"Pway don't butt like a billy-goat, Hewwies! I am goin' to make that wat sit up!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I would wathah punch his nose—but a fellow can't vewy well punch a beak's nose! The Head would be watty if a fellow punched a beak's nose."

"Just a few!" gasped Blake. "But—"

"Wats! Oh! Heah it is!" Arthur Augustus grabbed a bottle of gum from the study shelf!

It was a large bottle, and nearly full. There was no doubt that if Mr. Silverson sat in nearly a pint of gum in his study armchair, he would feel sorry for himself.

"But look here—" said Herries.

"Too jolly dangerous!" said Dig.

"Wubbish!"

Arthur Augustus, wrathful and determined, walked out of Study No. 6 with the big bottle of gum in his hand.

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Blake. "If you're going to play the goat, don't show that bottle of gum to the whole House! Shove it under your jacket, you image!"

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"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

And he shoved the bottle under his jacket and walked away to the study landing—leaving his chums rather dismayed. Nobody in the St. Jim's Fourth liked Mr. Silverson—he had a bad temper, and a heavy hand with a cane, and japing him was a perilous game!

But when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's neble mind was made up it was made up, and that was that.

On the study landing Baggy Trimble stared at Arthur Augustus as he passed.

"I say, what have you got under your jacket, D'Arcy?" he asked. It was quite unusual to see the swell of St. Jim's with a big bulge in his elegant jacket.

"Pway don't ask questions, Twimble!" answered Arthur Augustus. "I am not goin' to tell you whethah I have anythin' undah my jacket or not."

"He, he! I can jolly well see you have!" grinned Baggy.

"You cannot see that it is a bottle of gum, at any wate, and I am certainly not goin' to tell you what it is," answered Arthur Augustus, and he went on to the stairs.

"Oh, jiminy!" said Baggy.

Downstairs, Arthur Augustus was very cautious in approaching Masters' Studies.

Mr. Silverson was safe out of gates, but he did not want any other beak to spot him going to the Form-master's study.

Monsieur Morny was coming up the corridor, and Gussy waited at the corner till he had passed. The French master glanced at him, probably wondering why he was waiting there.

However, he passed on, and when he was gone Arthur Augustus headed for Mr. Lathom's old study, now the quarters of the new master of the Fourth.

He whipped into that study and shut the door. Then he got busy!

The contents of the gum-bottle streamed into the seat of the armchair. That armchair stood with its back to the window, and on the old dark leather the gum hardly showed. James Silverson was not likely to notice it till he sat in it. Afterwards, no doubt, he would notice it.

Arthur Augustus grinned serenely. A sea of gum floated in the seat of the armchair—all ready for Mr. Silverson when he came in from his walk. Arthur Augustus parked the empty bottle under his jacket again, peeped cautiously into the passage, and left the study. His new trousers, at the tailor's in Wayland, were as far away as ever—but Arthur Augustus was satisfied, at least, that Silverson was going to be sorry for standing between him and those beautiful garments.

THE MAN IN THE WOOD!

TOM MERRY frowned.

"That wotm!" he said.

Frowne did not come easily to the cheery, sunny face of Tom Merry. But his face darkened at the sight of Mr. James Silverson.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were coming along the footpath in Wayland wood. They had walked over to Wayland after class—chiefly because Manners required new films for his camera. Now they were coming back to the school, when they saw Mr. Silverson.

They had only a back view of that gentleman, but they knew him easily enough.

James Silverson was not on the footpath. He was standing under a tree at a little distance off

the path, apparently waiting for someone there.

The Terrible Three of the Shell all looked at him. But he did not look round, and he was too distant to hear their voices or their footsteps on the carpet of fallen leaves.

Manners paused.

"What's he up to?" he asked in a low voice.

"That needn't worry us," said Tom. "Come on—let's get out of sight of the worm!"

"He's waiting for someone," said Manners, unheeding.

"Looks like it—come on!"

"He's not waiting for anybody belonging to St. Jim's at this distance from the school," said Manners.

"No—come on."

"I'm not coming on just yet," said Manners quietly. "I'm going to see whom that worm is waiting for."

"We don't want to watch the cad!" said Monty Lowther.

"I do!" said Manners.

"Look here—" began Tom.

"Shut up, old man, and get into this bush, in case the worm looks round!" answered Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

James Silverson, his distant relation, his self-constituted rival for old Miss Priscilla Fawcett's moneybags, was his enemy—and a bitter, hard, unscrupulous and stealthy enemy. But Tom was not going to adopt James' method in dealing with James.

"Not good enough, old chap," he said. "I know he watches me—but I'm not going to watch him. From what we know of the cad, he's very likely waiting to meet some bookmaking blighter—and I don't want to see any of his pals from the Black Bull in Wayland."

"Can't say I want to, either," said Lowther.

"Shut up and do as I tell you!" answered Manners.

And taking his chums by the arms, he pushed them into the thick bush beside the footpath, where they were out of sight, either from James Silverson if he looked round, or of anyone coming along the path.

"Look here—" grunted Tom and Monty together.

"Don't be bigger asses than you can help," said Manners quietly. "A few days ago, Tom, you had a letter from a racing man at the Black Bull in Wayland—some blighter named Mulligan. Linton and Railton both saw it, and a search of our study followed. We know who put Mulligan up to writing you that letter—"

"Well, we think so, but—"

"Now he's waiting here in the wood, hardly a quarter of a mile from Wayland. Put two and two together!" grunted Manners.

"Oh!" said Tom. "You think he's here to see Mulligan?"

"I think he wouldn't dare to go to the Black Bull—and he's too jolly wary to put anything in writing. He must see the man, if he's got him to do his dirty work, sometimes."

"Well, yes, but—"

"But you don't like keeping an eye on a man who's as treacherous as a fox!" said Manners sarcastically.

"No, I don't!" said Tom bluntly.

"You'd rather be sacked from St. Jim's for blagging, and cut out of your governess' will for

disgracing yourself—and see the old lady diddled and done by that plotting rat!"

"Well, no; but—"

"Well, shut up, then," said Manners. "If he's going to see his precious Mulligan, we're going to see what Mulligan looks like, and perhaps spot what the scheming rat's next move is going to be."

"Oh, all right! But—"

"Just shut up!" said Manners.

And Tom shut up, and the three waited, James Silverson still stood where they had seen him, staring through the wood, as if expecting someone to arrive from that direction and not by the footpath.

That he was in view from the footpath James was probably not aware. He was at a good distance, and there were plenty of trees and

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bushes between. In fact, it was only through an opening of the underwoods that the Shell fellows had spotted him.

Anyhow, there he stood waiting—impatiently, as they could see when they looked at him through the bush where they were in cover. He glanced every now and then at his wristwatch. Possibly the other man was keeping him waiting—perhaps James was early at the rendezvous. Tom and Lowther were feeling far from easy as they lingered, but Manners was determined, and Manners had his way.

"There he comes!" muttered Manners, at last.

"My hat! What a specimen for a St. Jim's master to be meeting!" murmured Monty Lowther.

From the thick wood beyond the spot where Silverson stood, a figure came into view and joined the new master of the St. Jim's Fourth.

He was a man with a red face, a redder nose, and a large mouth under a shaggy moustache. He wore a bowler hat tilted to one side of his head, and a green muffler with red spots. He looked what he obviously was—a racing man of the most disreputable kind. A cigarette was sticking out of one corner of his large, loose mouth.

The juniors saw him give James Silverson a familiar nod. They could not help wondering what the Head would have said if he could have witnessed that secret meeting in the wood.

Mr. Silverson, as a temporary master, had come to St. Jim's to take Mr. Lathom's place from the agents who had supplied temporary masters when they were required. But it was safe to say that neither that firm nor Dr. Holmes had any knowledge of James' real character. The Head would have been considerably enlightened had he seen what the Terrible Three now saw!

"Bet you that's Mulligan!" whispered Manners.

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"Very likely!" said Tom. "Well, now we've seen the Worm's precious pal, let's push on!"

"Shut up and stop where you are!"

"Oh, all right!" said Tom resignedly.

James Silverson looked round. The red-faced man was speaking to him and possibly had given him a hint that they might be seen from the footpath. James cast a rapid, sharp suspicious glance round him, and but for the cover of the bush his sharp eyes certainly would have spotted the Shell fellows. As it was, he saw nothing of them.

But both men moved away from the spot where Silverson had been standing. The thick underwoods swallowed them from sight.

"Now—" muttered Tom.

"Quiet!" hissed Manners.

A voice came to their ears. In moving into better cover, the two had moved nearer the footpath, and though they were quite out of sight, a voice reached the bush in which the juniors stood.

"But I ain't never seen him, Mr. Silverson—I don't know the bloke from Adam!"

It was a beery voice, evidently that of the man who had joined Silverson.

"That is easily arranged, Mulligan!" answered the clear, acid tones of the new master of the Fourth.

"Ow, then?" asked Mulligan.

Tom Merry quietly stepped out of the bush into the footpath. He was not going to listen to the talk between the two men.

Manners and Lowther followed him—the former with a frown on his face. They walked up the footpath in silence for a time.

"You're a fool, Tom!" said Manners at last.

"I'd rather be a fool than a worm like Silverson!" answered Tom. "Don't be an ass, Manners! Can we hang about listening, like Baggy Trimble?"

"Ten to one they're fixing up something for your benefit," said Manners sourly. "We've got proof now that that worm knows Mulligan—the man who wrote that letter."

"Let them fix it up and be blowed to them!" said Tom. "A rogue never gets the upper hand in the long run—and Silverson can go and eat coke! I'd like to punch his head, but I'm not going to listen to what he says to that other blackguard. You wouldn't on your own account and you're not going to do it on mine."

"Well, you're an ass!" said Manners. "Come on, then—we shall be late for tea at this rate."

And the Terrible Three went on their way to the school, leaving James Silverson to his mysterious confabulation with the man from the Black Bull—whatever it was about!

LOWTHER THE LEG-PULLER!

"Is that Gussy, or a Cheshire cat?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Why that expansive grin, Gustavus?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Was I gwinnin', deah boy?"

"From ear to ear," said Manners—"a grin a yard long, old bean!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

The Terrible Three, coming in at the school gates, paused to look at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That elegant youth was standing there, looking

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out, with quite a pronounced grin on his aristocratic visage—a grin that leaped to the eye. It seemed that entertaining thoughts were working in Gussy's noble brain. For some unknown reason, Arthur Augustus was fearfully amused.

"Seen anythin' of Silvahson?" he asked. "I am waitin' for the wat to come in. You see, he is goin' to get it when he twickles in."

"Japing Silverson?" asked Tom dubiously. Like Blake & Co., Tom considered James Silverson rather a dangerous man to jape; likewise, he lacked faith in Gussy's abilities as a successful japer.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "I don't mind tellin' you fellows, but keep it feahfully dark of course. I don't want the wat givin' me six on the bags, you know, and he would jump at a chance."

"But what?" asked Tom, rather anxiously.

"What do you fellows think of a pint of gum in his armchair?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ten to one, you know, he will dwop into that armchair as soon as he comes in fwom his walk," said Arthur Augustus. "What a surprise, what?"

"If he spots you," said Lowther.

"That's all wight. I've been feahfully cautious!" assured Arthur Augustus. "You see, the cad has gated me for nothin' and I am hittin' back. I am goin' to make him sit up!"

"He's going to sit up when he sits down?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you think he won't know that you landed the gum on him?" inquired Manners.

"Wathah not! I am pwetty cautious, you know."

"You're a deep old Machiavellian plotter, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "You gum Silverson after he gates you, and you fancy that he won't put two and two together. Can't he do simple arithmetic?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"And to make it quite clear, so that he can't have the faintest doubt, you wait here to see him come in, grinning like a Cheshire cat! Jeyver see a man ask for it like Gussy?" inquired Monty, appealing to his chums.

"Never!" said Manners.

"Hardly ever!" said Tom Merry.

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them when Silverson sits in the gum," said Lowther. "Gussy, old man, you should stick to neckties, silk hats, and fancy waistcoats. Japing beaks isn't your long suit."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I thought it would be wathah amusin' to see him come in, and then keep an eye on his study window and see him sit down in the gum. But pewwaps, on the whole, it would be wathah more pwudent not to catch his eye."

"Just a spot!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "The best thing you can do, Gussy, is to be right off the scene, and get Silverson to forget your existence as much as he can."

"Pewwaps you are wight," agreed Arthur Augustus. "I nevah thought of that, you know. I wathah think I will twot off and see Figgins in the New House. That will be wight off the scene."

And Arthur Augustus—still grinning in happy anticipation of Silverson getting the gum—trotted off to the New House to pay a friendly call on Figgins & Co.

"Doesn't he beg for it?" sighed Lowther. "Silverson will get that gum—unless somebody

else does—and Gussy will get six! Hold on, though; don't go in."

"We're late for tea," said Manners. "Come on!"

"Never mind tea!" said Monty Lowther. "What does tea matter when it's a question of helping poor old Gussy to steer clear, and pulling the Worm's leg at the same time? I've got a wheeze."

"Never mind your wheezes," said Manners. "I'd rather have tea. And I want to shove some of these films into my camera."

"Bless, bother, and blow your camera!" answered Lowther. "I shall take that camera out some day, and drop it into the middle of the river."

"You silly ass!"

"Just hold on and stick here," said Monty. "We're going to wait here till Silverson blows in. I don't suppose he'll be long. Even Silverson can't enjoy the society of pals like Mr. Mulligan."

"But why?" grunted Manners.

"Don't I keep on telling you it's a wheeze?" demanded Lowther. "Stick where you are, and look the other way when Silverson heaves into sight. He's not to know we're interested in him. We're just standing around chatting when he blows in, and don't see him at all. And if he hears what we say, that's his look-out, not ours."

"But what—" asked Tom.

The three were rather late for tea. They had healthy youthful appetites, but Monty Lowther would cheerfully have sacrificed breakfast, dinner, and tea to a jape, especially on Silverson. His own tea, or anybody else's, counted for nothing in comparison.

However, as Monty, in a low voice, proceeded to explain, his comrades were consoled for the postponement of tea in Study No. 10 in the Shell. They waited. Pulling Silverson's leg was worth a wait.

As Lowther had predicted, they had not long to wait. Whatever was the object of James Silverson's interview with J. Mulligan in Wayland Wood, he was not likely to linger long in such company, and he did not. In ten minutes he was spotted coming up the road.

But the chums of the Shell did not reveal the fact that they had spotted him coming. They stood near the porter's lodge, with their backs to the gateway as Mr. Silverson appeared there, coming in.

The window of old Taggles' lodge served the purpose of a looking-glass, and warned Monty Lowther when the master of the Fourth was passing behind the group.

"What did you do with that bottle of gum, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther, as soon as he was sure that Silverson was within hearing.

"Never mind what I did with it," answered Tom Merry. "I'm not telling the whole school about it."

"Can't be too careful!" said Manners.

Mr. Silverson glanced sourly at the three as he passed. He never came near Tom Merry without a sour look.

Those three remarks reached his ears, though he did not, at the moment, attach any importance to them—such a thing as gum not being in his thoughts. It was likely to be in his thoughts later.

He walked on towards the School House, and the Terrible Three smiled at one another when he was gone.

"Think he'll remember that—after he's sat in the gum?" murmured Monty.

"Sort of!" said Tom, laughing.

"Think he'll jump to it that we gummed his armchair?"

"I don't see how he can do anything else," said Manners. "Rather a lark to get him on our track, when we can prove that we haven't even been inside the House while he's been out."

"Exactly!" said Lowther. "We're not going into the House at all till Silverson's got through with the gum. Can't be too careful. The more he gets after the wrong party, the less he'll get after the right one. Let's go after Gussy, and see if we can scrounge a tea in the New House."

"Let's!" agreed Tom Merry.

Mr. Silverson had gone into the School House. The chums of the Shell proceeded to the New House, where they found hospitality with their friendly foes, Figgins & Co. And they smiled cheerfully at the prospect of the Worm, having sat in the gum, getting on the wrong track and making a fool of himself, as he had often done before.

STICKING TO IT!

"MR. LINTON—"

"Well, sir?"

"If you will kindly step into my study for a few moments—"

Linton, the master of the Shell, paused in the corridor. Linton was rather a severe Form-master, with a dry, sarcastic manner, and was considered rather a Tartar in his Form. He did not like the temporary master of the Fourth much, and his civility to him was generally rather distant.

He had entered that study often enough when it was Mr. Lathom's, but he had not entered it since it had been Mr. Silverson's. He did not seem much inclined to enter it now.

"It is a matter connected with boys of your Form of which I desire to speak," said Mr. Silverson.

Mr. Linton's rather thin lips set a little.

"If it is on the subject of Merry, sir, I do not see any use in discussion," he said. "You have your own opinion of that junior—I have mine."

"As the boy is a distant relative of mine, Mr. Linton, I am naturally somewhat concerned about him," said Mr. Silverson. "I have, indeed, promised his guardian—Miss Priscilla Fawcett—to befriend him in any way that may be possible while I am at this school."

"Persisting in a bad opinion of the boy on extremely doubtful evidence is a peculiar way of befriending him, Mr. Silverson."

"My object, sir, is to save the boy, if possible, before matters have gone too far," said Mr. Silverson. "It is an undoubted fact that he was seen at that disreputable resort the Green Man—"

"And it is another undoubted fact, sir, that he explained that matter to the satisfaction of his Housemaster and his Form-master."

Silverson compressed his lips.

"If you do not desire to look into this matter, Mr. Linton—a matter that may be very serious for Merry—"

"As Merry is in my Form I am bound to look into any such matter," said Mr. Linton. "If you mean that something fresh has come to your knowledge—"

"I fear so!"

"Very well, I shall certainly hear it," said

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the master of the Shell, and he stepped into Silverson's study.

Mr. Silverson politely waved his hand to the armchair, and Mr. Linton sat down. The master of the Fourth stood by the study table. His expression was grave.

"Kindly look at this paper, sir!" he said.

He handed a rather grubby, crumpled sheet of paper to the master of the Shell. Mr. Linton gave a violent start as he looked at it.

It was a single sheet of common paper, with a scent of tobacco about it, and a stain of beer on the corner. It was scrawled on in pencil.

"The Black Bull,

"Wayland.

"Dear Tom,—I spose you know by this time that Blue Bag never came in. Like I told you before, he wasn't the orse I should have picked, but every man to his fancy. I've been expecting to see you at the usual place, but you ain't turned up. I can't wait for ever for the four pound you owe me on that orse. To put it plain, if I don't see you soon, you'll see me, and I spose you don't want that.

"Yours,

"J. MULLIGAN."

Mr. Linton's face grew darker and darker as he gazed at that precious epistle from the Black Bull in Wayland.

He sat silent.

"Whether that letter belongs to a boy in your Form is for you to decide, Mr. Linton," said James Silverson, breaking the long silence at last. "I know nothing about that, and do not venture an opinion. I picked it up on the study landing, where some juniors had been ragging, as they call it. I went up to stop the noise, and they hurried away at once, naturally—and that paper was left on the floor."

"Was Merry one of the boys?"

"He was—but there were at least a dozen others. The paper may have been dropped by one of them in the scuffle. It may even have been dropped by some other junior, who was gone before I arrived on the scene. It may, for all I know, have been dropped by any School House boy."

Mr. Linton did not answer. He sat gazing at the paper.

"Only the fact that it is addressed to a boy who is called Tom struck me," said Mr. Silverson. "Probably there are a dozen boys in the House with that name. But, with that disagreeable episode of the Green Man in mind, it has made me feel uneasy. It is for you to take any action that may be required, not for me, if you think that that paper belonged to a Shell boy. Otherwise, it had better be taken to the House-master. But—"

"I know this hand!" said Mr. Linton abruptly.

"The handwriting?"

"Yes."

"In that case, you have some clue to the owner, and I can only hope that it is not my relative—Merry."

"I have seen this handwriting and this signature once before," said Mr. Linton. "Last week a letter came here for Merry, which I requested him to open in my presence. It referred to a horse named Blue Bag, on which the writer appeared to have been instructed by Merry to place a bet for him."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Mr. Silverson.

"Then—can there be any doubt?"

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"This letter," said Mr. Linton, "cannot have come by post. A very careful scrutiny has been made of Merry's correspondence."

"Possibly he may have warned the man not to write again by post if a letter fell into your hands. No doubt there are other means of communication."

"No doubt," said Mr. Linton.

He sat with pursed lips and a frowning brow. "A search was made of Merry's study after that letter," said the master of the Shell slowly. "Nothing of a dubious nature was discovered. Inexplicable as it seemed, I was disposed to accept Merry's word that he knew nothing of the writer of the letter. But this—from the same man—"

"Do you know anything of the man, sir?" asked Mr. Silverson.

"Nothing—except that he is obviously a bad character," said Mr. Linton. "It would appear beyond doubt that this letter belongs to Tom Merry."

"I feared so, sir! As you will see, there is an implied threat in the letter; the man as good as states that, unless he is paid, he will come to the school. Such an occurrence—"

"Such an occurrence, sir, will close Tom Merry's career at this school," said Mr. Linton grimly. "If he has deceived me, deceived his Housemaster, and his headmaster, to such an extent as would appear, he is no fit boy to remain at this school! He will be expelled in disgrace."

James Silverson turned away his head; he was afraid to let the master of the Shell see the expression on his face at those words.

"It is scarcely to be doubted," said Mr. Linton slowly, "that this letter is Merry's. And yet—I shall not willingly give up my faith in that boy. I am much obliged to you, Mr. Silverson, for bringing this matter to my notice. I shall certainly give this matter my very closest attention."

Mr. Linton rose to his feet.

Or, to be more exact, he started to rise to them.

To his astonishment, something seemed to drag him back by the tail of his gown.

He half-rose, and plumped back into the armchair with a heavy bump.

"Goodness gracious!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Silverson stared at him. He had not the slightest idea why the master of the Shell was going through these strange gymnastics.

Mr. Linton heaved up again. He sat back again, plumping.

The fact was that he had sat so long in Mr. Silverson's armchair that the gum had had time to dry on his gown, pressed hard to the gummy seat of the armchair by his weight.

"What—" gasped Mr. Linton. "Goodness gracious! What—"

"My dear sir, what—" exclaimed James.

"I cannot rise from the chair!" gasped Mr. Linton.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Something seems to have caught my gown! Really, Mr. Silverson, this is most extraordinary! What is in this chair?"

"Nothing, that I am aware of," answered Mr. Silverson in amazement. "Really, my dear sir—"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

He placed both hands on the arms of the chair and heaved up, exerting force. There was a rending sound as the gown tore away from the gum.

"What——" stuttered Silverson, staring blankly.

Mr. Linton breathed wrath. He caught up the tail of his gown—sticky, gummy, crumpled—and stared at it. Then he stared into the armchair. Then he stared at Mr. Silverson with a look that the fabled Gorgon might have envied.

"Really, sir, this is unprecedented!" he exclaimed hotly. "Look at my gown! Look at that chair! If you spill a large quantity of gum in a chair, sir, surely it would be easy to ring for a servant, sir, to clean the chair before asking anyone to sit in it, sir!"

"But—but I have spilt no gum!" exclaimed Mr. Silverson, bewildered. "Nothing of the kind!"

"Look at it!"

"I was sitting in that very chair before I went out——"

"I wish, sir, that you had been sitting in it now, instead of offering it to me!" snorted the master of the Shell. "This is outrageous——"

"My dear sir——"

"Look at my gown!"

"But I——"

"Pah!"

Mr. Linton, still holding the sticky tail of his gown, swept across to the door. He was deeply annoyed—in fact, intensely exasperated. Such carelessness as leaving spilt gum in an armchair was inexcusable.

"But——" stammered James.

"Such gross, inexcusable carelessness——" hooted Mr. Linton.

"But I did not——"

"Such unexampled slovenliness, sir——"

"But I——" stammered James.

"Pah!" snorted Mr. Linton.

And he swept out of the study, closing the door after him with unnecessary force, leaving the bewildered master of the Fourth staring at the gummy armchair.

A JOLT FOR JAMES!

"MERRY!" said Silverson, between his teeth.

He knew it.

Back into his mind came the recollection of the words he had heard the Shell fellows utter as he came in at the gates.

He had not taken any special note of those words at the time. Now he recalled them, and he knew—at all events, he had no doubt that he did.

Someone had swamped gum in his armchair during his absence from the school after class. The master of the Shell had sat in it, but it had been intended for him—James Silverson. That was what Tom Merry had done with the bottle of gum about which Lowther had inquired. How could Mr. Silverson doubt it?

"Merry!" repeated James.

Mr. Linton, whom he had desired to soothe, to placate to enlist on his side by pulling the wool over his eyes, had left his study in an extremely bad temper, angry and resentful. And Tom Merry, of course, had done this—he had swamped that chair with the gum in which his Form-master had sat.

James' eyes glittered.

It had not taken him long to guess that. And now that he had guessed, he was rather glad that Linton had sat in the gum. Linton's intense annoyance would be turned on Tom Merry

as soon as he knew; and that was all to the good, from the Worm's peculiar point of view.

Silverson looked from his study window. His eyes glinted round the quad in search of Tom Merry. He was going to lose no time in calling that young rascal to account.

Tom, as it happened, was in full view. He was coming from the New House with Manners and Lowther, after teaing with Figgins & Co. The three strolled in the quad, not intending to enter the School House till calling-over, in case the gum had not yet been discovered.

Mr. Silverson threw open his window.

"Merry!" he barked.

Tom looked round.

Monty Lowther winked at Manners. The expression on the face at the window indicated that the gum had transpired. And the Fourth Form master's bark indicated that he attributed it to Tom Merry, as the cheery Monty had planned for him to do.

"Did you call me, sir?" asked Tom.

"I did. Go to your Form-master's study at once! I shall see you there!"

Tom Merry did not stir a step.

"Do you hear me, Merry?" thundered James.

"Oh, quite, sir!" answered Tom.

"Then go to your Form-master's study!"

"I've mentioned to you before, Mr. Silverson, that I am not under the orders of any Form-master but my own!" answered Tom Merry. "I will go to my Form-master if Mr. Linton tells me to do so, not otherwise!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lowther.

There were plenty of fellows in the quad after tea, and a good many heard Mr. Silverson's call to Tom Merry, and Tom's answer. Some of them gathered round, staring at the angry face at the study window.

"What's the row this time, Tom?" asked Talbot of the Shell.

"Silverson making a fool of himself, as usual," answered Tom. "If he fancies he can give orders in the Shell, it's time he woke up!"

"He's a beak, old bean," murmured Kangaroo.

"He's not my beak," answered Tom.

"Merry, will you go to Mr. Linton at once, or will you not?"

"Not!" answered Tom.

James, breathing hard, disappeared from the window. There was a buzz in the crowd of fellows round Tom Merry in the quad.

"Stormy weather comin'!" remarked Cardew of the Fourth.

"Look out for squalls!" grinned Racke.

"He, he!" chuckled Baggy Trimble. "Bet you Silverson's gone to Linton! You'll hear from him in a minute."

Baggy was right. Mr. Linton's window opened, and the master of the Shell glanced out. Behind him in the study James Silverson could be seen.

"Merry!" called out Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir!"

"Please come to my study at once!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Tom Merry went into House immediately, and arrived at his Form-master's study. He found Mr. Linton frowning.

"Merry, did you spill gum in an armchair in Mr. Silverson's study during his absence from the House after class?" asked the master of the Shell.

"No, sir!"

"You utterly untruthful boy!" exclaimed Mr. Silverson.

"Will you kindly allow me to question this boy of my Form, Mr. Silverson?" asked the master of the Shell acidly.

"Certainly, Mr. Linton! But that utterly untruthful statement—"

"You will oblige me, Mr. Silverson, by reserving your comments until the facts are established!" snapped Mr. Linton. "Merry, Mr. Silverson believes that it was you who played this foolish prank in his study."

"Does he, sir?" said Tom.

"He states that he heard certain remarks between you and your friends when he came in."

"Very likely, sir," said Tom coolly. "Mr. Silverson often hears remarks among the fellows—very often, indeed, sir."

James almost choked.

"Merry, do you mean to imply—" began Mr. Linton. Then he checked himself. "Kindly do not make such remarks, Merry. Answer me directly! Did one of your companions ask you what you had done with a bottle of gum?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you reply that you were not telling the whole school about it?"

"I did, sir."

"Such remarks, Merry, were more than enough to give Mr. Silverson the impression that you had played that trick in his study when he discovered the gum there," said Mr. Linton severely. "As it happened, it was I who fell a victim to this trick, Merry—if indeed a trick has been played."

"There is no doubt on that point, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Silverson. "The gum was placed in the chair."

"Unless, sir, it was spilt there by accident, and carelessly left there," retorted Mr. Linton.

"That was my impression at the time."

"That was not the case! This boy—"

"You deny having entered Mr. Silverson's study, Merry?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

James' eyes glinted at him. Like many untruthful people, James could never believe that others were more truthful than himself. James had not the slightest doubt that Tom Merry was uttering a series of barefaced untruths.

"You have had a bottle of gum in your possession, Merry!" said Mr. Linton.

"Certainly, sir! Most fellows have gum in their studies," answered Tom. "I did not take any gum to Mr. Silverson's study. I have not been near his study. In fact, I have not been in the House at all since class till now."

"That is a false statement!" said Mr. Silverson.

Tom Merry's lips curled.

"I am answering my Form-master, not you!" he retorted. "And that is not for you to decide, Mr. Silverson!"

"Mr. Linton!" James tried hard to choke down his wrath and speak calmly. "Let this boy's statement be investigated. He states that he has not been in the House. He certainly has been in the House. Let him prove where else he has been in the two hours and more since class was dismissed."

"Can you account for your time since class, Merry?"

"Certainly, sir! Immediately after class, I walked to Wayland with my friends, Manners and Lowther, and they will tell you so."

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"No doubt," sneered Mr. Silverson.

"If Mr. Silverson will not believe any of us, sir, he may inquire at the photographer's shop in Wayland High Street, where Manners bought a roll of films," said Tom. "Unless, of course, he chooses to doubt the photographer's word, also."

"No such inquiry is necessary," said Mr. Linton. "But if you returned before Mr. Silverson came in—"

"We did, sir; he passed us near the gates when he came in. We remained at the gates for some time, and Taggles must have seen us as he was in his lodge, and we were standing quite near his window. Mr. Silverson, of course, may suspect Taggles also of telling lies if he says so."

"And after that, Merry?"

"We went to the New House to tea with some fellows there. We've only just left the New House. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn will say so if they are asked—if Mr. Silverson will believe them!" added Tom.

"The matter is quite clear," said Mr. Linton. "Mr. Silverson unfortunately received a wrong impression from the remark he heard you make, Merry."

"Other masters in this school, sir, do not listen to what fellows are saying to one another," said Tom.

"What, what! You must not make such observations, Merry! Mr. Silverson, of course, heard your remark quite by chance."

"Yes, sir; he often does!" said Tom.

"You had better leave my study, Merry!" said Mr. Linton hastily; and the captain of the Shell departed.

"Is this matter to end here, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Silverson. "You, sir, have been the victim of a disrespectful prank intended for me—and investigation would prove that Merry was guilty—"

"Investigation would prove that Merry has stated the exact facts," said Mr. Linton coldly. "The boy might possibly play such a prank, especially upon a master who is obviously prejudiced against him—but he is not so foolish as to call on a number of witnesses, unless their evidence would substantiate his statements. The matter is closed."

"I do not believe a single statement he has made!" exclaimed James, quite forgetting caution in his exasperation.

Mr. Linton gave him a cold, steady look.

"Then I can only conclude, sir, that your prejudice against this boy, your relative, is ineradicable!" he said icily. "I decline to discuss the matter further."

James was very near at that moment to telling the master of the Shell what he thought of him. But he restrained himself and left the study. He left it with the conviction firmly fixed in his mind that it was Tom Merry who had gummed his armchair—which, undoubtedly, was all the better for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

TOM MERRY IS WANTED!

"ALL wight to-day!" remarked Arthur Augustus, the following afternoon.

"Which?" inquired Blake.

"As it is a half-holiday, I shall be able to twot ovah to Wayland without that wab buttin' in!" explained Arthur Augustus. "Even Silvahson wouldn't have the neck to gate a fellow for



Arthur Augustus crossed the pavement to the post office, quite unaware that his movements were being closely watched!

nothin' on a half-holiday. If he did, I should certainly go to Waiton!"

"So it's all right!" said Blake, with owl-like gravity. "I've been fearfully worried about those trousers, Gussy!"

"Have you weally, Blake?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently. "That is vevy pally of you, deah boy."

"I couldn't sleep a wink at night, thinking about it!" declared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Herries and Dig.

"Weally, Blake, if you are jokin' on a sewious subject—" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"What is it Shakespeare says?" went on Blake. "We had it in the literature class the other day—"

"Bai Jove! I do not wemembah anythin' in Shakespeare about twousahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "What was it, old chap?"

Blake proceeded to quote:

"Who steals my purse, steals trash!

But he that filches from me my new trousers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Herries and Dig again.

"You uttah ass, you have got it all w'ong!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway be sewious, deah boy. I was goin' to ask you fellows if you would like to come ovah to Wayland with me this aftahnoon. Old Wiggs would be vevy glad to see you,

and I should like to have your advice about a pair of twousahs I am thinkin' of—"

"This," said Blake, "is where we jump with both feet, you fellows! How could a half-holiday be better spent than in a tailor's shop?"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

"Shall we put in the afternoon sorting over the trouserings, and the suitings, and the coatings?" asked Blake.

"I don't think!" grinned Herries.

"Not in your life-time, Gussy!" said Dig.

"The fact is, deah boys, that you would be well-advised to pay a little more attention to tailowin'!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of his noble head. "I hate to mention it, Blake, but your twousahs weally are the limit! And look at the way your jacket sets on the shouldahs!"

"How the thump can I look at the way my jacket sets on the shoulders?" asked Blake. "I've no eyes in the back of my head!"

"Wats! I weally wish you fellows would come," said Arthur Augustus. "I should weally like advice about that pair of twousahs! It is wippin' matewial, mind—and though the twousahs are actually weady made, they fit like a dweam! But I feel wathah uncertain about the pwominent stwipes."

"What a problem!" sighed Blake.

"Yaas, it is wathah a pwoblem!" confessed

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Arthur Augustus. "A fellow cannot be too particular about his clobber! A fellow likes to be well-dressed—but it is fearfully important not to ovahe it, you know. It would be howwid to be loud, like Wacke of the Shell. On the othah hand—"

"On the other hand," said Blake, "we're going to play in a pick-up game this afternoon, and I'll tell you what, Gussy—chuck up your tailor, and come and change for footer."

"Good idea!" said Dig. "Do!"

"Imposs, deah boys! But if you weally pwefer footah to comin' ova to the tailah's—"

"Do we?" grinned Blake.

"Sort of!" admitted Herries.

"Just a few!" remarked Dig.

"Wight-ho! I think I will ask Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "He is wathah a sensible chap, and I should weally like some sensible fellow to give an opinion on those trowsahs."

And leaving his chums to go to the changing-room, Arthur Augustus proceeded to look for Tom Merry of the Shell.

He found that youth in the quadrangle in discussion with Manners and Lowther. The three, as was not uncommonly the case, had different ideas for killing time that half-holiday.

Tom Merry's idea was to join in the pick-up on Little Side. Monty Lowther was keen on a new film that was showing at Abbotsford. Manners declared that probably they wouldn't get many more such sunny afternoons, and that it would be a sin and a shame to waste this one—which being interpreted meant that Manners was going out with his camera.

So as Arthur Augustus spotted the Terrible Three, they were separating—Monty Lowther making for the gates to get a train for Abbotsford, and Manners going into the House for his camera.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Hallo, old top!" said Tom. "Playing in the pick-up?"

"No—I have somethin' wathah important on this afternoon," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Have you got anythin' on, deah boy?"

"Yes—a whole suit of clothes!"

"You uttah ass! I suppose that is second-hand frow Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway be sewious! I am goin' to see my tailah—"

"Have a good time!" said Tom, laughing.

"I thought pewwaps you would like to come!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!"

"If you cared to do so, Tom Mewwy, I should be vewy glad of your advice about a pair of trowsahs I am thinkin' of!" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, you don't know a fearful lot about clobber—but out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know—"

"Thanks!" grinned Tom. "Of course, I'd like it no end—but—hem—but as junior football skipper, I think I ought to play in the pick-up. Otherwise, of course, I couldn't think of anything more delightful."

"I am not leavin' till thwee!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you change your mind, old chap, come and tell me in the studay."

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom, with a cheery grin. It was not fearfully likely that he would change his mind, and decide on a visit to Gussy's tailor, instead of playing in the pick-up! "I won't forget."

Arthur Augustus went into the House to Study
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No. 6. He had a collection of patterns in that study, and a fellow could always put in a useful half-hour studying patterns—at least, Arthur Augustus could!

Tom Merry, left on his own, waited till Manners came out of the House with his camera. He walked down to the gates with Manners, and saw him started on a happy excursion, which was to use up that new roll of film.

As he came back towards the House, with the intention of going to the changing-room, Baggy Trimble squealed to him across the quad.

"Merry! I say, Merry!"

The fat Baggy came trundling up.

"I say, you're wanted!" he said.

"Oh, bother!" said Tom. "Who wants me?"

"My beak!" answered Baggy.

"Silverson?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes; he told me to tell you."

"Then he can jolly well want!" said Tom. "Your beak has no right to send for me, and I've told him so—and you can go and tell him so again, Trimble."

Baggy chuckled.

"He, he! I can see myself telling Silverson that!" he said. "Catch me cheeking Silverson! You're not in his Form, so you can cheek him. I say, you'd better cut off—Silverson's going out."

"He can go—and be blowed!" said Tom.

"He's going out with Lathom," said Baggy. "He's made friends with Lathom since he's been about again! Queer, isn't it—I jolly well know he doesn't want to go, but he'll have to go when Lathom gets fit. I say, we shall all be jolly glad to have Lathom back, and get rid of that man Silverson! So I jolly well hope that Lathom will get well—I do, really! It's the push for him when Lathom's fit again."

Tom Merry laughed.

Baggy trundled away—quite bucked at the prospect of his old Form-master getting well enough to take his Form again, and thus relieving St. Jim's of the presence of his substitute.

Tom Merry stood, hesitating a little. He disliked Mr. Silverson very strongly, and he was prepared to defy any order from a man who had no right to give him orders. On the other hand, it was possible that Silverson had some reason for sending for him. He was still undecided, when Mr. Silverson's study window opened and the master of the Fourth looked out and beckoned to him.

"Please come to my study, Merry!" he called out.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" answered Tom at once.

If Silverson put it civilly like that, Tom was prepared to be civil in return. James, it seemed, was not on the warpath this time; and if James had mended his ways, or if he had decided to give up his hostility now that his stay at St. Jim's was drawing to an end, Tom was not the fellow to be ungracious. So he repaired to Mr. Silverson's study—wondering a good deal what James wanted.

GUSSY OBLIGES!

"COME in, Merry."

Mr. Silverson's manner was not only civil, it was very polite. Tom could only wonder as he came into the study.

"I should be glad, Merry, if you could perform a small service for me this afternoon," said Mr. Silverson.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom, more and more surprised. James made a gesture towards a small object that lay on the study table. It was a packet prepared for posting, sealed and addressed, and marked "Registered." It was addressed to Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath. James, it seemed, was sending something by registered post to Tom Merry's old governess and guardian.

James, as Tom knew, was in regular correspondence with old Miss Priscilla. That simple old soul had a high opinion of James, which James was very careful indeed to cultivate.

"I desire that packet to be registered to Miss Fawcett this afternoon, Merry," explained James. "I may say that it is a little present to the dear old lady. You are probably aware that I have received many acts of kindness from her."

Tom hardly knew what to say.

This seemed to him quite a new James; civil, polite, and speaking kindly and even affectionately of old Miss Priscilla.

"I had intended to walk over to Wayland this afternoon and post the packet," explained James. "But as it happens, Mr. Lathom is walking with me and I fear that his health is not yet sufficiently restored for so long a walk."

"Yes, sir!" stammered Tom.

He had noticed, like other fellows, that James had become friendly with old Mr. Lathom since that elderly gentleman had been about again. It was not what he would have expected of James, as James had to go as soon as Mr. Lathom was able to resume his duties. He would rather have expected James to view Mr. Lathom's recovery with a disgruntled eye—instead of which, James seemed to be very obliging and attentive to him.

Possibly there was a spot of the milk of human kindness somewhere in James Silverson. It looked like it, at least.

"I understand that there is no football match on this afternoon," went on Mr. Silverson. "So I should be very much obliged, Merry, if you would register that packet at Wayland for me."

"Oh!" said Tom. "I see, sir."

"As it contains a present for the excellent old lady to whom you are attached, I am sure that you will take every care of it," said Mr. Silverson, with a smile.

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom. "I—" He paused.

He wanted to play in the pick-up game which would soon be forming on Little Side. On the other hand, a fellow could cut a pick-up, though he could not cut a match. He did not care to refuse a civil request from this new and surprisingly polite James.

"If you are willing to give up an hour of your time, on a half-holiday, Merry, I should be much obliged," said James. "I am rather anxious for that packet to reach Laurel Villa in the morning."

Tom made up his mind at once.

"Certainly, sir!" he answered. "I will take it! You can rely upon it that it will be safely registered this afternoon."

"Thank you, Merry! When you return, please place the receipt under this paper-weight on my table, as I shall probably be out until tea-time."

"Yes, sir!"

Tom left the study with the little packet safely parked in the inside pocket of his jacket, and a shilling to pay the postage on the same.

James smiled when he was gone.

It was not a pleasant smile.

But a pleasant smile was on James' face as he went to Common-room, where Mr. Lathom was awaiting him. And that pleasant smile still lingered on James' hard face as he walked down to the gates with the old master of the Fourth.

Tom Merry saw them going, and he, like a good many other fellows, could not help thinking it rather decent of Silverson to bother himself about the man whose recovery meant that he had to leave.

However, Tom soon dismissed Silverson and Lathom from his mind. He had undertaken, rather impulsively, to register that packet at Wayland Post Office, and he had to let the other fellows know that he would not be playing football.

Which was rather awkward, as he was junior captain of his House and was not quite so much at liberty in such matters as less responsible fellows.

He went to the changing-room at last, where a crowd of School House juniors were gathering, some of them already changing for Soccer.

"Oh, here you are!" said Jack Blake. "Forgotten that we're kicking off at three, and that you haven't picked the sides yet?"

"Slacking in your old age?" asked Kangaroo.

"No, ass!" said Tom. "But—well, I shall have to cut this afternoon. I don't want to, really, but—"

"Cut out the buts," said Blake, "and don't be an ass! Get into your clobber. Are your pals slacking, too?"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom. "Every man isn't wanted in a pick-up!"

"Thomas has some other engagement for this afternoon!" said Cardew, with a wink at Levison.

"Oh, Thomas, Thomas, Thomas!"

Tom gave Ralph Reckness Cardew a glare.

"What do you mean, you silly ass?" he demanded.

"Nothin', old bean!" said Cardew amicably.

"Why shouldn't a fellow slack, if he feels lazy? I always do!"

"Well, I don't!" growled Tom.

"Then it's a pressin' engagement!" said Cardew blandly. "Be careful, my young friend! Our beak has an eye on you! He's not your beak—but he's fearfully interested in you."

Tom Merry breathed hard. Cardew was alluding, he knew, to that Green Man story. Quite probably Cardew took it for granted that that story was true, and that the captain of the Shell had some engagement that afternoon not unconnected with the Green Man.

"You silly, slacking, blithering, footling fat-head—" said Tom.

"Thanks!" yawned Cardew. "What I like about Thomas is his way of never leavin' a fellow in doubt about what he thinks of him! No beatin' about the bush about Thomas."

Some of the juniors grinned. Tom Merry's face was red with vexation.

"If you fellows want to know, I've said I'll take a packet over to Wayland for Silverson, and register it at the post office," he said.

"We all knew how much you like Silverson," agreed Cardew.

Tom turned his back on him.

"Look here, that's rot, Tommy," said Blake decidedly. "Both your pals have cut, and Gussy's cut—and now you want to cut, with some silly rot about going to a silly post office for a silly Silverson! You've been rowing with the man ever

since he blew into St. Jim's—and now you say you've got to cut Soccer to oblige him! Rot!"

"Utter rot!" said Herries.

"Well, he asked me civilly," grunted Tom, "and, as it happens, the packet's going to my old guardian at Huckleberry Heath."

"Go and tell him to ask another chap," said Digby.

"I can't. He's gone out with Lathom."

"Well, it's rot!" said Blake warmly. "Look here, we want you in the footer, and you know we do. And you call yourself a football captain of sorts, I believe. Get another fellow to take it. Gussy's going over to Wayland to see his fatheaded tailor. Ask him."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I suppose Gussy can be trusted to post a letter!" snorted Blake. "Ask him to do it before he drops in on his tailor. Once he gets among trousersings, of course, he will forget everything else."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, I said I'd take it—" he began.

"Does it matter to Silverson who posts it, so long as it's posted?" demanded Blake.

"Of course it doesn't."

"Well, let Gussy take it, then, as he's passing the post office."

"I don't see why I shouldn't," said Tom, with a nod. "I told Silverson it should be safely registered this afternoon. Gussy would do it like a shot if I asked him. So long as it catches this afternoon's post it's all right."

"Cut off and ask Gussy, then, and don't waste any more time," said Blake.

"Right!" agreed Tom.

And he lost no time in repairing to Study No. 6 in the Fourth. He found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there, pondering over patterns.

"Twot in, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Look at these, old chap. What do you think—"

"Another time, old bean," said Tom. "They're waiting for me in the changing-room."

"Bai Jove! I thought you'd come to say you'd changed your mind, and were comin' to the tailah's—"

"Another time, old chap!" said Tom, laughing. "Look here, Gussy, I've undertaken to get this packet registered at Wayland Post Office this afternoon. You'll be passing the post office. Will you register it for me?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks, old chap! When you come back give me the receipt, and I'll take it to Silverson's study for him. Here's a bob for the postage."

"Wight-ho!"

The packet was deposited in Gussy's pocket, and Tom Merry hurried back to the changing-room. There he dismissed it from his mind—football filling his thoughts for the next hour and a half. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at three o'clock, went down to the bike-shed for his jigger, and rode away to Wayland, to post that registered packet on his way to his tailor's. And neither of them dreamed of what was to come of that trifling change in the programme.

MULLIGAN ON THE WATCH!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY dismounted from his jigger in the old High Street of the ancient market town of Wayland.

He lodged a pedal on the kerb and turned towards the post office.

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Gussy's thoughts, naturally, were on the important business he had in hand—those beautiful new trousers at Mr. Wiggs' tailoring establishment. But he was very careful to carry out the commission he had undertaken for Tom Merry. That packet addressed to Miss Priscilla Fawcett was to be duly sent off by registered post before Gussy pedalled on to Mr. Wiggs' shop farther up the High Street.

He crossed the pavement to the post office.

There were a good many passers-by in the High Street, and two or three lounging about the entrance of the post office.

Among the latter was a man with a red face and a very red nose, whose beery eyes fixed at once on a schoolboy in a St. Jim's cap, getting off his bike at that particular spot.

Arthur Augustus had never seen Mr. Mulligan, and never even heard of him; so naturally he did not notice him now.

But Mr. Mulligan noticed Arthur Augustus very keenly.

He knew no more of Arthur Augustus than Arthur Augustus knew of him. But, for some reason of his own, Mr. Mulligan was keenly interested in seeing a St. Jim's junior stop at the post office that afternoon.

No doubt he knew the St. Jim's colours, which were easy enough to spot. At the first sight of the cap on Gussy's noble head, he knew that this was a schoolboy from St. Jim's.

But Mr. Mulligan had reasons for wanting to be particularly sure about that particular schoolboy.

It was not likely, but it was possible that more than one St. Jim's fellow might ride over to Wayland Post Office that afternoon, and Mr. Mulligan did not want to make a mistake.

In point of fact, Mr. Mulligan was there to become acquainted with Tom Merry's personal appearance, so that he would know him, and know him again when required.

So far, all that Mr. Mulligan knew of Tom was his name, which was enough to know so far as writing letters was concerned.

Now he needed to know more.

So, although Arthur Augustus did not even glance at the red-faced man, Gussy himself was very keenly inspected.

Crossing towards the entrance, Arthur Augustus drew the sealed packet from his inside pocket. Mr. Mulligan's beery eyes shot at it.

That was what he wanted to see.

Once he had seen the address on that packet, Mr. Mulligan knew that he had seen Tom Merry.

Other fellows might be coming to the post office by some chance. Only one fellow would, or could, be carrying a sealed packet addressed to Miss Priscilla Fawcett at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, to be posted by registered post.

Packet in hand, Arthur Augustus walked unsuspectingly into the building. After him loomed Mr. Mulligan.

The swell of St. Jim's glanced round, and walked across to the section of the counter devoted to registered business.

Mr. Mulligan was at his side as he stood at that counter. Mr. Mulligan now had a packet in his hand—an excuse for being there if the St. Jim's junior happened to notice him—which, however, Arthur Augustus did not.

Arthur Augustus laid his little packet on the counter.

There was no reason, of course, why he should care if anyone, or everyone, saw it, and noted the address on it. It did not occur to him for a

moment that anyone could possibly want to do so.

Mr. Mulligan smiled—a beery smile.

Right under his beery eyes was the address, in a very clear hand: "Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, Sussex."

That was all that Mr. Mulligan wanted to know.

That address on the packet identified the schoolboy who was posting it. It had been, as Mr. Silverson remarked in the interview in Wayland Wood, easily arranged.

Nothing, in fact, could have been easier. Tom Merry was to be induced to take that registered packet to Wayland Post Office. Mr. Mulligan was to be on the spot to spot him when he posted it. What could be easier and surer?

Mr. Mulligan lounged away from the counter. He knew Tom Merry now.

At least, he had not the slightest doubt that he did.

Both the rascals had rather overlooked the fact that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, and that cunning is only too likely to over-reach itself.

The red-faced man adorned the post office doorway with his beery person, while Arthur Augustus was occupied at the registered counter. His eyes were on Gussy all the time, noting every detail of his looks.

In the scheme that had been concocted between Silverson and Mulligan a man could not be too careful. And Mr. Mulligan was very careful indeed. While Gussy registered that packet, Mr. Mulligan registered, in his memory, every detail of Gussy's appearance, nothing doubting that he was registering Tom Merry's.

He gave him a final scrutiny as he came elegantly out of the post office and crossed the pavement to his bicycle again.

Mr. Mulligan winked into space as the swell of St. Jim's remounted his jigger and rode on up the High Street.

It was O.K. now.

And Mr. Mulligan, feeling that he had earned one, rolled away to the Black Bull to stand himself a drink.

Arthur Augustus, still happily unconscious of Mr. Mulligan, arrived at the establishment of Mr. Wiggs.

In that establishment Gussy spent a happy hour. The new trousers, happily, were absolutely perfect—quite a dream in trousers! After a serious consultation with Mr. Wiggs, Gussy decided finally on the "twousahs," and the matter was settled.

The trousers were to be delivered at St. Jim's on the morrow. Life seemed a happy business to Gussy when he left his tailor's at last.

He rode back to St. Jim's in cheery spirits.

The pick-up on Little Side was over when he arrived there. He found Tom Merry in the junior day-room in the School House, and handed over the receipt for the registered packet.

"Thanks, old bean!" said Tom.

"Not at all, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "That's the receipt and there's the change from the shillin'!"

And Tom Merry went at once to Mr. Silverson's study. James had told him that he would be out till tea-time, so he did not expect to see him there. The study was vacant, and he placed the registered receipt under the paperweight, as instructed, and laid the change from the shilling—threepence—beside it.

After which he was done with Mr. Silverson and his registered packet, and he left the study and soon forgot both.

LINTON WANTS TO KNOW!

"PLEASE remain. Merry!" said Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

It was the following morning, and the master of the Shell was dismissing his Form after third school.

The rest of the Form filed out, and Tom Merry stepped to his Form-master's desk, remaining after the others were gone.

He wondered what Mr. Linton wanted, but without any feeling of uneasiness. There was nothing amiss, so far as Tom Merry knew.

Certainly he had noticed his Form-master's eyes often straying in his direction of late, but he had noticed that ever since that letter from the man at the Black Bull had reached the school a week ago. It did not occur to him that anything fresh had transpired.

Mr. Linton, sitting at his high desk, eyed the junior standing before him. It was difficult to feel suspicious, looking at that fresh, cheery unsuspecting, youthful face. Tom Merry was not, perhaps, so handsome as Talbot, but there was a clean, wholesome, cheery freshness in his face that generally disposed people in his favour at first sight.

The master of the Shell was, in fact, sorely perplexed.

For a couple of days he had had in his pocket that second epistle from the man at the Black Bull which James Silverson had found on the study landing after a schoolboy scuffle in which Tom Merry had been mixed up.

There was no doubt what it looked like.

On the other hand, there was no doubt what Tom Merry looked like.

It seemed utterly incongruous to think of Tom in connection with secret, shady, disreputable pursuits.

Obviously, from the boy's face, he did not know what was coming. Yet, if he had lost such a letter, surely he must have missed it, and would be uneasy as to what hands it might have fallen into. Plainly, however, he was not in the least alarmed by being called back by his Form-master when the rest of the Shell went out.

Mr. Linton suppressed a sigh. Either this boy was perfectly innocent, in which case the matter was inexplicable, or else he was a most accomplished actor. He had decided, at all events, to speak to him at last.

He was silent for a minute or two, and Tom waited. But the serious expression on Mr. Linton's face caused his own to cloud. He began to realise that something unpleasant was coming, though he did not yet know what.

"Merry," said Mr. Linton at last, "you have not, of course, forgotten the letter that came last week and about which I consulted your Housemaster?"

"No, sir," said Tom quietly. "But I hoped that that was over and done with, sir."

"It is not a matter that can be considered done with, Merry, until it is explained," said Mr. Linton; but he spoke quite kindly.

"I have explained it so far as I am able, sir. I do not know the man who wrote that letter, and he does not know me. Someone must have

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given him my name, and got him to write that letter, to land me in a row."

"You repeat that you do not know the man Mulligan, and have never written to him?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Have you received any communication from him since the letter that fell into my hands last week?"

"None," answered Tom. "But you would know better than I, sir, if a letter had come from him. You see all our letters before they are given out."

"No such letter has come by post," said Mr. Linton. "But that would scarcely be expected after one letter had fallen into your Form-master's hands, Merry."

Tom Merry reddened.

"I have had no letter from him secretly, sir, if that is what you mean!" he exclaimed.

"You owe him no money?"

"How could I?"

"That is not an answer, Merry! Answer me directly."

"I owe him no money," said Tom, his lip quivering. "I have never had any dealings with such a man. He pretended in his letter that I had asked him to back a horse for me. It was a lie from beginning to end."

"Are you aware that the horse named lost in the race mentioned in that letter, Merry?"

"I don't know whether it lost or won. Am I supposed to keep my eyes on the racing news in the papers?" exclaimed Tom passionately. "I have never given the matter a thought."

"The horse lost, Merry."

"I never knew and don't care."

"According to this man, you owe him money in consequence."

Tom Merry gave an angry laugh.

"Let him come here and say so!" he exclaimed.

"By gum, I'd like the rotter to face me and say such a thing!"

"Look at this!" said Mr. Linton.

He laid the second letter on his desk. Tom looked at it and set his teeth.

"Have you seen that before, Merry?"

"No, sir."

"You see that the man states that the horse selected by you lost, and that you owe him the sum of four pounds."

"Yes, I see that, if that letter is addressed to me. But I don't see how it can be supposed to be mine, as I never had it, and have never seen it before. My name is not even on it."

"That letter was found in the House, Merry, and there is no direct evidence as to its ownership. But it obviously refers to the letter that was sent to you last week."

"I suppose so," admitted Tom. "I can only say what I've said before, sir. Whoever got Mulligan to write the first letter must have left this about the House to be found."

"It is very difficult to believe that any person could be so malicious and so treacherous as to seek to cause you harm in this way, Merry."

Tom was silent.

It would have been as difficult for him to believe as for Mr. Linton, but for the evidence of the facts.

"You see what the man has written," said the master of the Shell. "That letter contains a threat."

"Not one the rotter will carry out," said Tom disdainfully. "He dare not come here and pre-

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tend that I know anything of him. He cannot even know me by sight. How could he?"

"Unless you have actually met him—"

"I had never even heard of him before that letter came. Anyone could tell him my name."

"You say you have nothing to fear from this man, Merry?"

"Of course I haven't! I have never spoken to him, never written to him, and certainly owe him nothing. Let him come here and pick me out of the Form!" said Tom scornfully. "If you cannot believe me, sir, send for that man and let him pick me out in the Form-room! He could not do it!"

"No such man could be allowed to enter this school!" said Mr. Linton dryly, and his dry tone caused Tom Merry's face to become scarlet. He could see that a doubt had crossed the master's mind that he was bluffing.

Mr. Linton put the letter back into his pocket-book.

"Do not think that I distrust you, Merry," he said at last. "This matter is extraordinary and perplexing; it cannot rest where it is. But I have too good an opinion of you to part with it lightly."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom. "I hope I deserve it—I know I do, so far as this matter is concerned. I can only give you my word on that, sir."

"Very well, Merry, you may go!"

Tom Merry left the Form-room, leaving his Form-master in deep and troubled thought. How that mysterious matter was to be elucidated was beyond the master of the Shell—unless, indeed, the man Mulligan carried out his threat, came to the school, and made it clear that he did, as he stated, know Tom Merry. And that, Mr. Linton thought, was very unlikely.

GUM FOR GUSSY!

"FATHEAD!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Chuck it!" hooted Dig.

"Wats!"

Three fellows in Study No. 6 were looking exasperated. One fellow was looking fiercely determined. That one was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus was wriggling as well as frowning.

Gussy was wearing at the moment those beautiful new trousers from his tailor's. That should have been enough—more than enough—to banish anything like a frown from his noble countenance.

Unfortunately, Arthur Augustus had had whops from a cane on those very trousers. Hence his wrath.

The swell of St. Jim's was standing at the study table. On that table was a large bottle. Gussy was filling that large bottle from a collection of small bottles, all of which contained gum.

Having discovered Arthur Augustus begging or borrowing practically the whole supply of gum in the Fourth Form studies in the School House, his faithful chums were alarmed.

Gussy had got by with a gumming game once, owing to Silverson having got on the wrong track. He could not really expect luck like that twice. Silverson—as Gussy's chums knew, if Gussy did not—would get on the right track next

time. The result would be altogether too painful for Gussy.

"Now, look here, old man," argued Blake, "Silverson's a worm! He's a rat! He's the last word in rotters! But—"

"You know what the wotah has done!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was simply expressin' my satisfaction at the news that Lathom will be back next week, and Silverson goin', and he gave me six—"

"Did you expect him to be happy to hear that you were so pleased that he was going next week?" inquired Blake.

"He ought not to have heard my wemarks, Blake! The wat is always cweopin' about listenin' behind fellows' backs! How was I to know that the weptle was behind me when I was talkin' to Levison?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "I am vewy glad he is goin' next week—and I said so, as I had a perfect wight to do! And he gave me six! A wotten eavesdwooppah! Pah!"

"You can 'pah' as much as you like!" agreed Blake. "Take it out in pahing and that's all right. But you're not going to gum Silverson!"

"I am goin' to gum his armchair, same as I did befoah, Blake! I have got lots of gum; this big bottle will be nearly full, and—"

"You got Linton last time!"

"That was an unfortunate accident, deah boy."

"You may get the Head next time."

"Wats!"

"Anyhow, Silverson will get you."

"Wubbish! He nevah knew last time, and he will not know this time."

"Not just after giving you six, fathead?" hooted Herries. "And as likely as not you'll carry that bottle of gum right under his nose."

"Poke him in the eye with it, very likely!" said Dig.

"Wubbish!"

Arthur Augustus completed the transfer of gum from the collection of small bottles to the big bottle.

"Where's that cork?" he demanded.

"I've chucked that out of the window to make sure you don't carry that bottle about, old chap," answered Blake.

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I cannot cawwy a bottle full of gum without a cork! I might spill some on my twousahs—my new twousahs."

"Exactly! Give it a miss!"

"I wufuse to give it a miss!" howled Arthur Augustus. "I would wathah thwash the wotah! Bai Jove! I should like to give him a feaful thwashin' befoah he goes! But that is impwacticable. I am goin' to gum his armchair—"

"You're not!" roared Blake.

"Wats!"

"Look here—"

"I wepeat, wats!" snorted Arthur Augustus. "You are an uttah ass to thwow away that cork, Blake! I shall have to cawwy this bottle undah my jacket without a cork! I shall have to be feafully careful! I am goin' now."

"Look here—" roared Blake, Herries, and Dig in chorus.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus, evidently, was determined. He had failed to gum Silverson last time, Mr. Linton having unfortunately got the gum. This time he was not, he hoped, going to fail. Gussy had a hopeful nature.

Blake & Co. did not share that hope. They

had no doubt that Gussy would be spotted. It had been rather a miracle that he had not been spotted last time. A miracle could not be expected to happen twice. They were determined that Arthur Augustus wasn't going anywhere near Silverson's study with that big bottle of gum.

As it was uncorked Gussy had to carry it very carefully while it was concealed under his jacket. That alone was enough to draw half the eyes in the House upon him on his trip to Silverson's study. It was not, in the opinion of Blake & Co., good enough. Silverson deserved gumming—indeed, in the opinion of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, he almost deserved lynching. But Gussy, in his wrath, was hunting trouble—not for Silverson, but for his noble self. Blake and Herries and Dig lined up in the study doorway.

Arthur Augustus eyed them in great wrath.

"Let me pass, you uttah asses!" he snapped.

"No fear!" said Blake. "Not till you've put that bottle of gum in the cupboard, and I've locked it in and taken out the key."

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!" roared Arthur Augustus. "And if you do not let me pass at once, Blake, I shall punch your nose!"

"What on earth's the row here, you fellows?" Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came along from the study landing. A dozen other fellows were drawn to the spot by the excited voices from Study No. 6.

"Gussy's going off at the deep end!" sighed Blake. "We're keeping him parked in the study for his own good."

"I wufuse to be kept parked in the studay, you cheeky ass!" bawled Arthur Augustus, in his excitement quite forgetting the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"But what—" asked Tom.

"It's all wight, Tom Mewwy. Those silly asses are playin' the goat!"

"But what—" asked Lowther.

"Pway don't ask me any questions, deah boys! I don't want to shout out befoah half the House that I've got a bottle of gum here for that cad Silverson."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A thing like this is bettah kept dark," said Arthur Augustus. "Blake, will you get out of the way, or do you want me to push you out of the way?"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"And rats!" said Herries.

"You're not coming out with that bottle of gum!" declared Dig. "You've had enough whopping for one day, old chap!"

Arthur Augustus said no more. He shoved through the doorway—and he shoved hard. Blake, Herries, and Dig staggered under that shove.

But they rallied, and shoved in their turn.

Three combined shoves were naturally more hefty than one shove. Arthur Augustus went staggering back into the study. He threw out his hand to the study table for support, rather forgetful of the necessity of being very careful of that uncorked bottle under his jacket.

The bottle slipped and rolled. Gussy grabbed at it too late.

Swoooooosh!

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the passage.

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That big bottle of gum rolled down Gussy's waistcoat and trousers.

Being uncorked, it shed its contents as it rolled.

Gum shot over Gussy's waistcoat and streamed thickly over his beautiful trousers. Gum fairly swamped him before the bottle crashed on the floor.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh ewombs!"

"Well," gurgled Blake, "you've done it now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is he sticky?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gazed down at his waistcoat and trousers. The waistcoat was streaming with gum; the incomparable new trousers were drenched with it. There was hardly any left in the bottle for Mr. Silverson—if Gussy had been still thinking of Mr. Silverson.

But he wasn't; he was thinking of his clobber. He gazed in horror at his gummy clobber.

For a long moment Gussy gazed, while the fellows in the passage shrieked with laughter; then, suddenly waking to life, as it were, Arthur Augustus jumped to a corner of the study where an Indian club stood.

"Oh, my hat! Hook it!" gasped Blake. "Run for your jolly old lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rushed at his too-devoted chums. Blake, Herries, and Digby scuttled down the passage, running for their lives, and howling with laughter as they went.

"You uttah wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Come back, you wottahs! Look at my waistcoat! Look at my twousahs! Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" floated back along the Fourth Form passage. Blake & Co. vanished down the staircase.

Only one consideration kept Arthur Augustus from fierce pursuit. He could not be seen about the House in those gummy trousers.

Breathing wrath, the swell of St. Jim's retreated into the study again, and banged the door in the faces of a yelling crowd.

After which Gussy got busy with gum—though not for Silverson. He had plenty to do without bothering about Silverson.

MR. MULLIGAN BLOWS IN!

TAGGLES, the ancient porter of St. Jim's, looked from the doorway of his lodge, and looked again, and yet a third time he looked. And every time he looked, Taggles wondered whether his ancient eyes were deceiving him.

Having decided, at length, that his ancient eyes were not, Taggles emerged with wrath in his grizzled brow.

"Ere!" hooted Taggles. "Houtside! And sharp!"

The red-faced man who had lounged in at the school gates glanced at him with a leer. He did not get outside. He lounged in.

With his hands in the pockets of his check trousers, a cigarette sticking out of the corner of his loose mouth, his hat tilted on one side of his oily head, Mr. Mulligan looked a rather unusual visitor for St. Jim's. Taggles could only wonder who he was, and what he wanted, and how on earth he had the neck to barge in. Certainly Taggles was not going to let him get

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farther. Taggles was going to guard that gate against such an intruder, as Horatius guarded the bridge of old.

"O.K., old sport!" said the surprising visitor. "Don't you go off at the deep end! I've called to see a friend 'ere."

"Yes," said Taggles, with withering sarcasm. "The likes of you 'ave got a lot of friends here—I don't think! Think this here is a pub, or what?"

"You jest point out the School House to me, and don't tire out your jaw," said the visitor.

"Never mind the School House, or the New House, either!" retorted Taggles. "You get out before you're put!"

"Young Merry's in what they call the School House—leastways, that's what he's told me,"



Mr. Linton placed both hands on the arms of the chair and heeled away from the g

said Mr. Mulligan. "And he's the young covey I want to see."

"Houtside!" said Taggles scornfully.

"Ain't I telling you I've called to see Tom Merry?"

"You can tell me that till you're black in the face!" said Taggles. "Master Merry wouldn't touch your sort with a barge-pole; and if he would, he wouldn't stay long at this school! Houtside, I tell you!"

"Pack it up!" said Mr. Mulligan. "You can take a message to him if you like, and I'll wait 'ere!"

"I can see myself doing it!" said Taggles, with ineffable contempt. "Get out before you're put!"

"You think you could 'andle me, you old bag

of bones?" asked Mr. Mulligan, with a disagreeable look. "If that's the big idea, carry on! I've knocked out blokes what was twice the man you are!"

Taggles paused.

He was rather an ancient gentleman to tackle a public-house loafer of Mr. Mulligan's kidney. On the other hand, he assuredly could not admit such a man into the precincts of St. Jim's. Still, there was plenty of force at hand.

Already a dozen fellows or more had gathered, drawn by the extraordinary sight of that red-faced, beery racing man arguing with Taggles at the gates.

"Oh jiminy!" ejaculated Baggy Trimble. "I say, is that one of Tom Merry's pals from the Green Man? He, he!"



ir and heaved up. There was a rending sound as his gown tore from the gum!

Baggy's fat chuckle turned into a howl as Figgins of the New House landed a boot.

"Ow!" roared Baggy.

"Have another?" asked Figgins genially. "You've only got to wag your silly jawbone again!"

"Where's young Merry?" called out Mr. Mulligan. "Tell him to come here! Tell him Jimmy Mulligan wants him!"

"You pie-faced rat!" said Figgins. "You know Tom Merry no more than you know me! Shall we boot him out for you, Taggles?"

"I'm here to see young Merry!" roared Mr. Mulligan. "I warned him, fair and square, that if he didn't come and see me, and bring what he owed a man, I'd look in for him. And 'ere I am!"

"Houtside!" roared Taggles.

"Pack it up! I ain't going without seeing young Merry!" retorted Mr. Mulligan. "Nor I ain't going without being paid four pound, neither. Four pound he owes me, and 'ere I am to collect it!"

And Mr. Mulligan, with jutting jaw and threatening brow, marched in. And Taggles, intervening, was pushed aside.

"Stop!" Talbot of the Shell stepped in his way. "Stop at once!"

"You going to stop me?" sneered Mr. Mulligan.

"Yes," answered Talbot coolly. "Another step, and I'll knock you spinning!"

"Will you?" said Mr. Mulligan. And he advanced a good step, hitting out at Talbot with a fist like a ham.

Rather to his surprise that fist was knocked aside, and Talbot's came crashing into his red face.

Mr. Mulligan gave a wild yell and staggered. He staggered several paces, and fell over. There was a bump as he sat down.

"Well hit!" roared Figgins.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

"Man down!" said Kerr. "Now let's roll him out!"

"Boot him out!" exclaimed Levison of the Fourth. "All together!"

Mr. Mulligan sat blinking.

Talbot's fist had landed on his nose. That nose was redder than ever now. It fairly shone. It seemed to have a pain in it, too. Jimmy Mulligan clasped it tenderly with his paw.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow, you young 'ound! Ow! I'll smash yer! Ow!"

"Get on with it!" said Talbot contemptuously. "How dare you mention Tom Merry's name, you rascal! Do you think that anyone here will believe for a moment that Tom knows a rascally brute like you?"

"Don't he?" gasped Mr. Mulligan. "Don't he owe me four pound on a 'orse! Ain't I come 'ere to collect the money, 'cause he was going to diddle a covey! Didn't I write to him and tell him I would if he didn't pay up?"

"My eye!" gasped Taggles.

"Here comes Railton!" exclaimed Blake.

Study No. 6 had arrived on the scene now. It was after class, and there were crowds of fellows out of the Houses.

Mr. Mulligan was getting a big audience by this time, which was what the rascal wanted, though he certainly had not wanted what Talbot had given him. And several masters were hurrying to the spot. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, and one or two others.

Mr. Linton's face was very startled.

At the sight of that red-faced, beery man at the gates, the master of the Shell had no doubt of what it meant.

It was the man who had written to Tom Merry, who had come to the school as he had threatened to do. Mr. Linton could not doubt that, and could not doubt that the matter was now to be put to the proof.

Mr. Railton's brow was like thunder as he strode on the scene. Taggles could not handle Mr. Mulligan, but the School House master could have handled two of him; and he was

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quite prepared to put the red-faced man outside the gates on his neck, if needed.

"What is this?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, as he came up. "Stand aside, Talbot! Stand back, boys!"

He fixed a grim eye on Mulligan. The man from the Black Bull staggered to his feet.

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Railton.

"Name of Mulligan, sir!" said the man from the Black Bull. He did not venture to be impudent to the athletic Housemaster. "Jest looked in to see a young friend of mine, sir. No offence."

"You can have no friends here," said Mr. Railton sternly. "Do you mean one of the boys of this school?"

"Young bloke name of Merry, sir."

Mr. Railton set his lips hard. The name of Mulligan was familiar enough to him from the letter which had been written to Tom Merry a week ago, and the second letter that had been "found" on the study landing, about both of which the master of the Shell had consulted him.

"No offence, sir!" said Mulligan. "That young covey owes me four pound. I ain't a 'ard man—but no man likes to be diddled. I've given him time—but he ain't squared, and I reckon he ain't going to unless I make him. I can't afford to lose four pound, sir."

"If you can prove that a boy in this school owes you money, you will be paid," said Mr. Railton, "and if it is proved the boy concerned will be immediately expelled from the school. You shall prove it, Mr. Mulligan, or you shall take the consequences. If you fail to do so, I will thrash you and throw you out!"

"Hear, hear!" came from the St. Jim's crowd thickening round the spot.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

And he turned to speak to Mr. Linton, while more and more St. Jim's fellows came streaming down to the gates, till it seemed as if the whole school had collected there.

NOT TOM MERRY!

"WHAT'S up?" asked Tom Merry.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther joined the swarming crowd. The Terrible Three, having spotted the excitement going on at the gates, came up to see what it was all about.

"Know that sportsman?" grinned Blake.

"Oh, my hat!" Tom started as he caught sight of Mr. Mulligan, standing at a little distance, rubbing his nose, while the Housemaster consulted with Mr. Linton.

"Bai Jove! You don't know that wottah, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

"No!" answered Tom. "I've seen him from a distance once, that's all."

"He says he knows you!" grinned Blake.

"Does he?" said Tom contemptuously.

"By gum!" breathed Manners. "So that's the game! That beery blackguard has come here to make out that he knows you, Tom!"

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"Let him!" he answered. "I know nothing of him, and he knows nothing of me. He won't find it easy to get by with that."

"He's been fairly yelling out your name!" muttered Figgins.

"I'd give him something else to yell for if the

beaks weren't on the spot!" said Tom, his eyes gleaming.

"Talbot's punched his nose already!" grinned Kerr.

"Good man!"

"Ho, he!" came from Baggy Trimble. "He knows Tom Merry, but Tom Merry doesn't know him! He, he!"

"Sounds so likely!" remarked Racke of the Shell. And his pal Crooke gave a snigger.

Mr. Railton, having exchanged a few words with the master of the Shell, turned back to Jimmy Mulligan. His face was as hard as iron. Mr. Linton glanced round, his expression a mingling of anger and distress.

His eyes fell on Tom Merry, at a little distance, in the swarming crowd. Tom met them calmly and moved a little forward.

He made it quite clear that he was not anxious to escape observation. He was quite ready to face Mr. Mulligan.

In fact, he did not believe for a moment that the man knew him from the other fellows. He knew his name, but how could he know him personally?

Mr. Linton gave him a long, searching look. But he saw only cool self-possession in Tom Merry's face.

"Now, Mr. Mulligan"—the School House master was speaking—"you have stated that you have had dealings with a boy in this school, and given his name—"

"Name of Merry, sir—"

"You have made your statement, and uttered that name before a crowd of Merry's school-fellows!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "You will now prove your words on the spot, if you are able to do so, or else confess that you are lying, in the hearing of all."

"Ready and willing, sir!" said Mr. Mulligan. "I'd never 'ave come 'ere if the young covey had squared! I can't afford to lose four pound, nor I ain't to be done by a schoolboy, neither."

"Merry has told me, and told his Form-master, that he does not know you, and that you do not know him!" said Mr. Railton.

"Know 'im like the back of my 'and, sir!" said Jimmy Mulligan. "There ain't a young covey as I know better. He's seen me often enough at the Black Bull on a 'arf-oladay!"

Mr. Railton knitted his brows.

If the man was telling the truth, his presence at the school was easy to understand. Admittedly he was a rascal in taking bets from a schoolboy. But he wanted to be paid—he had not been paid, and he had come to get his money, or to make himself disagreeable. All that was easy to understand.

What was not easy to understand was his presence if he were not telling the truth. Why should a man who did not know Tom Merry, and could not, therefore, be supposed to have any grudge against him, act as Mr. Mulligan was acting?

There was deep doubt in the Housemaster's mind—and in that of the master of the Shell. But the matter, at all events, was going to be proved, one way or the other, at once.

"Very well!" said Mr. Railton at last. "I will say nothing at present of your conduct, or your character, my man, if you have had the dealings with a schoolboy that you claim to have had. I require you to prove your statement, and I have told you what the result will be if you fail to do so. The boy you have named is present

among the hundred boys now gathered round this spot. You will first of all pick him out, and prove that you do actually know him, as you state. Do so at once."

"Know 'im like the back of my 'and!" repeated Mr. Mulligan. "I s'pose I know a covey all right that I've played billiards with more'n a dozen times at the Black Bull. If he's 'ere, I'll pick 'im out fast enough."

"Do so!" snapped the Housemaster.

Mr. Mulligan moved towards the staring crowd of St. Jim's fellows.

Contemptuous looks met him from all faces, but contemptuous looks had no more effect on Jimmy Mulligan than water on a duck.

His beery glance passed from face to face, looking for the one he knew.

From a distance, another face was watching the scene. Mr. Silverson was as keenly interested as any fellow on the spot—but he was very careful not to appear on the scene. Mr. Silverson had a bird's-eye view from an upper window of the School House.

Mulligan stared at face after face.

Among others, he stared at Tom Merry's, but without taking any heed of it. Then his beery eyes fixed on the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus gazed at him with calm contempt. But he jumped when Mr. Mulligan raised a grubby forefinger and pointed.

"'Ere he is!" said Jimmy Mulligan.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

His eyeglass dropped from his eye in his astonishment.

"You uttah ass!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Are you makin' out that you know me?"

"Don't I?" grinned Mr. Mulligan. "Know you like the back of my 'and, young Merry. Don't I just?"

"Is the man mad?" asked Arthur Augustus blankly.

"Mad as a batter, I should think!" said Blake.

"I wasn't going to give you away!" said Jimmy Mulligan. "If you'd squared that four pound, young Merry, you'd never 'ave seen me here at your school. I warned you fair and square! You'll see me, I says, if I don't see you! I ain't the bloke to be diddled by no schoolboy, and you can lay to that."

Tom Merry was staring blankly at the man.

That the man knew him, he did not believe; but that he would pick out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, and call him by Tom Merry's name was an utter surprise.

Arthur Augustus was blinking with amazement.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "The man must be completely off his silly wockah! I twust, Mr. Wailton, that you do not believe for one moment that I have ever seen that wascal befoah!"

"Come off!" jeered Mr. Mulligan. "Know you like the back of my 'and, Tom Merry. Come off of it!"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Linton blankly.

All eyes were fixed on Mr. Mulligan.

That he had made a mistake had not yet dawned on the rascal. Not the faintest shadow of doubt was in his mind. This was the schoolboy whom he had watched at the post office in Wayland, and seen post the registered packet. How, therefore, could there be a doubt, when Tom Merry had been specially dispatched with that

(Continued on the next page.)

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registered packet to give Jimmy Mulligan his opportunity to become acquainted with him?

"I'll trouble you for four pound, young Merry!" continued Mr. Mulligan, in the midst of a breathless silence. "You owe me four pound, and that's what I'm 'ere for! Pay up and look pleasant, young covey."

"You disreputable wascal!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I owe you nothin' and have neval seen you befoah."

"Don't know me, don't you?" grinned Jimmy Mulligan.

"Certainly not, you howwid boundah!"

"Well, I knows you pretty well, Tom Merry!" grinned Mulligan. "Pr'aps you'll explain to your schoolmaster 'ow I knows you, if you don't know me."

"You do not know me, you sillay ass, or you would call me by my wight name!" retorted Arthur Augustus. "I think you must be off your wockah!"

Mr. Railton's heavy hand fell on Jimmy Mulligan's shoulder and spun him round.

"Ands off!" spluttered the man from the Black Bull. "I've picked out the young covey, ain't I?"

"You have called that boy Tom Merry!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"Course I 'ave!"

"Tom Merry is here present under your eyes, and you have failed to recognise him after your statement that you have had dealings with him and that he has visited you in Wayland."

"Ain't I reckernised him?" hooted Mr. Mulligan. "There he is—young Merry, what owes me four pound!"

"You iniquitous rogue!" said Mr. Railton. "The boy you have picked out is not Tom Merry!"

Jimmy Mulligan jumped.

"Wot?" he gasped.

"That boy's name is not Merry! He is nothing like Merry! His name is D'Arcy!"

"He—he—he ain't Tom Merry?" gasped Mr. Mulligan, like a man in a dream.

"He is not Tom Merry, and he is nothing like Tom Merry!"

Mr. Mulligan almost fell down.

PAYING THE PIPER!

TOM Merry laughed.

He could not help it.

The expression on Mr. Mulligan's face was simply ludicrous. Never had a rascal looked so utterly taken aback and thunderstruck. Jimmy Mulligan's jaw dropped; his beery eyes popped; he gasped like a fish out of water. He was utterly and completely flabbergasted.

"Well, this beats me!" said Monty Lowther. "Of course, the man doesn't know you, Tom;

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but how the thump he can fancy that Gussy is you—"

"Beats me hollow!" said Tom, laughing. "But good-enough for Railton and Linton, I think, that he doesn't know me from Adam."

"Yes, rather!"

"He can't have come here on guesswork," said Manners in a low voice. "The wrong chap has been pointed out to him or something like that."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"He was put up to this, and we know by whom," said Manners. "But they've made some sort of a precious bungle of it—"

"No doubt about that," said Tom. "And, judging by Railton's chivvy, he's going to be sorry that he called!"

"Bai Jove! Do you think the man's a lunatic?" asked Arthur Augustus. "If he is not off his cumpet, what makes him fancy that my name is Tom Mewwy?"

"Listen to Railton!" murmured Blake.

Mr. Railton's grip was like iron on Jimmy Mulligan's shoulder. Mulligan, his knees knocking together, sagged in his grip.

He was absolutely bewildered by this unexpected outcome of the "identification parade." He had picked the fellow he had watched at Wayland Post Office. That fellow was not Tom Merry! And it that fellow was not Tom Merry he had nothing to say. Tom Merry was present, so were more than a hundred other juniors, but which fellow was Tom Merry, Jimmy Mulligan had not the faintest idea. He was hopelessly and utterly at a loss.

Mr. Linton gave Tom a smile.

He was more than satisfied now. Tom Merry had been cleared of all suspicion of associating with Jimmy Mulligan—by Jimmy Mulligan himself! The schemer of St. Jim's had worked out his scheme—to the complete and unmistakable exoneration of Tom Merry!

"Taggles!" said Mr. Railton's deep voice.

"Yessir!"

"Kindly hand me a stick!"

"Oh!" Taggles grinned. "Yessir!"

Taggles shot into his lodge for a stick.

Mr. Mulligan wriggled. The time had come to pay the piper.

"You let a bloke go!" he protested. "You lay a stick on me, blow 'er, and I'll 'ave the law on you!"

"I shall lay a stick on you, you rascal, in such a way as to make you sorry for your rascality!" said the Housemaster grimly. "I warned you of what the consequence would be if you failed to prove your words. You have failed to identify the boy you named—a boy who, as he has said, clearly knows no more of you than you know of him! Your motive in coming here and making a reckless statement that has proved utterly unfounded I cannot understand, but I shall give you a severe lesson for having done so!"

He glanced round at Tom.

"Merry!" he said. His tone was very kind.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

"You are completely cleared in this matter, Merry! It is obvious that this man has spoken falsely from beginning to end! I am glad to say, Merry, that I never lost faith in you, and still more glad that it has now been fully justified!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom.

Jimmy Mulligan blinked at the captain of the Shell. Now that the Housemaster addressed him by name, Mulligan knew Tom Merry—too late for the knowledge to be of any use to him.

(Continued on page 36.)

THE HUNGRY REBELS!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NOTHING DOING!

KNOCK! The butt of a riding-whip crashed on the door of the schoolhouse at Cedar Creek. Three heads were put out of a window at once—those of Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beauclerc.

It was old man Gunten who was rapping at the door. The fat Swiss storekeeper of Thompson Town looked round, glaring at the three smiling faces.

Frank Richards nodded genially.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gunten!" he said affably.

A snort was old man Gunten's reply. He was not in an affable mood.

"You've come along to tell us that you're giving in?" asked Bob Lawless.

"You young rascal!"

"Eh?"

"You young villain!"

"Dear me!" said Bob, unmoved. "Is that the kind of manners you learn on the school board, Mr. Gunten? You ought really to chuck it up and come to school instead! We'd teach you manners here!"

"I've come to talk sense to you young scallawags!" shouted Mr. Gunten.

"Why don't you begin, then?"

"This foolishness has been going on long enough!" exclaimed the storekeeper. "It's got to come to an end!"

"We're ready when you are," said Frank Richards. "You know the terms. Let our school-mistress, Miss Meadows, come back, and it's all over. Until then we hold Cedar Creek School against all comers!"

"Hear, hear!" came a shout from within the lumber schoolhouse.

"You're wasting your time, Mr. Gunten," said Vere Beauclerc. "You ought to know by this time that we're not giving in."

"I guess I know how you stand," said Mr. Gunten, with a scowl. "You've got no food there!"

"You can send us some if you like. We'll pay spot cash!" suggested Bob Lawless.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Old man Gunten did not look as if he would be likely to send provisions to the rebels of Cedar Creek, even for spot cash.

"What's going to happen to you if you stay there without food?" he snorted.

"Probably we shall get hungry," replied Bob. "It seems probable to me. What do you think yourself?"

"Now, look here," said old man Gunten, unheeding Bob's remark and the chuckle that followed, "I'm willing to be reasonable. Miss Meadows can't come back. She has been discharged by the board of trustees."

"By you!" said Frank.

"Your new headmaster, Mr. Peckover, has been duly appointed by the board."

"Which means you!"

"But I've spoken to him, and he agrees to let

you off unpunished if you return to your duty at once," said Mr. Gunten. "Nothing more will be said about this affair, on condition that you stop this nonsense at once."

"Rats!"

"What?" roared the unhappy trustee.

"Bosh!"

"You young rascals!"

"Go home!" said Bob cheerfully. "Go home and think it out again, Mr. Gunten! Second thoughts are best, you know."

"Mind, you won't get any food till you give in!" said Mr. Gunten savagely. "I've got a dozen men watching the school, and any kid who comes out will be roped in at once, thrashed, and sent home!"

"How kind of you!"

"If you stick there you'll starve!" roared Mr. Gunten.

"What a weight on your conscience if we do!" said Bob. "Still, your conscience is pretty tough, isn't it, Mr. Gunten?"

Mr. Gunten seemed on the verge of an attack of apoplexy. He had given the rebels of Cedar Creek time enough, as he thought, to come to their senses. But there was certainly no sign of surrender on the part of Frank Richards & Co. They were "on strike" until Miss Meadows was reinstated at Cedar Creek, and they intended to make it a fight to a finish.

As a matter of fact, they were encouraged by Mr. Gunten's visit and by his offer, which was a great concession—from his point of view. It looked as if the chairman of the board of trustees was getting alarmed at the length to which the school strike had gone.

It was an unprecedented state of affairs, and it certainly reflected no credit on the school management. Intervention was certain sooner or later from the powers that were, and Mr. Gunten could not expect to emerge from an official inquiry with flying colours.

But it was only too clear that there was "nothing doing."

"Any more remarks to make?" asked Bob Lawless, as the storekeeper stood silent, nonplussed. "If not, good-bye!"

"For the last time," said Mr. Gunten. "Look here, you'll all be let off. Isn't that good enough for you?"

"Nix!"

"Then you can stick there and starve!" roared old man Gunten; and, shaking his fat fist at the smiling faces at the window, he strode back to his horse.

As he led the animal out of the gateway in the school fence, a rough-looking man joined him there. It was Four Kings, the leader of the Red Dog crowd of Thompson.

Mr. Gunten spoke a few words to the ruffian, and then mounted and rode away down the trail. Four Kings remained lounging in the gateway, smoking his pipe.

Cedar Creek School was evidently being care-

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fully watched, and undoubtedly it was costing Mr. Gunten a good many dollars. And the end of the affair seemed more and more doubtful to the Swiss storekeeper as it was prolonged day after day.

Old man Gunten was not in a happy mood as he trotted home to Thompson.

A DESPERATE VENTURE.

FRANK RICHARDS closed and barred the window shutter as the storekeeper departed. The garrison of Cedar Creek were always on the alert, watching for a possible attempt to rush their stronghold.

The Red Dog men, however, seemed to be content to remain watching the school, to "bag" any fellow who ventured outside. They had attacked once, and had been defeated, with the help of the cattlemen from the Lawless Ranch; and Billy Cook, the foreman of the ranch, had warned Four Kings & Co. that if they attacked again they would have him to deal with.

That warning was quite enough for the Red Dog crowd, who had been severely handled by the cowboys on the previous occasion.

But matters were growing serious for the rebels besieged in the lumber school. The last of their provisions had almost gone, and how to obtain fresh supplies was a serious problem.

The garrison had been reduced day after day, as fellows were called away by their parents. The latter, while disapproving of Mr. Gunten's proceedings, could not quite approve of a schoolboy strike.

There were now only seven fellows in the garrison—Frank Richards, Bob, Beauclerc, Eben Hacke, Yen Chin, and two others. But seven were enough to hold the fort, unless Four Kings tried his device of smoking out the defenders; but that he did not dare to do.

"I guess it looks a bit serious," Bob Lawless remarked, as Frank barred the shutter. "Of course, we're not giving in."

"No fear!" said Frank emphatically.

"If we don't, old man Gunten must," remarked Vere Beauclerc. "You can see that he's getting anxious. I shouldn't wonder if the authorities have taken some step already, and he knows of it. If they send a man here to investigate, Mr. Gunten would like the trouble over before he comes."

"It won't be over," said Eben Hacke. "But what the thunder are we going to do for grub?"

"No glubbee to eat!" remarked Yen Chin dolorously.

"Oh, we can gnaw our belts if it comes to that!"

"Grooh!"

"We've got to make a break," said Frank. "We've tried it after dark, and we were stopped and jolly nearly nabbed. We shall have to make another attempt to-day."

Bob Lawless nodded.

"It's risky," he said.

"But what else is there to do?"

"Nothing," agreed Bob. "We've got to chance it. But, mind, if two of us go out and get roped in, the rest are to hold out all the same."

"That's settled."

Bob Lawless reflected. It was not an easy task to get through the watchers outside the school, though he did not believe that they numbered a dozen. Such a number would have meant a con-

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siderable expenditure of dollars, more than Mr. Gunten would be likely to disburse if he could help it.

Four Kings probably had five or six companions scattered among the timber round the school. In fistical combat the schoolboys were no match for the burly ruffians, and if they were caught their return to the school would be impossible. It was a knotty position, but it was pretty clear that the attempt had to be made.

Bob Lawless made up his mind, and he gave his instructions to his followers.

Bob and Frank climbed out of an upper window to the roof of the schoolhouse, where it was possible to drop to the ground behind the buildings.

At the same time Beauclerc and Hacke slid from a window into the playground in front. There they were, in full view of Four Kings, smoking in the gateway.

The ruffian sighted them at once as they came towards the gateway, as if intending to make a sudden rush through. He gave a shrill whistle, and three or four men came running up to join him.

Beauclerc and Hacke paused half-way to the gates, and Four Kings waved his pipe at them.

"Kim on!" he called out mockingly.

The two schoolboys came on, but paused again, and there was a chortle from the group of ruffians in the gateway. All their attention was given to the two, as Bob had guessed would be the case.

Meanwhile, Bob and Frank had dropped from the schoolhouse at the back, and, hidden by the buildings from the sight of Four Kings & Co., they scudded for the fence on the other side of the playground. They reached it and clambered over. Outside, there was no signs of a watch.

"I guess we'll do it!" muttered Bob. "Drop and chance it, Franky, and run as if you had a bull buffalo behind you."

"Right-ho!"

They dropped from the fence and ran for the timber. In a couple of minutes they were among the trees.

From the roof of the schoolhouse Yen Chin was watching, and as the two chums disappeared into the timber the little Chinese climbed back into the house. A minute later his pigtailed head was put out of the lower window, and he signed to Beauclerc and Hacke.

They retreated to the schoolhouse at once, followed by a roar of laughter from Four Kings, who concluded that they had given up the idea of making a rush through the gateway.

"All serene?" asked Beauclerc, as he reached the window.

Yen Chin nodded and grinned.

"Allee light! Flanky and Bob gonee."

"Good!"

Beauclerc and Hacke clambered in, and the shutter was closed and barred again.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless were on their way to Cedar Camp through the forest, and their comrades at the school could only wait and hope for the best.

GETTING A LIFT.

"**H**ERE we are!"

Bob Lawless spoke in terms of great satisfaction as he and his chum came in sight of Cedar Camp. They had had a long tramp through the forest, but they were strong and fit, and the miles had passed quickly under their feet.



As Frank Richards and Bob Lawless looked out from the trees they were startled to see Euchre Dick and Four Kings robbing a stranger.

They had seen nothing of Four Kings and his companions, who were still under the impression that they were within the besieged schoolhouse.

They were glad enough to see Cedar Camp. "Good luck!" said Frank Richards. "We've done the first half of the job, anyway, Bob."

"And we'll do the rest," said Bob cheerily.

They entered the Hotel Continental—the log hotel at which Frank Richards had stopped when he first arrived in the Thompson Valley to join his uncle in Canada.

Their first proceeding was to order a square meal, having arrived at dinner-time, when the habitués of the Continental were sitting down to their midday repast.

After that important preliminary they proceeded to the camp store, where they made their purchases. There had been a "whip round" at Cedar Creek for cash, and they were well supplied with dollars, which they laid out to the best advantage.

Provisions of all kinds were stacked into their haversacks, which were decidedly heavy by the time they had finished.

"I reckon it will be a hefty job getting this lot back," remarked Bob Lawless, as they left the store. "We've got to do it, though. We may get a lift on the trail as far as the timber."

They started out of the camp, keeping their eyes open for any passing vehicle. There were two miles of trail ahead of them before they reached the forest, and a lift would have been very welcome.

A quarter of an hour later there was a rumble of wheels behind them. Bob looked round quickly.

"By gum, it's the post-wagon!" he exclaimed. "Kern Gunten!" shouted Frank.

They stopped in the trail. The post-wagon was driven by Kern Gunten,

the son of the Swiss storekeeper, who was postmaster of Thompson. Gunten gave a start as he saw his two former schoolfellows standing by the trail, waiting for him to come up. He whipped up the horses, evidently not being desirous of stopping to speak to them.

Bob Lawless jumped into the middle of the trail.

"Halt!" he called out.

"Stand aside!" shouted back Gunten.

"Halt, I tell you!"

Kern Gunten did not heed. He drove right on, and it looked for a moment as if the rancher's son would be dashed aside by the horses. But Bob Lawless stepped to one side in time and caught one of the horses, Frank Richards catching the other. The two animals were dragged to a halt.

Kern Gunten gripped his whip hard, as if thinking of using it on the chums of Cedar Creek, but he refrained. Now that the wagon was stopped that proceeding was a little too risky. It would certainly have been followed by painful results for the Swiss.

He glared down at the schoolboys in the trail.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"We want a lift as far as the timber," answered Bob.

"You won't get it."

"Your mistake," answered Bob Lawless cheerily. "Jump in, Franky!"

"What-ho!" said Frank.

Again Gunten gripped the whip hard, but again he decided not to use it.

Frank Richards and his Canadian cousin clambered into the wagon. Kern Gunten watched them with an angry scowl.

"You've no right to shove yourselves into this

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wagon!" he snarled. "I guess you know that, you pesky rotters!"

"Better language," said Bob. "We might chuck you out and leave you to walk, you know."

Gunten snarled.

"So you're out of school," he said. "My popper thinks you're still in the schoolhouse."

Bob pointed to the two stacked haversacks in the wagon.

"Lift out for grub," he answered.

"You'll get bagged as you go back. Four Kings is on the watch for you, and four or five other galoots."

"We're chancing that."

"I guess they'll be feeding on the grub you've been buying," grinned Gunten, restored to good humour by the thought as he drove on.

The heavy post-wagon rattled on down the trail.

"Where do you want a lift to?" grunted Gunten.

"As far as old man Beauclerc's shack."

"I'm not going half the way. I turn off on the southern trail along Cedar Creek. You know that."

"You can go out of your way a bit for us," said Bob coolly. "These haversacks are rather hefty, and we want all the lift we can get."

"I can't turn out of the way for you!" roared Gunten.

"You can try," grinned Bob. "We'll see that you succeed."

"Look here——"

"If you'd been a bit more civil we wouldn't have made you—now we will!" said Bob.

"That'll be a lesson to you in manners. You need it."

Gunten gritted his teeth.

"You'll get it in the neck at Cedar Creek," he said, after driving on in silence for some time.

"The superintendent's coming."

"Oh!" said Frank. "Who's that?"

"The school superintendent from Kamloops," said Gunten. "He's coming up the valley to investigate into the affair at the school. Miss Meadows has seen him about it. You'll get turned out of Cedar Creek for a cert, you two; you're the ringleaders. And I shall come back when Mr. Peckover gets in as headmaster," he added, with a sneer.

"Mr. Peckover isn't in yet," said Frank.

"The superintendent will bring you to your senses, I reckon," said Gunten.

"He may bring your popper to his!" suggested Bob Lawless. "Anyway, we're not giving in if they bring along the whole Board of Education of British Columbia. You've been turned out of the school, Gunten, for jolly good reasons, and that's why your popper got Miss Meadows sacked and a new Head appointed. But he won't work the raffle. You turn off here, Gunten," added Bob, as the wagon rumbled on to the fork in the trail.

"I don't turn off," said the Swiss doggedly.

"I calculate you do!"

Bob Lawless gripped the wrist of the Swiss, and Gunten surrendered with a fierce scowl.

The post-wagon turned off on the trail towards the timber. Gunten reluctantly drove on till the Beauclerc shack came in sight—deserted now, as Vere Beauclerc was at Cedar Creek, and his father, the remittance man, was absent from home.

Near the shack the wagon stopped, and Frank jumped out, Bob tossing the haversacks to him and then following.

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"Thanks for the lift, Gunten!" called out Frank, with a smile.

"Hang you!" was Gunten's reply.

He pulled the horses round and drove off to get back to the Cedar Creek trail, leaving the chums to tramp into the timber.

"I guess that lift has saved us some trouble," remarked Bob Lawless, as they plunged into the shadow of the forest. "Only two miles to the school from here if we cut through the timber, and I guess I know all the trails."

The two schoolboys shouldered the two haversacks and started on their tramp. They walked on cheerily, despite the weight of their burdens and the difficult nature of the ground.

As they entered on the last half-mile, Bob Lawless suddenly halted in the midst of the thick timber.

"Hallo! What's that, Franky?" he exclaimed, holding up his hand.

From the depths of the timber, in the direction of the school, there came a sudden cry. It was a cry that told of surprise and pain mingled, and it was followed by silence.

The chums looked at one another.

"Somebody hurt," said Frank Richards, in a low voice.

Bob Lawless wrinkled his brows.

"I guess it's some galoot in trouble," he said. "Those Red Dog toughs are around, and they may have——" He paused. "Franky, we ought to be moseying back to Cedar Creek as fast as we can hump it; but——"

"But if that's somebody in trouble——"

"I guess we've got to give him a look in," said Bob. "Shove the bags in the thicket here; they'll be safe till we fetch them. Come on, Frank!"

The haversacks were hastily thrust out of sight in the green thicket, and the chums of Cedar Creek hurried on through the timber as fast as the underwoods allowed in the direction of the cry they had heard.

THE HOLD-UP!

A ROUGH loud voice reached the ears of the schoolboys as they hurried on. It came from ahead of them, where a trail ran through the wood, which they could already see through the openings of the trees.

"Take it easy, old gent! I guess you'll get hurt if you cut up rough. You hear me yaup?"

"You scoundrel!"

"Take it easy, pard! I ain't going to hurt yer, but I calculate you're going to pony up your dust."

"Give him a sockdologer on the cabeza as a warning, Dick!" came another rough voice—the voice of Four Kings, the leader of the Red Dog crowd.

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless came to a sudden halt where the thickets still screened them from the trail. As they looked out from the trees a startling sight met their gaze.

A man in "store clothes," well dressed, and evidently a stranger in the section, was lying on his back in the trail, and Euchre Dick had a brawny knee planted on his chest, pinning him down. Four Kings stood beside them, holding a lasso, the loop of which was round the fallen man's body.

Evidently the stranger had been roped in by the two ruffians, and in falling he had uttered the cry which reached the ears of the schoolboys in the timber.

Four Kings knelt beside the fallen man, and began to turn out his pockets.

Frank and Bob exchanged a look.

"We can't let them rob that galoot, Franky!" muttered Bob. "Look here, we've got to chip in. Get hold of a club, and we'll wade in. I reckon we shall take them by surprise, and we'll have a chance of downing them."

Frank Richards nodded. He was prepared to take the risk.

It was easy enough to obtain bludgeons by breaking off stout branches and whittling them with their pocket-knives. At length Frank Richards drew a quick, deep breath.

"Ready!" he whispered.

"Come on!" muttered Bob.

He led the way with a rush, Frank Richards following him like a shot. The sudden dash took them out of the timber and into the middle of the trail before the ruffians could take alarm.

Euchre Dick gave a sudden shout as he spotted them, but it was too late. He reeled back from the man he was kneeling on as Bob's bludgeon smote him across the head.

Four Kings, still on his knees, spun round, catching at the knife in his belt as he did so. At the same moment Frank Richards struck him full and square. The heavy bludgeon crashed on the ruffian's head, and Four Kings dropped in the trail like a log. He did not move again.

Euchre Dick had fallen, but he leaped up, backing away and clutching at a weapon, but both the schoolboys were upon him, lashing out fiercely, well aware of what would happen if the rascal succeeded in drawing his pistol.

Bob's blow caught him on the shoulder, and a second later Frank Richards struck him on the head, and Euchre Dick fell into the grass. He lay there and howled, with his hands up to guard his head.

"Let up! I pass!" he yelled. "Pass, pardners! Let up!"

"Get the rope—quick, Franky!" panted Bob.

Four Kings lay unconscious, but he was already showing signs of returning to himself, and there was not a moment to waste. Frank Richards caught up the loose end of the lasso and bound Euchre Dick's wrists together. Then he turned to Four Kings and dragged his hands together, while Bob Lawless bound them securely.

"Our game!" gasped Bob.

The stranger was sitting up in the grass, blinking at the schoolboys through his glasses dazedly. Bob Lawless relieved him of the loop of the lasso, and Frank helped him to his feet. Bob picked up his hat and handed it to him.

"By gosh!" ejaculated the stranger, taking the hat. "I—I—I guess I'm under an obligation to you, my lads. You came along very luckily for me."

"We had some luck, too, sir," said Frank Richards, smiling. "If we hadn't taken those rotters by surprise they would have handled us pretty severely."

"You took a great risk, too, my boys."

"All's well that ends well," said Frank. "Here's some of your things, sir. I think that's the lot."

He gathered up the rancher's belongings, which Four Kings had laid in the grass as he abstracted them.

Four Kings had come to his senses now, with a terrific headache and a furious temper, and he was struggling with the rope on his wrists. But he could not get loose, and he sat in the grass and poured out a stream of savage oaths.

Bob Lawless picked up his cudgel and gave the ruffian a light tap on the head with it.

"Stow the chinwag!" he said.

And Four Kings, who did not want another tap, promptly "stowed it."

The stranger restored his wallet, watch, and other belongings to his pockets, and dusted his hat and replaced it. He was rather a good-looking gentleman, with a plump, kind face, and the schoolboys liked his looks. He had recovered his breath now and his equanimity, though he was still feeling the effects of the bump on the hard trail.

"I am very much obliged to you, my boys," he said. "You have saved me from being robbed, and perhaps from ill-usage. I should like to know your names."

"Frank Richards, sir."

"Bob Lawless."

"You belong to this part of the country?"

"Yes; the Lawless Ranch, down the valley," said Bob.

"Oh, you do!" exclaimed the stranger. "Then you belong to Cedar Creek School, I suppose?"

Bob Lawless nodded, with a smile.

"Yes, we're Cedar Creek chaps," he said.

The stranger looked at them very attentively. He was manifestly interested in the circumstance that they belonged to the school, though the chums could not guess why.

"Aire you going to let a galoot go?" growled Euchre Dick.

"You can go as soon as you like," answered Bob. "I dare say your pards will untie you when you find them. Vamoose!"

"I guess I can't mosey along like this."

"I guess you'll have to," said Bob. "If you don't mosey along at once I'll help you with my boot!"

The two ruffians, cursing, disappeared into the timber, with their hands still bound.

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"We've got to hustle, sir," said Bob. "You're all right now?"

"Yes, certainly. But where is the haste?" asked the stranger, looking at him sharply.

"We've got to get back to the school."

"For your lessons?"

"Ahem! Not exactly." Bob hesitated a moment, and then went on: "There's a bit of a shindy in our school now, sir, and those ruffians who tried to rob you are up against us."

"It's a barring-out," explained Frank Richards, with a grin. "Old man Gunten, the chairman of the trustees, has sacked our schoolmistress, and we're not having it. So we've gone on strike, and we're holding out."

"Yet you are here—"

"We had to get out to get some provisions. Old man Gunten is trying to starve us out."

"But what have those ruffians to do with it?"

"Mr. Gunten is employing them to down us," explained Bob. "We've got to return before they get back to the rest of the gang and warn them that we're out of school. We've got our bags near here. Good-bye, sir!"

"One moment! Is Mr. Gunten actually employing ruffians of that type against the schoolboys?"

"Yes, rather!" said Frank. "We've had more than one tussle with them already. But we must get off, sir."

"I will come with you a little way," said the stranger. "I am very much interested in this."

"Just as you like, sir."

The two schoolboys hurried into the timber, the stranger accompanying them, and the two haversacks were taken up again. Then they started for Cedar Creek at a good pace, the man in store clothes still keeping them company.

His interest in the affair at Cedar Creek rather puzzled the two schoolboys, but they had no objection to telling him the story. On the way to the school he learned the whole history of the expulsion of Kern Gunten and of the exciting events that had followed. He put a good many questions to the chums, all of which they answered frankly enough.

But no time was lost on the way, in spite of the chinwag, and they came in sight of the school at last.

"Must leave you here, sir," said Bob Lawless. "We've got to get in over the fence. Better keep clear of the trail, or you'll fall in with those ruffians again. They're watching the school."

"Thank you, my boy!"

"If you're heading for Thompson you can cut through the timber and strike the trail farther on," added Bob.

"I came from Thompson," said the stranger, with a smile. "I was going to Cedar Creek when I was stopped by those ruffians."

"To the school?" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"Yes; but, on consideration, I shall return to Thompson now. My name is Macfarlane," added the gentleman, smiling again—"Dr. Macfarlane. You will probably hear of me again."

And with that he left the surprised chums.

"Blest if I quite make that galoot out, Franky!" said Bob Lawless. "Ever heard of Dr. Macfarlane?"

"Never that I know of."

"He seems jolly interested in our school. What on earth could he have been coming here for?"

"Friend of Miss Meadows, perhaps; and he mayn't have known what was on at the school," remarked Frank.

"If he's staying in Thompson I guess he's

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heard; it's the talk of the valley. But never mind him! Come on!"

Very cautiously the two chums quitted the timber and approached the fence at the back of the school enclosure. Nothing was to be seen there of the Red Dog crowd, and they reached the fence safely, and the haversacks were dragged over it, and the two schoolboys followed.

They cut across the playground to the school-house. A window at the back was open ready, and Vere Beauclerc was there, waiting for them.

"Here we are again!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Take in the loot, Cherub."

"Good luck!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

The haversacks were handed in, and Bob and Frank followed, and the window was closed and barred. And within five minutes the hungry garrison of Cedar Creek were enjoying a hearty dinner.

IN THE NECK!

CRASH! Bob Lawless jumped up. It was a terrific concussion on one of the barred windows, and it made the bars creak and groan.

"Hallo! They're coming!"

Dinner was not yet finished, but the schoolboys jumped up from the meal in hot haste. Outside, the loud voice of Four Kings was heard in savage tones:

"Hang them! I tell you I don't keer ten cents for the cowboys! Hang them! I'm going to smash up that young hound Lawless, I tell you!"

Crash!

Bob Lawless coolly unbarred the shutter, and it flew open under the next blow of the Red Dog ruffian. A furious face glared in at the opening. Four Kings scowled fiercely at the seven schoolboys gathered there, with cudgels in their hands to meet him.

"Oh, there you are, young Lawless!" he snarled. "You got back—hey?"

"Looks like it!" smiled Bob. "Have you dropped in to see me, old man? Step right in! Don't stand on ceremony!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Four Kings hesitated a moment, remembering his former experiences at that window; but he was too enraged to hesitate long. He made a sudden plunge at the window, and his head and brawny shoulders came through.

Bob Lawless had a rope ready in his hand. As the ruffian's head came through he made a rapid cast, and the noose descended round Four Kings' shoulders. It was drawn tight in a second, and the loop tightened round the ruffian's throat, and Four Kings gave a gasping yell.

"Hang on!" yelled Bob.

The schoolboys pulled on the rope, and Four Kings gasped and spluttered, his face as crimson as a beet. He clutched at the window frame with his hands, and held on, gasping.

"Let up!" he spluttered.

Bob shook his head.

"Can't let up!" said Bob. "Hanging's too good for you, Four Kings, but this is a chance too good to be lost! Are you ready?"

"Groooogh!"

"You're bound to come to it sooner or later, you know!" said Bob.

"Gurrrrrgh!" came from the unfortunate ruffian. "Let up! Groogh! Let up, and I guess I'll mosey along! Groogh!"

He clutched at the rope round his neck; but it was tight, and he could not loosen it.

"Let up!" he pleaded, all his ferocity gone now. "Let a galoot mosey along! I cave in! Let up, gents!"

"Well, you ought to be hanged, you know!" said Bob Lawless, with an air of consideration. "Might as well be sooner as later!"

"Pullee lope!" grinned Yen Chin. "Me pullee, hangee nicee-nicee! Velly funnee, hangee old lascal!"

And the Chinees caught hold of the rope and pulled in good earnest. Frank Richards grasped him and yanked him back in time.

"You young ass!" he gasped. "Do you want to kill the man?"

"Me wantee killee!" answered Yen Chin cheerfully. "Velly funnee, killee ugly ole lascal!"

To judge by the terrified expression on Four Kings' face, he did not think it funny.

"Let up!" he groaned. "I'll mosey! Let up!"

"You can vamoose," said Bob. "Keep that potty Chinees back, Franky!"

"Bettee killee!"

"Shut up! You can mosey along, Four Kings; but if you put your ugly cabaza in here again we'll rope you in, and keep you tied up for keeps! Mind that! Now absquatulate, and you can cut the rope when you're at a distance!"

Four Kings, glad of the permission, backed away from the window to the full extent of the lasso, watched by the grinning garrison. His own comrades were grinning, too.

Four Kings fumbled for his knife, and opened it and cut through the rope, sawing it through as fast as he could.

Bob Lawless gave him a jerk or two as a reminder to hurry up, and at last the rope parted, leaving the ruffian with the loop still about his neck. He was grabbing at it savagely when Bob closed the shutter and barred it again.

The schoolboys returned to their interrupted dinner without being further troubled by Four Kings. Over the meal Bob Lawless and Frank related their adventures in the timber and the meeting with the galoot in store clothes.

"What did you say he called himself?" exclaimed Eben Hacke.

"Dr. Macfarlane," answered Frank.

"Did he come from Kamloops?"

"Blessed if I know; but he was a stranger in the section," said Frank. "He came along to-day from Thompson."

"I guess I can tell you who he is," said Hacke, with a chuckle. "Didn't you say Gunten told you the school superintendent was coming up to-day?"

"Yes."

"That's the galoot. I guess I know the name; my popper knows him," said Eben Hacke. "That pilgrim you chipped in to help is the school superintendent who's coming up to investigate the affair here."

Frank whistled.

"That accounts for his being so keen to hear all about it," he said. "My hat! Well, he's heard our side of the story now, at all events. I fancy old man Gunten will have been pitching him a rather different yarn, and he was coming here to inquire for himself. I wonder how it will turn out?"

All the garrison of Cedar Creek were wondering that, and they hoped for the best. But, however it turned out, one thing was certain—there was no surrender for Frank Richards & Co.

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JACK DRAKE AT GREYFRIARS!

By Frank Richards.

TROUBLE IN THE TRAIN!

JACK DRAKE sat in his corner seat in the crowded carriage and looked about him.

Dick Rodney, in the opposite corner, had his eyes upon a book. The noise about him did not appear to disturb his reading, and there was plenty of noise.

The carriage was supposed to seat eight. There were ten fellows in it, and most of them were talking.

Jack Drake listened with a good deal of interest. He was going to Greyfriars to begin the new term there, and the fellows crowding the carriage were Greyfriars fellows, and he did not know one of them.

It was a change for Drake; only a few weeks before the Benbow had returned from her voyage to the Orinoco. Life on the school ship was a thing of the past now, and Drake and Rodney were bound for their new school.

They had plenty of opportunity to see what their new schoolfellows were like before they arrived at Greyfriars.

The train was crowded with Greyfriars fellows from end to end. The corridor was crowded, too. Somewhere on the train were Harry Wharton & Co., the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove, though Drake had not seen them yet.

Voices were raised in melody down the train corridor, and among them Drake thought he could distinguish the stentorian tones of Bob Cherry; and a squeaky voice that floated into the carriage from somewhere announced that Billy Bunter was not far away.

"How far now to Courtfield? Anybody know?" inquired a youth lounging in the corridor doorway.

"Two more stations, Ogilvy."

"Bolsover's been in the corridor all the way so far," chuckled Ogilvy. "He doesn't seem to like it. He's just kicked Bunter."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Yaroooh!" came a yell from the corridor.
"You beast, Bolsover!"
"Gerrout of the way, you fat frog!"
"Dear old Bolsover!" said Skinner. "He sounds ratty! Don't let him come in here!"
"No fear!" said Ogilvy emphatically.
A burly form loomed up in the corridor and stared into the carriage.
"No room, Bolsover!" called out two or three voices.

Bolsover major snorted.
"I'm going to sit down!" he said.
"Sit on Bunter, then!"
"I'm coming in here!" said Bolsover major determinedly. "I've stood up long enough!"
"Rats!"

"Shut that door, Ogilvy!"
Bolsover major's presence in the carriage was apparently not desired. Certainly there was very little room to spare; but that was not the only reason.

Jack Drake, as he glanced at Bolsover's heavy, scowling face and noted his bullying manner, could guess that the burly youth was not popular.

Bolsover was too far in for Ogilvy to slide the door shut. He shoved on forcefully and tramped into the crowded carriage.

"Get out!"
"Put me out!" snorted Bolsover. "If you're cheeky, Skinner, I'll sling you out fast enough! Now, who's going to give me a seat?"
"Go and eat coke!" retorted Ogilvy.

"Rats!"
"Buzz off!"
Bolsover major stared round the carriage. His eyes fell upon the two new juniors at the other end of it.

"Hallo, new kids!" he exclaimed.
Drake nodded as he met the glance of the bully of the Remove.

"Yes," he said.
"What's your name?"
"Jack Drake."
"Well, Master Drake, or Duck, or whoever you are, you can give me your seat!" said Bolsover major, tramping through a forest of legs towards Drake.

Drake stared at him.
"Why the thump should I give you my seat?" he exclaimed.

"Because I tell you to!"
"You'll have to give me a rather better reason than that," remarked Drake.

Bolsover came to a halt between Drake and Rodney. His eyes were fixed on Jack Drake threateningly.

"Get up!" he said.

"Rats!"
 "I want that seat!" roared Bolsover major.
 "You can wait!" suggested Drake. "I've no objection to that, but you can't have the seat!"
 "Better let him have it, kid," murmured a junior seated next to Drake. "You can squat on my knee, if you like."

"Thanks; but I'm sticking to my seat."
 "Let him alone, Bolsover, you bully!" called out Ogilvy.

"I'm having that seat," said Bolsover major calmly. "I want to sit down. It will do a new kid good to teach him manners to begin with! Now, young Duck—"

"Drake, please!"
 "I'll make both ducks and drakes of you if you don't shift!" said Bolsover major. "I generally have my own way in the Remove!"

"When Wharton's not about!" remarked Ogilvy.

"Or Bob Cherry!"
 "Shut up!" roared Bolsover major. "Now, are you getting out?"

"No!"
 "Then I'll shift you!"

Bolsover major dropped his hands on Jack Drake's shoulders to lift him bodily from the seat. Jack Drake sat tight.

He braced himself to meet the pull, and, to Bolsover's surprise, he did not succeed in detaching the new junior from his seat.

His face, flushed with exertion, glared down at Drake.

"You cheeky young cad!" he gasped.
 "Take your paws off my shoulders, please!" said Jack Drake quietly.

"Shift, I tell you!"
 "I shall hit you, if you don't!" said Drake, still quietly.

Bolsover major grinned. He was more than half a head taller than Drake, and broad in proportion. He had no doubt whatever that he could have dealt with both the new boys at once, with one hand to each.

He grasped more tightly and tugged.
 The crowd in the carriage looked on in silence, expecting to see Jack Drake dragged out of his seat like a cork from a bottle.

But that did not happen.
 "I've warned you that I shall hit out!" said Drake.

"There'll be a badly damaged new kid lying about the next minute if you do!" grinned Bolsover major.

"I'll chance that!"
 Crash!

Drake's right hand, clenched and like a lump of iron, came with a crash on Bolsover major's broad chest.

The bully of the Remove staggered back, letting go his hold, and sat suddenly and heavily on Dick Rodney's knees.

He did not remain there long. Rodney gave him an unceremonious shove, and he rolled off upon the floor, amid an army of boots.

He gave a breathless howl as he landed there.
 "Ow! Ooooooh!"

"Well done, new kid!" yelled Ogilvy. "Pile on him, you chaps! Keep him there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The opportunity was too good to be lost. Five or six pair of boots jammed on Bolsover as he attempted to rise, pinning him to the floor. Every other boot in the carriage was promptly added

Drake and Rodney joined in at once, stamping cheerfully and forcefully on Bolsover's legs. The yell that escaped Bolsover major would have done credit to the celebrated Bull of Bashan.

"Yow! Woop! Lemme gerrup!"
 "You're safer there!" chuckled Ogilvy. "Keep him down!"

"You bet!"
 "Tread on his face if he tries to get up!"

"What-ho!"
 "Yaroooooo!"

"Your own fault, Bolsover!"
 "I—I—I'll—"

"Down, dog!" chortled Morgan.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover major struggled furiously. But there were twenty boots lodged on his burly person wherever there was room for them, and he was helpless. In a rumpled and very dusty state, he squirmed on the floor, yelling threats of vengeance.

But he was not allowed to rise. As a matter of fact, he would have proceeded to put his threats into instant execution if he had gained his feet. As Robert Donald Ogilvy had remarked, he was safer where he was.

And where he was he remained, while the train rattled on to Courtfield Junction. By that time Bolsover major was as red as a beetroot and choking with wrath and dust.

"Courtfield next!" shouted a voice in the corridor—the voice of Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove. "Ready? The Remove bags the first bus!"

"I don't think!" came the drawling voice of Cecil Reginald Temple of the Fourth Form. "Look out, Fry, Dabney, Scott!"

"Back up, Remove!"
 The train stopped.

Rodney threw open the carriage door, and the crowd poured out on the platform, leaving Bolsover major to sit up and gasp.

HAND TO HAND!

COURTFIELD platform swarmed with Greyfriars fellows.

Crowds of them were there, from the Sixth to the Second.

Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, walked off sedately with Gwynne, Loder, and Carne, and other lofty Sixth Formers. But the juniors were anything but sedate.

Outside the station horse-drawn brakes were waiting. This was a surprise for the Greyfriars fellows, as motor-buses usually conveyed them to the school. But they learned that the usual buses had been commandeered by the local authorities for A.R.P. work, and so the horse brakes had had to be pressed into service. But none of the Greyfriars fellows minded that; so long as they got to school nothing else mattered.

It was a case of first come, first served. The Fifth and Sixth brakes were taboo to the juniors; for the others it was a rush and a scramble. There were too many fellows to be conveyed in one trip, and nobody wanted to wait for the brakes to come back from the school.

Wingate and his lofty fellow-seniors entered their brake and drove off. A number of the Fifth gathered round the second vehicle, and the voice of Horace Coker was heard, far and wide.

"What are we waiting for? What the thump are we waiting for, I'd like to know? Let's get out of this dashed rattle!"

"Waiting for Blundell, old top," said Potter of the Fifth.

"Blow Blundell!"

"And Bland!" said Greene.

"Blow Bland!"

"Blow 'em as much as you like, old scout," said Potter. "But Blundell's captain of the Fifth, and we've got to wait."

Whereat Horace Coker snorted. Coker did not deem it consistent with his importance to wait for anybody.

"Jolly good mind to drive off without 'em!" he growled. "Well, if we've got to wait, let's go into the buffet and get some refreshments."

"Good egg!" said Potter and Greene at once.

And they went, Coker disdainfully shoving his way through the mob of juniors.

The street was alive with Greyfriars caps, and round one of the brakes a scramble was going on. Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had boarded the brake, first-comers, and they were holding it against all others. Removees were allowed to clamber on board, but Fourth Formers were ignominiously ejected.

Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth attacked hotly, and there were loud bumps round the brake as they were shoved off.

Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was on the scene, supposed to be keeping order; but Mr. Prout had slipped over somebody's foot, and sat down with considerable force, and he had retired into the station to get his second wind.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry suddenly. "A fight!"

"Bolsover."

"And that new kid Drake."

"Here, come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We've got to stop this!"

He jumped from the brake, and his chums followed him. With a rush now Temple, Dabney & Co. swarmed on board.

But Harry Wharton did not heed them.

He knew Drake well enough—the new junior had passed a part of the holiday at Wharton Lodge—and so the captain of the Remove felt it his duty to intervene.

Bolsover major, in a dusty and dishevelled condition, had come raging out of the station in search of Jack Drake.

He found Drake and Rodney in the midst of the mob of juniors—Fourth, Remove, Third, and Second.

His heavy hand on Drake's shoulder swung the new junior round.

"Now, you cheeky young rotter!" spluttered Bolsover.

Drake knocked his hand off with a sharp rap.

"Hands off, old top!" he said. "What do you want?"

Bolsover panted with wrath.

"You—you—cheeky little beast!" he spluttered. "You thumped me in the carriage—"

"I'm ready to thump you again, if you like!"

"I'm going to smash you!" roared Bolsover.

Drake smiled cheerily. He did not seem much alarmed by that terrible threat.

"Go it!" he said.

Bolsover major went it without delay. He rushed at the new junior like a bull.

That terrific rush would have been very difficult for the lighter fellow to meet; but Jack Drake did not attempt to meet it. He side-stepped quickly, and Bolsover caught a heavy punch on the side of his head that sent him spinning.

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"Well hit!" yelled Ogilvy.

"Oh!" gasped Bolsover. "Why, I—I'll—"

He swung round on Drake again, and they closed.

Harry Wharton & Co. came up, with a rush scattering the intervening juniors right and left.

"Stop that, Bolsover!" shouted Wharton.

"Hands off, you bully!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

Bolsover major did not heed. He was hugging the new boy like a bear, and striving to throw him.

"All hands!" said Wharton.

"What-ho!"

Five pairs of hands were laid on Bolsover major at once, and he was dragged by main force away from his victim. He had to let go, and, as he let go, he sat with a bump at the feet of the Famous Five.

Jack Drake drew back rather breathlessly. Strong and sturdy as he was, he found that he had little chance in Bolsover's bear-like hug. He did not mean to let the bully of the Remove get so close again.

"Now, are you going to keep the peace, Bolsover?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"I'll smash you!" roared Bolsover.

"Bump him!"

"Hold on!" said Jack Drake quietly. "I'm awfully obliged to you fellows, but let him come on, if he likes."

"Fathead!" said Nugent. "He will squash you!"

"I don't think so."

"Oh, you can't think!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Get off while you are safe, and leave us to handle Bolsover."

"Thanks, I'd rather not."

"Lemme get at him!" roared Bolsover major.

"Yes; let him get at me!" said Drake. "He won't be happy till he gets it, you know!"

Harry Wharton gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, if you're asking for it—" he said.

"Exactly!"

The Famous Five released Bolsover major. If the new junior asked for it, there was no reason why he should not have it!

The bully of the Remove staggered to his feet.

"Now, you new cad!" he gasped.

He rushed straight at the new junior. But he did not succeed in getting his powerful grasp upon Jack Drake again.

Drake's hands were up, and his eyes gleaming over them.

He had been the best boxer on the Benbow, and, big as the Remove bully was, Drake did not shrink from the encounter.

He avoided Bolsover's rush as before and circled round him, and Bolsover, as clumsy as he was burly, faced round confusedly and tried to clinch again. All he succeeded in capturing was a drive which landed on his nose and brought a sudden spurt of crimson therefrom.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "That kid knows how to handle his paws!"

"Looks as if he knows how to handle Bolsover, too!" grinned Nugent.

There was a breathless circle surrounding the combatants now. A fellow who could stand up to Bolsover major was a fellow worth watching.

The bully of the Remove was attacking furiously, but he found that he could not get through the new junior's guard, neither could he bring him to a clinch. There was a shout from the Greyfriars juniors as Bolsover major went

staggering backwards from a heavy drive on the chin and landed on his back.

"Man down!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Well hit!"

Bolover major sat up dazedly.

"Ow!" he ejaculated.

"Cave!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Here's old Prout!"

Mr. Prout, disrespectfully alluded to as "Old Prout" by the Owl of the Remove, came hurrying out of the station in great wrath.

"What is this—fighting, fighting?" Bolover—boy! How dare you, Bolover?"

"I—I—I—" spluttered Bolover, staggering up.

"Don't tell me you were not to blame, Bolover; I know your ways!" thundered Mr. Prout. "Your appearance is disgraceful, sir—your nose is bleeding! How dare you, Bolover? Go into the station at once; you cannot be seen in public in that state! You are disgracing your school, Bolover! You are a ruffian, sir—a ruffian! Come!"

And the wrathful Form-master grasped Bolover major by the collar and led him into the station.

Bob Cherry clapped Drake on the back as the Fifth Form master disappeared with the hapless bully.

"Good man! You can put 'em up!" said Bob heartily. "I'll have the gloves on with you myself to-morrow."

"Pleased!" said Drake, with a smile.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter, fat as ever!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where's our brake, though?" said Harry Wharton.

"Gone!"

BAGGING A BRAKE!

TEMPLE, Dabney & Co. had taken their opportunity. While the Famous Five were interested in the fight, they had driven off. The brake was already a good distance down the street.

Another brake had rolled away, crammed with fags of the Third and Second—Dickie Nugent of the Second extending his fingers from his nose in farewell to the Removites. One brake remained, as well as the Fifth Form vehicle, and the juniors were swarming into it.

"We'll bag that!" said Bob Cherry.

"Come on!"

The Famous Five were quickly in the brake. Other Removites clambered in, with some fags and a few of the Fourth, and the driver put his horses in motion. He was already heavily loaded, and there seemed to be no limit to the number of passengers ready to climb in.

Jack Drake was setting himself a little to rights after the tussle with Bolover major, and the brake was gone when he looked round for it. Quite a little army of juniors remained in and around the station, having to wait till the brakes came back for a second load.

Only the Fifth Form brake remained outside the station, with Fitzgerald of the Fifth sitting in it, waiting for his comrades.

Tomlinson of the Fifth was standing beside the brake, chatting with Fitzgerald over the side.

"We've got to wait," remarked Dick Rodney.

"Can't be helped."

"There's a brake here!"

"That's for the Fifth, I think."

"Yes, rather," said Russell of the Remove. "Blundell of the Fifth is having refreshments in the station, and the brake's waiting for him."

"Why can't Blundell of the Fifth go on having refreshments till a brake comes back from the school?" suggested Drake.

Russell grinned.

"Better suggest it to him," he remarked.

"I say, you fellows—"

"How long before the brakes get back?" asked Drake.

"An hour, at least," answered Russell. "You can take a cab, if you like, you know. If you take a taxi, I'll bag a seat in it."

"Same here!" said Billy Bunter. "In fact, you could telephone for a car from the garage."

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Drake—I'll telephone for you, if you like—it'll only cost you a few pounds—"

"Fathead!"

"I'll stand half!" said Bunter generously.

Drake laughed.

"I mean it," said the Owl of the Remove.

"You just pay for the car, and I'll settle up my half to-morrow. I'm expecting a postal order, you know."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Drake.

As Billy Bunter had been one of the party at Wharton Lodge, with Drake and Rodney, the new junior had already heard of Bunter's celebrated postal orders.

"Well, if you're waiting for a brake, better come into the buffet," said Bunter. "I'll show you the way."

"Rats!"

"They've got some rather good cake—"

Drake did not heed the Owl of the Remove. His eyes were on the Fifth Form brake. Tomlinson had walked into the station now, probably to hurry up Blundell and his friends in the buffet. Fitzgerald yawned and whistled "Kathleen Mavourneen." The driver thoughtfully smoked a cigarette.

"Look here!" said Drake, in a low voice. "We're not waiting; we're going in that brake."

"But—"

"But—"

"Who's for the brake?" exclaimed Jack Drake, looking round. "We can collar it while those Fifth Form duffers are chewing buns."

Russell whistled.

"There'd be a row—"

"Bother the row!"

"But the Fifth—"

"Bother the Fifth! The Remove is as good as the Fifth any day, or a little better!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You wouldn't have the nerve, you know," remarked Wibley. "The Fifth would scalp you if you bagged their brake."

"Bow-wow!"

Jack Drake stepped up into the vehicle. A crowd of Removites and Third Formers gathered

round. Harry Wharton's brake was now well away in the distance.

"All aboard for Greyfriars!" shouted Drake. Fitzgerald of the Fifth left off whistling "Kathleen Mavourneen" quite suddenly. "Here, get out of this, you fag!" he called out.

Drake did not heed.

Rodney pitched his bag into the brake and followed his chum, Russell and Ogilvy bundled in after them, chuckling. Bagging the Fifth Form brake seemed quite a good "stunt" to the cheery Removites now that Drake had suggested the idea.

Their example was followed by a dozen other fellows.

Tubb of the Third swarmed in with five or six fags, nine or ten Removites clambered in, and the brake was soon swarming. Fitzgerald of the Fifth jumped up in wrath and excitement.

"Outside!" he roared.

"Rats!"

"Sit down!"

"Sure, I'll shift you if you don't hop out!" roared the Fifth Former belligerently.

"I don't quite see how you're going to do it," grinned Drake. "All aboard for Greyfriars! Get on, driver!"

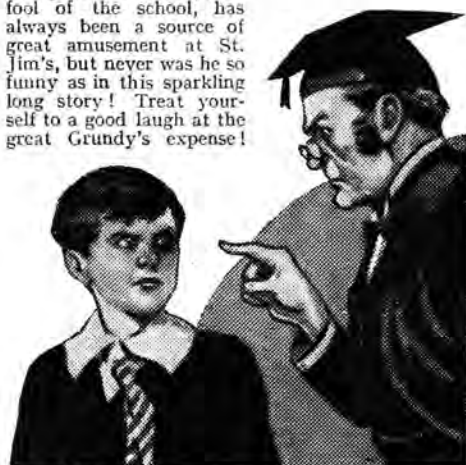
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fitzgerald came scrambling along the brake to collar the new junior. He collared him, and was collared in return.

The Removites were in a state of high and merry excitement now, and Fitzgerald had simply not a chance against the swarming crowd. Before he quite knew what was happening, he was dropped on the ground with a bump. There he rolled and roared, while more and more fags clambered in.

"The GREAT GRUNDY!"

George Alfred Grundy, the fool of the school, has always been a source of great amusement at St. Jim's, but never was he so funny as in this sparkling long story! Treat yourself to a good laugh at the great Grundy's expense!



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"Drive on!" shouted Drake.

"But, sir—" said the perplexed driver.

"Stick a pin in him, Rodney!"

"Certainly."

"Yow-ow-woop!" roared the startled driver. "Yurrrgh! Oh, my eye!"

He bundled out of his seat and jumped to the ground, and shook his fist at the juniors swarming in the brake.

"You young rips, I'll—"

Jack Drake slipped into the driver's seat and grasped the reins and the whip.

Crack-ack-ack!

The whip cracked loudly, the reins jerked, and the horses started.

Fitzgerald of the Fifth had picked himself up and rushed into the station to announce the impertinent raid to the rest of the Fifth.

As Drake set the horses in motion, Blundell and Bland and a crowd more of the Fifth came tearing out. They could scarcely believe their eyes as they saw their own special brake swarming with juniors, trundling down the street.

"Stop!" roared Blundell.

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

There was a howl of defiance from the brake.

"Stop, you cheeky young villains!" bellowed Coker of the Fifth. "Why, I'll skin you! I'll wallop you all round! I'll—"

Coker rushed after the brake.

He jumped on behind as it rolled away, and strove to clamber in. What Coker was going to do with nearly two score of juniors when he got to close quarters was probably not very clear in Coker's powerful brain.

But he did not get to very close quarters. A bag clumped on Coker's head, a boot clumped on his chest, what time an orange was squeezed down his neck. Coker found himself sitting in the road in a breathless and dazed condition, while the brake rushed on.

From the crowd of Fifth Formers stranded at the station there came a chorus of wrath and indignation, and threats of vengeance. Jack Drake drove on cheerily.

The horses were rather fresh and rather startled by the yells and howls behind them; but Drake had them well in hand. But the speed with which the brake rushed down the street rather startled the good folk of Courtfield.

Clatter, clatter! Bump! Clatter!

"Go it, driver!"

"Put it on!"

"Hurrah!"

The brake was soon out of Courtfield and rolling along the country road to Greyfriars. Here it was safe to put on good speed, and Drake let the horses go.

Ahead of them, Harry Wharton's brake was visible, and the Famous Five were staring back in astonishment.

"Ye gods, that new kid's driving the Fifth Form brake!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "He's bagged it!"

"Good man!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"There'll be a row—"

"The rowfulness will be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The new kid is a cool customer."

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

"Why, the cheeky ass is trying to get past us!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove indignantly.

"Put it on, driver!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter!



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A CLOSE FINISH!

JACK DRAKE handled his two horses well. He was overhauling the Famous Five's brake hand over fist, and he was determined to beat the Famous Five to Greyfriars. Every fellow in the brake entered into the spirit of the race, and shouted encouragement, with the exception of William George Bunter. Billy Bunter did not take kindly to the race.

"I say, you fellows, you're going too fast!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, you know, you'll be in the ditch! Stop, I say!"

"Chuck Bunter out!" shouted Russell.

"Oh, really, Russell—"

"We'll never win with that weight on board. Roll him out!"

"Out you go, Bunter!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo!" shrieked the Owl of the Remove, in great alarm; and Bunter dived under a seat for safety.

"Go it, Drake!"

Drake cracked his whip and shook his reins. The two horses were going hot and strong, and the brake drew level with the Famous Five on the wide road.

"Beat you to Greyfriars!" shouted Drake.

"Rats! Put it on, driver!"

"Make those critters move, can't you?" roared Bob Cherry.

Drake was drawing ahead. As a matter of fact, Wharton's driver was a far more careful and cautious handler of his horses than Drake,

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and it was a case of the race to the swift. Drake's horses shot ahead, and the Remove brake trailed behind.

Harry Wharton & Co. yelled to their driver, and Bob Cherry went to the length of punching the back of his neck. The brake put on speed, and for a minute the two pairs of horses were neck and neck, racing along at a terrific pace.

But Drake drove on furiously and once more shot ahead, and he was ahead when the road narrowed. There the Famous Five's brake had to slow a little.

The rival brake went on speeding ahead, its cargo of juniors waving their hands mockingly at the Famous Five.

"Put it on, driver!" howled Bob Cherry. "Do you want to be beaten?"

"Pinch him!"

"Pitch him out!"

"Ere, 'old on, young gents!" gasped the driver. "A man's doin' his best! 'Ands off!"

"Put it on, then!" shouted Wharton.

The brake raced and swayed and trundled on. But Jack Drake was well ahead now, and he kept his lead.

Never had a drive from Courtfield to Greyfriars been accomplished in such quick time, even when the buses conveyed the fellows to the school.

The grey old tower was visible over the leafless trees now; the schoolhouse roofs rose into sight, and the old stone gateway.

In the gateway stood Gosling, the ancient porter, staring blankly at the oncoming brakes with wide-open eyes.

THE PLOT AGAINST TOM MERRY!

(Continued from page 22.)

"As for you, you rogue!" continued Mr. Railton, "you will now take your punishment! Thank you, Taggles!"

Taggles came out of his lodge with a thick walking-stick. Mr. Railton gripped it in his right hand. With his left he gripped the dingy neckcloth of the man from the Black Bull.

"Look 'ere—" howled Mulligan.

Swipe!

There was a roar from Mulligan as the stick landed across his shoulders. He struggled, he wriggled, he kicked, he roared, and he howled.

But the Housemaster's grip held him fast while the stick rose, and rose again, and swiped and swiped.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Walton seems quite watty, deah boys! He is goin' it!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe!

The Housemaster laid it on hard and fast till the howling rascal was yelling for mercy. The St. Jim's crowd looked on breathlessly. From a distant window in the School House, James Silverson looked on, with feelings he could not have expressed in words.

How his scheme had gone wrong, James did not know. But he knew that it had. On that point there was no possible, probable shadow of doubt—no possible doubt whatever—as he saw Jimmy Mulligan writhing and howling and wriggling under that thrashing, and Tom Merry and his friends looking on.

"There!" said Mr. Railton. He ceased at last to swipe the howling man from the Black Bull. "Let that be a warning to you! Go!"

JACK DRAKE AT GREYFRIARS!

(Continued from previous page.)

"My word!" said Gosling. "Nice goin's hon! Wot I says is this 'ere— Oh crumbs!"

The leading brake had arrived.

Drake coolly turned his horses into the gateway, and Gosling made a flying leap to safety.

"Stop!" he roared. "You young rips! Do you think you're goin' up the drive at that there rate? Stop, I says! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

Clatter, clatter!

The brake rushed by.

"After them!" roared Bob Cherry, as his driver slowed down towards the gateway. "Put it on, or I'll scalp you!"

But the driver slowed, and turned in at a more moderate speed. Probably Jack Drake would have slowed, too, if he had been a little less excited. But he was thinking only of the race now, not of the effect his startling arrival was likely to produce at Greyfriars School.

With a rush and a roar, the leading brake came tearing up to the School House. The gravel on the drive spurted in all directions under the flying wheels.

"Ow! We shall all be killed!" howled Billy Bunter. "Stop him! Yow-ow! Help!"

In the big doorway of the School House there appeared an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown. It was the Head!

With a swing of his arm, he spun the man from the Black Bull out of the gateway.

Jimmy Mulligan went—sprawling.

He sprawled and roared, picked himself up, and ran. From the bottom of his beery heart Jimmy Mulligan repented him that he had blown in at St. Jim's that afternoon. He was not likely to be seen there again. No bribe that James Silverson could have offered would have drawn Jimmy Mulligan again in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Silverson, of course!" said Manners, at tea in Study No. 10.

"Think so?" asked Tom.

Manners gave him a look.

"Fathead!" was his reply.

Tom laughed.

"Well, if it was Silverson he hasn't got much change out of it," he said. "No: much good his trying that game on again, either. Letters from the Black Bull won't cut any ice after this."

"Hardly!" agreed Monty Lowther.

"No," said Manners. "That chicken won't fight any more. The Worm will have to let up on that. He will have to think of something new. But he's not got much time left."

"He's going next week," said Tom. "Thank goodness for that!"

"He will stick on if he can," said Manners. "But I don't see how he can."

But James Silverson, perhaps, saw more than Manners did in that matter.

Next Week: "CHECKMATE TO A CROOK!"

But Jack Drake had no eyes for even Dr. Locke just then. He had his hands full with the horses. Right up the drive came the horses, and Jack Drake pulled them in opposite the steps of the School House.

He was going to halt with a flourish, the winner of the race, but a wheel jammed on the lowest step. What happened next nobody ever knew exactly.

A shower of juniors landed before the astounded headmaster on the steps like manna from the skies. There were yells and howls and bumps on all sides.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Dr. Locke, in amazement. "What—what—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Drake.

He was sitting on the lowest step without knowing how he had got there. The horses were trotting on round the drive, followed by the brake, which had a list to starboard and dragged heavily.

Jack Drake looked up dazedly at a severe and astonished face that bent over him.

"Boy, what—who—how—" stuttered the Head.

Drake staggered up and touched his cap.

"Please, I—I—" he gasped. "I—I—I've come to Greyfriars!"

Next Wednesday: "THE STUDY-JUMPERS!"